

LESSON 12

AUGUST 22, 2021

UNIT III. FAITH GIVES US HOPE

PERFECT LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 14:15-24

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 John 4–5

PRINT PASSAGES: 1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5

KEY VERSE

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16b, KJV) .

. . . .

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1 John 4:16b, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Remember the love of God described by the writer of 1 John.
- Reflect on the various expressions of God's love in your lives.
- Respond to the challenge to love others with Christlike love.

KEY TERMS

Abide (4:13, NASB)—Greek: *menó* (men'-o): to stay, remain; “dwell” (KJV); “live” (NIV).

Confesses (4:2, NASB)—Greek: *homologeó* (hom-ol-og-eh'-o): speaks the same thing as another; agrees with; “confesseth” (KJV); “acknowledges” (NIV).

Flesh (4:2)—Greek: *sarx* (sarx): the soft substance of the living body; denotes mere human nature—being prone to sin and opposed to God; opposite of spirit.

Know (4:2)—Greek: *ginóskó* (ghin-oc'-ko): to come to know, “recognize” (NIV), perceive.

Love (4:16)—Greek: *agapé* (ag-ah'-pay): to entreat with kind affection, compassion, or goodwill.

Testify (4:14)—Greek: *martureó* (mar-too-reh'-o): to bear witness to, attest to.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, many churches have seen a dramatic decline in church attendance that parallels a steady incline in the divorce rate and the decision of many to live together outside the sacred covenant of Christian marriage. Researchers, social scientists, clergy, and everyday Christians have offered numerous explanations for these unfortunate trends and hallmarks of modern living. The sad truth is that our culture has become more secular (worldly), and those in

and outside the church have been spiritually infected with a rapid decline in Christian love and commitment to the things we once held sacred. To be clear, millions of people still sing love songs, walk down wedding aisles, and show up for church on Sunday morning. If you take a closer look, however, you realize that these same persons have an increasingly difficult time sustaining loving, committed relationships within the home and church. Divorce rates and instances of unwed pregnancies and unmarried co-habitation among Christians are higher than ever before. Many holidays that were once held sacred have become increasingly profit-oriented and commercialized (profit-oriented). The dignity and decorum we used to see in public life between celebrities, politicians, and strangers has sharply eroded—as people find increasing comfort in addressing each other with foul, insulting, hostile language that was once unheard of. The bottom line is that we are facing a decline in the practice of agape, the kind of Christ-like, unconditional, and forgiving love which moves us to regard others with gracious, loving compassion. The words of an old song still ring true: “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.” God’s kind of love, agape love, is the key to a lasting marriage, lasting relationships, lasting families, and a lasting church. We must practice the unconditional love of God—the same love that God extends to each of us.

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

First John 4:13 bridges the messages of 1 John and the gospel according to John. In the fourth Gospel, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit (or Advocate) who would come to maintain continuity and intimacy of relationship between the disciples and their Master (see John 14:15-31; 15:26-27; 16:5-15). First John 4:13-14 is one of the rare places in Scripture where the Father, Son, and Spirit are each mentioned as distinct persons of the Godhead in mutual relationship with us and with one another. They work together as one to perfect our love and help build a faith that is completely ready to serve God. The “day of judgment” (1 John 4:17) is a New Testament-era expression comparable to “the day of the Lord,” a phrase found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. It is the role and plan of the Godhead to guide and guard believers to eternal life with God. The apostle John suggests that God allows trials and tests to create in us a “conquering faith.” This kind of faith believes that all things are possible and that, with God, believers are well-equipped to handle any spiritual challenge that comes their way. Conquering faith understands that nothing catches God by surprise; it is unfailing and resilient even through life’s most difficult moments. By the strength of this kind of faith, believers are empowered to display God’s love in the world.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Be Aware of Others (*1 John 4:2-3*)

KJV

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

NIV

2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

In our current age of prosperity preaching, many people are seeking prophecy preaching (profitable future telling) as opposed to prophetic preaching (the proclamation of what thus saith the Lord), and many have the itching ear for motivational preaching. We have entered an era in which many false teachers have risen, and they are becoming harder and harder to identify. It is to this backdrop that approximately two thousand years ago, John penned the text that we read today. He seriously takes the task to heart to warn the believers to not believe everything they hear—for there are many false prophets in the world (verse 1 [Background Scripture]). Within that same verse John tells us to “test the spirit by the spirit.” There are those who would use this one phrase as a means of objection or to reject many valid preachers because something was said with which the listener did not agree. He does not leave us with that statement or stance as a means to validate arrogance, obstinance, or a hardened heart when someone feels out-preached or his or her toes are stepped on. Nor is it meant to be used at will in an effort to invalidate the preached Word of God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he gives guidelines as he tells us to be aware of others. To “be aware” and to “beware” are different words. He does not say to beware, meaning to be afraid and thus be aware of looming danger; rather, he tells us to be aware and thus equipped or knowledgeable enough to validate the word by the Word. This is what the next verses set up. The speaker will confess that Jesus came in the flesh (verse 2). This confession speaks to the wholeness of the ministry and love of Christ. By contrast, the antichrist, which is currently operating in the world, will not speak of the unconditional love of God in the appearance and working by way of redemption, and changed and transformed lives, in Jesus Christ (verse 3). True prophecy, preaching, and teaching will always present Jesus.

