

1 John 4:7–21 - We Love Because He First Loved Us

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

First John, chapter 4. Open your Bible there, please. While you're doing that, I'll just tell you that this is a challenging book to teach through. I'll just tell you, it's kind of...it reminds me of Proverbs. And I've mentioned this before, Proverbs is difficult to teach through as well because pretty much every verse, almost every verse, is a message unto itself. And it's almost that way with John's first letter.

And honestly, this book is one that deserves our thoughtful meditation. This is the kind of book, if that's something you've been thinking about doing. Just going through the word and maybe just taking a verse and pondering it for the day or something like that, this is a good book to do. Because these verses take some thought to understand, and the Spirit as well. So let's invite Him to do that work while we get into the Word.

Father, thank you so much for the opportunity tonight to gather in your name. I thank you for the people who are here. I thank you, Lord, for those who are tuning in online. And we all together, Lord, pray for the work of your Holy Spirit to open our hearts.

We recognize and confess tonight, Lord, our need of you to illuminate our hearts that we might fully embrace what your word is saying to us here in this challenging letter. We pray, Father God, that our hearts would connect to your heart tonight and that we'd hear your voice. We look to you, Father, to do this work of opening our hearts, and we ask it in Jesus's precious name. Amen. Amen.

We're picking it up in chapter 4, verse 7. So 1 John, chapter 4, verse 7. Instantly I've got this song popping into my head. Anybody read these verses and have a song from maybe the old days?

When I was in Bible college, I went to a class called The Johannine Epistles, and we went through obviously these three letters. And every single...it was like, the class was like two days a week, like Tuesdays and Thursdays. Every single day the teacher started us off with "*Beloved, let us love one another.*" And then some of the class would go *love one another. For love. . . come on*

you guys. “*For love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God.*” I'm the only one singing. “*He that loveth not* (TRIPLE CLAP -- I threw that in there) *knoweth not God; for God is love.*” *Beloved, let us love one another.* First John 4:7 and 8.

It's a good way to remember it. Anybody ever heard that? Some of you guys who have hair the color that's mine might remember that song. So anyway, we did it every...and that, you know, was a hundred years ago and I remember it today.

John begins with that very thing, “beloved, let us love one another.” But I want you to notice as we start this first verse, the call to love, you'll notice, is given to those who are loved. Did you notice he starts off by... he doesn't just say love one another, he says *beloved*, let us love one another. In other words, what he's saying is...the Greek literally means, “to you who are loved, let us love.” Right?

Now that gives it an interesting sort of a perspective, doesn't it? To you who are loved, let us love. Notice that God doesn't just call anyone to love like He loves. He calls those who are loved and those who have experienced His love. And we're going to talk about that tonight, what it is to experience God's love and then to love others.

And then John explains why we are to love one another. He says, for love is from God. Now that's a profound statement. He goes on to say, whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Let's talk about what John is saying and what he isn't saying.

First of all, what he is saying. John is saying that one of the witnesses, one of the proofs if you will, of being a child of God who has been touched, who has been transformed by the love of God, is the evidence of a heart that is now drawn or convicted to love others. Okay? That's what John is saying now. Again, he says here, whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

You know, we throw that out a lot today. Do you know God. does he know God? We'll talk about somebody and ask about if they're a believer by simply saying, do they know the Lord? Well, there's a lot of different words in the Greek that can be translated “know.” And some of them just relate to intellectual knowing. Like you would learn something in a classroom sort of a setting.

John in this passage is using a word that we've talked about in the past. It's the Greek word *ginosko*, and it is a word that means “experiential knowledge.”

Okay? So when he talks about the one who loves having been born of God, we know what that means, but also one who knows God. He's saying that the one who loves is the one who has experienced God's love. In other words, he knows God's love from an experiential standpoint. Okay? And that's really important.

Now, let's talk about what John isn't saying when he says that whoever loves has been born of God. He's not saying that every display of love in the world proves that a person is a born-again Christian. Because it is possible for an unbeliever to show love, to know love, to do acts of love. And so we have to be careful to understand because remember John is talking to believers here. He's talking to Christians, and he's fully aware that unbelievers are capable of showing love.

Many of you were raised in a home by unbelieving parents and you felt very loved by your parents. And John is not saying that that isn't possible, but those acts of love don't make them Christians. So we'll not confuse that here tonight. In fact, he's not really even addressing unbelievers in verse 7, but he goes on to say in verse 8 that anyone who does not love does not know God. And again, that means does not know God's experiential love, because he says God is love. All right?

So the person, he says, who does not love or show love to others proves by their lack of ability to show love that they possess no experiential knowledge of God's love in their life, okay? Why? Because he says God is love.

