

# THE SON EMBODIES DIVINE LOVE

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God, who in His essence is love, has called on people to love one another according to His love for them.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 4

**+** **SETTING:**

In his letter known as 1 John, the apostle John, one of Jesus's disciples, exhorted his readers to be on guard against false prophets. His readers must not be caught up in worldly errors but know "the Spirit of truth" (1 John 4:6). John then went on to point his readers to the importance of love in their relationships with one another. This love is rooted in the love of God for His people. Knowing "the Spirit of truth" should lead to love that looks like God's love for us. Our love for our fellow Christians is rooted in the gospel. Belief in the gospel should lead to love for other believers and for the whole world.

# DAY 1

## READ:

1 John 4:7-21

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 4:7

## NOTES

Are you a loving person? This may seem like a silly question, but one of the marks of a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus is love for others. In 1 John 4:7, John called his readers to “love one another.” The reason why we are to love one another is due to the fact that “love is from God.” The basis for our need to love one another comes from the character of God. If we belong to God and seek to live for Him, then we should seek to be like Him. This includes loving one another.

One of the worst ways to compromise a church’s witness in a community is a lack of love. A church that is made up of people who do not love each other is an awful witness. Jesus said that others will know His disciples when they see them loving each other (John 13:35). Not only does love come from God, but our love for one another is a sign to the world that we are followers of Jesus. Therefore, we should seek to be loving toward the people whom God has placed in our lives. The way the church loves one another actually serves as a witness to the watching world. How can you work to make sure love is a defining mark of your church?

Is your life marked by a love for others, or is it marked by a love for yourself? Love for our fellow Christians is fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives.

**What can you do this week to show love and care for someone in your church community?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Let no one say that when he sins he sins against other people but not against God, for how can you not be sinning against God when you are sinning against love?”<sup>1</sup>

—Bede (c. 673-735)

# DAY 2

## READ:

1 John 4:7-10

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 4:8-9

## NOTES



### KEY DOCTRINE #13: GOD IS LOVE

To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

How does the world define love? Much of the way the world speaks of love has to do with what others can do for you. We see this over and over in movies where the characters love each other because the affection of the other person makes them feel special. In other words, for the world, love is self-centered. However, that is not the case when it comes to biblical love. Biblical love is others-centered. We love one another not to get something out of a relationship but because we genuinely desire the good of others. We see this in 1 John 4:8-9. God's love for us is sacrificial and others-centered.

First John 4:8 shows us that love is one of the pieces of evidence in our life that we truly know God. John wrote that those who do not love “do not know God.” Those are terrifying words and should cause us to search our hearts. John shows us that those who have experienced God's love are truly changed and transformed. Instead of living solely for ourselves, we should live to make much of Jesus and love our fellow believers.

What does John mean by “God is love”? This verse has been misunderstood and at times misused. Some have misused this description of God as a license to live however they please. They dismiss their sinful actions by thinking that because God is love, He will let them live however they want. But “God is love” means that one of His key characteristics is love and it is in perfect union with His holiness. If we are to be Jesus's followers, then we will strive to love like God and live as God would have us to.

John also shows that God does not simply love us in a conceptual or theoretical way but in a concrete way—through sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to earth so that we might live. The love of God is meant to transform us. Our status before God is transformed and our relationships with one another are transformed.

**What is some evidence that your life is characterized by God's transforming love?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

## NOTES

We live in a day when there is much debate over the spiritual gifts, such as whether spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues continue today or they have ceased. While these are important topics to discuss, we must not overemphasize these debates about the gifts of the Spirit and miss out on the importance of the fruit of the Spirit. If we think our current debates about spiritual gifts can be controversial, the church in Corinth would make these debates look childish. The church in Corinth was being splintered into different groups due to these debates over the spiritual gifts. This is why Paul wrote to them about a “better way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). First Corinthians 13 comes right in the middle of a long section about spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14). Paul was showing the church at Corinth that if these gifts are truly being used in a God-glorifying way, then their lives should be marked by love and unity, not by division.

What about you? Are you known more for being divisive than you are for being loving? Our world is full of division, some good and some bad. However, in the church, our common love for Christ should unite us in a common love for one another.

Paul was warning the believers in Corinth, and us today, of the dangers of seeking power at the expense of love and unity. The better way is not the possession of powerful gifts that can easily lead to pride but humility marked by a love for our fellow believers. Is your life a constant pursuit of pride or is it a pursuit of humble love? Do you live for your own reputation or do you live for the good of others? The only way we can live with this humble love is to look to Christ and be transformed by His redeeming love in the gospel.

