

November 1/2, 2025

God is Love
Face to Face Series
1 John 4:7-21
Pastor Bryan Clark

Years ago when I was in college, my grandma Kate, my mom's mom, passed away. She lived in a little town called Swanville, Minnesota. So my mom, my brother Bruce and I went up to Swanville for the service. We were mingling around with the people. I really didn't know any of these people, and we weren't there too long until an elderly woman sidled up to me, just stared at me for a little bit, pointed her finger at me and said, "You look like a schrupp." And I thought, "You look like a shrub too. *(laughter)* I don't know what that's about." She walked off, and well over the course of the next 15–20 minutes, that happened several times. And I thought, "What is with these people, and why do they keep calling me names?" So I finally said to my mom, "Why do these people keep calling me a schrupp?" She said, "Well, because that was your grandma's maiden name, there's a clear family resemblance." My mom really looked like her mom. I look like my mom. My oldest daughter really looks like me. Strong Schrupp genes, *(laughter)* so strong that people that had never met me could look at me and figure out, "That must be a Schrupp." *(laughter)* That's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John 4. Continuing our study of 1 John, let's just go back and review quickly. So John is talking about how Jesus came to manifest, to unveil this eternal life, to be invited into this koinonia, this deep relationship with God, something we do in the light, something we do together. So we learn that to walk in the light is to love and those who hate walk in darkness. That was our first conversation with John about the topic of love. He went on and talked about some other things and then cycled back to the topic of love.

A couple of weeks ago we talked about the difference between children of God and children of the devil. You think of it like two different paths or two different streams. The children of the devil, in essence, have the devil's DNA. They walk in darkness. They're selfish to the core, and their poster child is Cain from Genesis 4, who killed his brother. It's a life of hate, and you keep following it downstream, and hate becomes murder. On the other side, children of God, the DNA of God who is love, is manifested in Jesus. So you keep going down that stream and he talked to us about love. The outflow of this new life should be a life where we love one another, and not just in talk, but in action, in doing things for people in need. And ultimately downstream, was the idea that Jesus laid down His life for us, which was the ultimate demonstration of His love. So he ends up in chapter 3, verse 23, by saying this comes down to one command: to believe and to love one another. In other words, those aren't two commands. To believe is actually to love one another. The natural outflow of that belief is to become like Jesus.

So last week, Ryan took us through chapter 4, verses 1 through 6. That's kind of an aside, as John has done before, to talk about the importance of truth and the danger of false teachers. All this comes down to believing the truth, which is one of John's major themes: Light, Love, Truth. Having said that, then we cycle back to one more discussion on the topic of love. That's where we

pick it up in chapter 4, verse 7. So, if you go to 3:23 and just jump to 4:7, you can see the train of thought flows there. He says:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (*NASB, 1 John 4:7)

Again, the repetition of this word, **beloved**. It's very pastoral. John's letter is not like Paul writing to the Corinthians, for example, where he's confronting them, he's rebuking them because their lives are a mess. This is much more pastoral. The false teachers have tapped into the insecurities of these believers, and they're struggling. They're wondering, "Do we really believe? Do we really know God? Do we really know the truth?" So John is not rebuking them; he's not confronting them. He's trying to comfort them. "Just look at your lives and how different they are than the false teachers. They don't know God. You know God. The evidence is there." He's trying to settle them down and to see this. Literally, the Greek text reads, "**Beloved, let us love one another for the love.**" So the definite article *the* is in there. The reason that matters is because John is not just talking about love, as in, "Let's go out there and love somebody." He's saying there is a love that comes back to this new commandment, this idea that you can only love with this kind of a love if you've first been loved by God, if you've experienced this new life in Jesus. This is a completely different kind of love, and he said it requires two things in verse 7.

The first one is **everyone who loves is born of God**. The grammar for the verb is perfect tense, which means it's something that happened in the past but has an ongoing effect. So He's talking about their conversion. There has to come a moment where you were **born of God**...born again. John gets this language from Jesus. He records the story in his Gospel in chapter 3, the conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus said, "**You must be born again.**" I think sometimes we're just so familiar with this kind of language, we fail to appreciate how radical it is. This is as radical as it gets. The Bible doesn't say you've had kind of a makeover or that you just need to try harder. The language is that you've been born again. You've become a new creation. Something radical has happened that has changed you from the inside out.

