

## 1 John 4 – Part G

### 1 John 4:7-11, Part 2

In studying a letter like [1 John](#), it is important to always keep in mind the author's intent. Obviously, there are many objectives in any New Testament letter, but in [1 John](#) it is clear that one of John's primary goals is to provide a doctrinal proof of salvation and a moral testimony of salvation.<sup>1</sup> The issue of loving God and loving other individuals becomes the moral test that John is providing. In other words, he is clearly communicating that when someone is genuinely saved that that work of God in their life becomes evident in multiple ways. The more that someone understands the New Testament and understands what it actually means to live out the Christian life, then the more clear it becomes that generally it is not the believer's knowledge of God that is defective, but rather it is their understanding of the love of God that is flawed.<sup>2</sup>

Because it is the very life of God operating in the individual, it has to reveal itself. Surely at some point in the discussion, someone is going to ask the question "*How can a person know that God is a God of love?*" Obviously, that is very good question. The reason that some people ask that question is so that they can feel good about the fact that God forgives sins. They think that if he is a God of love, then the corresponding impact of that love is that He will surely forgive them and in the end that everything will be perfectly fine. They think that is what love always does. However, what they fail to understand is that the love of God is rooted and grounded in His perfect righteousness and holiness. The basis of forgiveness is not the love of God. The basis of forgiveness is the righteousness and holiness of God in demanding a sacrifice for sin, and it was His love that was willing to make that necessary sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> Until someone places biblical faith in the sacrifice of Christ, they will never have forgiveness no matter how much God may actually love them.

Every individual who is not saved and lives their life apart from Christ is dead. They are spiritually dead. [Ephesians 2:1](#) explains that truth this way,

**Eph 2:1** *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,*

The lost individual is dead and does not even know it. He is dead to spiritual truth, to spiritual understanding, and has no spiritual life within him, and apart from Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in their life no hope for eternity. The individual is dead to God, and absolutely nothing could be worse than that reality and to not understand it. This individual is not seeking God, nor does he even care to seek after God. This is exactly what it means to be lost. It means to be dead and to be an enemy of God. [Romans 8:7](#) says,

**Ro 8:7** *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*

The Greek word for "**enmity**" means hostility toward someone, hatred of someone, and opposition to them. Dr. Strong in his New Testament dictionary defines it as being the opposite of the Greek word "*agape*" for love which John uses in this passage.<sup>4</sup> It is a kind of hatred that just lingers and is held on to for a long time, a deep rooted bitterness. It is a deep seated hatred for someone, and in this case God says that it refers to all men who are lost. They simply are not willing to recognize Christ and to yield their life to Him. They are dead - dead in their sins and in their trespasses.

In [1 John 4:9](#), John uses the word “**manifested**” to portray how God demonstrated and revealed His love for the world. It was not that God just said that He loved, but God visibly “**manifested**” that love, and so John’s point will be that true believers will also demonstrate their love both for God and other people in a visible way. If God had chosen not to send His Son, then in reality it would have been impossible for men to understand and appreciate what the love of God actually is. [1 John 4:10](#) states it this way,

**1Jn 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

By giving His Son, God clearly provided a perfect illustration of His love. Then, to further validate what God’s love is like, Christ consistently demonstrated God’s kind of love through His earthly life. He and the Father were eternal and so Christ fully understood what God’s love was like and therefore He was able to perfectly demonstrate and manifest that love to others. No one is capable of manifesting divine love unless they have been given that love by God Himself. The point is really very simple. If someone loves God and loves other people with the same kind of love that God “**manifested**”, then it is because that individual is “**born of God**”. No lost person has the ability or the capacity to love in this manner - not one single person.