And this is one of the most profound statements, frankly, in the Bible. And also fairly misunderstood, and I should say controversial. Because when unbelievers are challenging you about the character of God, they're always going to start it off with something like, well, if God is a god of love, then ... and then they're going to cite some terrible, tragic, challenging circumstances that have happened in the world and then ask you why, if God is a god of love, he allowed that to happen.

Well, God doesn't explain that in this passage. John simply tells us that God is love, right? And what that means is that He is the originator of love, that He is the source of love. He's not simply telling you that God is loving. We say that about ourselves. We'll talk about someone in our family or someone we know; we'll say they're very loving. Sometimes we'll even talk about children. He's a very loving child. She's a very loving little girl. That's not what John is saying about God. He's not saying God is loving. Because that speaks of a personality trait. John isn't talking about God's personality trait here; he's talking about His

essence. He's saying God is love, and what that means is that He can't be other. He can't be other than the source and originator of love.

It's kind of a thought or an idea that we struggle to lay hold of in our own heart and mind because we are creatures of contradiction. We can love, but then that same love can turn to hate. And what's interesting about human attributes of love and hate is that I have to suspend one in order to express the other. If I'm feeling very loving today, then I'm really not going to be entertaining thoughts of hate, and neither would you. And when I'm feeling thoughts of difficult...you know, hatred towards something or someone, I'm not going to be entertaining thoughts of love at the same time. I have to essentially put those out of my mind in order to focus or fixate on my particular emotion of the moment.

Please don't think of God as that way. God never, ever suspends His love. He cannot suspend His love because it's not what He *does*, it's who he *is*. He cannot do other than be who He is, or he would be less than God. So His love is a constant, even when He is expressing wrath. He is no less at that very moment a god of love, right? So God never suspends any one of His attributes to express another like you and I may have to do as it relates to our emotions.

Now, the fact that unbelievers...since John's talking to believers here, the fact that unbelievers still have the capacity to love, remember God is the source, the originator of all love. So the fact that unbelievers still have the capacity to love, and they do, tells us that this fallen world still retains somewhat of a remnant of what it means to be created in the image of God.

And I want to remind you about your unsaved family members, your unsaved friends, coworkers. They are created in the image of God even though they are unsaved, even though at this moment they are not technically children of God. Because we know that children of God is a title that is given to those who have received Christ. But they are still created in the image of God and they still have that echo of the source of God's heart and God's love.

Even so, human love...even though unbelieving humans are certainly capable of feeling and expressing and receiving love, it can so easily be corrupted. I don't know if you've noticed or if you've paid attention throughout the course of your own life, just how many times love, the simple expression or emotion of love, can so easily be corrupted and it becomes part of our selfish desires or self-centered needs rather than a true expression.

True love as God defines it is agape love, and that's that unconditional kind of love. It cares about you without any reference to me. And that's something that

as believers we can experience when the Lord lays it upon our hearts in a significant sort of a way. But it doesn't come naturally to us, it comes supernaturally. It is natural to God to love unconditionally, but the world, it's natural for the world to love conditionally.

And it's kind of funny, sometimes I'll be watching a movie and I'll hear someone expressing their love for someone in the movie. And while they're saying, "I love you," they will often say the statement, "I need. I need you." And in movies that's considered a romantic statement.

But when you stop and think about it, it's an incredibly selfish statement because you're telling someone, "You fill some area of need, and I want that need filled by you because you make me feel good. I want you." It's really not...it's the opposite of unconditional love. It's something I'm getting out of it personally, and that's why I love you. I love you for what I get out of it.

And it's funny, but in movies that's considered to be a romantic statement. And that just tells you how far fallen man has deviated from a true understanding of the quality of God's love, which is totally for your benefit and not for mine. It has nothing to do with anything I get out of it. It's all for you. My love for you, my desire for you, is all about you. It has no reference or reflection to me. That's unconditional love, and again that's something that God may allow us to express in rare occasions, but it certainly does not come naturally.

Verse 9 goes on here in the text, and it says,

⁹"In 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." (ESV)

I've got to tell you, that verse 9 is a beautiful verse, one of those verses that it would be good for you to meditate on, because it gives us here in this simple verse the substance of God's love. He doesn't sit and talk about God's love as some philosophical construct or abstract sentiment: the love of God, let's talk about the love of God. Notice he says that the love of God was manifest. And that word "manifest," it means it's obvious, it's clear. God just laid it out there in unmistakable fashion. How? By sending His Son to give His life on the cross for you and for me. God's love was manifest, clearly seen, when God sent His Son into the world.

If somebody ever asks you in some philosophical moment of curiosity, "What do you think is the definition of love?" Oh, I have no problem explaining that to you. The definition of love is, God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins.

That's it, that's exactly what John says here in verse 9. So that's the definition of love. It's not the Hallmark definition; it's not the Harlequin Romance definition. This is the biblical definition of love. It was manifest. Boom. It's secure, it's obvious, God sent his son.

