

## “The Continuation of the Incarnation” (1 John 4:7-21)

“Bible study, prayer, witnessing, and serving in the church...now *these* are the greatest measures of spiritual maturity.” The Bible says, “NO!” None of these are the greatest measures of spiritual maturity. Don’t get me wrong, there is a definite place for all of these, but there’s an even greater maturity measure than all of these combined. The greatest maturity measure is love. We reveal the depth and the degree of our spiritual maturity by the love that we have for other Christians. At no time are we more like Jesus than when we love one another.

The apostle John, the beloved disciple, loves to speak about love. In the book of 1 John, he hits this theme in three critical passages. He begins addressing the topic of love in 2:7-11. In these five verses, John states that our love for other believers is an evidence of our fellowship with God. In 3:11-24, he stresses the fact that God’s children should love one another and thus exhibit their new nature. Finally, in 4:7-21,<sup>1</sup> John tackles the subject of love for the third time.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean John has run out of ideas and has to repeat himself. It means that the Holy Spirit, who inspired John, presents the subject once more from a deeper point of view.<sup>3</sup> In this passage John tells us: *We are the continuation of the incarnation.* The word “incarnation” simply means “in flesh.” The incarnation refers to the act when Jesus became a man clothed “in flesh” on our behalf. It is the story of Christmas. John is saying that since Jesus is not present on earth we are to be His flesh—His hands and feet. We are to pick up where He left off. In order to do so, we must bear in mind two important truths.

**1. Our love for others incarnates God’s love (4:7-12).** In this section, John answers the question, “Why should Christians bother loving one another?” In 4:7, John writes, **“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”** On three separate occasions in this chapter, John uses the word “beloved” to address his readers (4:1, 7, 11).<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that John is not writing to determine whether his readers are saved or not—he clearly believes they are (2:12-14). John is writing to encourage saved people to live saved lives.<sup>5</sup> In this thematic verse, he implies that the greatest external evidence that we are saved and mature is our love for one another (John 13:34-35).<sup>6</sup> Thus, John tells us that we are to love one another<sup>7</sup> because love is from God.<sup>8</sup>

Our culture uses the word “love” in many different ways: “I love pizza!” “I love skiing!” “I love scrap-booking.” We often think that love is a sentimental, sugary feeling. So we need to remember the biblical definition of love. *Agape* love is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.<sup>9</sup> At its heart *agape* love is a *commitment*, and thus it may be commanded. The goal of this commitment is the highest good of the one loved.

Have you made a commitment to love your fellow Christians? Do you want the highest good for your spouse? If you have leisure time do you want your spouse to have leisure time? Do you want the highest good for your children? If they need help with school, are you willing to lay aside your hectic schedule and teach them? Do you want the highest good for your church? Are you constantly asking the question: What can I sacrifice to help Emmanuel become the church that God desires her to be? If I were to run a love background check on you in your home, at work, and at church, what would I find? Would those who know you say you are a loving person who exemplifies Christ?

John continues his argument in 4:8 by saying, **“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”**<sup>10</sup> In 4:7, John uses two descriptive phrases: “born of God” and “knows God,” yet in 4:8 he eliminates the phrase “born of God.”<sup>11</sup> This is very significant.<sup>12</sup> It is possible to be saved and not love, but it is impossible to be mature and not love! Salvation is distinguished from dedication or spiritual maturity. If we desire spiritual maturity we must be Christians who love one another. That is the chief indication of spiritual maturity.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps you have assumed that you really “know God.” You are involved in the church—you serve, you give, and you even study the Bible. Yet, there is another brother or sister in Christ that you do not love. Maybe there are even a handful of people that you have ill-will toward. John would say that at this moment in your experience, you do not know God. You are out of fellowship with Him because you are out of fellowship with His kids. John explains the logic of this: “God is love.” Love flows from God as naturally as water flows from a spring. He cannot do anything else but love! God is the source of love; He is the origin of love. Love does not define God, rather God defines love.<sup>14</sup>

Okay, okay, that preaches well but practically speaking how can we love one another? The first step in learning to love is recognizing that it is impossible to truly love anyone apart from God. If we want to become better lovers of people we need to first understand how God loves. Fortunately, 4:9-10 tell us five things about God’s love.

