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“Beloved if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,” I John 4:11

## The Love of God

**Lesson Aim:** To note that as God loved us, we are also to love one another.

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**Topic:** God: Love of; Love: Of God.

### INTRODUCTION

“**God is love,**” I John 4:8. The significance of this profound statement has not yet been sounded out by man. We can understand what it means to be in love, to show love, to receive love, but we do not comprehend what it means to be love. But **God is love!** What kind of love is equated with God?

There are three meanings to the word “love” as used in the Greek language. Indeed, in the original Greek manuscripts there are **three different words** used to set forth those meanings. (1) The Greek term **eros** means lust. (2) The Greek term **philia** means close, intimate, abiding friendship. (3) The Greek term **agapa** introduces a whole new concept into human thought. It refers to the kind of love which is wholly unselfish. It is not interested in benefits brought to the lover but in bringing good to the beloved. It does not base its affection on the worth of the one loved but is extended to the high and holy exactly as to the low and sinful. It loves so as to lift.

This third concept of love is the one which is used in today's lesson. It always is used to refer to God's love to sinful mankind. It is the same kind of love which is shed abroad in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit to keep them from being ashamed of their hope, Romans 5:5. This is the word commonly used to describe the affection which unites the Christian brotherhood. This is the love of John 3:16, I Corinthians 13 and I John 4. It is the love the Christian receives from the God who is love.

One who stands near a fire will carry away the smell of smoke on his garments. So the man who stays close to God will live in the realm of a self-giving love which delights to lift. We talk much about love. Let us study this lesson to evaluate the nature and extent of our love. The lesson aim is “to note that as God loved us, we are also to love one another.”

## EXPOSITION

### 1. GOD LOVES US

Amazing truth! God actually loves us. When the Bible says that God loves “the world” it does not refer to a creation of sand, rocks, and trees, but to “the world of mankind.” God loves men. Only the Christian religion stresses this truth. All other religions of the world are based on fear, and offerings are for the appeasement of angry gods. The Christian revelation says the one true God loves, not hates, men. Instead of their giving Him offerings to appease His anger, He gave His only Son to redeem them in love. This love of God is the heart of the Christian religion. Our God not only loves and is loved, He is love.

1. Propitiation.—God has revealed His love by giving His own Son as a propitiation for sinful men, verses 9-10, 14. It has been observed that the Old Testament message in the law was. **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,”** but the revelation given in Jesus Christ reverses these words. **“The Lord thy God loves thee.”**

How did God reveal His love to men? By giving them the finest gift which heaven can offer: His only begotten Son. This is no small thing. John 1:11 states the Creator came to His own creation and His own people received Him not. Only love prompted God to go further once His love-gift was rejected. Paul writes of the coming of Jesus in these words: **“(He) made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men,”** Philippians 2:7. To be made of “no reputation” means to be “emptied” of the evident qualities of deity so as to become man. The incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus are the eternally astounding exhibition of the outreach and depth of God's love.

God's love did not stop when man's sins became evident. True love is not blind. It does not overlook faults. It admits them and seeks to remedy them. So the love of God was not offended by the sins of men, but reached out the more to redeem. But man did not want to be redeemed. He was rebellious, carnal and totally depraved. Even as God worked out the way of redemption on earth man rebelled every step of the way. Yet, God kept on

loving him and perfecting his redemption through Jesus Christ.

So God sent His only begotten Son to be the Saviour. But He was not received as the Son of God. He looked like any other man and people laughed at His claim to Divine Sonship. Knowing, but not admitting that He was different, they grew jealous of His power, tired of His teachings, and convicted by His holiness. In a mob stirred almost to riotous frenzy, they condemned and crucified Him. They had no idea that thereby the redemptive work of God was being fulfilled and that Jesus was dying for their own sins.

In His death, Jesus actually bore the sin of guilt of all men. **“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world,”** I John 2:2. Observe that word “propitiation.” It signifies the turning away of the wrath of God by an offering. Paul wrote, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. . .”** Romans 1:18. Ephesians 5:6 and Colossians 3:6 both speak of “the wrath of God coming upon the children of disobedience.” The testimony of the Old Testament and New Testament is that all men, Gentile and Jew, are sinners and come under the wrath and condemnation of God. But propitiation enters.

