

Week 7: Love as Jesus Loved

Hook

TRUE FAITH

Main Point: Those who know Jesus will love the way Jesus loved.

Our time today in 1 John will address a popular subject in our culture – love. Imagine people who have zero knowledge of our country and their only exposure to American culture is through movies and television; what would they think love is?

Break into small groups and provide a definition for “love” based on movies and television from each of the following decades: 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 2000-present. (Example: 50s – love is respect and honor shown to others; 80s – love is accepting others despite their faults.)

Q: Do you think our current culture understands what love is?

Q: Today’s passage shows us that the love of God is a self-sacrificing, humble-servant kind of love. How does our culture respond to that kind of love?

RECAP: In the last few lessons, John has circled back to one of the main points of his letter, that children of God love others because God is love. This letter may feel repetitive to us, but John was using a type of ancient rhetoric called amplification, which intentionally uses repetitive cycles of the same ideas with a little different emphasis or angle each time. In this passage, John focused on describing the *kind* of love God’s children have – love like Jesus’. Since God is love and Jesus is God, Jesus’ life tangibly exemplified what God’s love looks like in the flesh, in practice. Those who know God, who have the Spirit dwelling in them, and who abide in Jesus will love others the way Jesus loved.

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Book

Main Point: Those who know Jesus will love the way Jesus loved.

1 John 4:9–11 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–8 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Godly love is self-sacrificial.

Q: Why is God's gift of His Son as a sacrifice for us the manifestation of love?

Q: How would you summarize all the qualities of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13?

After telling his readers that those who know God will love others, John then described what this "love" looks like. This was important in their time and place because of what the false teachers were saying about God and love, and it's just as important today. Our culture's definition of "love" doesn't typically match what the Bible says.

In modern American culture, romantic love is typically considered an emotion rather than an action. Couples fall in "love" easily. And they fall out of "love" just as easily when they don't "feel" it anymore instead of making the choice to love someone for the long haul, through the emotional ups and downs. Love is often about whether the other person "makes us happy," focusing on what we are getting out of the relationship rather than what we are giving. Love is more about our own personal enjoyment and satisfaction than a commitment for better or worse.

When we think about it, our modern version of "love" is pretty self-centered. Even loving our friends and family can have a self-centered quality to it. We only stay connected to friends who make us feel good. Some friendships feel as if one person is always taking, never giving. We tend to avoid family members who are more difficult to love. For some people, even parental love can be self-centered. Their "love" for their kids is conditional and can even be manipulative and controlling. It's about what they get out of the relationship rather than focusing on the kids' needs.

Biblical love is unconditional, selfless and giving to the point of sacrifice. John wrote that God's love was "made manifest," or made visible in God, sending His only Son into the world as a sacrifice for our sins. The word *propitiation* in the ESV means "atoning sacrifice." The word *sacrifice* is part of the very definition of love. The NIV says, "This is love:" with a colon after it. This is the definition of love. Earlier in the letter, John said, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). Paul agreed, writing, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). While we were still sinners, while we were His enemies. His love is undeserved, unearned, unconditional. Christ's self-sacrifice is the tangible manifestation of God's love. This is what love is. This is what love looks like. Sacrifice.

Jesus was saying the same thing to His disciples at the Last Supper when He washed their feet. To love is to humble yourself and serve the other person (John 13:1–15; 34–35). Then He explicitly said it: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This is the kind of love Jesus showed us, and it’s the kind of love those who love Jesus will show to others.

This is the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13. All the qualities of love listed there are self-sacrificial – patient, kind, not arrogant, and so on. As we go through that list, we can quickly see that *agape* love is others-focused, not one that insists on its own way. While in English, we only have one word for love that can be used for everything from “I love my mom” to “I love pizza,” Greeks had four words for love: *eros* (desire), *storge* (an instinctive love for one’s family), *phileo* (brotherly love or close friendship), and *agape* (the God kind of love). Only *phileo* and *agape* appear in Scripture, and it’s *agape* that is used in these passages.