What do you think? In what ways can we be aware of false teachers?

Be Aware of Our Self (1 John 4:13-17)

KJV

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

NIV

13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.

16 And 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 them.

17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

Knowing ourselves and our position in Christ helps us to be aware of any schemes or ungodly manipulation of Satan and anyone utilizing ungodly tactics to distract and keep us off course. The “by this” of verse 13 refers back to verse 12 and is a direct reference to God’s love, especially within the life of the believer. This godly love dwells in us and is visibly evident in our actions and words as the very proof of God’s Spirit within us. It is the love of God that enables us to love those who hate us; be kind to who lie and mistreat us; and worship with those who sometimes serve with false, insincere motives. This is the kind of love to which God has called every believer. The strength to demonstrate such love is available through the power and presence of God’s indwelling Spirit. By the power of God, we testify of Jesus (verse 14)—His life, death, resurrection, and the change He continues to bring in our lives. Acknowledging Jesus (verse 15) requires more than words; we acknowledge or bear witness of His presence through what we do more than what we say, hour by hour, day by day. As we witness with our lives, we give undeniable proof that Jesus lives in us (verse 15). This is what it means to abide with Christ (see verses 4-7; John 15:1-8). To abide with Jesus means to be connected to Him. We cannot access the blessings of God the Father without first abiding in Jesus. God is love and in Him we find the source of our strength and our love, as we pursue Him daily and strive to exhibit to others that same love that God allows to shine in our hearts (verse 16).

What do you think? What can I do to be better prepared for worship and to help lead and engage others in worship?

Be Aware of Our Savior (1 John 5:4-5)

KJV

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

NIV

4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

We are not unaware of Satan's distractions that come at us through others. We are especially aware of the distractions we can bring on ourselves. But, as we seek the power of a conquering faith, we must be even more aware of our Savior and His perfect love. John wants us to stand boldly and walk confidently in our assurance through Christ Jesus that we are "born to win" no matter what this world throws our way. Every child of God has the victory to overcome the world—its setbacks, distractions, and difficulties (verse 4a). The word translated as "overcomes" is the Greek word *nika*, meaning "to conquer or prevail." John writes in the present tense, indicating the possibility of overcoming in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. But how do we overcome and stand victorious even when there is so much sadness and madness all around us? The answer is by "our faith" (verse 4b). Our weapon of victory is our faith—not a favorite song, a problem-solving ability, or self-confidence, but faith and confidence in Jesus, God's Son. This is the power of salvation in Christ Jesus. To be clear, John boldly states that it is "only" those who believe, and not just believe that Jesus exists, but that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the incarnate Word and the Son of God. He is the one who has the power to overcome the world (verse 5).

What do you think? How can we become more aware of the power we have in Christ Jesus?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

The power of perfect love lies in the fact that it is only accomplished through Christ. His perfect love is an everlasting, unconditional, and forgiving love that transforms the lives of those it touches. With God's help, we can see our relationships transformed by the power of divine love at work through us.

YOUR LIFE

Seek out intentional opportunities in your personal life to display unconditional love. It may look like simply forgiving someone for past offenses. It could also mean making an extra effort to be kind and helpful to someone in need, especially someone with whom you may not be on good terms.

YOUR WORLD!

Take a moment to discuss with the class areas within the church that could use an extra sprinkling of God's love and grace. Make a group commitment to come together to share loving acts of service for the benefit of the church facility, an individual member, or a selected ministry. Your efforts might include cleaning a yard, washing a car, running errands, or volunteering for any effort that needs your helping hands.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to be more mindful of opportunities to show love and kindness to others. Remind us that through Your power we can overcome the world, including the weight of hurts, guilt, or temptation. Guide us as we seek to serve You so that Your glory may be revealed in us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

While reading the background Scripture, consider this thought: "How can we remain confident in times of crisis?"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

HOPE ETERNAL

(August 23-29, 2021)

MONDAY, August 23: "From Death to Life in Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:16-23)

TUESDAY, August 24: "Strengthening the Inner Being" (Ephesians 3:14-21)

WEDNESDAY, August 25: "Every Deed, Good or Evil, Judges" (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

THURSDAY, August 26: "God's Judgment of Human Behavior Impartial"
(Romans 2:4b-11)

FRIDAY, August 27: "Paul, Confident in the Ministry" (2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

SATURDAY, August 28: "Entering the Presence of Jesus" (2 Corinthians 4:7-15)

SUNDAY, August 29: "Live the Faith with Confidence" (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10)