

Week 8 – 1 John 4:7-21

Abide in My Love

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” (1 John 4:16, ESV)

John’s letter has three major sections about love:

- The new commandment to love – [1 John 2:7-11](#),
- Loving one another – [1 John 3:10-14](#), and
- God’s perfect love is available to every person – [1 John 4:7-21](#).

John literally writes (Greek: *agapetoi agapomen*) “those who are loved, let us love.” Those who were once helpless, ungodly sinners and enemies of God ([Colossians 1:21-22](#)), are now the focus of His perfect love ([Titus 3:4-5](#)).

One cannot offer genuine love (*agape*) unless the experience of being loved by God empowers it. Consequently, God’s inspiring love compels us to love. How can we do less than he has done for us? As the children of God, we are called to love one another.

- **1 John 4:7** – *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”*

Of the [four words for love](#) used by the Greeks, John is not speaking of the three natural human “loves”: **storge** – love of family; **phileo** – friendship love; or **eros** – romantic love; but of **agape** – divine love. Agape is a selfless love, a love that seeks the best for the recipient. This is a quality of love that believers show only when filled with, controlled by, and walking in the Holy Spirit ([Romans 5:5](#)). The Holy Spirit Alone can produce this supernatural love in our hearts ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). Love comes from God and is a gift of His grace, and a fruit of His Spirit, and which He teaches the faithful to exercise.

While unbelievers can love others, it is a natural love and not a supernatural love enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Here, John is referring to a kind of love that is found only in those who have been born again. When we are “born again [[or from above](#)],” we have become “*partakers of the divine nature*,” having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. ([2 Peter 1:3-4](#)) And since one of the chief aspects of God’s nature is love, God’s children will reflect His love. The implication is that the life God imparts to us in the new birth manifests itself in love toward others.

- **1 John 4:8** – *“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

Love is known only from our actions. John states the absence of “*agape*” love in the life of any individual proves that he “*does not know God*” whom he has never come to know personally.

Unbelievers absolutely cannot love with “*agape*” love for they do not have the divine nature ([2 Peter 1:3-4](#)), do not know the Divine Source (God is love) and do not possess the Divine Power (Spirit - [Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

- **1 John 4:9** – *“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.”*

Jesus Christ reveals God’s love. This verse reveals that God’s love is not an abstract principle or a sentiment. God communicates His love to sinful men not just in words in the Bible, but in deeds.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." ([John 3:16-17](#), ESV)

- **1 John 4:10** – *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

The wonderful truth is not our love for God, but His love for us. John is emphasizing that the nature and the origin of love do not lie in our response to God. Love is, and love starts with God. We can love (agape) God only when we have first been loved by God. It exists only as a response to his initial love for us. And if anything we feel or do can be called love, it will be because the new birth connects us to God.

- **1 John 4:11** – *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

God does not love us because we are lovable, but because He is loving. Consequently, we are to love others because we are called to be loving, not because others are loveable.

The world loves [not *agape*] those that love [also not *agape*] them ([Romans 5:7](#)). But Jesus commands us to love [*agape*] even our enemies ([Matthew 5:43-47](#))

"Ought" is in the present tense, which signifies this is a believer's continual *moral obligation*. The implication is since this supernatural love is clearly a quality of love God enables in us, it is something we must show to one another. How? By His Spirit. Are you continually walking in His Spirit, filled with (controlled by) His Spirit, and being led by His Spirit ([Galatians 5:16-23](#))? If you are, then "*agape*" love should be a natural outflow ([Romans 8:14](#)).

- **1 John 4:12** – *"No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."*

John's Gospel also states these words ([John 1:18](#)). This teaches that love fulfills two functions in our lives.

First, it is the visible evidence that God "*abides in us*." We know God by His love. We cannot see God, because He is spirit ([John 4:24](#)). What we can see is His effect. We see the invisible God through Christians' practice of loving deeds.

"Abide" is used six times in [1 John 4:12-16](#). It refers to our personal fellowship with Jesus Christ. To abide in Christ means to remain in spiritual oneness with Him, so that no sin comes between us. Because we are "born of God," we have *union* with Christ; but it is only as we trust Him and obey His commandments that we have *communion* with Him. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes this abiding possible (see verse 13)."

Second, when we practice love, God's love "*is perfected in us*." This means that our love is the ripened fruit of His love ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). John speaks here not of perfect people, but the result of God's love finding its fullest possible earthly expression as people respond to the message of Christ and reaching out to one another.

- **1 John 4:13** – *"By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."*

Throughout this epistle, John offers assorted indications of authentic Christian experience, which provide a basis for the assurance of our salvation. The presence of these signs testifies to one's true spiritual condition. John mentions three evidences of genuine Christianity; three grounds of assurance that one is the "real deal."

(1) Having the presence of the Spirit ([1 John 4:13](#)),

(2) Acknowledging Jesus as God's Son ([1 John 4:14-15](#)), and

(3) Abiding in love ([1 John 4:16](#)).

Abiding in Christ does not refer to a second level of maturity. It refers to whether you are in the vine or in the fire.

"If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." ([John 15:6](#), ESV)

- **1 John 4:14** – *"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."*

The disciples' association with the incarnate Son proved to them the reality of His redemptive mission. What they experienced convinced them of His identity as the Messiah. This conviction prompted them to bear witness concerning Him.

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." ([2 Peter 1:16](#), ESV)

The Christian life rests upon the acknowledgement of God's revelation of Himself in His Son and a personal acceptance by faith of the Son's unique person and ministry.