Outside of the Bible, there are very few instances of the word *agape* in Greek culture, almost as if it were a Christian invention. *Agape* love was radical in Jesus’ time. It’s an others-focused love, a voluntary giving of yourself to others. No other religion, philosophy, or society gave emphasis to an others-centered love.¹

Agape is specifically used of love of God (whom you could never repay) and love of the poor (who could never repay you). No amount of repayment should enter an *agape* relationship. A godly spouse does good things for his or her partner without expecting anything in return. A godly friend doesn’t do an unkind thing to get back at a friend for a wrongdoing. Godly relationships are about choosing to love and serve others, regardless of whether they “deserve” it, because none of us deserved Christ’s sacrificial love for us. He gave Himself even when we were His enemies.²

Agape love is a love that can only come from God. It’s not natural human “love.” It’s not an impulse generated by feelings. It’s an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. When God commands us to love our enemies, He’s not telling us to have good feelings about them but to choose to act in a loving way toward them. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to love others as He did. We can do all the “religious stuff” in the world, but it means nothing if it’s done without self-sacrificing love (1 Corinthians 13:1–3). As believers, *agape* love must be central to everything we do for our friends, family, neighbors, church and even our enemies (Matthew 5:44; 1 Corinthians 16:14).

Q: Describe people who have loved you in an *agape*, others-focused, self-sacrificial way and the impact they have made on your life.

Q: Review the list of qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13. How have you grown in these areas since following Jesus? How are these still a struggle for you?

Q: What would it look like for you to have a servant’s heart toward *all* people?

1 John 4:12–16 and Galatians 5:1, 13–26 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Abiding in God means abiding in *agape* love.

Q: How is love connected to the Holy Spirit? Why is it the foundation of the whole law?

Q: Where do we get the power to love the way Jesus loves?

In this section, John repeated much of what he had already said in previous chapters, returning to the same basic truths to make sure they were really sinking into the hearts of his readers. Our faith isn't just about believing in a theological concept; it's about fellowship with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we abide in Christ and His Spirit dwells in us, we live in *agape* love because God is love.

This is a logical argument, like a mathematical proof. If X is true and Y is true, then Z is true. If we abide in God and God is love, then we abide in love. It may seem repetitive and maybe even oversimplified, but it's because John was fighting against false teachers who were telling his readers they needed some special knowledge to really know God. And those false teachers weren't living in the love of God for others. John was trying to give them very clear guidelines to distinguish false teachers from true apostles. He was trying to make it as simple and clear as possible.

Obviously, none of us is perfect at loving others. We all fall short sometimes. But in general, if we really know God, we will live in His love for the world. The focus in this passage is on abiding in God/love. "Abide" is used six times in these five verses. This *agape* kind of love is not just something we do here and there, like random acts of kindness. It's not something we do when we feel like it or when it's convenient. It's a way of life. It's day-in, day-out, choosing to love others, even when it's hard.

This is why John wrote that God's love is "perfected" in us. This doesn't mean believers will love others perfectly. The Greek word there means "to bring to an end" or "complete," like finishing a race.³ When we love God and one another, God's love reaches its goal. It doesn't mean God needs us to experience love fully. God was completely satisfied in relationship with Himself, the perfect communion of the three persons of the Trinity, before He created us. He didn't need to create us to be complete. Yet He created us out of His great love. Then, when our sin broke that relationship, out of His great love, He sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice.

God's love being "perfected" in us means that the goal of God's sacrificial love in sending His Son to die for us was to reconcile our relationships with God and one another. So when we abide in God and love one another, God's love has reached its goal. Christ's sacrifice has accomplished its purpose – fellowship with God and one another as the body of Christ. God's goal is relationship.

When we abide in love with God and others, we are fulfilling God's purpose for His creation. Because that's what God's consummated kingdom will be like, a place where

everyone loves God and one another in perfect unity. This is why Jesus said the whole law can be summed up by loving God and loving others. When we abide in love with God and others in the *here and now*, we are living as if we were in God's perfect consummated kingdom even though we're in a fallen world. We're bringing a taste of heaven to earth. This is why John started this paragraph with "no one has ever seen God." No one has seen God, but people can see God through us when we live in love.

Q: Describe families, churches or other relationships where you have seen people love each other well. What impact did that have on the world around them?

Q: Think specifically about people who are difficult for you to love. How can you see them as Jesus sees them and love them as He does?

1 John 4:17–21 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Those who abide in God have no need to fear the Day of Judgment.

Q: Why did John's readers need reassurance of their salvation?

Q: Why does abiding in God's love cast out the fear of Judgment Day?