- 1) **God’s love is visible.** John writes, “**By this the love of God was manifested in us**” (4:9a). Any invisible love is non-God love. God’s love is more than verbal, it is practical and tangible (3:18).<sup>15</sup> Last night, our Fusion youth group provided babysitting for those families in Kid’s Choir. Tonight, our Home Upgrade group will provide babysitting for our young married couples. These are visible expressions of God’s love for the body.
- 2) **God’s love is decisive.** John informs us that “**God has sent His only begotten Son<sup>16</sup> into the world**” (4:9b). God did something definitive by sending Jesus. We must make a decision that we are going to love the body of Christ, and then daily decide to renew our initial commitment.
- 3) **God’s love is purposeful.** John states God’s purpose in 4:9c: “**...so that we might live through Him.**” It is something of a paradox that Christ had to die so that we may live through Him. God didn’t just save us for heaven; He saved us for earth. He wants more than living in us; He wants to live His life through us. God is not merely after a few random acts of love. Rather, He wants us to exhibit a lifestyle of love.
- 4) **God’s love is intuitive.** John puts it like this: “**In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us**” (4:10a). Love springs forth unconditionally from who He is. He manifested His love based upon His grace. Likewise, we must naturally love believers whether they are “worthy” or not. We must base our love on a decision of our will.
- 5) **God’s love is just.** John closes 4:10 by stating that God “**sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**” The word “propitiation” means a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God (cf. 2:2). God was angry about sin, so He sent Jesus Christ to appease or satisfy His wrath toward our sin. This was the ultimate expression of “tough love!” *Agape* love often requires tough love. Love is *not* a touchy-feely, warm, fuzzy, goose bump, “can’t we all just get along?” attitude. In fact, it may be that the most loving thing you can do for a person is to share a rebuke or a challenge. *Agape* love is both tough and tender.

We’ve just looked at five aspects of God’s love; now, what should our response be to God’s love? In 4:11, John writes, “**Beloved, if [since]<sup>17</sup> God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**” Why should we love other believers? Because God loves all of us! The word translated “ought” carries the idea of “owing a debt.”<sup>18</sup> Although God’s love for us is unconditional, we ought to live for Him since He died for us. This is just a part of being a member of God’s family.

Last night after I finished the dishes, I asked one of my children, “Will you wipe off the table?” This child, who shall remain anonymous, responded, “Let me go look at our chore chart on the refrigerator and see whose turn it is.” My child excitedly reported that it wasn’t his evening to wipe the table. I immediately responded, “Every member of this family ought to be willing to wipe the table off every single night. That’s just a part of being a member of our family. Mom blesses us every night with wonderful meals and our natural response should be one of gratitude and love.” If that is true at the Krell Casa, how much more so is this true in the church as we respond to all that Christ has done for us?

Once we realize what Christ did for us on the cross, our normal response ought to be to love Him and to love one another. To love one another simply out of a sense of duty is good, but to love out of appreciation (rather than obligation) is even better. Warren Wiersbe has said, “The cross is a plus sign; it reconciles sinners to God and people to one another.” I like this! When Christians do not love one another they have taken their eyes off the cross.

After exhorting us to love one another, John goes on to say in 4:12a, **“No one has beheld God at any time.”** What he means by this is no one has seen God in His pure essence without some kind of filter.<sup>19</sup> Instances in which the biblical writers said that people saw God were visual representations of God’s glory.<sup>20</sup> At first glance this verse seems a bit out of place. Why mention this here? What’s the point? The point is: No man can see the essence of God, but men can see the action of God. The only way that people see God today is when they see Christians loving one another in a biblical way. *We are the continuation of the incarnation.*

