

Lesson 13 – 1 John 4:7-21

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Review/Introduction

John is writing so we might know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). He does this by presenting the objective truth (1 John 5:11-13) and subjective evidences that give assurance of salvation. We have talked a lot about both.

John writes presenting tests to determine if true saving faith has been exercised or are the readers (and ultimately us) deceived. He makes it very clear that a profession of possessing salvation without the evidences that flow from salvation is self-deception.

The objective basis of assurance is the finished work of Christ and His promise to those who exercise true saving faith. John's inspired writings give a plethora of objective truths (John 3:15-16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26; 1 John 5:1).

The Scriptures are clear that true salvation is accompanied by a changed life. The subjective evidence for assurance is the witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:24), fellowship with God's people (1 John 1:3), walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7), hatred and confession of one's own sin (1 John 1:5-2:2), walking in obedience (1 John 2:5; 3:5-6), walking like Christ (1 John 2:6), not loving the world (1 John 2:15), purity (1 John 3:3), love (1 John 3:14; 18-19), overcoming the world (1 John 5:4), etc.

John presents his tests in four spirals laying out doctrinal and conduct tests or evidences of true, real, actual regeneration. Each spiral starts with a doctrinal test then presents conduct tests. The spirals all have similar topics that are expanded on and/or reiterated in each spiral. John uses repetition to present his simple, yet profound, truths to encourage his readers and us.

Today we will look at the first conduct test in the third spiral – love. We have looked at love before as a subjective evidence of love. Love is a distinguishing characteristic of the believer (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5). If you are a believer, you love because Christ lives in you (Galatians 2:20). It is a natural result of surrendering your life to Christ.

Love is a subjective evidence of salvation. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." We can know we are a child of God if we see supernatural love being evident. But, hating demonstrates that salvation has not occurred. Saying you love is not adequate as a subjective evidence of salvation. True love is demonstrated. Since Christ laid down His life, so must you lay down your life for the brethren. There is no limit to the extreme, humble, sacrificial effort to serve the brethren.

In today's passage, John brings together many thoughts on love. He has talked about it twice already, but now he hits it harder and longer than previously. We may be tempted to say, "Hey dude, I got it." But let's look at this repeated theme with humble hearts and pray for Spirit-conviction and Spirit empowered confession and repentance in areas of failure.

Spiral 3 – Conduct – Love (4:7-21)

1. God is the source of love (4:7-8)

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (ESV)

There are many people who think they are loving, at least to the degree they define love. Maybe they think of good feelings or compassion or “acceptance” or provision for another. But that “love” is of the world. It is based on worldly wisdom. It is, at its core, demonic. It is not from God.

John has been telling us repeatedly that love is a subjective evidence of salvation. But that love is from God, not the world. It is an outflow of your connectedness to Christ. Not only do we have the moral imperative to love, but we have the capacity to love.

Think of the amazing love that God graciously bestows on us, the objects of His love.

⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴**But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,** ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:3-9)

“Beloved”, dear one, precious one, constantly love one another.

³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**, even as I have loved you, that you also **love one another**. (John 13:34)

¹²“This is My commandment, that you **love one another**, just as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

One of John’s clear objective evidences is to love one another (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5). If you are a believer, you love. That happens because Christ lives in you (Galatians 2:20), so it MUST happen if you have surrendered your life to Christ.

You must love because love is from God. If you are born of God, then you love. If you do not love then you do not know God. This all has to be true, because God is love. God has eternally given of himself to you. You love because you have the Spirit and the Spirit is love.

❖ Do you love the brethren?

2. God’s love is displayed through Christ (4:9-12)

All Scripture are from the NASB ‘95 Update unless noted.

Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

⁹By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (ESV)

We have seen that God is the source of love. But He Himself “is” love. Love is one of God’s excellencies (1 Peter 2:9). With God, love is found perfectly. It is intrinsic to His being. It is His nature. People can display love or be loving at points in time, but God “is” love.

With God, love is not a concept. The reason He commands His children to love in deed and truth (1 John 3:18) is because He Himself loves in deed and truth.

God’s love was manifested (brought to light, come out in the open, made public) in a historic event in His children. God’s love is seen in the incarnation and the new life He gives to the elect. God’s love brings the spiritually dead to life.

When we were not lovely, God loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins – to live the perfect life we could not and die the atoning death we could not.

⁶For **while we were still helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰For if **while we were enemies** we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:6-11)

Since God so loved us when we were helpless, sinners, and enemies, we have a moral imperative to love one another – to love other objects of God’s love.

God loves you & God loves the brethren ∴ You must (and will) love the brethren

Though God is invisible spirit, just as in the incarnation Christ manifested the Father, if we love one another, we make God know.

Loving one another demonstrates that God abides in us and because of that, His love is brought to its purposeful conclusion – His glory.

❖ **Is God’s love manifested in Christ’s sacrifice a motivating factor to love the brethren?**

3. God's love results in regeneration (4:13-16)

¹³By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶We 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.

¹³By this we know that we abide 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. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (ESV)

God is the source of love and His love was perfectly displayed in Christ. His love also moved Him to regenerate you.

