

1 John 4 – Part H

1 John 4:9-11

[1 John 4:9](#) says the following,

^{1Jn 4:9} In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

John states one of the primary purposes of why Christ died. It was “so that we might live through Him”. The word “live” (*zao*) is a very common New Testament Greek word, but in this context it refers specifically to a supernatural spiritual life that is only available through the person of Christ. So, it is referring to much more than just being physically alive in the flesh. The specific life to which John is referring is God’s spiritual life that is conferred and granted to the sinner at the new birth.¹ This is the very reason that God sent His Son and it is only “**through Him**” that a person can have this kind of life.

Here is the problem. Everyone who is outside of Christ is physically alive, but spiritually dead. They believe that because they are physically alive that their mental capacities provide them with adequate spiritual knowledge and reason. Sadly, however, nothing could be any further from the truth than that illusion. Men are not only uncomprehending and lacking of any true knowledge of God, but they are also lacking any capacity to understand the spiritual realities of God’s kingdom. [1 Corinthians 2:14](#) says,

^{1Co 2:14} But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness (*moria*) to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Whatever spiritual resources and abilities that the lost person believes that they have is only a spiritual mirage. The lost man is spiritually dead to everything that is eternally important. He does not love God and cannot love of God. He is actually in opposition to and at enmity with God. The Bible teaches this everywhere.

Now, that may seem like a strange way to begin to address this verse, but the goal is to try in some meaningful way to provide a meaningful backdrop for the measurement of the love of God itself. However, until the total and utter depravity of all men can be seen and understood, it is very unlikely that the love of God can even be faintly comprehended. Once again, I feel compelled to convince each of us that “**there is none righteous, no not one**” ([Romans 3:10, 12](#)). That is the underlying backdrop against which the love of God operates. That is the very hostile environment into which the Son of God was sent. Until the total wickedness, corruption, immorality, decadence, and evil propensities of men can be appreciated, then the love of God will seem like a distant mirage that has no substance and value for the Christian life.

The picture is one of men and women who find themselves under the wrath of God, but without any ability or capacity to even understand spiritual truth, nevertheless do something to save themselves. They are hopeless and they are helpless. Just think of the man who finds himself spending eternity without Christ. At the moment in which he enters into eternity he will be utterly without hope and without any help whatsoever. Nothing could be more frightening than this scenario which is played out daily in the lives of thousands of people who die without Christ. The carnal mind is at enmity with God, in opposition to God, hostile to Christ, and antagonistic towards His Word. [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.

Unfortunately, the problem that many individuals have is that they “feel good” about themselves and about where they are headed. For various reasons they feel good about life. They believe that God is a God of love and therefore He will be merciful and forgiving towards them - if that is even necessary for them. They feel good about all of that, but in reality good feelings will never bring anyone to Christ. Good feelings will only corrupt the reality of sin and unbelief in the sinner’s life. The only way that someone can come to Christ is for them to see themselves as they truly are – sinful, unrepentant, without Christ, and therefore without hope. All of this is why in v9 that God had to send His Son. Without Christ, men are physically dying and spiritually dead. The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that the lost man must be “**made alive**”. [Ephesians 2:1 and 5](#) says,

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

Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

[Colossians 2:13](#) says,

Col 2:13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

The Greek word for “**made alive**” is “*zōopoiēō*” and it literally means to cause to live, but in the context it is clearly speaking of imparting spiritual life and the spiritual sustenance needed for that spiritual life.² Whatever is needed to sustain the spiritual life that God has given to the believer is immediately provided to them with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their life. The power to live the Christian life is imparted at the new birth. Everything that the believer needs for the Christian life is provided to them the moment that they are saved – everything. This is a cardinal principle of the New Testament.

Now, in [1 John 4:10](#) John provides a biblical description of love when he says the following,

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.

Take note of the beginning phrase “**In this is love...**” What John is about to say is clearly how biblical love, or God’s love, is defined. Love is not something that we have for God in and of ourselves – not at all. John is not going to allow our personal definition of love to trump God’s definition. God’s definition says that we did not love God - “**not that we loved God**”. Our definition of love is very selfish. We only tend to love people who love us in return and do things for us that we deem to be favorable to our life. In fact, when someone offends us or does something against us, it normally provokes within us a kind of dislike for them. We find ourselves not wanting to have anything to do with them. We certainly are not inclined to be their friend or to continue to spend time with them. However, when someone treats us kindly and graciously, we generally develop a kind of natural love and appreciation for them. In fact, we may even do some benevolent things on their behalf. We tend to treat them respectfully and often times spend a good deal of time with them.