The second thing he says is born again **and knows God**. The verb tense for **knows** is present tense, which means this is something that goes on every day. So, because you were born again in the past, the point is *to know God*. It's a love story. That word **knows** is an interesting word. It's used in the Bible to describe sexual relations between a husband and a wife. It's to know God deeply and intimately. We've been invited to dance with God in the light. The salvation that God offers is not merely a ticket to Heaven any more than the purpose in getting married is to obtain a marriage license. The point is to enter into the love relationship. So to truly love as God loves, we must be born again, and we must know God. Verse 8:

The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

One of the distinctives of many of the religions in our world today is people that are zealous or passionate about these religions hate other people. It's part of the very DNA of that religion. It's common in our culture for people to believe all religious roads lead to God, but apparently they don't, because what John just said is, "If you hate, you don't know God because **God is love.**" Hate

is incompatible with what it means to be born of God and to know God. The text doesn't say just that God is loving. It's that **God is love**. It's His essence. It's who He is. It's what flows out of Him.

When you look at verses 7 and 8, I think there's a couple of legitimate questions that flow out of that. The first question would be, "If you have to be born of God and know God to love, can an unbeliever love?" The answer is, "Yes, of course." It's what we call common grace. It's part of the common grace to all people made in the image of God. I have lots of unbelieving friends. They're spouses that love each other. They love their children. They're great neighbors. They love other people. They're wonderful people. But can they love (*the* love that John is talking about), and the answer is, "No!" The text is clear. To do that, you'd have to be born of God. You have to know God, because they still walk in darkness. Ultimately, they're still selfish in their orientation. Their love is defined by a deep sense of self-interest, and the only way to be set free from that, is to experience new birth and to know God, and to love at a different level of love.

The second question, and I think this is a legitimate question, is, "If God is a God of love, why do these things have to happen? Why do trials have to happen? Why do hurtful things have to happen? Why do abusive things have to happen? Why do these things happen that break my heart if God is love?" I can't answer that question. I don't know. There are things I don't understand, but I would say that I could never, with good conscience, ever claim that God is not love. The reason for that is that we are not asked to believe some sort of theory, some sort of spiritual claim that, "You know God is love, and you may not understand that; you just need to believe it, in spite of the evidence." That's not what the Bible says. What the Bible says is, ***God demonstrated His love. God has manifested His love; He has made it known with His actions.*** That's where John goes. Verse 9:

By this the love of God was manifested (was demonstrated, was made known) in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we may live through Him.

We learned in chapter 3 that all of us are born spiritually dead, but because of what Jesus has done for us, we have gone from death to life. We've been born of God. We experience new life in Jesus, because God demonstrated His love by sending His **only begotten Son** to be our Savior.

The phrase **only begotten** is a phrase that means *unique* or *special*. John gets it from Jesus, again it goes back to John chapter 3, verse 16, "***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,***" His unique one-of-a-kind Son. You see it, for example, in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 17, where Isaac is identified as Abraham's only begotten son. Abraham had lots of sons, but only one was unique and special. That was Isaac. We're children of God. I could call myself a son of God. But Jesus is the unique, eternal Son of God that took on human flesh so that we might live through Him. Verse 10:

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the propitiation for our sins.*

Religion is a result of the fact that we as people are made in the image of God. There's something deep within us that longs to know God, that longs to know the God or gods that are out there. So mankind initiates this movement toward God. But it's a belief that God is distant, that God is aloof,

that God is out there. It kind of reminds me of Patty and my dating life. I kept pursuing; she kept fleeing. (*laughter*) That's what religion is. We initiate this movement, but it's based on fear, because if you can't somehow appease the aloof god, he's eventually going to whack you.

But the Bible tells a very different story. I don't initiate the movement. Love doesn't start with me. It starts with God, because God is love. While I was in rebellion against God, while I was a declared enemy of God, while I was traveling the way of Cain, while I was walking in darkness, it was God's love that initiated this love story...that He would send His only Son in order to be our Savior, to be the propitiation for our sin. We saw that word in chapter 2, verse 2. It's a word that means Jesus was the payment when He died on the cross, that paid the debt for our sin, in order that God could offer forgiveness and this new birth, and still be a holy, just God. So the story is all about how much God loves us, not how much we loved God.

