

Subject: *Straight Talk about Christian Love*

Scripture: *1 John 4:7-21*

Love is one of the basic virtues in the Christian faith. John is known as the apostle of love and he has written much about love in this letter (2:7-17; 3:11-24). Love in one form or another is found 46 times in this letter. John describes God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for one another. In this section John mentions love for the last time in the letter and he goes into greater detail as he describes love and the character of God, love and the coming of Christ, love and the believer's confession of faith, love and the believer's confidence in judgment, and love and the believer's concern for others

1. The Priority of Love (vs. 7-8)

John begins with a reminder of love ("beloved"). Christians are those who are specially loved by God. Then he gives a challenge or exhortation that we ought to love one another. If we don't love one another we have not fulfilled the very basic obligation as brothers and sisters in Christ. He continues with a statement about God and His children. Love describes God and His children. To be born of God and know God means to be a Christian. Being a Christian is more than knowing about God; it means knowing Him personally. Jesus described eternal life this way in **John 17:3** *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* Then John offers one final statement about the priority of love. Absence of love is a mark of someone who does not know God, someone who is not a Christian. Love is at the very heart of who God is and who we are as God's children.

2. The Proof of Love (vs. 9-11)

God proved His love by sending Jesus to this world to die for our sins. "Manifested" is a word that means revealed, demonstrated, made known. He has used this word several times in First John. In 1:2, Christ manifested or revealed the eternal life of God. In 3:5 Christ was manifested or revealed to take away our sins. In 3:8 Christ was manifested or revealed to destroy the works of the devil. In 3:16 and here in 4:9-10, Christ manifested or revealed the greatness of God's love by laying down His life for us. What more could He have done to prove how much He loved us?

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* His "only begotten Son" means God's unique Son, His one-of-kind Son. This term "only begotten" is found only five times in the New Testament, all in the writings of John (Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and here). We are the children of God, but Jesus is the one and only unique Son of God. John Stott commented: "No greater gift is conceivable because no greater gift is possible." **John 15:13** *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* **Romans 8:32** *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?*

Years ago a young American Indian was sending smoke signals to his girlfriend across the ridge telling her that he loved her. In that same area the government was testing a bomb. There was a loud boom and then a giant mushroom cloud rose in the distance. The young man said, "Man, I wish I'd said that."

Verse 10 reminds us that the greatness of love is not that we loved God, but that He loved us. That we have loved God is nothing wonderful, but that He loved us is absolutely amazing. And that love ought to move us to love one another (vs. 11).

3. The Perfection of Love (vs. 12-18)

Verse 12 speaks of God's love being perfected in us. The same word is found in 2:5. That means to be completed, finished, or brought to a proper end or goal. When we love one another as we should God's love has been fulfilled and has reached its goal. This verse seems to suggest that believers make the invisible God visible. This world can't see Him, but they can see Him in us as we love one another.

Verses 17-18 speak of our love for God. John does not mean that we love perfectly. Only God can love perfectly. Everything we do is imperfect at best. This means that as we love God and others then our love will reach the point where we have boldness to face God in judgment. This is another way of saying that we have no fear of facing God. We have assurance of eternal life. Verse 18 states that mature love does not have fear (dread or terror, the opposite of boldness). Love and fear cannot exist in the same heart.

4. The Practice of Love (vs. 19-21)

The real test of love is to love our brother. Two boys grew up in a family, went off to school, and eventually one became a medical doctor and the other one a preacher. An old family friend saw one of the boys for the first time in years and asked him, "Are you the one that practices or the one who preaches?" Aren't we supposed to practice what we preach?

Loving one another is a matter of opportunity (vs. 20). We can see our brother and we have real, tangible ways to love him. It is also a matter of obedience (vs. 21). I think the key to understanding what it means to love others is to realize the word John uses for love all through this passage. There are three different words for love in the Greek language. *Eros* (erotic) is not found in the New Testament. *Philia* is the love of friendship, but that is not the word used here. *Agape* is divine love, not an emotion but a principle by which we live. It is the love of deliberate choice. Someone described these words like this: *eros* is all take; *philia* is give and take; *agape* is all give. Do we love others with an attitude of give and take? Or do we love others with an attitude of all give, an attitude of doing whatever it takes?

Ancient church history states that when John was so weak and could not preach they would carry him to church and have just a brief word for his congregation. He would always say, "Little children, love one another." Some of the people got weary of it and asked him why he kept repeating this over and over all the time. He said, "Because it is the Lord's command, and if you will only do this, it is enough." That is a profound thought. If we truly love one another that is enough.