

THE SON EMBODIES DIVINE LOVE

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Nature of Love (1 John 4:7-10)
2. The Primacy of Love (1 John 4:11; 1 Cor. 13:1-3)
3. The Character of Love (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Background Passages: 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God, who in His essence is love, has called on people to love one another according to His love for them.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God, in His nature, is love. God's greatest act of love has been giving of Himself to us in Christ Jesus. Jesus took on flesh, suffered and died, and rose again to forgive the sins of all who trust in Him. Jesus's work leaves no question of God's glory and His love for people.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because God, out of His great love, has sacrificed of Himself for us, we are to love others and sacrifice greatly on their behalf.

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: In his letter known as 1 John, the apostle John, one of Jesus's disciples, exhorted his readers to be on guard against false prophets. His readers must not be caught up in worldly errors but know "the Spirit of truth" (1 John 4:6). John then went on to point his readers to the importance of love in their relationships with one another. This love is rooted in the love of God for His people. Knowing "the Spirit of truth" should lead to love that looks like God's love for us. Our love for our fellow Christians is rooted in the gospel. Belief in the gospel should lead to love for other believers and for the whole world.

EXPLAIN: We use the word "love" for all sorts of reasons, such as "I love pizza" or "I love Marvel movies" or "I love my mom" or "I love my spouse." The word *love* may have various meanings and intents to various people.

DISCUSS: How would you define *love*? (affection for someone; devotion and care for someone; putting others' needs before your own; sacrificing for the sake of the good of someone)

TRANSITION: In our session today, we will be looking at how Jesus embodies divine love. Through the saving work of Jesus Christ, we see the nature of love, the primacy of love, and the character of love. While the world is often confused about what love is, God has clearly revealed what love looks like for His people. The greatest act of love the world has ever seen was the Lord Jesus Christ being sent to earth in order to save His people from their sins.

POINT 1

THE NATURE OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-10)

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** 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. **10** 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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 John 4:7-10** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7-8** commentary to highlight the key doctrine (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #13: God Is Love: To say that God is love is to say that God is the **essence** of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a **sign** that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in **Christ** so that we might become reconciled to Him.

DISCUSS: Call attention to the Bible passage on **PACK ITEM 11: GOD IS LOVE**; then ask: **How does the Bible's description of love contrast with the world's view of love?** (in the Bible, love is from God; in the world, love is from you and your heart; in the Bible, God is love; in the world, anything can be love; in the Bible, if you don't love, you don't know God; in the world, if you don't love, you just need to talk it out; in the Bible, love means sacrificing and putting others above yourself; in the world, love sometimes can be self-serving)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-10** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Love is best exemplified by God's **sending** His Son as a **sacrifice** for us that we may know God's love and learn to love others sacrificially.

DISCUSS: What are some ways people can misunderstand God's love? (using God's love as a license to sin; thinking they must earn God's love; thinking God could never love them; thinking they could lose God's love)

TRANSITION: The nature of God's love calls us to love one another. Because God gave of Himself in sending the Son, Jesus Christ, into the world so that we might have life, we must love one another in a way that reflects this greatest gift of God.

NOTES



PROPTIATION

The act of averting or appeasing God's wrath, specifically through Christ's death on the cross. Because God is holy, sin must be dealt with. Because God is loving, He Himself provided an atoning sacrifice in His Son, Jesus, to cover sin and turn away His anger.¹

COMMENTARY

VERSES 7-8 / The apostle John directly addressed his readers by calling them **“Beloved.”** This could also be translated as “Dear friends.” More than just a term of endearment toward his readers, this word also introduced the topic that John was going to address: love. John’s appeal was that Christians should love one another for two reasons: 1) love is from God, and 2) love is evidence of one who has been born of God.

First, love is from God. John based our need to love one another in God’s nature and character. God’s actions are the ultimate displays of pure love. Ray Van Neste writes, “Love is fundamental to God’s character; thus his children must bear the family resemblance.”² The source of the believer’s love for one another is God.

The second motivation for loving one another is that genuine love for one another is evidence of being born of God. Love for our fellow Christians is a fruit of regeneration. John’s statement **“Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God”** does not mean that belief in Christ is not necessary. In fact, right before this section, John was talking about knowing the truth about Christ coming in the flesh to earth. If one is born of God, then the love of God has transformed him to have a love for the family of God.