So think of it like this. I have three girls, and I love them with all my heart. Would I die for my girls? Absolutely I would! I would die for Patty; I would die for my girls! I don't even have to think about that. I'd do it in a heartbeat. But would I willingly choose to give up one of my girls, knowing that she would be tortured and ultimately executed on a cruel Roman cross in order to pay the debt of someone who has declared himself to be my enemy? Answer: I absolutely would not! I wouldn't! I don't have it in me! I would not give up one of my girls to die for someone who has declared themselves to be my enemy. But that's what God did for you. You were God's enemy. You were traveling the way of Cain...you were walking in darkness...you were living in rebellion when God willingly gave up His Son, knowing He would be tortured and executed on your behalf, to pay your debt so you can be forgiven. I think we tend to have a bad habit of thinking somehow the love God would have for His Son is different than the love I would have for my daughters. In other words, what I'm saying is: God doesn't love His Son as much as I love my daughters. When I say it that way, we hear it: it's utterly ridiculous. Love is from God. God's love is infinitely greater for His Son than my love could ever be for one of my children. So, I understand that sometimes life gets hard; it gets confusing. I don't understand why it has to be this way if God is loving. But in good conscience, I could never deny the love of God, because I know what it cost Him to offer me this salvation. That's what John is saying. Verse 11:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Now again, don't confuse the tone. He's not wagging his fingers, saying, "You ought to do this, you naughty Christian; you need to clean up your act." That's not the tone. What he's saying is, "It makes sense that if you've been born of God, you're God's child. You know God because God is love, so you ought to look like Him. It's no different than saying if you have Schrapp genes in you, it makes sense that you look like your mom and your mom looks like her mom. He's wanting them to look at the false teachers, to look at their lives, to look at how they're treating people, and to see how different they are and how much God has changed them, and how the love of God flows through them, indicative of this new life they have in Christ. Verse 12:

No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected (or completed) in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us His Spirit. (Vs. 12-13)

So what does he mean by **no one has seen God at any time**? This is a major theme throughout the Old Testament, that God is so glorious that no human has ever seen God in all His glory. As a matter of fact, the Old Testament goes so far as to say that if you saw God in all His glory, it would kill you. So when Jesus took on humanity, yes, He was fully God, but we refer to this as His *humiliation*. He was not God in all His glory, but rather He took on human flesh. No one has seen God in all His glory. But if you know God, then God abides in you and you abide in God, and His Spirit affirms that this story is true, which gets us then to verse 14:

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to *be* the Savior of the world.

What John is saying is, “How will people in 21st century America, 21st century Lincoln, Nebraska, how will they see God?” Answer, “They will see God in you, specifically how we love one another.” Jesus said that in the Upper Room. John, the writer of this letter, was there when Jesus said, “***This is a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.***” But then he added... “*that all the world will know that you are My disciples.* You're my children; You're related to Me by how you love one another.”

It's hard for me to imagine that in my lifetime, there's been a time in our history...in our lifetime... where the opportunity for the light of Jesus to shine more brightly than the potential for that today. The reason is because the darkness has become so dark. People are bent on hating one another, on fighting with one another. There's so much anxiety; there's so much fear; there's so much despair. It's just gloomy every direction you look. So there has never been a better time for the light of Jesus to shine brightly, to demonstrate that we are children of God: “Whatever it is you have, I'm not sure, but whoever you're related to, I think that's what I want!”

So, there's a beautiful picture of this a little over twenty years ago. One day I was at the gas station in Hickman. I'm filling my vehicle with gas and there's another guy at the gas pumps. He's got a truck, and he's got a big boat, looks a little bit rough. He comes over and he says to me, “Are you Pastor Clark?” Now I'm never quite sure what I'm going to get when I answer that question. (*laughter*) I said, “Yes, I am.” He said, “I just want to tell you my wife and I have been coming to your church and it has changed our lives, and I just wanted to say, ‘Thank you.’” It was a very encouraging, wonderful conversation. So I said to Ron, “You know, I'd love to get to know you a little better. Can we meet sometime?” He said, “Sure, I'd love to.” So we got together, and he told me his story. He and his wife moved just outside of Hickman, and he found out that he had a neighbor right across the road who was a Christian...and he would have none of that. So when they met, the first thing Ron said was, “I hear you're one of those Bible thumpers. You're a Christian. I just want you to know I'm not interested. I don't want to hear it. Don't talk to me about it!” His neighbor's name was Jeff, and Jeff said, “Okay.” But Jeff loved him. He did things for him. He helped him; he talked to him. Little by little they became friends, and little by little Ron started asking questions. There was something about Jeff he wanted. So little by little Jeff just answered his questions and that would go on until, eventually, Ron made a decision to trust Jesus as Savior. So Ron and his wife started attending Lincoln Berean, because that's where Jeff attends. That's about the time, then, I met him at the gas station. It wasn't too long after that that Ron was killed in a car accident. I had the privilege of doing his funeral. Pretty much anybody that knew Ron was quick to say that something had happened, and Ron had completely changed. Ron saw

something in Jeff. “I don't know who you're related to. I don't know where that DNA comes from, but I think I want that.” And Jesus changed his life.