A little boy, frightened by a thunderous lightening storm, called out one dark night, “Daddy, come here! I’m scared!” “Son” the father said, “God loves you and He’ll take care of you.” “I know God loves me,” the boy replied. “But right now I want somebody who has skin on!” This world will never see God, but we ought to have such a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ that we become God with skin on. We are to pick up where Jesus left off and love God’s kids. *We are the continuation of the incarnation.*

Not only have we been called to be God with skin on, 4:12b goes on to say that **“if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.”**<sup>21</sup> The word “if” indicates a condition that must be met. IF we love our fellow Christians, two important events occur: (1) *God abides in us.* That is, we consciously enjoy His blessings in our lives. His indwelling presence becomes a reality. Others become aware that God is with us and in us.<sup>22</sup> (2) *God’s love is perfected in us.* In this case, the word “perfected” does not mean to improve or make better. It means “to complete, to finish, to bring to its goal, to bring to full measure.”<sup>23</sup> God wants the people of the world to see His love expressed through His children. If we simply love one another we will experience an intimate, abiding relationship with God, and His love will be perfected in us.<sup>24</sup>

This leads us to a rather stunning implication. My most intimate fellowship with God may not occur when I am alone. “Oh boy! Now you’ve done it. After all the sermons I’ve heard about the importance of a quiet time alone with God, you’re telling me that the most intimate moments occur when I’m around other people? Get real!” Yet, this is likely the case. John certainly says God’s love is perfected when I am reaching out on a horizontal plane.

This truth has had a profound impact on my life. I’ve always been a big, quiet-time guy (i.e., into morning devotions). For years I tried not to let anything or anyone interrupt my time with the Lord. I falsely assumed that the perfect quiet time was with me and my Bible. If I was reading the Word and working through my prayer list, I thought God was especially pleased. What I failed to recognize was that there was no horizontal interaction with other believers. Consequently, in my rigidity I often missed out on other disciplines God had for me.

Today, while I still like to guard my morning times, I am much freer to teach a class, be in a men’s accountability group, or have a breakfast with another man. I have become convinced that God is equally pleased when I practice the spiritual discipline of love, even when it interrupts or postpones my quiet time. God is seeking well-balanced men and women who are strong in all of the spiritual disciplines. Nowhere is this more important than the discipline of love. If you are an introvert this means that you may have to stretch yourself to ensure that your schedule includes time with other believers. It is only in our fellowship with other believers that we can incarnate the love of Christ.

**2. Our love for others provides confidence before God (4:13-21).**<sup>25</sup> One of the questions you may be asking is, “But can this *agape* love really become a reality in our lives?” In 4:13, John writes, “**By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**” Before we begin, it is important to recognize that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the most tangible evidence of God’s love in our lives. With that said, notice the latter half of 4:13. John does not say we will be able to abide in God and love the way that He loves “because He has given us His Spirit.” John says, “He has given us OF His Spirit.” John is literally saying, God has given us “out of His Spirit,” the enablement and empowerment that is necessary to love biblically.<sup>26</sup> The Holy Spirit doesn’t just regenerate, indwell, baptize, and seal us the moment we are saved; the Holy Spirit is also used by God to activate our love lives. He alone is the agent who makes this possible.<sup>27</sup>

This humbling reality was driven home in my life as a seminary student. I was working for a swimming pool company and I happened to have a supervisor who had a knack for making my job less than enjoyable. I’ll call this man John. (Of course, this was his name.) John was the grumpiest, angriest man I’ve ever met. He came across as a man who absolutely hated life. He was always short with people, and customers frequently complained to the owners, and me, about this man.

The thing that bothered me most was this man professed to be a Christian. It would have been much easier for me to love this man if he was an unbeliever who didn’t know any better. But since John was a believer, working for a Christian owned company, it irked me that his testimony was so poor. Day after day, I attempted to love him and express kindness to him; day after day, I became more and more frustrated and fed up with his behavior. Finally, one day after he yelled at me in front of two female customers, I came to the end of my rope. I remember walking into the pool room, closing the door, and crying out to God, “Lord, I can’t take this anymore. I can’t stand John. I hate him! I’ve tried as hard as I can and it hasn’t made a bit of difference. I’m through.”