**What topics in the church are you or have you been divisive about in the present or past, and how are you dealing or have you dealt with them?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Corinthians 13:4**

## NOTES

One of the distinctive marks that developed over time in the early church was their kindness toward those in desperate need. First Corinthians 13 would have been a formative section in Scripture for developing patience and kindness. Whether it be toward widows, orphans, or unwanted infants, the early church's kindness was a defining mark that gave them opportunities to share the love of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul begins to paint a picture of what Christian love looks like. The first characteristic of love is patience. Paul wrote, "Love is patient." This could also be translated "long suffering." Christian love does not leave when things get hard but sticks through until the end. God Himself is patient with us, longing for us to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). If God is patient with us, then we should seek to be patient with others. When the circumstances of life get difficult, we are not to lose patience and move on. We should see the challenges in our life as an opportunity to practice the discipline of patient love. May you seek to use the trials and hardships of this broken world as an opportunity to practice loving patience.

Additionally, Paul said that love is kind. Paul used this word here to show how love is not simply an emotion but involves action. Due to the loving-kindness that God has shown us in Christ, we are to be kind toward others in our actions, in our words, and in our thoughts. In our present culture, this can sometimes be difficult to do. Yet through our kindness toward others, we can share about the reason why we are kind—because Christ has been kind to us. We must not overlook the apologetic for the Christian faith that is our kindness inspired by the love of God for us.

**How is your love for others proving to be patient and kind?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

## NOTES

When we think of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (and 8a), we often think of marriage, but none of us has lived up to this ideal description of love. We can't, so this passage helps to point us to the One who perfectly followed what Paul was teaching here—Jesus Christ. The greatest act of love the world has ever seen was the Lord Jesus Christ going to the cross to die for our sins. Love is not simply an emotion or a feeling; as we see at the cross, love requires action.

Eight characteristics described in this passage tell us what love is not: love does not envy, love is not boastful, love is not arrogant, love is not rude, love is not self-seeking, love is not irritable, love does not keep a record of wrongs, and love does not find joy in unrighteousness (13:4-6). Think for a moment about the picture of love that Paul was painting here. When you think of those eight characteristics of what love is not, how far short of that standard do we fall? We all fall incredibly short.

Finally, Paul stated positively that love rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Think again about the way Paul described love here. How are you doing at living out the biblical understanding of love? Again, we see how far short we fall.

Yet there is One who never failed to love in this better way—the Lord Jesus Christ. Where we have so often fallen short of this biblical standard of love, Jesus lived this out perfectly. His life was marked by love, and even His death on the cross was marked by love. He went to the cross to die and purchase for Himself a sinful people who needed to be transformed by the love of God. Love is not about receiving; rather, it is about giving. We see this ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead so that we might know God and be loved by Him.

**How do you see Christ's love reflected in this passage, and how can you live that out in your own life?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Right love of God is what enables right love of self and others. When we devote heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving [God], we perceive ourselves rightly—no room for pride or self-exaltation—which prepares us to love our neighbor freely. Rightly perceiving ourselves to be the unworthy recipients of the *agape* [love] of God, we become willing to love our neighbor in spite of himself because God first loved us in spite of ourselves. We do not wait to feel love; rather, we will ourselves to act in love whether we feel it or not. *Agape* transcends our feelings.”<sup>2</sup>

—Jen Wilkin

## POINT 1: The Nature of Love (1 John 4:7-10)

### KEY DOCTRINE #13: GOD IS LOVE

To say that God is love is to say that God is the \_\_\_\_\_ of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a \_\_\_\_\_ that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in \_\_\_\_\_ so that we might become reconciled to Him.



**How does the Bible's description of love contrast with the world's view of love?**

Love is best exemplified by God's \_\_\_\_\_ His Son as a \_\_\_\_\_ for us that we may know God's love and learn to love others sacrificially.



**What are some ways people can misunderstand God's love?**

## POINT 2: The Primacy of Love (1 John 4:11; 1 Cor. 13:1-3)

Following Christ's \_\_\_\_\_, we must love \_\_\_\_\_ sacrificially.



**Why do you think we find it difficult to love others?**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, even if learned and done for the Lord, are pointless if we don't have \_\_\_\_\_.

### POINT 3: The Character of Love

(1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Love is \_\_\_\_\_ and considers the other person \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves at every opportunity.



**Paul's list is not exhaustive in terms of what love is or is not. What would you add to the list?**

It is \_\_\_\_\_ to love perfectly this side of heaven, but as we look to Jesus's love and example for us, we can be empowered to love \_\_\_\_\_ .



**What can you do to help you love better?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because God, out of His great love, has sacrificed of Himself for us, we are to love others and sacrifice greatly on their behalf.

- **HEAD:** How might the truth that "love endures all things" help you in your relationship with other Christians?
- **HEART:** What person or group of people do you need to love better, and how?
- **HANDS:** What is one concrete action you will take this week to love in the way Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Love, and do what thou wilt: whether thou hold thy peace, through love hold thy peace; whether thou cry out, through love cry out; whether thou correct, through love correct; whether thou spare, through love do thou spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good."<sup>3</sup>

—Augustine (354-430)