

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

Does God Really Love Us?

1 John 4:7-12

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Scripture

All in the Family was a popular 1970s CBS TV series that made the curmudgeonly Archie Bunker a household name. In one scene, Archie's son-in-law, Michael, and his wife, Gloria, are in the kitchen. Michael is eating a sandwich and Gloria is baking cookies. Gloria asks him, "Michael, do you love me?"

"Yup," he manages in between bites.

"Would you give up your life for me?" she asks.

"Right after I finish this sandwich."

"Ma saw this movie on TV. It takes place in the desert. The husband gives up his life so his wife can live. I was just wondering if you would do the same for me."

"Sure, honey. If we're ever in the Sahara desert together, you got my life. You got any pickles?"

Gloria sighs and says, "Michael, I'm serious. I mean, if we were stranded in the desert, and we had just enough water for one of us, what would you do?"

"I'd flip you for it."

Gloria is visually exasperated, so Michael adds: "Well honey, what do you want from me? That is a very difficult question to answer. Not many people know how they'd react in a life-and-death situation."

"Okay, forget the desert," she says. "Let's say we're out in the ocean, and there's this shark coming at us. Would you swim in front of it to save me?"

"How big is the shark?"

"He's big. He's a man-eating shark."

"Well, then maybe you should swim in front of it to save

me.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s a *man*-eating shark. You didn’t say *woman*-eating shark.”

At this point Gloria has about had enough. “I’m just trying to find out how much you care for me!”

“I care for you, honey. If you care for me, you’ll let me finish this sandwich.”

Gloria grabs the sandwich out of his hands and looks him in the eye glaringly: “Michael, we are lost in the mountains. This is our only food – our only chance for survival. Would you give me this sandwich?”

“I wouldn’t have to. You’d take it from me.”

“Michael! I just want to hear you say you’d give up your life for me. Would you say it?”

Gloria angrily walks out of the kitchen and into the living room. Michael follows her.

She looks back at him again, saying, “Just say you’d lay down your life for me.”

“This is ridiculous. How did we get into this?”

“Just say the words, Michael!”

Michael finally gives in, exhausted by the whole conversation. “All right! All right! I’d lay down my life for you!”¹

We chuckle at this scene. Gloria desperately wants to know if her husband Michael truly loves her.

Sometimes Christians may wonder, “Does God really love me?” In today’s Scripture, the Apostle John writes to reassure his readers of God’s love for us.

Let’s read 1 John 4:7-12:

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/may/6052608.html>.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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. 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

Introduction

In his commentary on First John, David Jackman writes, “The last three words of verse 8 form one of the most profound statements of the whole Bible and perhaps for many people today one of the hardest to believe. *God is love.*”² When we consider that there are almost 8 billion presently living on planet Earth, can we talk meaningfully about God loving us? According to the Population Reference Bureau, “about 117 billion members of our species have ever been born on Earth.” It is hard even to conceive of such a large number of people. And again we wonder if God really loves us.

Yet, John insists that God is love. And because God is sovereign and supreme over all creation, we must not think that God is too great to be bothered with each one of us. Indeed, God is so great that he is concerned about each one of us individually.

² David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters: Living in the Love of God*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 117.

Lesson

First John 4:7-12 gives us three evidences for God's love for us.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God's Love for Us Is Seen in the New Birth of Christians (4:7-8)
2. God's Love for Us Is Seen in the Death of Jesus (4:9-10)
3. God's Love for Us Is Seen in the Love of Christians (4:11-12)

I. **God's Love for Us Is Seen in the New Birth of Christians (4:7-8)**

First, God's love for us is seen in the new birth of Christians.

John's says that Christians should love one another, as he says in verse 7a, **"Beloved, let us love one another."** Actually, John said three times in this paragraph that Christians should **"love one another."** Here in verse 7, it is an exhortation to **"love one another."** In verse 11, it is a statement of duty: "we also ought to love one another." And in verse 12, it is a hypothesis: "if we love one another...." We will return to these statements throughout this message.