In verse 8, John explained how those who lack love have not been changed by the transforming power of the gospel; they are said to **“not know God.”** This verse is shocking and should cause Christians to look at the state of their heart and concern for others. God does not love us and leave us in our same sinful state. No, the power of the gospel transforms us so that we can and will love one another.

What does John mean by **“God is love”**? This verse has been misunderstood and at times misused. Some have misused this description of God as a license to live however they please. They dismiss their

sinful actions by thinking that because God is love, He will let them live however they want. But “God is love” means that one of His key characteristics is love. The one true God is a loving God who cares about others. But God is not only loving, He is holy as well. John wrote earlier in his letter: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1:5). In this letter, John was showing that two key attributes of God’s character are His love and His light—His love and His holiness.

VERSES 9-10 / John turned from the big picture of God’s love to a concrete example of how God’s love is displayed—ultimately in the giving of Himself to us in Christ Jesus. John was saying that God’s love is **“made manifest among us”** in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s **“only Son,”** which shows us His unique identity—there is no one else like Him. No one else could be sent on this mission to earth to save. Notice the purpose for which God sent Jesus into the world: **“so that we might live through him.”** God sent Jesus into the world on a mission to bring life through death. John’s language here is similar to what we studied in John 3:16.

The love of God is described even further in verse 10: **“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.”** John shows us how we who were destined for eternal punishment in hell could have eternal life in Christ. Jesus came and took upon Himself at the cross the punishment that we deserve for our sins. The word for **“propitiation”** could also be translated as “atoning sacrifice.” This sacrifice was done in order to bear the wrath and judgment of God. Jesus did that for us.

Therefore, we should seek to love one another because God loved us. And it is only through understanding and knowing the costly love and sacrifice of God for sinners that we are able to love and sacrifice like Him as well.

POINT 2

THE PRIMACY OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:11; 1 COR. 13:1-3)

1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

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1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

READ: Ask two volunteers to read aloud **1 John 4:11** and **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** from their own Bibles.

EXPLAIN: Use the **1 JOHN 4:11** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Following Christ's **example**, we must love **others** sacrificially.

DISCUSS: Why do you think we find it difficult to love others? (in our sinful nature, we enjoy receiving love more than giving love; it takes much effort to love others; we're prideful and think we deserve more love; we like comfort and don't like to sacrifice in loving others)

EXPLAIN: Use the **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Knowledge and **actions**, even if learned and done for the Lord, are pointless if we don't have **love**.

TRANSITION: As Paul needed to remind the church at Corinth to love one another, we need the same reminder today. Paul called the believers in Corinth to live a better way by exhorting them to love one another. As followers of Jesus, we should be committed to living this better way as well.

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Right love of God is what enables right love of self and others. When we devote heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving [God], we perceive ourselves rightly—no room for pride or self-exaltation—which prepares us to love our neighbor freely. Rightly perceiving ourselves to be the unworthy recipients of the *agape* [love] of God, we become willing to love our neighbor in spite of himself because God first loved us in spite of ourselves. We do not wait to feel love; rather, we will ourselves to act in love whether we feel it or not. *Agape* transcends our feelings."³

—Jen Wilkin

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 4:11 / John began yet another verse by calling his readers, **“Beloved.”** He was reminding them of why he was writing this section: Our love for others must be rooted in God’s love for us. Again we see how God’s love for us transforms us to love others. Love is meant to be a primary mark of the life of a Christian. In light of God’s amazing love, we are to love one another. Understanding the great love God has for His people should move Christians to act. When John said, **“if God so loved us,”** he was calling his readers to think of the way in which God loves them. When we think of the love God has for us, we must consider how costly the love of God truly is. Love is not easy, but it is good and right. God’s love for believers is not some abstract concept but real and includes action.

When was the last time you pondered the love God has for you? Think of what it cost God to love you. God loves us despite our sinful rebellion against Him. He loved us despite it costing Jesus His life. When we think of this great cost, we should be moved to love those whom God places in our lives.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 / First Corinthians 13 may be familiar to you because some verses of this chapter are often read at weddings. But this is ironic when considering the original context. In a wedding ceremony, you have a man and a woman coming together as one. The church at Corinth, however, was full of divisions and hostility toward one another. They were not united because they lacked love for each other. First Corinthians 13 is situated in a long section on spiritual gifts starting in chapter 12. Some Corinthians were causing divisions over the different gifts, saying some were more important than others. Paul wrote this section to show them “a still more excellent way” (12:31). The better and more excellent way is love. Instead of fighting over the importance of gifts, Paul said they needed to have love for one another.

