



1 JOHN
HE LOVES
1 JOHN 4:19

MAIN IDEA

The love of God is His benevolence, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, and grace directed toward His people. Those who have been blessed by the lovingkindness of God will in turn be enabled and moved to love God as well as fellow man (2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 John 4:19).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- **When was a time someone who was close to you recognized something was bothering you, even though you didn't say a word?**

- **What are some ways we recognize when something is amiss or uncharacteristic about a person close to us?**

We can often discern that something impactful has happened to another person by the evidence points to it. Imagine a friend comes to you and says, "You will never believe what just happened to me! As I was walking back to the car after leaving the grocery store a semi-truck ran over me!" That's an alarming statement. But something doesn't add up. The person is telling you that they have just been run over by a truck and you have reason to trust them. But when you look at them, there is no evidence of such a traumatic event taking place. Their hair is neatly fixed. Their clothes are clean, barely wrinkled. There are no injuries. The evidence contradicts the message.

On the other hand, if your friend comes stumbling in with a broken arm, wounded head, and clothes that are dirty and torn, he or she wouldn't have to say a word. You would know something major had happened.

In the same way, people who have been rescued from their sin and made new will exhibit evidence of this major event through the work of the Holy Spirit. The evidence is first and foremost repentance of sin and a deep love and passion for Jesus.

But this is also evident in their relationship to others. A blood-bought, born-again sinner loves others — both friends and enemies, family and strangers, Christians and non-Christians. In our passage today we will consider what it means to love God and others and why it is necessary to first experience the love of God to be able to truly love another.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 4:19a.

It's important to consider what John meant here when he said, "we love." He was writing to people who had placed their faith in Christ and repented of their sin. He wrote to Christians, and we ought to be careful not to apply these principles to all people. These words are directly only toward those who in Christ can now love with a divine love.

- **Who are Christians to love?**

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands" (Matthew 22:37-40). Thus, Christians are to love both God and their neighbor.

Christians love God by acknowledging His supreme worth and responding to His character appropriately. Those who love God honor, respect, and fear Him. They seek to know God and make Him known to others. Christians obey the commands of God and cherish all the promises and principles of His Word (John 14:15).

- **How are Christians to love their neighbor? Their enemies? How are Christians enabled to love others this way?**

Jesus said, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another” (John 13:34). This command is the overarching directive under which all the specific commands that are given to followers of Christ are organized. The command to carry one another’s burdens fulfills the law of Christ to love one another as Christ has loved His followers.

The appropriate response of a Christian who has experienced the love of God in Christ isn’t only a shift in allegiance. Rather, the Christian who has truly experienced the love of God cannot help but love others. They are to imitate Christ by demonstrating the love He has shown them to others. A Christian cannot possibly claim to love God while hating others, especially those in the household of God (1 John 4:20).

Christians are to be imitators of God by demonstrating the kind of love God has shown them. God’s love wasn’t conditioned upon the loveliness of a person. If it were, then no one would find themselves loved by God, for all have sinned and made themselves unlovely. In the same way, Christians don’t demonstrate love only to the lovely or those who can reciprocate in kind. A Christian’s love isn’t predicated on what can be gained in return. Rather, godly love is based in the experience of God’s love. In other words, Christians demonstrate love to their neighbor because God has demonstrated His love toward them in Christ.

Paul alluded to this reality in Philippians 1:8 when we wrote, “For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” Paul’s love for the Philippian church was a supernatural kind of love. He said his affection was based in Christ Jesus. Love that is based in human emotion wears out. The only kind of love that endures despite heartache and difficulty in tough circumstances is God’s love—the affection of Jesus Christ. That’s the only kind of love that lasts.

- **When was a time you were shown sacrificial love by another person? How did that affect you? How might you seek to impact others by loving them in this way?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 4:19b.

The word “because” in 1 John 4:19 is important. It serves as a hinge that describes the relationship between the love of God and the love of a Christian. It indicates to us that a Christian loves God and others as a result of God’s love for them. A sinner being raised to life and being made a child of God is like the proofing process in baking.

Bakers will allow their dough to proof before putting it into the oven. Proving is the process of allowing the dough to rest and rise. During this time, the yeast ferments and produces gases, thereby leavening the dough. If the dough isn’t proofed, the bake won’t be right. The leavening of God’s grace toward us in Christ Jesus is what makes it possible for us to do what we ought to do—loving God with all of our hearts and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

- **What did Jesus do so that we could be made alive to truly love?**

Jesus is the burden-bearing Christ. His bearing of our burdens is a demonstration of perfect love to Christians. It is also the

thing that makes it possible for Christians to love God and others.

Take a deep breath and sigh in relief at the remembrance of the great burden Christ carried up the hill of Calvary. It wasn't the ridicule, treason, shame, or vitriol under which He heaved. It wasn't the weight of the wooden cross that threatened to overwhelm Him. It wasn't even the shame and guilt of our sins that laid Him low.