Again, John returned to a point he had previously made, that believers who abide in Christ can be assured of their salvation. And once again he used repetition to drive the point home. The false teachers had made them doubt their salvation, but John assured them they could have confidence before God in the Day of Judgment. They could know they were part of God's eternal kingdom, not because of their own worthiness but because God's love had been perfected in them. Believers need not fear that day because for the believer the Day of Judgment is a day of joy!

This is one of those passages that is often taken out of context, but the phrase "perfect love casts out fear" has a very specific context. It's not talking about romantic love but the love of God *in* us. It doesn't mean we have to learn to love perfectly. "Perfect love" means love that has been "perfected" or reached its goal in us, as we learned in the last talking point. The fear it's talking about is very specifically the fear of punishment on the Day of Judgment. It is saying that when we abide in God's love, we have no need to fear the Day of Judgment. We can be assured of our salvation.

Then John returned to the same chorus he had been repeating throughout the letter: Those who love God will love others. Someone who hates his brother doesn't really love God; he just says he does. John used simple logic again – if you don't love your brother whom you can see, how can you love God whom you can't see? More deeply than that, we are only able to love because God first loved us. Love comes from God. Those who know God will love. It's really that simple.

This doesn't mean we have to be perfect at loving people. Loving people is hard! It can be messy and complicated. Some people are hard to love. Sometimes we must have

“tough love.” Some people are ungrateful for our love. Some will take advantage of it. We won’t do it perfectly, but that’s not what “perfect love” means in this context. It means that abiding in God means abiding in the God kind of love. Not the feel good, emotional, me-centered “love” of our culture, but true, *agape*, self-sacrificing, others-focused love. The “washing feet” kind of love. The “loving your enemies” kind of love. The “even when they don’t deserve it” kind of love. The kind of love Jesus has for me. If I accept that kind of love from Jesus, I should show the same to others.

Q: What difference does it make in your life to be assured of your salvation?

Q: How can this passage help you in sharing the Gospel with others?

Q: How can abiding in God’s love change your perspective of the world and your purpose in it? How can thinking of yourself as the hands and feet of Jesus change the way you think about loving and serving others?

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Took

Main Point: Those who know Jesus will love the way Jesus loved.

As a beneficiary of God's love, you can pass on that genuine, sacrificial love to others. Will you? Dr. Tony Evans, Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, describes two types of Christians: cul-de-sac and conduit Christians:

Sometimes I get the impression that when we ask God to bless us, we forget the full definition of a blessing. We forget that God doesn't want us to be cul-de-sac Christians where all of our blessings end with us. God wants us to be conduit Christians where all of our blessings extend through us to others.⁴

Choose to be a conduit Christian this week, particularly in the area of love; allow His love to flow through you and be a blessing to others.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on all your relationships, from your spouse or significant other to your children, parents, siblings, friends, coworkers, neighbors and so on. What would it look like to show sacrificial love to each of them? How can you serve them? Which people in your life are difficult for you to love and why? How can you change your heart's attitude toward them? Reflect on how God has shown you great love, compassion, mercy and grace and how you can do the same for others.

PRAY that the Lord would give you His heart for everyone in your life, no matter how difficult they are to love. Thank God for His great mercy, compassion and love for you and ask Him to give you that same love for others. Ask God to continue to show you how you can serve others in your everyday life.

ACT: Serve. Choose one person in your life who is difficult for you to love. Ask God to show you how you can serve that person this week, and then do it!

NEXT TIME in 1–3 John and Jude: Next week, John concludes his first letter by summarizing all he has said to his readers so far:

- Those who know God will love others.
- Those who know God overcome the world.
- Those who know God will not keep living in sin but abide in Christ.
- Those who know God have eternal life through Christ.
- Those who know God can have confidence in their salvation.

In his conclusion, we see the purposes of John's letter – to help his readers distinguish false teachers from real apostles and to assure them of their own salvation.

¹ Art Lindsley, "Argument from Agape," *Knowing and Doing* (C. S. Lewis Institute, Winter 2007).

² Roman Krznaric, *How Should We Live? Great Ideas from the Past for Everyday Life* (Blue Bridge, 2013).

³ *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, electronic edition (Biblesoft, 2002).

⁴ <https://go.tonyevans.org/blog/cul-de-sac-christianity-by-tony-evans>