At this point in the discussion, it is critical for a professing believer to evaluate if they actually love God and love other people. This particular attribute must be evident in a person’s life if in reality their professed salvation can be considered to be legitimate. Obviously, every believer grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ and in the things of God. The fruit of the Spirit and the attributes of God are developed in a believer’s life over a period of time, but those attributes are developed and they must at some time become clearly evident in that individual’s life. To constantly be grumpy, ill-tempered, negative, selfish, impatient, irritable, touchy, always complaining, sulky, and self-serving is generally evidence that an individual is not saved. However, many individuals profess to be saved, but these kinds of negative attributes seem to characterize their life more than the fruit of the Spirit. What John is saying is that their life is the testimony that the life of God is not in them. None of those kinds of characteristics have anything to do with the character of God being demonstrated in a person’s life. Obviously, for every Christian there are moments of failure in their life in any of these areas, but it should not be the dominating and controlling testimony of their life. [1 John 4:7](#) simply states that “**everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**”. If a person truly and genuinely “**knows God**” it means that they know something of Him and of His attributes, and the clear implication is that because they know God they will love in a way that reflects God’s nature. It is the fact that someone is truly “**born of God**” that gives them this knowledge and then gives them the ability to exercise that knowledge in a loving way.

Think of it this way - to not love is to not know God. The fact that someone is consistently unloving clearly proves that that individual does not know God, and it is His not knowing God that explains and accounts for the fact that he is unloving in his actions towards other people.<sup>5</sup> However, for someone to love others in the way that God loves them is to confirm that the person actually knows God. If the very nature of God is to be loving, then because Christ lives in the believer through the Spirit of God it should be the nature of the believer to love like God. God cannot exist without loving. It is His very nature. It is an attribute of His that has existed in Him for all eternity. Before time even existed, God chose to demonstrate His love by choosing His Son to become the sacrificial Lamb for a world that would actually

hate Him and eventually crucify Him. Why would God do that? It is because “**God is love**”. It is his nature not only to love, but to demonstrate that love in multiple ways. The obvious thrust of these verses in [1 John 4](#) is saying the same thing about those people who truly know God. They to, because of their new nature, will find ways to demonstrate the love of God to people who are undeserving. The great commandment of the New Testament is that men are to love God and to love their neighbor. [Matthew 22:36-39](#) says,

**Mt 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

Obviously, the Parable of the Good Samaritan says that someone's neighbor is anyone who has a very legitimate need in their life. Then, in the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 5:43-44](#), Jesus made this astounding statement,

**Mt 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

Please do not lose sight of the fact that the love which is of God must be understood solely in the person of Christ. The fact that God would make the ungodly to be godly and to make the unlovable to be lovely can only be comprehended and appreciated in the person of Christ. Apart from Christ men could never know the love of God. They would continue to eternally live in their hatred, their greed, their personal self-indulgences, and in their animosity for that which is good. At the very core of their being, men are ruthlessly evil and ungodly. They actually hate God and they hate His Son and His Word. They hate God wanting to control their life. They hate the truth. They hate the fact that God calls on men everywhere to both repent of their sin and to forsake that sin against God. Men hate God. Men hate the Bible. However, when the Spirit of God draws a man to Christ, when He draws and woos them into the love of God that is “**manifested**” in Christ, it is then and only then that their heart changes and now they understand the love of God in a way that had been completely alien and irrelevant to them. They see it now, they understand it now, and as a very part of the new nature given to them at salvation, they to have to demonstrate this love to others. It is such a deep work of God in them that it would be impossible to be a Christian without it. In fact, John says exactly this in [1 John 4:8](#) when he says,

**1Jn 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

It could not be any clearer and any more emphatic than that statement. Obviously, John is providing another test. Of all of the tests that John will give in this letter, no test will be more revealing than the test of whether or not a believer truly loves both God and other people, and especially other believers. At some point this kind of love becomes sacrificial. It must. Why? It is because the way in which God demonstrated His love was through the most incredible sacrifice that has ever been made. He did not make some kind of superficial, trivial, and inconsequential sacrifice. If love cost God what was the dearest to Him personally, then the same applies to the believer. At times the constant demands of love itself is an indication of the hardship that love will often have to face.<sup>6</sup> God made the most profound, yet necessary sacrifice in eternity. Too often believers are satisfied with their definition of the term

sacrifice or commitment, but not God’s definition. Many professing believers have a rationalization, a personal justification, and a reason why it is not necessary for them to be fully committed to Christ. [Luke 14:18](#) is part of the Parable of the Great Supper when many were invited to it, but v18 says “**But they all with one accord began to make excuses**”. People always seem to believe that the Scriptures are talking about someone else, and that they are personally exempt from the demands of discipleship – but they are not. People have “other priorities” that seem to always take precedent over the Word of God and over their commitment to His church. They are satisfied to simply “**make excuses**”.

