

Week Seven: God is Love

'God is love' is the complete truth about God so far as the Christian is concerned... He knows that the true story of his life, when known will prove to be, as the hymn says, 'mercy from first to last', and he is content.

- J.I. Packer

OPENING PRAYER

READ | 1 John 4:7-21

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶And 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 him. ¹⁷In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸There 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.

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

DISCUSS

1. What do you think the statement, "God is love" really means (verses 8, 16)? John's not saying that God is loving, but that God *is* love. If this is true, can there be any love that is not of God? Brainstorm some of the implications (relational, spiritual) of this statement, God is love. What's it mean that our experience of love is, in fact, experiencing God?

[What are the attributes of God? Consider the attributes of love. What is real love and how does demonstrating it and receiving affect our lives? Our greatest desires and joys are rooting in our experience of love—being loved and loving others. What, then, does it say about God that he is love? Brainstorm...there are many good takes on this.]

2. John appears to be saying that by loving one another we can make God more 'visible' among us (verses 12, 16-17). What do you think John means by this?

[The calling of Christians is to, in effect, make their God and his kingdom more visible on earth, by doing his will—loving others as we have been loved by God. This is both a joy and a powerful calling and responsibility for the follower of Christ. God's rule in our lives is reflected by our love for others—this is the effect of his love. God is like the wind in this way: you can't see the wind, but you can see the effects of the wind.]

3. In verse 16, John concludes, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." What do you understand that to mean? What does it mean to rely on something? How is knowing and relying on God's love manifested in daily living?

[This is among one of the richest verses in the Bible. To know God's love and to rely on it means you understand it both in our minds and in our hearts, and we can depend upon it. Once a person truly understands God's love, (though it is so awesome, we never fully comprehend it this side of heaven) she begins to rely upon it. Nothing will move it or change it, neither the weight of our disobedience or our struggles with sin can cause God's love to waver or falter. He loved us while we were sinners. Therefore, it does not make sense that he would stop loving us because we are still sinners. To be sure, we can displease him and find ourselves chastised in the same way that an earthly father might chastise the child he loves. Our subjective experience of his love may lessen. But his love for us remains unmoved. It does not decrease, nor does it increase. How could it? He already loves us with every fiber of his being. This kind of understanding of God's love is necessary for living a healthy Christian life.]

APPLY

1. Many people look at the outward circumstances of their lives to determine whether God loves them. According to John, how can you really know God loves you? How can/does being secure in God's love affect the way you view the changing circumstances (good or bad) of your life?
2. If perfect love drives out fear (verse 18), why is it that we walk around in guilt and fear so often? What is the remedy to this? What does John say will be the inevitable consequences of knowing God's love in our own lives?

CLOSING PRAYER

- Prayer suggestions:*
- > That we would look to Christ's love not only as a model for the love we are called to show one another, but also as a refuge for us when we fail to love others well
 - > That our love for God would grow as we see more and more the nature of his love for us, demonstrated most clearly and perfectly in the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - > That our love for God would grow as we see what he calls us to, and the type of love he calls us to demonstrate toward others