However, that is not John’s definition of what love is. To the contrary, it is actually the very opposite of his definition. His definition clearly states that “**God loved us and sent His Son**”. Well, why would He have to do that? It is because everyone that God loved did not love Him and would never have come to Him unless He had demonstrated what real love is and does. Real love is anchored in being sacrificial - no matter what the cost. Please appreciate that God did not simply say “*I love you*”. That would have been easy. We can do that without thinking, but that simply is not love. **God loved** and **He gave** the most sacrificial gift that could be given for the most undeserving.

The Greek word for “**propitiation**” is “*hilasmos*”. Please keep in mind that this word is the backdrop against which the love of God must be understood. It is a word that refers to the means by which sin is covered and removed. It is a word that means that Christ became the actual offering for sin – and in that sacrifice God was completely satisfied. He fully understood that we personally had no means of paying for our sins, so He provided His Son as the payment. That is “**propitiation**” and that is the love of God. Whatever punishment that God declared each of us deserve was placed on Christ by God. [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) says,

^{2Co 5:21} **For He (God the Father) made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

[1 John 2:2](#) says the following about Christ,

^{1Jn 2:2} **And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**

In other words, the backdrop of God’s love is “**our sins**”. The word “**sins**” covers it all. It is physical sin, mental sin, emotional sin, moral sin, and spiritual sin. It is a hatred of God, a hatred of Christ, a hatred of His Word, and a hatred of the church. It includes all sins of every possible kind from birth and childhood through youth, middle-age, and ultimately into old age and death. It includes a disregard for the things of God, cursing, using God’s name in vain, and having no respect for His work in our life. It is treating the things of God lightly, it is demeaning the work of Christ by ignoring obedience and commitment to Him, and it is diminishing the worth and value of our personal bodies through ungodly habits and addictions that denigrate our bodies as the very temple of God. It is being filthy, dirty, obscene, selfish, immoral, indecent, adulterers, liars, gossips, backbiters, fornicators, haters of God, greedy, covetous, idolaters, murderers, and drunkards. Just think of all of the things that men do against God on a regular and repeated basis. Please appreciate that the world is full of evil. Men curse God, ignore God, disobey God, reject God, rebel against God, and oppose God.³ The picture that God paints of how men perceive Him and react to Him and against Him is very ugly.

That is the backdrop of the love of God, and men absolutely hate hearing these spiritual indictments against them. They believe themselves to be good and that they are getting better, when in reality they are ungodly sinners before a holy God that have absolutely no goodness in them whatsoever. These are words that offend a lost man. Often times they offend believers. They are descriptions that antagonize, upset, and insult their perception of their goodness. If in hearing all of this someone believes that they can leave themselves out of this picture and out of this depiction, then in all likelihood they are not even saved. Each of us are these people - the people for whom Christ died. These are the people for whom the love of God was “**manifested**” and revealed. Once again, this is the backdrop for understanding

what love really is. If we are saved, it is not because of anything that we did for God. It is not because of our perceived goodness or our supposed merit before God. It is not because God looked at us and saw something really good and desirable in us. It is not because we were better than other people, no matter how ungodly they may have lived. Never! Once again, “**there is none righteous, no not one**” – not me, not you, and not anyone you know. If you are saved it is only because of what God has done for you in Christ and absolutely nothing else. Salvation is a gift from God to people who absolutely deserve nothing from God – and every single one of us fall into that category no matter what our personal perceptions may be of ourselves and our perceived goodness. [Romans 3:12](#) says “**there is none who does good, no not one**”.

No man has personal merit **before God** apart from Christ. It does not matter how often they go to church, how many times they pray, how much they study the Bible, how many church meetings they attend, how many benevolent deeds they perform, how many classes they teach, or how much money they place into an offering plate. All of that is a salvation by works and it is worthless with regards to initial salvation. If we taught that a person has to do good in order to be good, we would be teaching a works based salvation and a performance based salvation. Please appreciate that both goodness and righteousness are not something that lost men possess, but they are two things that are imputed to the sinner by Christ at salvation. Please appreciate that the culture in which we live is headed towards utter catastrophe. There can be no doubt about that, and unfortunately the church has offered to men a maligned and denigrated gospel that has no substance and no saving validity to it, and the result will be that men who thought they were saved will die in their sins both hopeless and helpless. This is exactly why God “**sent His Son**”. This is how God has demonstrated, revealed, and made known His love. This is how God both verified and validated His love - He gave. He has done the most unthinkable for the most undeserving, and the majority of those people who are even privileged to hear this great gospel message of salvation will completely and totally reject it for a life of sin that will bury their soul in eternal torment and destruction.