Immediately, the Spirit’s still, small voice said, “Good, I finally have you right where I want you. Now instead of trying to love John in your strength, why don’t you try My Spirit instead?” At that very moment I made a commitment to love John, no matter what. Eventually, my actions changed my feelings. My motion resulted in *emotion*. Instead of detesting John’s behavior I began to feel sorry for him. I recognized that he must have a lot of hurt and bitterness in his life. This made me want to be more sensitive and to love him more.

Who are the unlovable people in your life? Is it your own spouse? Is it one of your children? Perhaps it is your dad or mom or a brother or sister? Maybe it is a member of your small group? I don’t know who the Lord has just brought to your mind. But I do know this: God wants you to love that person with His love. Today, will you commit yourself to relying upon the Holy Spirit to love those that you are convinced that you can’t love?

Whether we are aware of it or not, when we make a decision to love one another we become witnesses. Verses 14-16 tell us that our abiding relationship results in a witness. In 4:14, John pens it like this: “**We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.**” God’s presence is observable in the midst of Christians who love one another. God produces that love. Most of John’s readers had not, and all of us have not, seen Jesus Christ in the flesh as the apostles did. However, we can see God too, and can bear witness with the apostles that God sent Jesus Christ into the world. We can share the apostles’ experience that John said was his goal in writing this epistle (1:1-4). We can see God, both in the manifestation of His love and in God’s life behind that love, as we observe Christians loving one another. This verse then is a high point in John’s argument. This is the only place in John’s epistles where he used the term “Savior.”<sup>28</sup> John seems to be saying, “When we love one another, we best display the Savior of the world!”

In 4:15-16, John declares, **“Whoever confesses<sup>29</sup> that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.<sup>30</sup> We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”<sup>31</sup>** The absence of confessing Christ is an absence of love. You can’t be close to God and not love, and you can’t love without being a witness. No one falls in love and doesn’t talk about it. Now that you’re married you may not talk about it as much, but you sure did when you were dating, right? You were in loooooove and you didn’t mind telling it. When you love the brethren with the love of God it overflows to the world as a witness.

Sadly, we often get people to mechanically do what isn’t there. The problem is not that people aren’t witnessing, the problem is people aren’t abiding. The people are not applying the truth of God to their lives. First, we must become what God wants us to be and then He’ll energize our witness. John has said again and again that when we abide in Jesus the fruit of the Christian life follows (see John 15:1-11).

What difference does a loving witness make? Verses 17-18 tell us it makes all the difference in the world. In 4:17, John writes, **“By this, love is perfected with<sup>32</sup> us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.”** This verse brings to light the phrase “the day of judgment.” John is referring here to the judgment seat of Christ. He is saying, on the day of judgment we may have confidence. This word “confidence” or “boldness” carries with it the idea of “freedom of speech.”<sup>33</sup> John is saying that we don’t need to fear the judgment seat of Christ if we have demonstrated love to others. Instead, we can have confidence! By loving others we become like Jesus Christ, our Judge. Therefore, to give love is to gain confidence.

The final phrase in 4:17 is often overlooked. Many people don’t want to read these words literally because they seem so strong. Quite simply, John says: We are the equal of Christ in the world. Who is Christ? He is the Son of God, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Who are we? We are sons and daughters of God. What is Christ doing? He is perfectly demonstrating the love of God. What are we to do? We are to demonstrate the love of God. As He is, so also are we in this world. *We are the continuation of the incarnation.*

John continues this theme in 4:18 when he writes, **“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.”** Let me be clear: As believers we should never be afraid of God disowning us, because once we believe in Jesus we’re adopted into God’s forever family and that can never be undone. Once you’re adopted, family membership is never in question. But family discipline sure is. As God’s children we should never fear condemnation in hell, because our Father will never take us there. But our Father might take us to the woodshed to correct us. God will never disown us, but He may chasten us. And it’s perfectly consistent with His love. In fact, His discipline is an expression of His love (see Heb 12:6).