Paul’s call to love is a much needed exhortation for the church today as well. Much

like the church in Corinth, the church today faces all different kinds of division. Whether it be political or social concerns, the church can easily be divided over a number of important and unimportant issues. So we must take to heart Paul’s call to love. We must not let our differences divide us but seek to be united by our common love for Christ and submission to His Word. The call to love is not meant to be a call to compromise the truth of the Scriptures. Rather, because of the truth revealed in the Scriptures, we are called to love.

In verse 1, Paul said our words must not be empty of love. Yes, some may speak eloquently, but if they have not love, they are of no more use than an instrument with no purpose.

In verse 2, Paul talked about having **“all knowledge.”** He said that even if he knew everything and possessed all the faith needed to move mountains but did not have love, then that knowledge and faith truly meant nothing and were devoid of all worth. Remember what was happening in the Corinthian church. These believers were placing great value and worth on the spiritual gifts. However, instead of using those gifts to encourage their brothers and sister in the faith, they were creating a spiritual hierarchy that was dividing the church. The church is united by faith and knowing Christ, and at the center of that unity should be the common love for Christ that transforms us.

In verse 3, Paul spoke of taking great action: **“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned.”** Paul was telling them that they could do all the good in the world and be known for their good works, but if they did not love, then those actions were meaningless.

Thus, we may know much and do much, even taking these steps for the Lord in our minds, but if love is not the motivating factor, then it will all be pointless.

POINT 3

THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (1 COR. 13:4-7)

NOTES

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. **7** Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Love is **active** and considers the other person **above** ourselves at every opportunity.

DISCUSS: Paul's list is not exhaustive in terms of what love is or is not. What would you add to the list? (love is merciful and forgiving; love is caring and compassionate; love is not harsh; love is not sarcastic; love is not apathetic)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-7** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

It is **impossible** to love perfectly this side of heaven, but as we look to Jesus's love and example for us, we can be empowered to love **better**.

DISCUSS: What can you do to help you love better? (pray for the Spirit's power to love; understand the magnitude of Christ's love for me and others; find someone to keep me accountable on loving better; find opportunities to love others; confess my lack of love)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 4-5 / In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul assembled a number of verbs in the Greek (15 to be exact) to describe the characteristics of love. What can be seen from this section is that love is active; it is not simply a feeling or an emotion.

In verse 4, Paul used patience and kindness to describe love. Patience carries with it the idea of waiting and sticking with someone. This patience is often used to describe God's relationship to His people (2 Pet. 3:9). This means that when something goes wrong in our relationships (and it will), we are not to move on and ignore others but seek to demonstrate this act of patient love. Next, Paul said love **"is kind."** This is the only place this specific verb appears in the New Testament. Due to the loving-kindness that God has shown us in Christ, we are to be kind toward others. One of the distinctives of the early church was their kindness toward those in need, including widows, orphans, or unwanted infants. The early church's kindness was a defining mark that gave them opportunities to share the love of Christ.

Next, Paul went on to list eight characteristics of what love is not:

- Love **"does not envy."** This means that we do not think negatively of others when they experience success. Such envy seems to have been at the heart of the Corinthian church's divisions. Instead of being thankful for the gifts God had granted to other believers, they were jealous.
- Love is not boastful. This could be translated as "vainglory." Love does not seek to boast in a self-glorified way.
- Love **"is not arrogant."** Love does not seek to be prideful but humble.
- Love is not rude. This word has a wide range of meanings. It can mean anything from inappropriate sexual behavior to dishonorable actions.
- Love **"does not insist on its own way."** Instead of being selfish, the way of love seeks to serve others. In

1 Corinthians 10:24, Paul wrote, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."

- Love **"is not irritable."** Love means we will not be easily angered by others.
- Love is not **"resentful,"** literally, "Keeps no books on evil." When people are wronged, the way of love does not seek to hold that wrong against the offender but seeks to forgive.
- Love **"does not rejoice at wrongdoing."** This could also mean that love does not rejoice over injustice.

