

Witnesses to the TRUTH



A Study of John's Letters

LESSON 7: 1 JOHN 4:7-21



INFORMATION FOR TEACHER

Many of the themes in this week's lessons are found in earlier parts of 1 John, and thus we have already covered them to some degree. The challenge for teachers will be covering the whole text without simply rehashing earlier lessons.

However, the theme of loving our brothers and sisters cannot be studied enough. It is something with all Christians struggle constantly, and so a little repetition is not troublesome. If John, an inspired writer, though the subject was worth this much text, it ought to merit our attention.



BIG IDEAS

- *We know what love looks like because of God sending his son.*
- *Love is an observable action.*
- *Love gives us confidence, not fear.*
- *We cannot love God while hating brothers and sisters in Christ.*



DISCUSSION

- *Name some famous (not necessarily biblical) acts of sacrifice.*



INTRODUCTION

After his brief discussion on testing the spirits, John returns to one of the main themes in his letter: loving one another. As he has before, he ties our love for one another with our love for God. God, by his actions, has given us a definition – or a template – for love.



THE BIBLICAL TEXT

I. 1 John 4:7-10

Read 1 John 4:7-10

John begins a new section with his typical address “dear friends.” Now, he again commands them to love one another. Why? Because love has its origin in *God*. People who love have been *born of God* and *know God*. In other words, love is evidence of our relationship with God. If “God is love” (4:8b), then those who do not love obviously cannot know God. Love is part of God’s identity; it therefore must be part of ours also.

John now gives us another “this is how we know” statement in verse 9. How do we know God showed us love? Because he sacrificially sent his son (4:10). *That action* defines love.

We are reminded again that love is observable, definable, and tangible. Humans cannot always know the *feelings* of God, but we can know his *actions*. And his actions showed self-sacrifice, which John calls “love.”

In verse 10, John reminds us that *we* do not define love; God does. We are often tempted to use ourselves as the standard, but John reminds us that all things are rooted in *God*. We must stop comparing our love with others (well, at least I didn’t act like *him!*) and start comparing it to *God!*

- ***How does God’s sacrifice of his son add to our definition of love?***
- ***What are some other ways God has shown his love to his people throughout history?***

II. 1 John 4:11-16a

Read 1 John 4:11-16a

Having rooted love in God’s sacrificial action (4:9-10), and having reminded readers of their identity in God (4:7-8), John now makes a clear command: we must love one another (4:11). If God loved, so must we.

We may not be able to *see* God, but we can come close through love (4:12). Love is so much a part of God’s character that *humans* showing love gives us the best glimpse of God.

In verse 13, John reminds his readers that they have received God’s spirit (cf. 3:24). In other words, Christians have no excuse! We are given the ability to love by God’s spirit, so we have no reason *not* to love – God is enabling us! This should give us *confidence*! God has commanded us to love and he has given us the tools we need (esp. the Spirit) to do just that!

Again digging at his opponents, John reminds his readers that *they* have made a proper confession of Jesus as Lord (4:15) (as opposed to those who have left the church to follow pseudo-Christian teachings). This, again, should give us *confidence* – we can *rely* on this love! (4:16a).

- ***What human actions of love help you see God better?***
- ***Are there some specific ways people have shown you love that have helped you see God better?***
- ***What gives us confidence, according to this passage?***

III. 1 John 4:16b-21

Read 1 John 4:16b-21

John has already touched on many of the points in this passage, so we’ll hit a few high points:

A. Love gives us confidence (4:16b-18)

Those who live in love are consequently living in God and God is living in them. This makes love complete, and this then gives us confidence!

This complete, perfect love *drives out fear*. We do not need to fear punishment, because God is living in us. Why is he living in us? Because of our love.

B. You cannot love God and hate others (4:19-21)

John has already called out people who say they love God while hating their brothers/sisters. They are “murderers” (3:15) and now they are “liars.” John poses a great question: How can we love God, whom we *cannot* see, if we can’t manage to love our brothers and sisters, whom we *can* see? (4:20). John closes by using the strong word “command” and rooting it in something *God* has already said: “Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (4:21).

- ***What are some specific fears that love does away with?***
- ***How is love the opposite of fear?***
- ***Why do you think John spends so much time on our relationship with our brothers and sisters?***



PUTTING SCRIPTURE TO WORK

- *How can we shift our thinking from love as “feeling” to love as “action?”*
- *Why is our relationship with our brothers and sisters such a difficult thing for us?*
- *How does the love of God give us confidence?*
- *Which is harder for you: loving God, or loving others? How can you work on that this week?*



FOR NEXT WEEK

Read 1 John 5:1-12.