At this point in the passage, John exhorts Christians to love one another. John goes on to give the reason for doing so when he writes in verse 7b, **"for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."** John asserts here that love originates with God. But this is not just any love. John is not talking about a human capacity for love. Nor is John talking about loving human relationships that is

given by God's common grace to all people. No. John is talking about divine love, *agape* love. And there are two reasons why this kind of love belongs only to Christians. The first reason is that John clearly says that non-Christians do not have this love, as he states in verse 8, **“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”** And the second reason that John is talking about divine love belonging only to Christians is because there is in Greek a definite article before the Greek word for love. That means that it is a particular kind of love that John is speaking about, and that love is divine love or *agape* love.

John's point is that God's love is seen only in Christians. Or, as John puts it in verse 7b, **“whoever loves has been born of God.”** God's love is seen in the new birth of Christians. The word for **“love”** that John uses here means to have a strong non-sexual affection for another person and his or her good as understood by God's moral character, especially characterized by a willing forfeiture of rights or privileges in another person's behalf. God reproduces this kind of love in those who are born again into his family.

I became a Christian on Easter Sunday in 1976. That same year, Chuck Colson wrote a best seller book about his life that was titled *Born Again*. That was also the time that Billy Graham was very well known all around the world for his evangelistic preaching in which he called people to be “born again.” I came to understand that every Christian is born again. It is because of that regeneration that he or she is enabled to trust in Jesus and repent of sin. In 1984, when I was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, I was boarding with an older Christian lady named Mary. I remember talking with Mary about being “born again” and she said that she really did not know much about it. When she grew up and became a Christian, they just talked

about faith and repentance.

Well, I do think that there are times when a term like “born again” is popular and more widely used than at other times. Nevertheless, the concept is very Biblical. And the truth is that every Christian is born again. In fact, God’s love for us is seen in the new birth of Christians.

People sometimes feel that they have to earn or merit God’s love. It makes me think of a man who wanted to be loved by a certain woman. He did what he thought would impress her and make her begin to have affection for him. God is not like the woman. He is not impressed by our efforts. In fact, not one of us is at all deserving of God’s love. There is nothing at all that we can do to merit his favor. And that is good news. Because God’s love for us does not depend on us. It is his nature to love. And he sets his love on countless numbers and every one of us is unworthy. And by his grace, we are born again. I think that knowing that truth frees us to receive his love and to enjoy his love. And it also frees us to love others out of the love we have already received from God and not in an effort to receive his love.

So, God’s love for us is seen in the new birth of Christians.

II. God’s Love for Us Is Seen in the Death of Jesus (4:9-10)

Second, God’s love for us is seen in the death of Jesus.

John goes on to write in verse 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.”** God’s love is not known everywhere. We need to keep in mind that the love that John is talking about here is *agape* love, that is, the

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love that is a strong non-sexual affection for another person and his or her good as understood by God's moral character, especially characterized by a willing forfeiture of rights or privileges in another person's behalf. This love is seen supremely in Jesus when the Father sent him to the world. Life in the full sense and love in the *agape* sense come to us only through Jesus.

Christians are the only people in the world that have eternal life. Moreover, Christians are the only people in the world that have abundant life. And Christians have that abundant life now. Christians can live life to the fullest and love others in the way that God loves us. When Christians live in the way that God designed us to live, then the world will take notice. It will be simultaneously attracted and repelled by the life and love of the Christian fellowship. There is something in each person that yearns for a meaningful life and love. But the only way to receive it is on God's terms. Christians know that they lose nothing when they surrender to God. They gain abundant life, eternal life, and God himself.

John goes on to write in verse 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.”** This is an astonishing statement. John has been hammering away at the truth that true love finds its origin in God and not in us. Here in verse 10, John concludes that God's love is seen most brilliantly in the cross of his Son Jesus. It is at the cross that Jesus propitiated the wrath of God.

