

# GOD WITH US

## Part 11: LATER LETTERS

### Message 12 – 1 John

#### Walking in Love

#### 1John 4:7-5:21

#### Introduction

The letter of 1John focuses on two key *evidences* of the reality of one's faith in Jesus: obedience to His commands, and love for people. Of all the letters in the New Testament, John gives the most attention to the second theme – love for others as evidence of one's love for God. Various forms of the word “love” occur 34 times in this short letter. Other letters in the N.T. of similar length have somewhere between 5-10 references to love. Clearly this is a big theme in John's theology. Why? Because LOVE is so central to who God is . . . thus, as His true children come to resemble Him more and more, they will show evidence of God's love growing in their character. Without love for people, it is impossible to claim that one genuinely knows and loves God.

Recall from our last lesson that 1John has 3 “cycles” in which the author covers 3 “themes.” We now come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final cycle.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> CYCLE: 4:7-5:21

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle we find the same three themes (faith in the true Jesus; obedience to God's commands; love for people) as in the previous two cycles, but the order is changed. A long section emphasizing *love for one another* opens this section. The word “love” occurs 26 times in this passage alone, making it the defining passage in the New Testament on the importance of demonstrating love for God by *loving one another*.

#### A. Loving one another: 4:7-21

- Love is evidence of knowing God.

***“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (4:7,8).***

John's reasoning is simple: Since God IS (in His essential nature)

love, those born of God will show their spiritual DNA by expressing love for others. This resemblance to our heavenly Father is the result of truly having a relationship with Him (having His Spirit living inside of us). Failure to love indicates that a person does not truly know God (i.e., have a relationship with Him).

**- God's love is sacrificial.**

***“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. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (4:9-12).***

John clarifies the *kind of love* that God has for us. His love is *sacrificial, giving, and unconditional*, providing for us the model as to how we must love others. John is not talking about love as an emotion; rather, this is volitional love (an act of the will). It is the decision to love another person, at the expense of yourself, whether they deserve your love or not.

**- Acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God.**

While staying on the love theme, John briefly slips over into one of the other themes – believing in the *true Jesus*, the Son of God. (Recall that there were false teachers denying that Jesus had actually come in the flesh.) Once we come to know who Jesus truly is, and believe in Him, His Spirit lives in us . . . which is described here as “God living in us,” and “us living in God.”

***“This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God” (4:13-15).***

**- There is no fear of judgment in God's kind of love.**

As we learn to grasp God's unconditional love, there is gradual reduction of fear in our relationship with God, because we learn that we are *secure in His love*. There is no fear of judgment, or fear of condemnation, or fear of not being good enough. The one who still has fear in their relationship with God has not been “perfected in

His love” (i.e., has not come to fully comprehend and appropriate His love).

***“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (4:16-18).***

Learning to know and experience the depth of God’s love is a key to living the Christian life. This was Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:17-19 . . . that believers would become firmly rooted in God’s unfathomable, incomprehensible love. Many people have difficulty knowing and experiencing God’s love because of conditional, performance-oriented love they experienced from others (parents, siblings, friends, etc.). It takes time for the love of God to take hold in such wounded hearts. But as we meditate on His love, as described in the Bible, and as we learn to daily live and move in His unconditional love, we can gradually remove the lie of God’s love being conditional, based on us earning His love, and replace it with the truth of God’s amazing and unchanging love. Thus, fear of judgment is replaced with security and confidence in knowing Him as our loving heavenly Father.

### **- Loving God and loving People are inseparable.**

John has repeated his central idea again and again. He ends this section with the strongest statement on the absolute necessity of keeping love for God and love for people together.

***“We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister” (4:19-21).***

Is there someone you are struggling to love? Ask God for His Spirit, Who lives within you, to give you His power to love that person in the same way that God loved you – unconditionally and sacrificially. This is the most important aspect of our obedience to Christ . . . to love others as God loved us.