John insists that when we love others we have no basis for fear as we anticipate the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>34</sup> A believer who does not love others feels guilty and fears meeting his Judge—perhaps subconsciously, if not consciously. This fear is a punishment. His guilty conscience punishes him. A Christian who loves others may have other fears, but he need not fear the judgment seat of Christ. The fact that he loves others demonstrates that his relationship with God is essentially what it should be.

Do you want to have greater confidence in your Christian life? Commit to love those in your sphere of influence. Do you want to be set free from apprehension surrounding the judgment seat of Christ? Love the body of Christ. The Christian life is very simple: Love God and love others (Matt 22:37-40). The Quaker theologian, Elton Trueblood, asked, “How do I want to be remembered? Not primarily as a Christian scholar, but rather as a loving person. This can be the goal of every individual.”<sup>35</sup> Trueblood was right. May we endeavor to share his goal.

In 4:19-21, John summarizes his sermonette. Beginning in 4:19, John writes these simple words: **“We love, because He first loved us.”** Love originates from the Father. He loved us before all of creation. He chose to love us in spite of knowing how we would behave. On account of all He has done for us, our natural response should be to love. As we continually remind ourselves of what Christ has done for us, loving others will not be a burden.

There’s a story about a man walking down the street. He passed a used bookstore, and in the window he saw a book entitled *How to Hug*. He was taken by the title, and being a hopeless romantic he went in to buy the book. To his chagrin he discovered that it was the 7<sup>th</sup> volume of an encyclopedia and covered the subjects “How” to “Hug.” Everyone knows that the church is a place where love ought to be manifested, and many people have come to church hoping to find a demonstration of love—only to find an encyclopedia on theology or tradition.

The truth is: there is a difference between friendliness and a friendship of culture. At Emmanuel we are seeking to build a friendship of culture. Thus, it is imperative that we recognize our friendships in the local church relate to our friendship with God. Not only does God care about friendship, so do others. Knowing that people have needs for friendship we must become proactive rather than reactive. This means diligently seeking out people to whom we can show the love of Christ. Love is the hallmark, it is the trademark, it is the benchmark of the family of God. Remember: *You are the continuation of the incarnation.*

In 4:20-21, John closes by going for our jugular. John states, **“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates [i.e., refuses to love] his brother,<sup>36</sup> he is a liar;<sup>37</sup> for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”** If someone says he loves God, check out his love relationship with his brothers, his sisters, his wife, his children, etc. Love is dependent upon action, not vocabulary. How can we love someone we’ve never seen? Loving someone we’ve never seen can only be validated by loving what we have seen. If someone claims to love me, he or she must love my children. My children are an extension of me. God feels the same way. He wants us to love His kids. So He insists that we are only rightly related to Him when we are rightly related to our brothers or sisters.

Verse 21 is especially clear that God commands us to love both Himself and our brothers, not just Himself.<sup>38</sup> God’s one commandment, while singular in form, has joined together love for God and love for one another (cf. 3:23).<sup>39</sup> Both aspects are crucial to obedience. God has called each one of us to be *the continuation of the incarnation.*

Prior to my final year of seminary, I worked on a janitorial team at Oregon Episcopal School. My supervisor, Chuck, was a chain smoker who spent a great deal of time in the school’s boiler room. Since OES is a non-smoking campus, that was the only place where he was permitted to smoke. Even though Chuck knew I didn’t smoke and would not participate in a lot of the talk, whenever we worked together he would insist that I accompany him to the boiler room during our breaks.

Needless to say, I became quite acquainted with the boiler room. In a boiler room, it is impossible to look into the boiler to see how much water it contains. But running up beside it is a tiny, glass tube that serves as a gauge. As the water stands in the little tube, so it stands in the great boiler. When the tube is half full, the boiler is half full; if empty, so is the boiler. How do you know you love God? You believe you love Him, but you want to know you love Him. Look at the gauge. Your love for your brothers and sisters is the measure of your love for God.

