



The Move to Love

1 John 4:7-21

“Dear friends, let us love one another ...” (1 John 4:7a)



The Source of Love

1. Read 1 John 4:7-21. John writes, “... for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7b, NIV). “God is love” (4:8b, 16b). “We love because he first loved us” (4:19). How do these words encourage Christians to love?¹

The Demonstration of Love

2. When you consider the arrest, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, what do you think about? What are your impressions? Is “love” evident in these events? Explain.²

📖 “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10, NIV)

📖 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NIV).

📖 “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16).



The Practice of Love

3. What is the appropriate response to God’s demonstration of love? What motivates us to respond?³ Why might we fail to respond appropriately?

📖 “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

¹ Love is part of the very *nature* and *character* of God. If we are truly born of God, if we are truly his children, we are partakers of His nature through the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:4). So we should be characterized by love. If we truly know God personally, if we are united with Him who is Love, we will be transformed into loving persons. Because God is love, his love comes from his own character; it is not dependent on the loveliness of the loved. God chooses to love the unlovable (Romans 5:6-8). And if we truly know God, we will come to love that way too (though imperfectly, of course). It helps to know that the ability and power to love come from God.

² Certainly, these events demonstrate hatred, cruelty, evil and injustice. But they also demonstrate love.

³ Nonbelievers may not respond because they don’t accept either the historicity or the significance of the cross. But what about the believer? John uses the word ‘ought,’ but is our only motivation a sense of duty?

The Completion of Love

4. In what way does God “live in us?” (4:13) In what way is God’s love “made complete in us?” (4:12, 16-17) What does this mean?⁴

📖 “... if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (4:12b)

📖 “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us...” (1 John 4:16b-17a, NIV).

5. What fears do you have? Do you fear the judgment of God (or the *possibility* of God’s judgment)?⁵ Why do you fear?⁶ How does “perfect love drive out fear?”⁷ (4:16b-18)

Reflection/Application

- Do you feel that you are lacking in love for others? Only through faith in Christ, can we fully experience God’s love. Only through faith in Christ, can we love others as God commands.
- As Christians, we “ought to” love others. In Christ, we “can do” because God lives in us. Indwelt by the Spirit, we should “want to.” If you are lacking “want to,” could it be that you’ve not really understood and appreciated God’s love demonstrated through the cross? Reflect on Christ’s “atoning sacrifice for our sins” and ask God to change your heart.
- Next, let us think of “how to.” In what practical way can you show love this week to a brother or sister in Christ, or to another person who needs the love of God?

The “Atoning Sacrifice for Our Sins” (1 John 4:10)

- ❑ *What is “atonement?”* Reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and human beings through the death of an acceptable substitute, one who is without defect.
- ❑ *Why is atonement needed? Why must an acceptable substitute die?* Because all people are sinners (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23). God cannot tolerate sin; sin separates us from God (Habakkuk 1:12-13; Isaiah 59:2). Death is the necessary result of sin (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). God must punish sin; forgiveness requires the death of an acceptable substitute (Exodus 34:6-7; Hebrews 9:22).
- ❑ Particular animals could qualify as acceptable substitutes, but only partially and temporarily, for their purpose was to point toward the Ultimate Substitute (Hebrews 10:1, 4).
- ❑ Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final acceptable substitute. Only the Ultimate Sacrifice could really take away sins (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 2:1-2).



⁴ God’s love *for* us is made complete (perfected) only when it is reproduced *in* us or *among* us in the Christian fellowship (John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John* [Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988], 167). Love is made complete in Christ-likeness (1 John 4:17).

⁵ A person may be uncertain about God, but still has fear concerning the end of life, and the possibility of judgment.

⁶ We need to distinguish between reverent ‘fear’ (i.e., reverence for God, which is a positive characteristic of the Christian) and fear of punishment and God’s judgment. Reverent fear is expressed in verses like Proverbs 9:10 (‘The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom’) and others (e.g., Philippians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:17). Love and reverent fear are compatible, but we cannot approach God in love and hide from him in fear at the same time.

⁷ ‘perfect love’ involves a mature love relationship between the person and God