

Session 2

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God Is Love

THE POINT

We can only truly know love by knowing God.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In 1970, the Beatles broke up. The band that famously sang “All You Need Is Love” couldn’t get along anymore. In the years that followed, a rivalry between John Lennon and Paul McCartney began to simmer. Lennon accused McCartney of writing lightweight, sappy songs lacking in depth. In response, McCartney wrote what would become one of his biggest post-Beatles hits. “Silly Love Songs” was at the number one position on the charts for five weeks and was named Billboard’s number one song of 1976. Decades later, the world is still full of love songs. Some are shallow; some are vulgar; some are sweet. Most of them are easily forgettable because most of them ignore the source of real love, God Himself.

Two thousand years before John Lennon, another man named John wrote the short letter of 1 John. In five chapters, John used a variation of the word love more than twenty-five times, more than any other book in the New Testament. And what John says about love is anything but silly.

QUESTION 1:

What are some silly love songs that were popular when you were a teenager?

1 JOHN 4:7-10

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Country music has plenty of love songs as well. In 1980, Johnny Lee hit it big with "Lookin' for Love." The title itself tells us a lot about the human condition. People for all of time have been looking for love. Unfortunately, the devil has been working since the garden of Eden to get human beings to look for love anywhere and everywhere other than God. And those are all the wrong places!

The apostle John tried to clear it up for us in these verses. Love is from God, and if you love, you've been born of God. This doesn't mean only Christians are capable of loving. Sadly, it sometimes seems like people outside the church do a better job showing love than Christians do. John was acknowledging that everyone is made in the image of God and that, when we express genuine love, we are exhibiting God's nature. However, a person can be created in God's image and still not know God. Any expression of love that doesn't acknowledge God as the source of love—and that His love was revealed when He sent His Son into the world—is woefully incomplete. Knowing God means knowing that God sent Jesus into the world so we might live through Him.

Verse 8 could be (or maybe should be) alarming for anyone who holds onto anger or hatred toward someone else: "The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

Let's face it. There are some people who are hard to love: people who have hurt you, lied to you, or betrayed your trust; people who for one reason or another just rub you the wrong way. Was John really saying that if we don't love them, we don't know God?

In a word, yes. Think of how unlovely you were in your sin. Think how often you've grieved the heart of God or failed to keep a promise you've made to Him. And yet, God has never withdrawn His love from you! He sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for your sin. If, despite all the love and forgiveness God has shown you, you still cling to anger and hatred toward a brother or sister, you truly need to evaluate whether you actually know God. Daniel Akin described the apostle John's logic in a beautiful way:

God is love.

Those who have been born of God and know God are God's children.

God's children have God's nature.

Therefore, God's children will love.¹

That makes it sound so easy! Thankfully, God doesn't leave us to do it on our own. Don't miss the beautiful promise of verse 9. God sent Jesus so we might live through Him. If you are

having a hard time loving someone, remember you live through Christ. Ask Jesus to remind you that He loves that person, and that your life is lived through Jesus. You have the capacity to love that person because it is Christ in you doing the loving.

One more thing: We often hear individuals say, “I’m a Christian because I love God.” Verse 10 shows that salvation is found “not that we loved God” but in the reality that God loves us and sent His Son for us. In our find-your-own-truth culture, it’s crucial to realize that “God is love” and “love is God” are not the same thing. That’s

the heresy of pantheism—the idea that God is in all things, therefore all things are God. It isn’t love, loving feelings, or loving actions that define God. God is the one—the only One—who defines love.

QUESTION 2:

What are some ways the world wrongly defines love?

1 JOHN 4:11-15

¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world’s Savior. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God.

The revelation of love in films often touches viewers deeply. Cinematic scenes can resonate deeply because many of us have felt that longing for something missing in our lives. It’s a reminder of the profound connections we seek and cherish. The 17th century mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal described it as a God-shaped hole in the human heart. We try to fill up that hole with relationships, financial success, adrenaline rushes, substances, or even our own families, but nothing else fits. Pascal said, “none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God Himself.”²

The Greek language uses several different words that are translated “love.” There’s *phileo*,

which can be thought of as brotherly love. (I see you over there, Philadelphia!) There’s *eros* for romantic or sexual (erotic) love. There’s *storge*, or familial love. Which of those was the apostle John using when he wrote that “God remains in us and his love is made complete in us” (v. 12)? As it turns out, none of them. Instead, John used the word *agape*, which describes unconditional or sacrificial love. Like I said earlier, John used this word a lot.