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### Scripture Reading

1 John 4:7-21

1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-24

Matthew 5:11, 44

John 1:18; 3:16-18

John 13:34-35

John 17:22-26

Romans 5:6-10

### Study Questions

1. John commands us to love one another (4:7-21). *Agape* love is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. How do I model *agape* in the following relationships: spouse, children, extended family, boss, coworkers, church members, and neighbors? In what specific relationship do I struggle to exhibit *agape*? Why is this? What can I do about it?
2. Practically, how should we show love to a difficult person? Do we confront his or her sin or overlook it? Where are the boundaries? Does loving someone (biblically) require liking or trusting him or her? Why or why not? What is the difference? What concrete action is God leading me to take this week to express love for someone I find unlovable?
3. In 4:9-10, John tells us five things about God's love. Which of these characteristics is the most meaningful to me? Why? In what way will I implement this characteristic or behavior in my own life?
4. John states that fear can keep us from loving others and being confident at the judgment seat of Christ (4:17-18). What fears have held me back from loving others? How will I strive to resolve these fears?
5. John informs us that loving God and loving other believers are two sides of the same coin (4:20-21). Have I ever considered that loving my fellow believers may be the most important spiritual discipline I practice? What will this realization mean for me? How should I spend my time? Do I need to adjust my priorities?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In 1 John 4:1-6, John includes a parenthetical passage dealing with false teachers and truth and error. These six verses are not a brief biblical burp. John perfectly interrupts the flow of his argument with this important news flash: When truth is extracted from love we have been robbed of love. John is exhorting us to be careful not to believe wrong information. True love cannot be present apart from truth.

<sup>2</sup> The word “love” (*agape*) occurs 32 times in 1 John 4:7-5:3 (40 times overall).

<sup>3</sup> This particular section is the heart and soul of 1 John. Throughout his book, John’s goal has been to persuade his readers that God has granted all generations the opportunity to experience apostolic fellowship (see 1:1-4). In other words, John has been saying that the very same intimacy that the first century apostles actually experienced as they lived with Jesus Christ can be ours as well. The key to tapping into this fellowship potential is love. Love is the key to understanding, experiencing, and applying fellowship with God. It is love that is the greatest measure of spiritual maturity.

<sup>4</sup> Both 1 John 4:7 and 4:11 begin with the author addressing the readers as (*agapetoi*, “beloved”), so 4:7-10 appears to be a discrete unit, with 4:11 marking the beginning of another unit.

<sup>5</sup> The term *agapomen* (“let us love one another”) is a subjunctive, not an imperative. However, according to Smalley, this clause gives “the fundamental *basis* of the imperative.” Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*: WBC series (Waco: Word, 1984), 237.

<sup>6</sup> The formula “love one another” occurs five times in this epistle (3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12). The words “one another” mean *one another of the same kind*.

<sup>7</sup> John uses the phrase “love one another” in 1 John 4:7, 11, and 12. In 4:7 it is an exhortation; in 4:11 it is a statement of duty; and in 4:12 it is a hypothesis. See John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*: TNTC series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 165.

<sup>8</sup> D.A. Carson wrote a perceptive little book, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999). He points out (pp. 16-19) that the Bible speaks about God’s love in at least five different ways: (1) *The peculiar love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father* (John 3:35; 5:20; 14:31; 17:24). (2) *God’s providential love over all that he has made*. He cares for all of His creation, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission. (3) *God’s salvific stance toward his fallen world*. God so loved *the world* that he gave His Son (John 3:16). Carson argues (p. 17, correctly, I think), “On this axis, God’s love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect.” (4) *God’s particular, effective, selecting love toward his elect*. Many passages in both the Old and New Testaments affirm this aspect of His love (Deut 7:7-8; Rom 9:13). (5) *God’s love is sometimes said to be directed toward his own people in a provisional or conditional way conditioned, that is, on obedience*. Jesus tells us (John 14:21), “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Carson points out (pp. 21-24) that we must not compartmentalize the various loves of God, as if they were each independent of the others. We must integrate these truths in biblical proportion and balance. And, he argues, we must be careful about various evangelical clichés. For example, to say that God’s love is unconditional is true if you are referring to His elective love, but it is not true with regard to His disciplining love of His people. A sinning Christian needs to understand that he abides in God’s love only when he obeys God.