That's what John's talking about. Verse 15:

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him...

Confession means to agree. This goes back to chapter 4, verses 1 through 6, what Ryan talked to us about last week...that you have to believe the truth. That's the only way this comes about. Truth has been a major theme for John: Light...Love...Truth...major themes! When you believe the truth, ...**God abides in him and he in God.**

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (Vs. 16)

I think those two verses are a summary of what he has said about love in his letter: When you believe the truth, God abides in you; you abide in God, and you experience this love, this new birth relationship. The natural outflow—your new spiritual genetic code—is to love as God loves, for **God is love.**

So that's interesting to think about. Related to this over the last couple of decades, I would say, it's become fashionable for Christians not to like the church. They claim to be Christians. They're out doing their thing. It's not just that they don't attend a church. They don't *like* the church. Some of them, when you talk to them, it's not just that they don't like the church, they don't like other Christians. Some of them clearly have a disdain for other Christians. Now it's not my place to judge them and their hearts. But I am going to say, it seems to me, and John is really clear about this. He has a real concern that if you're born of God, if you know God, the natural outflow is that we love one another. And when we don't, there has to be serious reason for concern. He goes on verse 17:

By this, (That's everything we've talked about this morning.) love is perfected (or completed) with us, so that we may have confidence (there it is) in the day of judgment; because as He is, (which is love) so also are we in this world. (Vs. 17)

This is the third time John has used this word **confidence**, a very strong word. Whatever the false teachers were doing, they were tapping into the insecurities of these believers, and they're starting to think, “Maybe we don't know God. Maybe they do know God more. Maybe we don't have this right?” There's obviously a fear that one day when we stand before God, this is not going to go well. So what He's saying is that the evidence of the presence of Jesus in your life...new birth...knowing God...the outflow of that should give you **confidence**. You know God. Look at the false teachers. Look at how they treat other people. Look at how they're living. They couldn't possibly know God. So because God is, then that's who we are in the world. It's evidence that this is true, that Jesus has changed my life. Verse 18:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (Vs. 18)

I don't know what your emotions are when you think about standing before God, when you think about one day standing before God in judgment, when you think about Jesus returning, but what John is saying is, "It should not be fear!" Religion is all about fear. Religion is about trying to appease the gods so you don't get whacked. Everything about it is fear-driven. This is not what God is about. This is a love story. God started it as a love story. It cost Him His own Son to make it possible for you to dance with Him in the light, because that's what the story is about. Love and fear do not exist together. To rightly understand the story is to understand that love drives out fear. This is not going to be about punishment. It's not going to be about condemnation. It's going to be about the fulfillment of a beautiful love story. That should give us confidence.

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, (Now we have learned this is code language for something the false teachers have been saying.) "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (Vs. 19-20)

He's wanting these believers to look at the false teachers. "I hear what they're saying but look at how they're living. They clearly don't know God. They don't love God." Verse 21:

And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Because God is Love...from the beginning of this letter we learned that Jesus has come to manifest, to unveil this eternal life that our souls long for, that we have been invited to dance with God, this beautiful, intimate koinonia relationship with God. But we don't do this as individuals. This is something we do together as the children of God, because love is not simply something we do. It's who we are as the children of God...and it is at the core of authentic Christian community!

Our Father, we celebrate today that this is a love story that You initiated, that cost You the life of Your own Son, that we might be invited into a relationship with You. Lord, may the outflow of that relationship be so obvious to the people around us that they will see You in us because of how we love one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Introduction

Over the last couple of months we've been talking about authentic community. John circles back to this topic many times in his epistle as a way to continually remind us what true community is, how it grows and why it is needed. Our passage this week reminds us that community is more like a value—it's a way of life that is fueled by love for God and love for others.

Study Questions *(to complete on your own)*

- 1) Read 1 John 4:7-21 in a couple different translations of Scripture. List out everything this passage tells us about God's love for us.