Sometimes, my fear is that I will stand before God ashamed that my life failed to adequately honor Him as He desired. Each believer will answer to God for their level of commitment to Him, and the excuses that they made will seem so trivial at that moment. If the truth of the matter was clearly understood, no believer should ever think that they have ever sacrificed anything. To begin with, everything that they have, utterly everything, is from God. The Bible declares in [James 1:17](#) that,

**Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**

Many Christians often believe that what they have is because of their efforts and because of their hard work, their diligence, and their resourcefulness. They believe that they have earned it all and that it is all theirs. In reality, God has made every believer a steward of God’s possessions and of His giftings. “**The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof**”, and whatever someone may think that they own is in reality an illusion. Just ask the rich young ruler what he would have done with all of his earthly possessions if he knew earlier what he knows now. He had other meaningless priorities for his life.

The love of God that operates in the believer is never dormant or passive. Why? It is because the love that operates in God is never dormant or passive. It is always functioning in a critical way for the believer’s benefit and for their blessing. The love of God does not need some kind of external and outward influence to provoke it to activity and action, but to the contrary it is always functioning. It is always working for the believer. It never malfunctions or breaks down. The love of God operating in the believer’s life never fails. [Romans 5:5](#) says this about the love of God and how it operates in the believer’s life,

**Ro 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

The love of God is always present, always urging, pressing, admonishing, pleading, insisting, and appealing to the believer to love in a way that reflects God Himself. This is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. This is the life of God working in and sustaining the believer’s life. God was like this before creation, He is like this at this very moment in a believer’s life, and in eternity God will be manifesting this same kind of love for His Son and for the believer. The Bible calls it an “**everlasting love**” in [Jeremiah 31:3](#).

It is important to understand the phrase in [1 John 4:7](#) that says that “**love is of God**”. The word for “**love**” is the Greek word “*agape*” and it is a very important New Testament word that needs to be understood. In the Greek language there are several words for “**love**”. “*Agape*” and “*phileo*” are by far the most common words used. “*Phileo*” speaks primarily of what would be called a brotherly love,

whereas the word “*agape*” is primarily used to speak of a kind of love that is descriptive of God and descriptive of His relationship to believers. There are times in the New Testament when the word “*agape*” is used to describe a person’s love for things, and when that is the case its meaning is that love is being directed to the wrong end and not towards God.<sup>7</sup> For instance, [Luke 11:43](#) says,

**Lk 11:43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love (*agapate*) the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.**

In [John 3:19](#) the word is used to describe that men “**love darkness**”.

**Jn 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved (*egapesan*) darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

In [2 Timothy 4:10](#), speaking of Demas, it says that men love this present age.

**2Ti 4:10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved (*agapesas*) this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.**

In each of these three verses the form of the word “**love**” is in the verb form, so it is able to have a negative connotation. However, when the noun form is used in the New Testament it does not have a negative usage. It is always used in reference to the kind of love that is represented by God’s love and by God’s nature. It can represent either God’s love for believers, the believer’s love for God, or the believer’s love for other believers and people who do not know God. The only way that an individual can have an “*agape*” love for God is that they must have been “**born again**”. In other words, the natural man and the lost man cannot love God with this kind of love. It is spiritually impossible. So the kind of love that John is addressing is a love that can only be found in those who are saved. A person’s ability to actually love like God loves is an ability and capacity that is given only to true believers. If a person says that they love God, but they have no love for genuine believers, then the reality of that confession is that they have no saving relationship with God.

Because God’s love is a perfect love and because it is a love that is always consistent and always the same, it means that God has the same kind of love for believers that He has for His own Son. God loves believers with the same passion with which He loves Christ. That truth should stagger every true Christian. It is a truth that should revolutionize and transform their life. It is a truth that should constantly provide confidence and encouragement in their life.. The believer has been brought into the Father’s family and he will be loved with an everlasting love in exactly the same way that the Father loves Christ.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, 165.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 430.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 431.

<sup>4</sup> Strong, 1124.

<sup>5</sup> Candlish, 388.

<sup>6</sup> Verbrugge, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Verbrugge, 6.

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