<sup>9</sup> The word *agape* is used only once outside of the Bible in extra biblical Greek. This is amazing since we have at least 1,000 times the number of extra biblical Greek writings than we do the Scriptures. This validates the notion that *agape* love was indeed a supernatural kind of love.

<sup>10</sup> This is the third of three expressions in John’s writings that help us understand the nature of God: “God is spirit” (John 4:24); “God is light” (1 John 1:5); and “God is love.” None of these is a complete revelation of God, of course, and it is wrong to separate them. But it can be helpful to bear these in mind. Regarding the statement God is love, Leon Morris writes, “This means more than God is loving; it means that love is the essence of his being. God loves—but not in an incidental or haphazard fashion. He loves because it is his nature to love, because it is his nature to give himself unceasingly in love.” Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 136.

<sup>11</sup> The perfect tense of the words “is born” (*gegennetai*) means that from the point we received new birth, God makes our spiritual birth permanent. The person born spiritually (with lasting effect, not again and again) has a lasting and permanent relationship that goes on forever with the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> Several scholars note that the chiasmus of 4:7-8 is incomplete. E.g., Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*: Anchor Bible series (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1982), 548; Michael Eaton, *1.2.3 John*: Focus on the Bible (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996), 143-144.

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<sup>13</sup> In 1 John 2:3-11, John used the word “know” (*ginosko*) in the sense of intimacy with God. Here he comes back to the same thought. A person can be born of God but quenching the Spirit. He could be walking in darkness. If so, he is quenching the Spirit, not walking with the Spirit, and therefore not enjoying the fruit of the Spirit like love and joy. If this is true of him, we can certainly say he is not close/intimate with God. He does not know God in this intimate sense.

<sup>14</sup> Sam Gordon, *Living in the Light: 1.2.3 John* (Greenville, SC: Trans World Radio, 2001), 157.

<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare once said, “They do not truly love who do not show their love.”

<sup>16</sup> This is the only place in John’s epistles where he uses the phrase “only begotten.” Yet, John does use the term *monogenes* (“only begotten”) in his gospel (1:14; 3:16). The words “only begotten” pertain to what is unique in the sense of being the only one of the same kind or class—unique. The Son is the one of a kind. Isaac was another “only begotten son” (see Heb 11:17). Even though Abraham had another son (Ishmael), Abraham’s only begotten son was Isaac because he was the one through whom the promised blessing was going to come. Isaac was a type of Christ.

<sup>17</sup> The “if” (*ei*) in the Greek assumes that John’s readers agreed with the reality of God’s love for them. This “if” or better, “since” refers back to 4:10.

<sup>18</sup> John uses the same Greek word *opheilomen* that he uses in 1 John 3:16; 4:11; and 3 John 8. In each case the idea of “owing a debt” is present. Although God’s love for us is completely unconditional, we ought to live for Him, since He died for us.

<sup>19</sup> No one can see God since God is a spirit (see John 1:18; 4:24; 5:37; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16).

<sup>20</sup> The theological term for this is “theophanies” (see Gen 18:1-22; Exod 33:18-23; Num 12:8; Isa 6:1-12; et al.). It seems clear from these passages that what these people saw was not the actual essence of God, but rather a visual representation of God’s glory. Even when Moses asked to see God’s glory, it was only a likeness of God which Moses saw, not the very essence of God. In Num 12:8, the Hebrew word *temunah* is used, which means “form or likeness.” Although there are numerous *apparent* Bible contradictions, upon closer examination, there are none that stand as contradictory. When the Lord says in Exod 33:20, “no man shall see me and live,” that’s what He means!

<sup>21</sup> I like the way the NLT renders this verse: “No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us.”

<sup>22</sup> Eaton, *1.2.3 John*, 153.

<sup>23</sup> See BDAG, Electronic Ed.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Schaeffer said, “The love of God displayed in His people is the strongest apologetic that God has in the world.”