- **1 John 4:15** – *"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."*

John had just described Jesus as "the Savior of the world" (verse 14) and now explains how this truth become operative in an individual's life.

From verses 4:2-3 we see that *"every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."* In making this confession, God comes to abide in that person. In the last verse, John referred primarily to confession of the true humanity of Jesus (fully man). Here the confession has to do with His divinity, as the Son of God. This confession serves to differentiate those who are of God and those who are of the world.

"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." ([1 Corinthians 12:3b](#), ESV)

- **1 John 4:16** – *"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."*

To know (Greek: [ginosko](#)) God means to be in a deep relationship with Him – to share His life and enjoy His love. This knowing is not simply a matter of understanding facts; it is a matter of perceiving and living in truth.

Believers' confident assurance of God's love in Christ, not existing circumstances, is the basis of their relationship. When one abides in the love of God, his knowledge of God grows more intimate, and his faith in God grows. The more we love him, the more we understand him, the more we trust him; thereby, increasing our faith.

You may sometimes think, "I believe in Jesus as the Son of God and as my Savior, but I don't have strong faith. I often have doubts. I abide in His love and seek to be the channel of His love for others, but I often fall short. How can I have assurance that I abide in Him and He abides in me?"

As we've seen throughout 1 John, the issue is not **perfection**, but **direction**. The important questions are, "What do you do when your faith wavers? Do you come before the Lord in confession, asking Him to strengthen your faith? What do you do when selfishness dominates your life, rather than God's love? Do you grieve over your hardness of heart and ask God to fill you with His Spirit and to produce the fruit of His Spirit in you?"

Fruit is not an instant product. It takes time and cultivation. Faith and love take time to grow ([Philippians 1:9](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#)). If these qualities are growing in you, God abides in you and you in Him.

- **1 John 4:17** – *“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.”*

“By this,” refers to the previous verse: “...whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” Love perfected in us has the wonderful result of producing boldness or confidence regarding future judgment. When perfected in love, we have nothing to fear ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). We have assurance that we are eternally safe and sound, and need not fear dying and ending up in hell forever. This assurance is far more significant than any other aspect of our lives, for none of us know when we will leave this earth.

Love for God expresses itself not only in a confident attitude towards Him, devoid of fear, but in a loving concern for our brothers and sisters. When we fully understand God's love, it will radically change our view of ourselves. That changed view invokes within each of them a confidence that enables him or her to live in the realm of God's love and not in the realm of fear. We can deceive ourselves into thinking we love God, when in fact we do not. Our love for one another gives us confidence in the day of judgment.

- **1 John 4:18** – *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”*

Fear is the characteristic emotion of someone who expects to be punished. When people are afraid, it is because of something in the past that haunts them, something in the present that upsets them, or something in the future that threatens them. It may be a combination of any two or all three. A believer in Jesus Christ does not have to fear the past, present, or future, for he has experienced the love of God through forgiveness of the past, His presence in the present, and our eternal reward in the future. This love is being perfected in us day by day.

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” ([Romans 8:15](#), ESV)

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” ([2 Timothy 1:7](#), ESV)

- **1 John 4:19** – *“We love because he first loved us.”*

“We love” describes an active, dynamic love (not an emotional feeling) and speaks of our lifestyle. Agape love is divine love and has a supernatural source, the indwelling Holy Spirit ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). So, if a man loves with this quality of love, it is a clear sign he has the Spirit of Christ.

The love which God has for us is the great prompter of love in us. His love for us is the great motivation for love in us. If you are struggling to love someone, especially someone who has wronged you, meditate on God's love as it was shown to you at the cross.

- **1 John 4:20** – *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”*

John quoting the statements of the false teachers in order to make a point ([1 John 1:6](#), [8](#), [10](#); [2:4](#), [9](#)).

This is another example of what I call the IF/BUT/THEN statement. IF you claim something, BUT you do not meet the criteria, THEN your statement is a lie.

He is giving another test of the authenticity of one's faith and salvation. In this example, the individual fails the test and remains in danger of eternal separation from God.

However loudly we may affirm ourselves to be Christian, our habitual sin, denial of Christ and selfish hatred expose us as the liars we are. John calls for our life to match our lips, our practice (demonstration of love to our brother) to match our profession ("I love God.")

"Whoever does not love abides in death." ([1 John 3:14b](#), ESV)

- **1 John 4:21** – *"And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."*

Love God and love one's brother are really two parts of one command. You cannot separate them. So, the end of this matter is this: loving God and loving others is a package deal. You can't have one without the other.

That love can be commanded shows that it is not primarily a feeling, but an action: a caring, self-sacrificing commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.

That God commands us to love shows it is not always effortless or easy. If love just gushed out of us like a mountain spring, then John wouldn't have labored the point as much as he does. By God's grace and in dependence on the Holy Spirit, you can and must practice such love, even toward those who are difficult to love.

Some of you have experienced betrayal or harm from others, even those professing to be Christians. I'm not saying that loving them will be easy, but I say that it is not optional. God gave us this commandment, and He didn't attach a list of exceptions for difficult cases.

Since God's love is no longer visible in the presence of the incarnate Christ here on earth, God is manifesting His love as it is now displayed in His people.

1 John Commentary – Precept Austin

https://www.preceptaustin.org/1_john_47_commentary

COMPARISON OF THOUGHT AND STYLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL AND FIRST EPISTLE		
First Epistle of John		Gospel of John
1 John 4:9	God sent His only begotten Son	John 3:16
1 John 4:12	No One Has Seen God	John 1:18