The death of Jesus Christ is the propitiation for sinners. The paradox is that God provided Himself the means of removing His own wrath. So He “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” verse 10. The purpose of Christ's becoming a “merciful and faithful high priest” was “to make propitiation for the sins of the people,” Hebrews 2:17. Someone or something must turn away God's wrath or man would be destroyed. That wrath is averted only by Christ's atoning offering. So His saving work is properly called “propitiation.” In view of these comments, read verses 9 and 10 again. **“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world,”** I John 4:14.

2. Perfection.—**“If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us,”** I John 4:12. In what sense could God's love be “perfected” in us? Is it so lacking that mortal man can add to it? No, Indeed! The Christian is to “carry on to its intended goal” the love which God has shown to him. He is to be the agent to express God's love to other men.

God did not just love those who are presently believers. The Bible says He loves the whole world of mankind. Each person who trusts Jesus as Saviour has the love of God in his heart for it is broadcast there by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5:5. He then becomes God's agent in showing and sharing that love with others that they might know forgiveness in Jesus also.

No man has ever seen God with his natural eyes. Yet, when Christian believers live a life of holy love, God is manifest in them. Left to himself,

each man would live in envy and malice, hateful and hating others, Titus 3:3. God changes that, however, by making the believer a new creation in Christ Jesus, II Corinthians 5:17. Still he is not left with his own mortal affection with which to manifest the wondrous love of God. God loves others through His children. “He who is love dwelleth in us; He who dwelleth in us is love. It is not so much we who love, as God who loveth in us. It is His very own love that is now in us its full expression, if we love as He is love. It is ours to see to it that it is and shall be so.”—Robert S. Candlish.

God wants every creature in the whole world of mankind to know of His love. He could have written this message of love and redemption in flaming letters on the skies. He could have announced it by angelic choruses. He must have implanted it as a natural heritage in the minds of all men. But He chose to use His believing children to be witnesses to the rest of their fellow men that all might know of the love of God. So as believers live the life of love and share the gospel of grace and love, the love of God is “perfected” (brought on to its goal) in them.

3. Indwelling.—God not only loved us at Calvary when Jesus died, He loves us still. His love is manifest in His indwelling presence in the hearts of believers, verses 12-13, 15-16. His indwelling is in the person of the Holy Spirit. Verse 12 speaks of God dwelling in Christians, and verse 13 speaks of their dwelling in Him. In verse 12 the proof is that believers “love one another” while in verse 13 the proof is that God has given His spirit.

Every born-again believer has the Holy Spirit living within him. He overcomes the world because he lives in the realm of the Spirit, Galatians 5:16. In this realm the love of God is real and operative. The one who is abiding in love is abiding in God and shows that God is abiding in him. The closer one grows to God the more he loves. The more he loves the more he grows in grace. Living the life of love in the realm of the Spirit will manifest itself in Christian testimony, verse 15. This confession is not mere lip service paid by the insincere. It is surrender and obedience. Such a confession is proof of fellowship with God, I John 1:3; 3:24. If God really lives within, the believer will surely make Him a subject of normal conversation.

The indwelling Spirit keeps all of life oriented in a God-ward direction. When a young man falls in love, he cannot keep his mind off his beloved. If his work requires concentration he will concentrate. But the minute the mind is free it flies back to thoughts of his beloved like the hand of the compass flies to the northward direction. What about the man who loves God? Will it be a burden to discipline himself to keep God in his thoughts? No! His mind

will naturally turn to God if his love is sincere. The indwelling Spirit makes God real every hour of every day.

4. Assurance.—“**There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love,**” verse 18. Where there is perfect love there is perfect trust and therefore no fear. Why should the believer fear? Redemption is sure; communion with God is sweet; love to brethren is real; love to God is increasing daily. Why should the believer fear? Perfect love casts out all fear.

During the tumultuous days of World War II the hearts of many people became fearful. A great Baptist preacher delivered a sermon to his congregation entitled, “Fear Not.” Speaking to them of the love of God for His children, he counseled, “Fear not life; fear not death; fear not what comes after death.” Indeed, perfect love has no fear. So the Apostle John wrote of “boldness in the day of judgment” because of assurance in the love of God.

It is possible many people live their entire lives in fear because they do not rest in the perfect love of God. A young husband and wife sought counsel from their pastor because of marital problems. The conversations which ensued showed the husband to be extremely jealous of his wife, though she gave him no reason to be. He was miserable and was making her miserable because he feared lest her love would cease or be untrue. When at last he saw that the problem was not in the faithfulness of her love but in his willingness to trust her love, peace was restored to the household.