<sup>25</sup> It is very difficult to discern where the section breaks in 1 John 4:7-21. I have chosen to break this text into two paragraphs. I am following the two primary breaks in the Greek text (UBS 4<sup>th</sup> ed). Two other commentators that I read follow this structure: I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*: NICNT Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). Marianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John*: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> The Greek text does not say “Holy Spirit”; it just says *pneuma* (“spirit”). It could be either “Spirit” or “spirit.” Of course it is only the Holy Spirit who can produce such perfect love in us, so the capitalized “Spirit” in our English versions is appropriate.

<sup>27</sup> Nothing happens apart from the Holy Spirit. Before salvation we were blinded by Satan (2 Cor 4:4), and we were in the dark (Eph 4:18). But as God drew us to Himself (John 6:44) and His light shined on our hearts (2 Cor 4:6) we came to call Jesus Lord through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, the only way that we will be able to successfully love our fellow brothers and sisters is through the Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

<sup>28</sup> The term “Savior” also appears only once in John’s Gospel (4:42). Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 John* (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1john.pdf>, 2006), 50.

<sup>29</sup> The word “confess” (*homologeō*) is used three other times in 1 John (1:9; 2:23; 4:3), and in each case, confession or the lack of, determines whether an individual is in an abiding relationship with God.

<sup>30</sup> Confessing that Jesus is God’s Son is not the only condition for abiding in God. It is one evidence that one is abiding. One not abiding may or may not make this confession. Confession is the last step, the step of bearing witness (cf. 1:9; 2:23; 4:3; Rom 10:9-10). Constable, *Notes on 1 John*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> “The stages in John’s thought at this point have now emerged clearly. Faith (acknowledging Jesus as God’s Son, v 15; and trusting in the love which God has for us, v 16a) leads to mutual indwelling between God and the believer. Such a personal relationship is consequently expressed in and perpetuated by ‘living in love’ (v 16b). The believer’s love, for God and for other people (or for God in other people, cf. v 12), is to be active and sustained.” Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 256.

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<sup>32</sup> Here, John said God's love reaches perfection "with us" (*meth hamon*), whereas in 4:12 he wrote that His love reaches perfection "in us" (*en hamin*). When it reaches perfection *in* us, a proper relationship to other people exists, namely, no hate. When it reaches perfection *with* us, a proper relationship to God exists, namely, no fear. As Jesus abode in His Father and consequently had confidence in the face of trials and death, so we can abide in Christ and have confidence in spite of the world's hostility. Abiding in God gave Jesus confidence, and it gives us confidence too.

<sup>33</sup> John uses the word "confidence" or "boldness" (*parresia*) in 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; and 5:14. As in 2:28, there is a focus on our future state ("confident and unashamed before Him"). John is saying that loving Christians can even have boldness at the judgment seat of Christ when their Lord returns.

<sup>34</sup> John was using love for God and other people here, as he did elsewhere in this epistle (e.g., 2:3-11). He meant that it is the most important manifestation of a proper relationship with God, not the only manifestation.

<sup>35</sup> Preaching today Citation: Elton Trueblood. *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Notice that John uses "brother" (*adelphos*) twice in this verse. His reference is to loving fellow Christians. He uses "brother" 12 times in this epistle. Both "brother" and "brethren" occur a total of 17 times in 1 John.

<sup>37</sup> "You are a liar!" appears five times in five chapters. John could have easily added the word "hypocrite" to "liar." The Greek word for hypocrite suggests one who is playacting—wearing a mask. It was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak out from large masks and impersonate or mime a character they were really not. Christians are hypocrites when they come to church, sing hymns, say amen, act spiritual and yet have not spoken to their brother or sister in weeks. That is a hypocrite!

<sup>38</sup> See 1 John 2:3; 3:23-24; 5:3. Here is another false claim (cf. 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9, 22; 5:10).

<sup>39</sup> Jesus Himself taught the two-fold commandment of loving both God and others (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12: 29-31; John 13:34).