

## Be Sure: Confident Living from 1 John

That You Love One Another

1 John 4:7-12

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<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> 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).

In June 1967, between 400-700 million people around the world watched the first live, international, satellite broadcast. It was called “Our World,” and it featured bands from nineteen countries. The two-and-a-half-hour event was the largest television event to date.

But the global concert was best known for one band and one song. The band was the Beatles. The song was “All You Need is Love.” The song was designed to be a simple, memorable message – one that could be embraced by everyone. The word love is repeated 111 times. Here are a few lines of the lyrics:

*There's nothing you can do that can't be done  
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung  
Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game  
It's easy  
Nothing you can make that can't be made  
No one you can save that can't be saved  
Nothing you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time  
It's easy  
  
All you need is love, all you need is love  
All you need is love, love, love is all you need<sup>1</sup>*

The simple and repetitive message took the world by storm. But it not only was a global musical hit, *All You Need is Love* became the theme song for the Flower Power movement and the growing protest against the Vietnam War in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://genius.com/The-beatles-all-you-need-is-love-lyrics>

The message of the song and the movement was simple, memorable, and compelling: all you need is love. And while the Beatles and the flower power movement oversimplified the message into an individualistic and (even) narcissistic mantra, the centrality and impact of “love” are undeniable.

I think God designed love to be that way. But not the way that Beatles had in mind.

Love, after all, is God’s idea. In fact, God is love (1 John 4:8). God loves the world (John 3:16). Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another (John 13:34). Love is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is how husbands are to treat their wives (Eph. 5:25). Love is how God relates to us, how we are to relate to Him, and how we are to relate to our neighbor (Deut. 6:5).

In our text today from 1 John 4, we discover that love for one another is a vital part of assurance. Rather than love being an emotional need that makes the world go ‘round, love is the central characteristic of those who know God. In this respect, love and true Christianity must go together.

First John 4:7-12 makes the case for the centrality of love by giving us two reasons why Christians must love one another:

- 1) Love because God loved you
- 2) Love because God lives in you<sup>2</sup>

I’m sure I don’t need to convince you that the Bible calls true believers in Jesus to a life of love. Factually, we can certainly all agree on that. But knowing that love is supposed to be a part of a believer’s life is one thing; having it be practically true is another.

Let’s look at both of these reasons and then draw some wide-ranging applications.

### **Love Because God Loved You**

John links assurance with the priority of love, and the basis of that love is the way God has loved you. The kind of love for others that validates our love for God, flows from the way God has loved you. In other words, if you have experienced the love of God, you will love others.

Last week Nate Irwin, at North Indy and Greenwood, and Tommy Johnston, at Castleton, helped us understand the connection between experiencing new birth and not practicing sin: “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning.” Obedience flows from identity. Knowing who you are in Christ, empowers resistance to sin. Why? Because, as 1 John 3:2 says, “Beloved, we are God’s children...” Spiritual adoption creates new affections.

Our text begins with another “beloved” statement followed by a command. John’s use of “beloved” needs to be noted. This is the fifth time he has addressed his audience in this manner (see also 1 John 2:7, 3:2, 3:21, and 4:1). John uses this word to both mark a new subject and to communicate warmth

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<sup>2</sup> I’m thankful for this outline from Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 176.

and affection for the people to whom he is writing. Part of the reason he does this is because of the directness of his words. John knows that pointed words need to come from soft hearts.

What follows in verse 7 is the central command that carries the text all the way to verse 11, where we see another “beloved” statement. John’s instruction in verse 7 is clear: “let us love one another.”

Now I don’t think I need to spend a lot of time convincing you about the importance and centrality of the command to love. Even if you are not yet a Christian, I don’t think it is a surprise to you that Christians are called to love one another. As I said earlier, Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another as He loved them (John 13:34). But He also said that love would be the way people would know that they are His disciples (John 13:35). Following Jesus and a life of love are absolutely linked. No surprises there.

It is what John lists as the basis or the reason for this love that is the bulk of his concern. And this helps us understand how to create that kind of love we know we should have. Let me put it in a question to make it really clear: “What do we draw upon in order to facilitate Christ-displaying love for one another?”

John’s answer is to point us to the very essence, character, and history of what God has done. Christians are to be marked by love because God loved us. What does God’s love look like? Let me give you five qualifying characteristics:

**1. Love is from God** – The first qualifier is foundational and incredibly important. That is why John begins the list here. He is saying that love has its source and its root in who God is. Love is tied to the character of God.<sup>3</sup> We see this repeated in verse 8 when John says, “God is love.” God’s essence, actions, and being are how we know what love is. God defines love. He emulates love. He acts in love. Everything He does is marked by love. John starts here because understanding love requires that we see the connection between this word and the nature of God.