Don't doubt the love of God. It is an “everlasting love” and will not fail, Jeremiah 31:3. Don't fear that His love will cease to be extended toward you. “**He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?**” Romans 8:32. Stop worrying and start trusting and you will know by experience that “there is no fear in love,” I John 4:18.

## II. WE SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

The aim of this study is “to note that as God loved us, we are all to love one another.” This is the practical expression of God's love. If God loves men, and His love is perfected in us by the Holy Spirit, we will love all whom God loves. It is not actually we who love but God who loves others through us.

1. Challenge.—“**Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,**” verse 11. It is human to love those who love us. It is divine to

love those who do not deserve nor desire our love. God loved us when we were undeserving of love. So we must love others with this same holy, self-giving love that lifts.

The person who loves God sincerely will manifest it by loving concern for his fellow men. God's love challenges the Christian to share such love with others. Such an affection is not only expected but John said it is commanded: **“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment,”** I John 3:23. John probably refers to the words of the Lord Jesus, **“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,”** John 13:34-35. Loving others is a religious duty which can be fulfilled only in selfless devotion to their welfare.

The holy love which the believer is called upon to express is not a matter of feeling nor words only. John writes, **“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth,** John 3:18. It expresses itself in a willingness to share one's material resources with those in need. **“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”** I John 3:17. True love is so far reaching that it even inspires the supreme sacrifice: **“. . . we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren,”** I John 3:16. This is the way God loves us.

If each believer truly possessed and expressed this kind and quality of love, there would be a radical change in our society. Church factions and divisions would be at an end. A tremendous evangelistic, missionary, and benevolent ministry would be inspired. People would take knowledge of us that we had been with Jesus. Jesus calls us to such a life. **“Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?”** Matthew 18:33.

2. Response.—True Christian love is but a response to the love of God. **“We love him, because he first loved us,”** verse 19. God loved us before we loved Him. Our love is the response to His love. In fact, all Christian love is based upon God's having loved man first.

To refuse to love God and those whom he loves (especially the Lord Jesus) is to ensure eternal doom. I Corinthians 16:22 reads, **“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.”** Observe the last two words in this Scripture passage. **Anathema** means “accursed.” **Maran-atha** means “the Lord comes.” The meaning is clear that one excludes himself from all hope of mercy by refusing the love of the

Lord. This judgment made certain by the soon coming of the Lord Jesus.

Love for one's fellow man verifies love for God. Love and hatred are incompatible. **“If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”** verse 20. Believers compose the Body of Christ. How can one confess love to the Head of that body while he hates the members thereof?

“I do not love my brother because of what he is, but because of what I am; not because he deserves to be loved, but because the love of God goes out to the undeserving. I love him because he is Christ's; because he has been bought with the tremendous price, the precious blood of Jesus. I love him, because I love the Lord Jesus. I love him, because it is the divine nature to love; that nature indwelling in me asserts itself in loving all who are of God.”—August Van Ryn.

The extent to which a man loves, therefore, is an indication of the extent of God's love which he comprehends. To know the fulness of God's love is to love fully. To know God's love only sparsely will produce a love which is weak.

## CONCLUSION

Test your own love-life in view of this study. According to your love to God and your brethren, so will your spiritual life be. Look at what John has told us about the ministry of the love of God within us. God's love brings eternal life, 4:9; it brings communion, 4:16; it imparts confidence, 4:17; it casts out fear, 4:18; it begets love within us, 4:19-21.

The relationship of believers to God is not that of passion nor of dear friendship. It is a relationship of abiding, self-giving, redeeming love. Every time the Bible speaks of God's love to us, of our love to him, or of our love to Christian brethren, it always uses this term for “a love that lifts: So the Scripture admonishes, **“Seeing' ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently,”** I Peter 1:22. **“Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God,”** Colossians 3:2-3.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by, “God is love”?
2. What concept of love applies to God?

3. How has God manifest His love to us?
4. How is Jesus the “propitiation” for our sins?
5. How can God’s love be “perfected” in us?
6. How does the indwelling Spirit prove God's love to us?
7. How does true love bring assurance?
8. What should be our response to God’s love?
9. How should believers manifest their love?
10. How can this lesson benefit you as a Christian?