

Do you know that God loves you? Are you confident of the great love of God almighty? Most people will probably answer yes to this question, but because of the various trials and troubles of life, they will have doubts at times. Though all of us experience difficulties in life, yea sometimes even tribulations, we ought never to doubt God's love for us as the body of humanity and for us as individuals. God loves you! Twice John, the apostle of love, in 1 John 4 assures us that "God is love" (verses 8 and 16). Please consider what this means, and with the assurance of God's love, consider also what our response ought to be to this marvelous love, and the benefits of a proper response.

What Does "God Is Love" Mean?

To help with our understanding, consider first what the statement, "God is love," does not mean. "God is love" is not a definition. Statements of definition can be reversed. "John is a person" can be turned around and stated, "A person is John." However, "God is love" cannot be reversed. Love is God? Is the emotion of love our God? Probably to some that might be the case. However, those who have come to know the God of heaven as revealed within the sacred book, the Bible, know that He is much more than just a feeling of endearment.

Further, "God is love" does not indicate the source of all love. Ultimately, God is the source of true love which is properly directed. Notice what John wrote earlier in his first epistle: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16). John is clear in his statement that such love does not stem from God. God's love and proper love is not directed towards this material world in which we currently live.

In addition, "God is love" does not identify God. Certainly, God is known for His love, but love does not establish the identity of God. God is more than just love. He is all just and the creator of the universe. He provides life and breath for every living thing. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. These are just a few of His qualities!

What then does the statement, "God is love," mean? "God is love" describes the character or

quality or attribute of God. In other words, God's nature is characterized by love. Everything that God does is done out of love. He is all just, but His justice is characterized by love. He is the creator of the universe, but love was the motivation behind His creation. He provides life, but all of His provisions originate in love. God only acts out of love. He is only and always benevolent and never malevolent. He is not just full of love, does not simply possess love, does not only show love, He is love.

How Do We Know That God Loves Us?

First, clear statements of God's love are revealed within the Bible. Please consider these three examples. One of the most known is John 3:16 which says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Paul also wrote about the loving Creator in Ephesians 2:4 which says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." John in addition wrote of our loving Father in heaven in his first epistle, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1).

A second way we can know that God is love is by the revelation of His will. Only a benevolent God would reveal His will to rebellious sinners. Yet, that is what our loving Savior did for us. In 1 John 4:16 John wrote, "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." How have we come to know and believe God's love? The only way is through the revelation of God. Our loving God wants all men to be saved (1 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). In order for us to be saved, our tender and affectionate God lovingly revealed His terms of salvation for us to follow.

A third way for us to know that God is love is by the greatest demonstration of love. Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). John further wrote in 1 John 3:16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." In 1 John 4:9 John continued, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only

begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

What Is the Proper Response to "God Is Love"?

It is amazing how so many people speak of the love of God, but it never really changes their lives. It never really affects their behavior or the way they live. Often, it seems as if there is no response. A benevolent God who demonstrates His love for us by the sacrifice of His Son ought to impact our lives. How?

In response to God's love, we ought to love Him. John wrote, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Thus Jesus exhorted, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:29-30). Like other virtues, love is more than just an emotion. Love is also an action. Anyone who hears the words, "I love you" ought also to know words are cheap unless they are backed with actions. For a person to declare his or her love for God and not back it with actions is hypocritical. Notice in Jesus' discussion in the upper room with His apostles, He emphasized the need to obey in relationship to our love for Him. In John's gospel record Jesus exhorted, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (14:15); "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (14:21); "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (15:10); and "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (15:14). This is further emphasized in John's epistles. Chapter 5 and verse 2 says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." And 2 John 6 says, "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." Thus, love and obedience go together. In fact, the love of God ought to change our attitude towards keeping His commandments. John wrote in 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not

grievous.” Why are the commandments of God not grievous? Because of His love for us, we act out of our love for Him.

A second response to the love of God is love for the children of God. Children imitate their parents. Thus, if God is our Father, then we will imitate Him. God is love, and God’s children imitate His love. Notice the application John gives concerning God’s manifested love. He wrote, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). How can we lay down our lives for brethren? John continues with a practical application which will answer our question. He wrote, “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18).

Is it not the case that sometimes we need a little extra help in loving brethren? To help us, God provided through John four motivations of love found in 1 John 4:7-8. First, love is of God. Verse 7 says, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God.” Remember, God is the source of all true love. Second, “every one that loveth is born of God.” The imitation of this characteristic of God indicates whether or not a person is God’s child. Third, he who loves knows God. The idea of “know” is often used of relationship. If a person shows no love, then his or her relationship with the Father is feigning. Fourth, love exhibits the nature of God. Since “God is love,” then those who love are displaying a basic characteristic of God.

What Are the Benefits of a Proper Response?

There are several benefits found in our text of 1 John 4. Please consider these:

If we properly respond to the love of God, we will live through Him. In verse 9, John wrote, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” Not only will our lives improve in this world, but we will live eternally with God in the glories of heaven.

With a proper response to God’s love, we will have the propitiation of sins. Notice verse 10, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Propitiation is the act of making atonement for sin. “All have sinned...” (Romans 3:23), and therefore all need a Savior. Christ Jesus made atonement because of God’s love. Do you want atonement? God makes it available to all, but sadly only a few will accept it.

If we rightfully respond to the love of God, we will grow to maturity in His love. Verse 12 says, “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” “Perfected” means to bring to completeness, finish, or end. When Christians live in the light of God’s love, they cannot help but be influenced to mature in love.

When God’s love is responded to properly, we will dwell in God, and God will dwell in us. Notice verse 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.” Dwelling with God is what it is all about.

With a rightful response to God’s love, we will have boldness in the day of judgment. Note verse 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.” God’s love will deliver us from fear.

Is it not good news to know that God is love and that salvation is available to sinful men because of a loving God? Truly God does love us. The question, then, is do we truly love God? Do you love God? What do you do to show that love? No doubt, these are penetrating questions, but they need to be answered. Will you have the courage to investigate your heart for the answers, and will you have the courage to let the love of God make a difference in your life?

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the
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“I Know”

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I Know...

God Loves Me, Therefore I Love God

by
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