- 2) This is the third time that John has circled back to the topic of love within the letter to add more depth and definition to what love can look like in community with God and others. Read through the first, two mentions of love and note any details you want to remember.

1 John 2:7-12

1 John 3:11-24

- 3) In two or three sentences, summarize the main point of 1 John 4:7-21.

Discussion Questions *(with your group)*

- 1) Love is the topic of this week's passage. It is a word that is repeated many times and used in multiple ways throughout these verses. **Share with your group some thoughts about God's love, or loving others that you noted during the sermon teaching or from your personal study.**

- 2) **What does John say about how we have been loved by God in verses 7-11?**

Can someone who doesn't know God (unbelievers) truly love others? Why or why not?

- 3) **Verse 12 says that, "No one has ever seen God...". Why is this?** (Look to Exodus 33:18-20 and John 4:24 to confirm your answer.)

How does the second half of verse 12 explain how people can "see" an invisible God? (Look at John 13:35 and 17:20-21 to confirm your answer.)

- 4) **Think about an area in your life where you worked so hard for perfection. Describe that process. How successful were you?**

By contrast, does the perfecting of God's love in us, the sanctification process, require effort on our part?

What role does abiding play in sanctification? How do you pursue abiding with God?

How can your Life Group be an encouragement to you in this on-going, sanctification process?

- 5) **According to verse 17 and 18, if God's love is made complete in us, what will be the result?**

Verse 17:

Verse 18:

What is the relationship between love and fear? Why does perfect, mature, complete love cast out fears about the day of judgment to come?

Share with your group if you are willing. **What are some of your fears about God, about others, or about circumstances? How have you seen the perfect love of God cast out fears in any of these areas bringing you confidence.**

- 6) **According to verse 19, what should be our motive for loving others? Also, what are some lesser motives that we tend to have when loving others?**

As you think through your relationships with others, do you see this as your main motive for loving others? Explain your answer.

Most of us know the tension of loving God, but at the same time, also wanting to sidestep loving a person in our lives who is difficult to love. **In verses 19-21, what is the message to us regarding these hard relationships?**

How can you apply this message to a hard relationship in your life? What are some practical ways you can love well simply because God loves you?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so that we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit— we invite you to strengthen your souls with exercises that challenge and stretch you in new ways. Choose one and commit to repeating it until you gain strength in that area.

- 1) Scripture Reading: to listen and soak in the Word as an experience of the words washing over you.** Read or listen to the entire letter of 1 John at least twice/week. As you take it in, resist the impulse to study and parse the details. The point is not to gain “head knowledge” but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.
- 2) Memorization: to internalize God’s Word.** A key passage for this series is **1 John 4:7-14**. Commit to memorize it yourself and encourage others in your group to do it with you.
- 3) Walk & Pray: to actively engage with the scripture passage.** Write out the passage of the sermon each week on a note card and take it with you on a daily walk.
- 4) Journal Reflection: to practice remembering what God has done.** Make time in your schedule to put down in writing the feelings and thoughts that are stirring as you interact with the Word of God.

Self-control Exercise: to help you come to stillness from a busy or hurried pace of life. Set a timer for 10 minutes. Sit upright but comfortably in a chair with your palms open and upward on your lap. Focus on a word or short phrase about the character of God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When your thoughts wander to the things on your to-do list or other people’s needs, redirect them back to the character of God. When the 10 minutes is up, close in a short prayer of gratitude.

Prayer

Praying together in a group is different than praying alone with God. It's a conversation that can help you grow closer to each other as you are in God's presence. One way to pray follows this often-used pattern in scripture – acknowledge who God is, recognize the need we have for Him, and ask to partner with Him on behalf of others. When possible, use the passage of scripture from this week's sermon as your starting point, then form a prayer that follows this pattern:

God, our Father, this week we learned that you are _____ and _____ .

As I looked into your Word, I understood how I need you to _____. Help me to be faithful to _____ in the week ahead.

Other people are on my heart, and I trust that you have put them there for a reason. I ask for your will to be accomplished in their life as they _____. Help me to know how to respond well to the needs of _____, even as my first step is in praying for them right now.

Each group engages in prayer differently. Some groups go around and allow anyone to pray that desires to do so. Other groups have several people pray or maybe 1 person closes the group in prayer. Still other groups split into smaller groups of 2-3 people and those people pray for each other. How you choose to engage in prayer is dependent on your group and your choice to ENGAGE! **We learn to pray by praying and by listening and praying with others!**