Let’s drill down a little further. Verse 11 begins with the salutation “Dear friends.” In this form of *agape* (*agapetos*), John was reminding them that they were the recipients of Christ’s unconditional love. Next, he used the verb form of love (*agapao*). It appears in both past tense

(“God loved us”) and present tense (“we also must love one another”). Finally, John uses agape as a noun: “If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us.” (v. 12). Suffice it to say, this little word is doing a lot of heavy lifting! Let’s recap:

- You are beloved (*agapetos*).
- God loves you (*agapao*).
- You must love one another (*agapao*).
- If you choose to love one another (*agapao*) . . .
- Then, God’s love is made complete in you (*agape*).

Does that mean God’s love is incomplete if it isn’t in us? Verse 12 helps us understand what John meant by this. Since no one has seen God, the only way for anyone to see Him is for them to see God in us. And the only way for them to see Him in us is for us to love one another. When we love one another, God’s love is made complete.

Early in a relationship, couples will have the “DTR” talk—Defining the Relationship. It’s a time to clarify whether they are just friends,

getting serious, or whether they want to remain together at all. Without the clarity of a defined relationship, we wonder where we stand.

As Christians, we can sometimes wonder where we stand with God. Is He really with us? Do we really belong to Him? How can we know if God really loves us? John gave the answer in verses 13-14. It’s our “DTR” with God. We know God remains in us because God has given us His Holy Spirit. Not only is God with us, God is in us! Notice how all three Persons of the Trinity are referenced here: “He has given us of his Spirit,” who indwells us (v. 13). God the Father sent the Son who saves us (v. 14).

On the other side of the equation, we demonstrate we are with God by confessing Jesus is the Son of God. When we confess our faith boldly and without apology, we show the world that we belong to God and He belongs to us. It’s the ultimate status update!

QUESTION 3:

How do we remain in God’s love?

1 JOHN 4:16-19

¹⁶ And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. ¹⁷ In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

Engage

GOD'S LOVE IN MY LIFE

Reflect on the importance of God's love in your life by filling in the following blanks.

A time I have seen someone love another person selflessly: _____

Someone who has shown me sacrificial love: _____

A time I knew I was loved: _____

Someone who is an example to me of genuine selfless love: _____

A time I have loved someone else selflessly: _____

The reality of God's unconditional love is even more astounding when you contrast it with all the examples of conditional love we find in the world. Conditional love is frightening because we are constantly worried we won't meet the conditions—especially as it relates to our relationship with God. How will He feel about us when we inevitably mess up?

QUESTION 4:

What are some obstacles we face in loving others?

The companion of conditional love is fear. But God's Word tells us "there is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear" (v. 18). So, the companion of unconditional love must be assurance. In verses 16-19, the apostle John gave us the following reasons why we can have assurance of God's unconditional love for us.

We have the gospel. When John wrote "we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us" (v. 16), he was virtually quoting what he recorded Simon Peter saying to Jesus in John 6:69: "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God"). John provided proof after proof of how God's love was expressed through Jesus's earthly ministry. At the end of his Gospel, John concluded, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus should remove any lingering doubts about the depth of God's love for us.

We have God's character. God's very nature is love (v. 16b, also v. 8). He can't *not* love. Have you ever wondered why God revealed Himself to human beings as the three Persons of the Trinity? It's because love exists in relationship and is expressed as love toward something or someone. Thus, at Jesus's baptism, we have God the Father proclaiming that Jesus the Son is His beloved, and the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove (see Matt. 3:13-17). Augustine wrote "God is (at once) Lover, Beloved, and Love itself."³ He is the One who loves, the One who is loved, and the ultimate source of all love.

We have eternal life. In verse 17, John repeated what he said in verse 12, that God's "love is made complete with us." The word "complete" is the Greek word *teleioo*, which means to finish, accomplish, or consecrate. Jesus Himself used a form of this word when He cried "It is finished" from the cross (John 19:30). It's the finished, accomplished work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection that gives us the "confidence in the day of judgment" It's this confidence that makes perfect love drive out fear.

We have God's example. We love because God first loved us. A growing Christian is becoming more like God every day. It may be a slow process, but the very fact that He hasn't given up on us and that we are becoming more loving, more patient, and more kind as we learn from Him is proof of His unconditional love for us.

QUESTION 5:

What are some ways you've seen love drive out fear?

LIVE IT OUT

Despite the glut of songs about love, movies about love, and shallow proclamations of conditional love, we can only truly know love by knowing God. Here are some practical ways to lean into that truth this week:

- **Read.** Read a chapter of 1 John each day this week and take note of all the times he used the word “love.”
- **Meditate.** Instead of listening to songs about love, listen to some of the great hymns of our faith, such as “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus,” or “Blessed Assurance.” Sing along, if you like!
- **Share.** Since love is expressed in relationship, find ways to show God’s love to someone else this week, either inside your family or outside.



1. Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 103.
2. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, Section 7, Fragment 425.
3. As quoted by John Mark Comer in *Practicing the Way: Be With Jesus, Become Like Jesus, Do as He Did* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Publishing, 2024), 77.