

Session 5

October 3, 2021

SURE OF GOD'S LOVE

1 John 4:7-13,19-21

The centrality of God's love toward us cannot be overstated. The redemptive process, from man's creation on earth, to his salvation, to his ultimate glorification in heaven, is a demonstration of God's gracious love (see Rom. 5:8). No wonder one of the first praise songs we learned as children (at least in my day!) was "Praise Him, praise Him, all ye little children... God is love, God is love."

John, the apostle who wrote this epistle, knew all about love. Because he experienced the love Jesus felt for him so deeply, he referred to himself in his Gospel account as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." Here, he once again reiterates the place of God's love in our lives.

Love defined (vv. 7-10). The word *love* appears in some form or other nine times in these four verses. But the entire concept is derived from the last few words of verse 8: "God is love." That is to say, that love is an essential attribute of God. Because God is love, love comes from Him, indicates intimate knowledge of Him, and allows us to love others (v. 7). Further, failure to love one another indicates one's separation from God, who is the very source of love (v. 8). For reflection: *An old Bible commentator was fond of saying, "We can love each other without necessarily liking each other!" What do you think about that?*

Love demonstrated (vv. 9-13). While we often think of love as an *emotion*, in the Bible, love is most often an *action*. Just as faith without works is dead (James 2:20), so the *emotion* of love without the *demonstration* of love is equally useless. In this section, John lists two ways that God's love is revealed through *His* actions. First, sending His Son Jesus to die so that we might live is an act of love (see John 3:16). Second, that Christ would die as our *propitiation* is an act of love. The word *propitiation* is difficult to define concisely. It was the word used for "mercy seat" in the Old Testament (Ex. 25:17). Elsewhere it means "atoning sacrifice" (Rom. 3:25). In every case, the term carries with it the idea of *mercy given in place of judgement*. When Christ died, not only were our sins forgiven, but the judgement that was due us was poured out upon Him (see 1 Pet. 2:24). Next, John lists two ways in which God's love is to be revealed by *our* actions. First, as a reflection of God's love to us, we are to demonstrate that same love to others (v. 11). Second, the love that God demonstrates to us, and we are to demonstrate to others, also indicates to the world that we belong to Him. While God cannot be seen, His love certainly can be! (v. 12). For reflection: *Read John 13:35. How does Jesus' statement relate to this one made by John?*

Love defiled (vv. 19-21). John's simple style of writing leaves no doubt about our obligations toward God. After describing what believers ought *to do*, he also tells us what *not to do*; and hating our brothers is at the top of the list (v. 20). Hating one another has two immediate effects. First, it proves the "believer" is a liar; then it proves the "believer" is actually *not* a believer at all! (v. 20). Notice that throughout, the flow of God's love is downward to us. A lost person does not, (nor is able to) love God. Rather, we can only love Him because He first loved us (v. 19). So, God loves us and expects that His love will overflow to others and be reciprocated back to

Him. For reflection: *John specifically mentions the sin of hating one's "brother." Does that mean it's okay to hate lost people? What Bible text(s) could be used to support your conclusion?*