All of these words help believers understand what love is not.

VERSES 6-7 / Paul then turned back to stating what love is in a positive sense:

- Love **"rejoices with the truth."** Instead of seeking to spread lies and gossip, love seeks to delight in the spread of truth.
- Love **"bears all things."** When circumstances get hard, love seeks to be supportive and bear the burdens of others.
- Love **"believes all things."** This does not mean that love is gullible or accepts everything as fact. Love is not caught up in error. Rather, this word carries with it the idea of believing the best about others. Instead of jumping to the worst conclusion about the actions of others, we should seek to extend a gracious understanding.
- Love **"hopes all things."** For believers, we should never fall into a fatalistic mindset. We have a "living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3).
- Love **"endures all things."** The way of love does not end when something goes wrong but continues. Love never gives up.

When we read through this passage, it seems impossible to follow. But this passage is not meant to paralyze us in hopelessness. Rather, Paul's words once again point us to the One who loves perfectly—Jesus Christ. The greatest act of love the world has ever seen was the Lord Jesus Christ going to the cross to die for our sins. Now that is love in action.

MY RESPONSE



NOTES

PACK ITEM 12: GOD'S LOVE HYMN: Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together as a reminder of the wonderful love of God embodied in Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Because God, out of His great love, has sacrificed of Himself for us, we are to love others and sacrifice greatly on their behalf.

HEAD:

From the Bible passages in this session, we see that God desires that we be united and love one another. Unity and love are central to the life of a healthy church and to faithful followers of Jesus. Paul showed us that love is foundational to every spiritual gift that believers are equipped with. If we do not have love, then our gifts will not be used to honor God and build others up.

How might the truth that “love endures all things” help you in your relationship with other Christians?

HEART:

Love is not simply an emotion, it involves action. In fact, our actions will demonstrate if we have the spiritual fruit of love in our lives. When we realize how much God has loved us in Christ, we will seek to love and forgive others. God is not calling us to do something that He was unable to do Himself. God has loved and forgiven us in Christ. Therefore, we should love and forgive one another.

What person or group of people do you need to love better, and how?

HANDS:

God has sacrificed greatly on our behalf. His love was costly; it cost Jesus His life. So we are to love others with a sacrificial love modeled after God's love for us. Love often entails sacrifice, and we see that in the cross of Jesus Christ. There will be times when we have to love others in a costly way, but we do so because we are following in the steps of our Savior, in the way that He loves us.

What is one concrete action you will take this week to love in the way Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Love, and do what thou wilt: whether thou hold thy peace, through love hold thy peace; whether thou cry out, through love cry out; whether thou correct, through love correct; whether thou spare, through love do thou spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.”⁴

—Augustine (354–430)

POINT 1: THE NATURE OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-10)

+ COMMENTARY

“The meaning of the expression ‘born of God’ is best explained by reference to the Fourth Gospel. John 1:12–13 emphasizes that people become children of God, not by natural birth, but by being born of God. In John 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born ‘from above’, and this is equivalent to being ‘born of the Spirit’. Being born of God, then, is quite distinct from natural human procreation. It is brought about by God through his Spirit, in conjunction with faith in Christ on the part of those concerned.”⁵

POINT 3: THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (1 COR. 13:4-7)

+ COMMENTARY

“Structurally, 1 Cor 13 divides into three sections: Verses 1–3 expound the absolute necessity and primacy of love, vv. 4–7 describe the nature or character of love, and vv. 8–13 establish the permanence of love. Paul’s exposition of love is particularly suited to the Corinthian context. The chapter begins by establishing the preeminence of love in relation to spiritual gifts (tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith) and exceptional sacrifice (13:1–3). Paul then provides a definition of love, not in terms of mere abstract qualities but in terms of what love does (13:4–7). The chapter concludes by showing that whereas prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease, love never fails (13:8–13). Love as the ‘greatest’ of the faith/hope/love triad resonates with the exhortation of 12:31a to earnestly desire the ‘greatest’ gifts.”⁶

References

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3. Jen Wilkin, *In His Image* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 38.
4. Augustine of Hippo, “Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John,” in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. H. Browne and Joseph H. Myers, vol. 7, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 504.
5. Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 157.
6. Mark Taylor, 1 Corinthians, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 303.