## **B. Believing in Jesus as the God-man: 5:1-15**

Now John returns to the theme of having a true view of Jesus. In order for faith to be effective, the *object of one's faith* must be reliable. This is why John kept emphasizing the *truth about Jesus* being both divine and human, as the basis for true belief.

### **- Being born into God's family.**

***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (5:1-5).***

The theme of obedience to God's commands is sprinkled throughout the above passage; but the emphasis at the beginning and end is the same: believing that Jesus is the Christ . . . the Son of God. Our faith in Him allows us to “*overcome the world.*” Recall 2:15-17 where John pointed to three aspects of “the world” – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. With (the Spirit of) Christ living on inside, the child of God has the power to live a life dedicated to Him rather than giving in to the temptations of this world. John will ultimately end this letter with a similar emphasis on the *victory* that God's children have over the Evil One and his world system (5:18-21).

### **- The physical reality of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

John has repeatedly countered the heresy that Jesus was not truly human (He did not possess real flesh and blood). Here John says that Jesus came “*by water and blood*” (5:6). The meaning of this phrase is disputed by scholars, but it seems most likely that John is referring to two very *physical* moments in Jesus' life – His baptism in the River Jordan (Matt. 3:13-17), at the beginning of His public ministry (water), and His death on the cross when His blood was poured out (and John literally saw blood and water come out of Jesus' side at His death – see John 19:34,35 where John makes a special point about this moment). The Spirit was testifying through these events that Jesus was the God-man.

***“This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son” (5:6-10).***

It is a primary work of the Holy Spirit to constantly bear witness to the TRUTH about Jesus (see John 16:12-15 where Jesus emphasized that when the Spirit came, He would help people see and grasp the truth about Him). Thus, a good prayer to pray to the Spirit would be this: “Spirit of truth, help me to understand and live in the truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When I open the Bible, show me the truth. When I listen to a sermon, show me the truth. When I hear a worship song, show me the truth. When a fellow believer comes to me with a word of encouragement or correction, show me the truth.” The Spirit of truth is always delighted to lead those He indwells into the truth of God’s Word.

**- Knowing that you have eternal life.**

Eternal life is a gift from God. When you accept this gift (accept the Son of God and what He did for you on the cross- taking upon Himself your sins as your sinless substitute), then you are given eternal life (and full forgiveness). You can be SURE of this.

***“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life” (5:11-13).***

Do you KNOW that you have eternal life? There is one simple way to be sure. Have you accepted the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as your personal Savior? Have you invited Him to live in your heart? If you do not yet have the assurance that you have eternal life, why not settle that issue today. Stop right now and invite Jesus Christ to be your Savior and Lord. Read slowly the words above from 1John 5:11-13 and receive the assurance from God’s Word: If you have the Son, you have the life! It’s that simple.

## - Confidence in Prayer

***“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him” (5:14,15).***

Note that it says here, *“if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”* This is a key to understanding how prayer works. We must ask in alignment with His will. But how can we do this since we do not know the “will of God” for the future? John is not talking here about the “future” will of God; rather, He is talking about the “moral” will of God, or the “revealed” will of God. He is talking about the principles, values and agendas that God has already made clear to all of us in His Word. Note the very similar idea that Jesus gave to His disciples: ***“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7).*** To pray “according to His will” means to pray in alignment with His Word (letting the words of Jesus deeply live/abide within us). As we come to know God’s heart more and more (His “will”) our prayers will increasingly align with His values and purposes for us and for our world. Thus, we will pray with the confidence that He hears us, agrees with us, and will answer our prayers in His own timing and way.

*Someone has described prayer this way: When our hearts are beating in sync with God’s heart, we can ask for whatever our hearts desire. The key to effective prayer, then, is getting our hearts truly aligned with the heart of God. Intimacy with the Father leads to effective prayer, because we will be talking to God about the things that really matter to Him. Think about the big things you are praying for these days. As you examine your prayer requests before God, can you honestly say that you are praying according to His heart, as revealed in His Word? If not, how might you re-tune your prayers to be more in line with His will?*

## C. Keeping God’s Commandments: 5:16-21

John concludes his letter by focusing again on the theme of obedience, as evidence of truly knowing God.