Rather, it was the crushing weight of the wrath of God that pressed Him to the dust. The righteous and consuming fire of the wrath of a holy God against the iniquity of your sinful soul was transferred from your shoulders and placed squarely on Christ.

But He was not overcome. He was not overwhelmed. He was not destroyed. He was not defeated. He bore the wrath of God for our sin in perfect obedience to God the Father. His sacrifice was accepted, and He was raised to life. Sin and death were defeated, making a way for those who would call upon His name to be saved.

How could we presume to demand more from Him? Yet, He does more. Christ lifts our daily burdens even now: "Blessed be the Lord! Day after day he bears our burdens; God is our salvation" (Psalm 68:19). Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

- **What keeps us from being able to love others as we ought in our own strength and power?**

Our depravity is quite astounding. How could we, after all God has done for us, rebel against Him and transgress His law? He created us, gave us life, provided for us from birth, and has given us countless undeserved

gifts and kindnesses. Yet we, along with every person on earth, stiffen our necks against His will; we turn up our noses at His invitations.

Our constant transgression of God's law shows just how radical our corruption is. Our continual leaning away from God reveals the totality of our depravity. What hope do we possibly have after offending such a great God to such a great degree? Without someone to intervene and intercede, we have none. This is what Christ has done for sinners.

- **How has the love of God in Christ changed your heart toward God and others?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 4:19c.

The main idea of this verse is that a person's devotion and obedience to God is preceded by God's kindness to them. This is an important principle because Christians are prone to think that they must bring the love of God down upon themselves by first proving their devotion and love for Him. Although this is a common conception, it is the opposite of the biblical conception of the love of God.

- **How is the pattern of people responding to God's loving them first established throughout the Bible? What are some specific examples you can think of?**

From the very beginning, we see that God is the initiator of a relationship with people by expressions of love. God created Adam and Eve, and they responded to that act of love by loving Him back. When Adam and Eve sinned, God sought them out, even though they were hiding. In Genesis 4, we see God coming to Cain to warn him against sin. God is continually the initiator.

God first loved us, and as Christians grow in Christ, they will see increasingly that any acts of devotion that they offer up to God are always preceded by God's lovingkindness. Of course, the Bible commands Christians to love God and one another, but we should never take those commands to eclipse the fundamental reality that God's love is the prime mover in all our demonstrations of godly love. If we understand that our acts of love and devotion were prompted by God's lovingkindness toward us, that will change the way we view ourselves.

If our acts of selflessness, kindness, compassion, and mercy are rooted in those same kinds of acts of God toward us, then we have no right to boast or take pride in our good works. All these deeds come about because of God's initiative. If are enabled to display divine, selfless love, it is only in response to His divine, selfless love.

We understand love in the same way we understand all other good works in the Christian life. We don't bring anything to the table that God has not first provided us. No good work proceeds from us independently of our Maker. If you are a Christian, then you have been rescued from the penalty of sin, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and adopted into God's family. Now that you have been made alive in Christ, you can love Him and others as you have been loved. It is a serious error to think any ability to truly love springs from within you independently from the work of the Spirit in your life.

- **How would you describe the love of God? How does God's love differ from what many people call love today?**

Paul gave the Ephesians an excellent definition of love: "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God" (Ephesians 5:1–2). Christ gave Himself up for sinners at Golgotha. On the wooden cross, He bore the wrath of God the Father so that we would not. Love led Him to the cross.

The divine love of God is sacrificial and selfless. This is the difference between biblical love and our culture's view of love. Biblical love isn't simply good feelings toward someone but unconditionally giving oneself for the good of another: "This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16).

- **What assures you of God's love even when you don't feel as though God loves you? How do passages like the one we've studied today encourage you in that regard?**

APPLICATION

Divine love is not something that a person can produce by him or herself. Rather, it is something that is poured into a person's heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). God's love is His work in and through Christians. It is a gift to them as they walk with the Spirit moment by moment.

- **What are some ways you are tempted to try and earn the love of God?**
- **How have you been motivated to act in love toward others in response to God's love for you?**
- **Why should God's love compel us to have gospel conversations with others?**

PRAY

Ask the Lord to give you clarity about true divine love. Ask Him to help you separate from worldly definitions of love. Ask that you would know His love in Christ Jesus and that His love would compel you to love Him and others.

1 JOHN 4:19-21

God first loved us and made a relationship with him possible. The text drives home its refutation of the antichrists and false prophets. We cannot claim we love God and then show that we hate our brothers. This only proves one thing: we are liars. It is difficult to prove whether or not we love God based on our actions toward him because we cannot see him. Love for God is reflected in love for his children, our brothers and sisters, whom we can see. Therefore, God gave us this verifiable command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Jesus stated the principle in other words: whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me (Matt. 25:40).¹

Notes:

REFERENCES

1. David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999)