If you have exercised the gift of true saving faith in Christ then you have been regenerated. It is the Spirit who regenerates and renews and spiritually baptized and indwells and seals.

⁴But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, ⁵**He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** ⁶whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

²⁷**For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:27-28)

¹³In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, **you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,** ¹⁴**who is given as a pledge of our inheritance,** with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Only believers have been regenerated and spiritually baptized and indwelt and sealed. It is all by God's power, therefore they are remaining in God and He is remaining in you.

❖ Is this you?

Christ is the Savior of the world. Confessing Christ alone is the way of salvation. There is none other.

¹²And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

⁵For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, (1 Timothy 2:5)

The exclusivity of Christ for salvation and sanctification is an important distinction in presenting the gospel.

❖ **What “gospel” do you proclaim? Do you proclaim the true gospel at all?**

4. God’s love gives us assurance (4:17-18)

¹⁷By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There 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.

¹⁷By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (ESV)

God is the source of love, His love was perfectly displayed in Christ, and His love moved Him to regenerate you. His love also gives assurance.

“By this” most likely refers back to verse 16: “God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” Abiding in God’s love and God Himself and having God abide in you brings about sanctification.

“Love is perfected with us” does not mean that love is “perfect” or without flaw. It means that sanctification brings about a maturing love, a love that is being brought to its purposeful conclusion, a love that is reaching its intended target.

Maturing love or sanctification or conformity to the character of Jesus Christ is **for the purpose of** giving you confidence that you are saved. It is the subjective evidence of salvation.

We know we are saved because as He is, so also are we in this world. Christ is righteous. Believers live in the world clothed in Christ’s righteousness. The Father deals with you as He deals the Son.

So, there is no fear in being loved by God nor in the true, maturing, love for God. Mature love casts out fear because fear involves punishment. “Fear” describes that which causes terror or dread. We need not fear the “day of judgement” because we have been loved by God as evidenced by our love for God and the brethren.

²⁷And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, ²⁸so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to* sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28)

❖ **Do you fear death?**

What about this side of the “day of judgment”? What about now? There is a second part of “fear”. As our love for God grows, we do not fear His sovereign work but fully trust Him who is good, wise, and loving, casting all our cares on Him.

¹⁹Therefore, **those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator** in doing what is right. (1 Peter 4:19)

⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

²²**Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you;** He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Psalm 55:22)

❖ **Do you fear in this life?**

If you fear either death in God's love or life in God's love, something is amiss.

5. God's love results in supernatural love (4:19-21)

¹⁹We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰If someone says, "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. ²¹And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (ESV)

God is the source of love, His love was perfectly displayed in Christ, His love moved Him to regenerate you, and His love also gives assurance. His love also results in our ability to love supernaturally.

We love because God first loved us. You did not have the ability to love God or love others before God loved you and intervened supernaturally in your life by grace.

Don't think that you "weren't that bad" before you were regenerated. You absolutely were "that bad" and more! You were evil by nature and choice, tainted by sin, dead, and only not as evil as you could have been because of common grace. Yet He loved you

❖ **Do you avail yourself of the supernatural ability to love?**

John has already taught on the polar opposites of love and hate.

⁹The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

¹⁰The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:9-12)

¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:14-16)

But now John says it in a different way. If you say absolutely that you have a lifestyle of loving God and yet have a lifestyle of hating (not loving) your brother or sister in Christ, then you are as a lifestyle liar. Said another way – a lifestyle of hate, selfishness, and self-centeredness is an indication that something is amiss in your Christianity.

If you have exercised the gift of true saving faith then you have encountered Christ, but you have not seen Christ (1 Peter 1:3-9); you have been loved by God with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3), but you have not seen God; you have exhibited the changed life, the progressive sanctification of the redeemed but you have not seen the Spirit (John 3:8). As a child of God, you know these things to be true and you “see” by faith but not by eyes.

⁶Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— ⁷**for we walk by faith, not by sight**— ⁸we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:6-9)

Yet your brother/sister, an object of God’s everlasting love, one for who Christ died, stands before you. John is clear, if you cannot love the one you can see, then don’t lie to yourself and the body and ultimately God and say that you love God whom you cannot see.

❖ **Do you love the brethren?**

John restates the commandment again but adds the idea of loving God. If you are a child of God, if you are redeemed, if you “love” God, then you have a moral imperative to love in deed and truth all the children of God, the brethren.

Remember, love is exemplified by the extreme, sacrificial service of Christ – the sacrificial commitment of His will to another’s needs and best interests regardless of the cost to Himself.

❖ **Have you committed out of love for God to love the brethren?**

Conclusion

John is writing to present tests of true saving faith. His purpose is to ensure that his readers know if they have eternal life (actual, true, real regeneration) or not. Today, we looked a third time at love, the supreme subjective evidence of salvation.

Additional Study

1. Each time you come to the Scriptures, pray for the Spirit to give you understanding.
2. Read 1 John once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for five days).
3. Pray that God would show you personal applications from today’s passage.
4. Read today’s passage noting repeated words/ideas and ask yourself what John means.
5. Re-read the notes from today and contemplate the thought questions.