### - Praying for those who are sinning.

***“If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those***

***whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death” (5:16,17).***

It is clear from this passage that believers *will sin* (recall the same idea at 1:8-10). John teaches us here that we can *pray for one another* and God will “*give life*” to the one who is sinning. He will bring them to repentance, confession and the restoration of fellowship with Him. There are some situations involving believers who are sinning that call for more direct divine discipline. This seems to be what John means by “*a sin that leads to death.*” We see in Acts 5:1-11 how the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, lying to God about their offering, led to their physical deaths. Similarly, Paul refers to some believers at Corinth who had become physically sick or even died as a result of abuse of the Lord’s Supper (1Cor.11:30). Paul refers to another situation in Corinth where a certain offender would have died, if he had not repented of his sin (1Cor.5:1-5 compared with 2Cor.2:6-8). Thus, it seems that when John speaks of the “*sin that leads to death*” he is referring to a believer engaged in willful, unrepentant sin that may lead to God severely disciplining them (Hebrews 12:5-11). But John’s main point is that most of the time believers will fall into “sin that does not lead to death” and in such cases we can pray for them and God will give them life (i.e., restore them).

*Is there someone who has committed sin (against you or others) that you need to pray for? John says here that if we pray for a sinning brother or sister, God will give them life (He will lead them to acknowledge their sin, confess it, and be restored to life (true fellowship with God and other believers). Who do you know that needs your prayers today? Perhaps they are “stuck” in their walk with God because of unconfessed sin. Often this is relational sin against another believer, which is referred to as “hate” towards another person. God might use your prayers to help them (or you!) to get “unstuck.” KEY: In the case of relational sin with or between you, there will be life and reconciliation and restoration once again between you. 1John has MANY verses which deal with HATE. This sin between believers in Jesus Christ is HUGE to God. See: 2:9-17; 3:11-18; 4:20.*

## **- The safety that Jesus gives to His children.**

In all of John's writings (gospel, letters and Revelation) there is significant emphasis on the spiritual conflict that is raging between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. He ends this letter with reference to this ongoing struggle, and how those "born of God" have special *protection from the Evil One*. Satan may harass and tempt you as a child of God, but by virtue of the fact that the Spirit of God lives within you, the Evil One cannot touch you. He may be in control of this world system (for a similar idea, see 2Corinthians 4:4 and John 12:31), but Satan is *not in control* in the life and heart of the person who has the Spirit of God living within.

***"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot touch them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:18-21).***

Why does John end this lofty letter with the final exhortation, "***Dear children, keep yourselves from idols***"? Remember that John lived and ministered in the influential city of Ephesus. This city was a large center of tourism due to the famous temple of the Greek goddess Artemis. This temple was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Idol worship of Artemis and all of the immoral behaviors that accompanied this, was easy to fall back into from allurements and social pressure. Avoiding a lifestyle of idolatry was as difficult then as avoiding beliefs and lifestyle issues in our own day. Bible scholar F.F. Bruce defined an idol as being "*Any conception of God that is at variance with His self-revelation (of God) in Christ is an idol.*" Thus, even the Gnostics' false picture of Jesus as a divine being, but not truly human, might be regarded as an "idol."



## Discussion Questions

1. Read through 4:7-21 noting the emphasis on love. If you were to pick one verse from this section that captures your attention the most, which verse would it be?
2. Look at 4:16-18 again. How deeply has the love of God *for you* taken root in your heart? Is it hard for you to live in the unconditional, sacrificial love of God for you? If so, why?
3. Discuss this statement: Love for God and love for people are the two inseparable sides of “true religion.” Compare James 1:27; Matthew 22:36-40.
4. What have you learned about the Biblical view of “hate”? What might Jesus be leading you personally to do in any of your relationships?
5. Do any “idols” come into your mind that you need to attend to, and keep yourself from?