In [1 John 4:11](#) John gives a revealing test in that believers are to demonstrate God’s sacrificial love to other believers when he says.

^{1Jn 4:11} **Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

The Greek word for “**ought**” actually means to owe someone and to be under an obligation to them. It is a word that expresses a logical necessity.⁴ If someone were in a serious automobile accident and had obvious major injuries, it would create a logical necessity and a moral obligation to get them to the hospital as quickly as possible. It is only logical and moral to do such. So, if a believer knows and understands that God demonstrates and manifests His love to people who are very undeserving, then every believer is morally obligated to do the same. Obviously, Scripture has definitive guidelines on how to handle unruly and inappropriate behavior. Love does not just give a green light to any kind of indecent or inappropriate behavior. However, in most cases those are not the issues by which believers are tested. It is the irritation, an unkind word, or a lack of patience with someone. It normally is the small things that reveal the reality of our lack of love for other individuals.

Just suppose that we see something in somebody else that is distasteful to us. It could be anything - their appearance, their attitude, their lifestyle, their laziness, or some area of pride in their life that is distasteful

to us. It could be something very unattractive and somewhat repulsive. However, when we see something like that, does it cool or quench our genuine love for them? The question has to be asked as to whether or not when God sees that same thing does it cool or quench His love for them like it does for us? Does what God sees hinder Him from continuing to love that individual with an everlasting love? Obviously, it does not. In fact, it actually calls forth the love of God that He demonstrated at the cross. To the contrary, God deeply longs to manifest His earnest love to the sinner and to the one who was distasteful.⁵

In reality, the local church should be a place to demonstrate a great love for other believers. It should be a place of warmth and fellowship and a place where kindness and forgiveness are ever present. It should be a place where grace is extended to those who have failure in their life. However, oftentimes church is a place where the exact opposite is demonstrated. Many professing believers come to church, take a seat, leave quickly, and never communicate one thing to anyone else that surrounds them. They come, they go. They offer little to nothing to the fellowship that should be characterized by great love for one another, and then they wonder why God does not seem to do much in or through their life. It is simply because God is not going to shape His work in someone who is not willing to manifest His love to other people. No wonder lost people are generally not impressed with what goes on in a church. Often times in many churches the visitors are the people who are the most ignored. The lost visit a church and have a reasonable expectation of that church, yet they find a fairly indifferent kind of attitude and deportment. Christians often become disgruntled with someone in their church, so they simply “move on”. Nothing could be further from the perfect will of God than that kind of reaction and decision.

So, the real test for the believer is not just saying that they love God. Every conscientious believer will do that simply because it is quite easy to do - just say that we love God. The real test, however, is the test of whether or not we as a believer are truly demonstrating, exhibiting, and validating the love of God to other believers as well as to people who are without Christ. Love can be expressed in many different ways – and should be. This is not something that is just passive and inactive, but rather it is quite visible and should happen fairly frequently - this thing of demonstrating God’s love to others who are not deserving of God’s love. Too often our kind of love is just superficial. It only operates when there is a reciprocal love to it, but that is not a demonstration of the love of God, but rather a demonstration of a person’s love for themselves.

Before leaving this passage, it is important to look at what God has done for believers through Christ. [Colossians 1:14](#) says it this way,

Col 1:14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

We were all dead in our sins, but now because “**He loved us**”, every believer has redemption and forgiveness. It means that he has been pardoned and is now at peace with God. The power of God can now operate in his life. John simply says that it was so that “**we might live through Him**”.

ENDNOTES

¹ Precept, *1 John 1:9*, electronic page.

² Vine, 668.

³ Preachers, 297.

⁴ Strong, 1279.

⁵ Candlish, 396-397.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous. *The Preacher's Outline and Study Bible: I, II Peter, I, II, III John, Jude*. Vol. 12. Chattanooga, Tennessee: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996.

Candlish, Robert. *Geneva Series of Commentaries: I John*. Third Edition. Avon: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993.

Precept Austin. n.d. http://www.preceptaustin.org/1_john_49_commentary.htm.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Vine, W.E. *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. A Special Edition. Edited by John R. Kohlenberger III. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984.