I have previously noted that the word **“propitiation”** comes from “sacrifice” and refers to the removal of wrath. The great aim of all religions is fellowship with God, to know him, and to enjoy a relationship with him. But the supreme problem we have is sin, and it is sin that breaks fellowship with God. Moreover, God is rightly angry because of our sin. To meet

that problem, a sacrifice is offered. By a substitutionary sacrifice, God's wrath is appeased and fellowship with God is restored. Jesus died on the cross to avert the wrath of God from us, and by doing so, Jesus demonstrated the amazing love of God for us. Rightly has one commentator said, "It is one of the NT's resounding paradoxes that it is God's love that averts God's wrath from us, and indeed that it is precisely in this averting of wrath that we see what real love is."³

When I think of sacrificial love, I think of soldiers on the battlefield, say, falling on hand grenades to save the lives of their friends. That is truly a sacrifice. But they are not propitiating God's wrath. Jesus' death on the cross is in a class by itself. He took our place. He endured the punishment we rightly deserved. He sacrificed himself on our behalf. He averted the Father's righteous wrath. And he did all of that because of the Father's great love for us. The only proper response is worship and wonder and gratitude.

So, God's love for us is seen in the new birth of Christians. And second, God's love for us is seen in the death of Jesus.

III. God's Love for Us Is Seen in the Love of Christians (4:11-12)

And third, God's love for us is seen in the love of Christians.

John writes in verse 11, "**Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**" There is no place for selfishness in a believer. Believers are to love God and also to

³ Leon L. Morris, "1 John," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1407.

love one another. (This reminds me of Jesus' summary of the two great commandments.) That means we will serve others and seek their greatest good.

Jesus once said in John 13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." One of the greatest witnesses to the reality of the gospel is found in the fellowship of believers. In a healthy Christian fellowship, believers love one another and serve one another. They participate in the life of the body.

I recently attended a worship service in which the preacher's sermon theme was about all church members getting involved in the ministries of the church. They apparently already had a rather high level of involvement from their members. This exhortation was an encouragement to demonstrate their love to one another and, thereby, to demonstrate their love to all people.

John writes in verse 12, "**No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**" John is not denying the visions that people had in the Old Testament, such as that recounted in Exodus 24:9-11 with Moses, Aaron, and others. However, these visions were partial and incomplete. It was with the arrival of Jesus that people saw God. Jesus said in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." John is saying that love for God and love for one another is found in believers. But his point is that love for one another is very important because it is this love rather than love for God that shows that God lives in us.

I saw on Facebook a post from a church billboard that read, "Kind atheists are closer to Jesus than mean Christians." I don't intend to analyze the statement but I do want to look at the characterization of "mean Christians." A Christian is a person who is transformed by the grace of God. A Christian is

a new creation in Christ. And, according to John, a Christian demonstrates his love for God by his love for one another. Yes, Christians still make mistakes and even commit sins. However, the new direction of the Christian's life is to love others as he has been loved. So, to be a mean Christian is a complete contradiction. A Christian cannot be mean.

So, God's love for us is seen in the new birth of Christians. Second, God's love for us is seen in the death of Jesus. And third, God's love for us is seen in the love of Christians.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God's love in 1 John 4:7-12, let us be assured of God's love for us.

Poet Amy B. Hunter writes:

Five years ago I had emergency surgery. My sister, a professor with final exams to give, was getting married in less than a week. Yet she drove from New York City to Massachusetts in a snowstorm to see me in the hospital. No phone call would reassure her that I was alive. She had to see me with her own eyes.

Sometimes the demand to see is not doubt; it is love.⁴

Does God really love us? Yes, he does! Be assured that God's love for us is seen in the new birth of Christians, in the death of Jesus, and in the love of Christians for one another. Amen.

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2021/june/sometimes-what-looks-like-doubt-isnt.html>.

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develop them to Christlike maturity,
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and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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