**2. Love is an essential result of true conversion** – In verse 7b, John connects the supernatural reality of the new birth and knowing God to love. He identifies love as the critical marker that a person has been “born of God and knows God.” Now this does not mean anyone on earth who loves someone else or does loving things is automatically a Christian. Even people who don’t believe God exists can love others. Instead, John is connecting the supernatural transformation of the new birth (being born again) and the knowledge of God, with love. In the same way that love comes from God, it also comes as evidence that a person has truly been born again and knows God. The miracle of God-centered love is the result of the miracle of being born again. They are linked.

**3. The absence of love reveals a lack of knowing God** - Just to make this clear, John reverses the argument in verse 8. Apparently, he wants to drive this point home. John approaches the previous point from a negative viewpoint. If a person does not have love in his or her life, then there is no knowledge of God. A consistent pattern of a lack of love should cause great concern. Why? Because

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<sup>3</sup> This summer (June-July) we’ll explore this topic more fully when we take 9 weeks to examine the various attributes of God. You can get a head start by read A.W. Tozer’s book *Knowledge of the Holy*.

God is love. Love is so central to who God is and the heart of the gospel, that a consistently loveless life means that you don't know God.

Let me illustrate this to help you understand it more fully. There are some things in life whose characteristics are so linked to the essence of an activity that they must go together. For example: water and being wet. When you get into water, you will get wet because water and wetness are fundamentally linked. It would be silly for a child to say, "I want to swim, but I don't want to get wet." And if your son comes running in from the outside soaked from head to toe, he cannot deny that he's been in some form of water. Wetness is evidence of water because wetness is part of the essence of water.

Love is to God and the gospel what wetness is to water. And John aims to remind us about this reality because, over time and because of self-centeredness, we can live as if this isn't true or as if we have forgotten that God is love.

**4. Love was displayed in the gospel** – In verse 9, John moves away from the essence and the character of God to what God did through the gospel. That's why he says, "in this the love of God was manifest among us..." Love requires action. God's greatest display of love is found in the second half of verse 9: "...God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." The most poignant example of God's love was the sending of Jesus to die on a cross so that those who trust in Him might be saved. God's love in this action was intentional, costly, sacrificial, redemptive, and transformational. The selflessness of God in the sacrifice of Jesus becomes the definition of what love is and what it does. Jesus died so others might live – that's love. Jesus paid a debt, so others could be freed – that's love. Jesus absorbed the wrath of God, so others could be spared – that's love.

If you are a follower of Jesus, this is how God loved you. Feeling the weight and seeing the beauty of this action on God's part not only changes your life, but it informs how you live. You must love because of the way God loved you. Love was displayed in the gospel. Experiencing this love changes how you think about and how you apply love.

**5. Love rescued us** – In the same way that John repeated himself in verses 7-8, he does it again in verse 10. He reminds his readers, and us, that the love of God was something that came to us undeservedly. It is not as though we set out to love God, and then He loved us. Rather, God loved us before we loved Him. And He sent His son to be the payment for our sins before we ever set our love on Him. God lovingly provided the means of our salvation before there was any love in our hearts for God.

Don't miss this, because it is a critical aspect of a biblical definition of love! God's love is not a response to our love. His love created our love for Him. God moved toward us in love while we were still His enemies. His love rescued us from our dangerous, loveless hearts.

Do you see and feel the beauty of God's love for you? If you are a Christian, part of the strategy for developing a heart that reflects the love of God is regularly reminding yourself about the extent of God's love for you. It is vitally important that we direct our hearts and minds toward what God has

done for us because our natural tendency, even after conversion, is to base our love on what we see in other people. And if we do that, our definition and expectation will be terribly off-center.

If we are not careful, we'll love people if they love us back. We'll love people when it benefits us. We'll wait to act on love until we feel like it. We'll excuse our loveless actions because people do not deserve it. We'll justify our actions because we've been wronged, unfairly treated, or because we're frustrated. And you can find others to validate your excuses.

But when you hear how God loves you, it changes how you think about love. It changes what you are willing to do when it comes to love.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, I want you to consider if you really know the love of God through Christ. You may know the emotion of love toward another person, but God's love through the sacrifice of Jesus is a love like none other. This kind of love comes from knowing that a holy God has forgiven your sins based upon the work of Jesus. This kind of love comes from a deep and life-altering understanding that you are forgiven a debt you could not pay. Why not come to Jesus today?

