

## The Message of the General Letters

### God Is Love

### I John 4:7-21

Intro: This succinct statement by the Apostle John may be the most memorable quote from the three letters that bear his name. His entire letter revolves around the love of God made clear to us through Christ Jesus.

John refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20). Having experienced so powerfully the love of Jesus, and having heard the teaching about love from Jesus, he rightfully made it the linchpin of his teaching.

John is the one who records Jesus’ teaching on the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10). John is the one who tells us about the love of Jesus for Lazarus who died (John 11:3). John records the teaching of Jesus about the true vine and how the branches must remain in the love of the vine (John 15). And John records the High Priestly prayer of Jesus for his own, including us (John 17).

So what does it mean when John writes that God is love? How does that work out in my life? Nothing is more important—or more powerful—than discovering this truth for your own life. Ultimately, John declares, whoever lives in love lives in God (1 John 4:16).

As quickly as possible, we all need to get centered in the love of God—standing under the waterfall of God’s love and letting that love splash off us and on to everybody around us.

The Holy Spirit inspires John the Apostle to write a long section on how God is love. He uses the phrase twice, once in verse 8 and again in verse 16. I want to explore that phrase by giving attention to two small words: “is” and “so.”

#### I. **God IS Love** (verses 8 and 16)

A. The meaning of IS: “Is” is the present indicative form, used hundreds of times in the Bible and in ordinary language. It is the verb “to be.” It is the third person singular form of the verb *eimi*.

When “is” appears with a predicate, as it does here, it shows what the subject is in reference to character, power, greatness, or nature.

“It depends on what the meaning of the word ‘is’ is,” said President Bill Clinton one day in 1998. We all thought it was odd that the president would be reflecting on the nature of being at that moment.

The president illustrated well for us how illusive and slippery words and definitions can be. God knows the limits of our human language. We want it be more precise that it often is.

\*\*\*I have in my hand a bottle of Boscoli Italian Olive Salad. This is closer to the Bible than you think. Olives are in the Bible. Italy is in the Bible. So we have a biblical illustration in olive salad of the love of God.

B. Address: Its source: Love comes from God v7

\*\*\*If you read the label you will find that Boscoli Olive Salad comes from Kenner, Louisiana.

1. If you trace love back to its source, you will be at God.
2. If you read the label on love, you will find God's address as the manufacturer.
3. If you live at love's address, you live with God. "If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12).

C. Ingredients: Its nature: "Born of God" v7

\*\*\*This label has ingredients on it.

1. Love is constituted by God. Its ingredients come from God.
2. When you list the colors in the rainbow of love, you are recounting the nuances in the character of God. The nature of true love is the nature of God himself. The colors of love are rehearsed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13: patience, kindness, humility, forgiveness, trust, endurance.

D. Nutrition Facts: Its knowledge: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" v8

\*\*\*Nutrition facts outlined here: total fat, cholesterol, carbs, sodium, protein, etc.

## II. God SO Loved: *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another* (v11).

A. Definition of "so": The little adverb "so"—*outos* in the Greek. It appears here and in John 3:16: *For God so loved the world...*

It refers to the previous thought. It means "in this way, in such a manner, in the manner spoken of, in the way described, in the way it was done."

"So" is not an intensifier in this context. It modifies the verb, "loved," but it does so by referring back to the previous thought. In each case the previous thought is God sending and giving his Son to die on our behalf.

B. Love's greatest expression: God sent his Son v9. God spoke love to us through the sending of his one and only Son. This act on the part of God goes beyond anything we could imagine. God loved the world "in this manner"—"so."

1. This is a love spoken by the Greatest Lover of the Universe.
2. This is a love spoken through the Greatest Gift ever given, a gift we remember in this Christmas season.
3. This is a love demonstrated in the Greatest Humility ever observed, that Christ would lay down his life on our behalf.
4. This is a love sealed in the Greatest Sacrifice ever offered, the life of the Perfect One on behalf of we who are guilty.

C. Love's greatest illustration: God sending his Son. If you are looking for a way to illustrate love, you find no better or clearer expression than God sending his one and only Son.

According to this illustration given at Calvary:

1. Your love must give what is of most value to you.
2. Your love must issue from a fundamental humility that seeks to serve the other person.
3. Your love must involve sacrifice—the setting aside of self-interest and the surrender of personal territory.
4. Your love must involve determination and perseverance for these are part and parcel of true love—love suffers long, bears all things, endures all things.

D. Knowing and Relying on God's Love: *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us* (1 John 4:16).

1. We rely on God's love in our justification. The only way our sins are forgiven is through the love of God. We cannot achieve a right relationship with God outside of his love.
2. We rely on God's love in our sanctification. We cannot make moral and spiritual progress without the love of God motivating us and molding us. We know and rely upon the love of God in our daily walk and work.
3. We rely on God's love in our glorification. Our future is in the hands of God. We are trusting in his love for our eternity. Jesus declared, and said it was so, that he was going to prepare a place for us. That is our destiny in God's love.

We are made PERFECT IN LOVE. Our development as children of God and as humans on this planet can be faithfully and accurately measured only by our growth in love. As we love one another we are cooperating in the perfecting work of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we refuse to love one another, we are resisting that maturing work of the Spirit.

**Conclusion:** The Seen and Unseen test is offered by the Apostle John for every reader. No one has ever seen God. The test of our love is not what we say about our love for the unseen. It is what we demonstrate about our love for the seen—the brother, the neighbor, the stranger.

NO FEAR in love. Perfected love casts out fear. Fear has torment.