And for those of you who are Christians, have you allowed your definition of love to be weakened by an absence, considering what God has done for you? Have you allowed other circumstances to alter your understanding of what love should look like? Did you pray for your enemies? Did you ask for a heart of forgiveness? Did you speak kindly to those who were unkind? Did you exhibit patience with those with whom you were frustrated?

Just let 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 wash over you today in light of what God has done for you:

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)*

Believers in Jesus love because God loved them. But there's more.

### **Love Because God Lives in You**

The second reason why believers in Jesus must love one another is because God lives in them. While the first point caused us to consider how God has treated us, this concept flows as an extension of how they've been changed.

In verse 11, we find a second "beloved" command. It is the same command as in verse 7, but he offers a different reason. The argument extends all the way to verse 21, but we are only going to cover verses 11-12 because the point is apparent.

After telling them that there needs to be a love for one another because of God's love for us, John then says the following:

<sup>12</sup> *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*  
1 John 4:12 (ESV)

By saying that no one has ever seen God, John is not simply stating the obvious. He is helping them to understand that when love is demonstrated in the life of sinful person who was previously God's enemy, we see the life of God in them. In other words, we may not see God, but we surely see what He does. And nowhere is this more evident than when we love one another.

A godly marriage filled with love, relationships between friends that overlook differences, a unity in the church that crosses ethnicity and socio-economic status, communication styles that are concerned about others, and resolving conflicts in a way that is filled with grace – these are the rare evidences of the life of God in people. When you are around people like this, you are able to see the life God in them.

That's why John uses his favorite word in verse 12: abide. This is the same idea that we find in John 15 when he talks about Jesus as the vine. Jesus said, *"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love"* (John 15:4, 9).

Love demonstrates that God is abiding in us. For followers of Jesus, Christ-like love is not only the right thing to do, it is tangible evidence that the life of God is present! Love is the essential mark of the follower of Jesus.

What's more, our love also demonstrates that His love is perfected in us. This does not mean that we are going to be perfect people. John is not calling us to some kind of sinless perfectionism. Rather, he has in mind the sense of completion or something that is holistic. Or think of it as something that fits. It's the way puzzle pieces fit together so that you can see the full picture. Love helps us to see all of what God is doing. It completes the circuit of God's grace in our lives.

In other words, a self-centered, "me-first," careless, thoughtless, and bitter person does not fit with the gospel. They claim to know water but have never known "wetness." John is telling us that love is not optional for the Christian. It is central to the transforming effect of the gospel.

As breathing is to life, so too love is to Christianity.

## **Applications**

Let me try to broaden and deepen the application of this idea of love. I'm going to give you a series of random ideas of how love should be applied. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

- **Relationships** – Christian relationships are to be marked by a unique aroma of the gospel where our first response is to be patient, to believe the best, and to not give up quickly (1 Cor. 13:4-7). That's how we love.
- **Speech** – Our words are to be marked by kindness, understanding, clarity, and grace (Eph. 4:31). That's how we love.

- **Ethnicity** – We are to see brothers and sisters from different ethnicities through the lens of the gospel, since Christ is all and is in all. We must let our love for Christ and the gospel be the unifying reality of our lives (Col. 3:11-12). That’s how we love.
- **Marriage** – Husbands and wives are to be marked by a radical other-centeredness that reflects the gospel and their one-flesh union. And husbands are to be particularly focused on loving our wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). That’s how we love.
- **Offenses** – We must be regularly overlook things that bother, bug, frustrate, annoy, and hurt us (1 Pet. 4:8). We should be slow to take offense. We should be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to get angry (James 1:19). That’s how we love.
- **Forgiveness** – Love compels us to be quick to forgive and in a posture that is ready to reconcile (Eph. 4:32). That’s how we love.
- **Confrontation** – We must be willing to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). This means you are willing to speak not only the right way, but in a candid way because you are more concerned for your brother or sister than you are what they think of you. That’s how we love.
- **Humility** – Our others-centeredness in the gospel compels us to consider the needs of other people as more important than our own. Love means I think of myself less and I think more about others (Phil. 2:3-4). That’s how we love.

That’s a good start. I could go on, and you should think of other ways to apply this important aspect of the Christian life. Love is central to what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and it is a vital aspect of assurance.

The theology of the Beatles is a long way from the truth of God’s word. They are not correct when they said:

*There's nothing you can do that can't be done  
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung...*

*All you need is love*

The Bible tells us just the opposite. The hope is not in ourselves. True, we need love, but not the kind of love the Beatles had in mind.

We need this kind of love:

<sup>10</sup> *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* <sup>11</sup> *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:10–11 (NIV)*

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