And in verse 10, almost just as profound, he says,

¹⁰ *“In 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.” (ESV)*

We'll get to that \$64 word in just a moment. But he says the definition of love is not found in our love for God but is rather seen in His love for us. Right? And when he speaks of the sacrifice of Jesus, he speaks of one element of that sacrifice that was made for you and me. And that is the propitiation for our sins.

And I'm assuming you have a Bible that does use the word “propitiation.” If you have an NIV I think it uses the word “atonement,” but the word “propitiation” is actually quite significant because that word means “to avert wrath.” So when it says that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, it means He averted the wrath of God.

It's kind of like taking a stream and diverting it from its usual course, target, and making it go a different direction. Jesus averted the wrath of God for you and me. How did He do that? He consumed it, that's how.

Getting back to that picture of someone digging a trench so that a stream of water, rather than going in its regular course goes a different way, diverting it to a...in this case, Jesus diverted the wrath of God to himself. And in so doing He became the propitiation of our sins. And I know that's a word you probably don't use very often, I certainly don't, but it's a beautiful word. When you think about what it means: there is no wrath.

Guys, do you understand? And John's going to talk about this more as we get into the rest of this chapter. Jesus consumed the wrath of God for us. I am heartbroken by the number of Christians that I hear talking about their fear of God's wrath in their lives. I really am, because they don't understand. They don't understand the idea of propitiation. They don't understand the idea that what Jesus did on the cross was finished.

Jesus declared, and it was a declaration of victory, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He cried out before giving up His spirit on the cross, “It is finished.” That means paid in full. The wrath of God has been diverted. It has been consumed

in the person of His Son and now there is, therefore, now no wrath and “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). None whatsoever.

That doesn't mean there isn't discipline. What does the Bible say how God treats us today? He disciplines those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6). That's not wrath, believe me. We are disciplined out of love. He disciplines those whom He loves. It's an act of kindness to us, not wrath. God's wrath has been consumed in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, on behalf of those who are trusting in His finished work on the cross.

So please, please, brothers and sisters in Jesus. Don't let Satan trick you into thinking that somehow you are under the wrath of God. If your confidence is in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, the wrath has been propitiated; it's been averted and consumed in the person of His Son.

And then verse 10, when you understand that the wrath of God has been averted, verse 10 is the application. Actually, I think...I read verse 10. Verse 11, I'm sorry:

¹¹ “*Beloved*, (and there again he starts off by saying, “you who are loved”) *if God so loved us*, (that he would send His Son to avert His wrath on our behalf) *we also ought to love one another.*” (ESV)

So again, this is John's heart. This is his theme; this is his message. Since you are loved by God and you understand that His love went so far as to remove the wrath, His wrath against you, to the point where He showered His love upon you, now he's saying you also ought to shower your love upon those who least deserve it.

And we've got to be careful not to look on people and say, well, I'll love them if they deserve it. Well, that isn't the way God...that wasn't His attitude toward you. He didn't say, “Well, I'll love those who deserve it.” Because you know what, none of us deserved it. He showered His love on those who least deserved it, and we are to do the same.

That's hard, isn't it? Let's just...I want to say that during the course of this study of the latter part of John, 1 John chapter 4, I want to remind you that the things that John is saying here, he's making statements that sound very final and very conclusive. But have you noticed in your Christian walk that very little of your walk is very final and conclusive as it relates to successfully walking these

things out? Like loving people who are unlovable and always walking in a full understanding of God's love for you?

We have hiccups, don't we? And I want you to understand that that's a normal part of what it is to walk with God. We struggle, we stumble, we have...the enemy whispers in our ears. Sometimes we start believing it and we have to be brought back to center with the word of God and get readjusted. Kind of that spiritual chiropractic, getting ourselves back in line with where we need to be thinking and believing and so forth.

So please understand when John is making these very conclusive statements, we understand as believers that there are times, there are days.

Verse 12, he goes on, he says,

¹²*“No has ever seen God; (Right? I mean, it's just one of those statements.) if we love one another, God abides in us (He's living in the midst of us) and his love is perfected in us.*

¹³*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because 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.”* (ESV)

What is John saying in those three verses? He starts off by saying nobody has ever seen God. In other words, you know the people of the world, they're... some of them aren't even sure if God truly exists and they've never seen God. They've seen what God has created, and frankly that should be enough to convince them of the existence of God. But in some cases, there's a lot of struggling going on along those lines.

So they haven't seen God, but guess who they have seen. They've seen you and they've seen me. And so John is saying, he says they haven't seen God but they see us. And if we're abiding in Him, and if He is abiding in us, then what they're going to see in us is a testimony that God the Father sent His Son into the world. That's what they're going to see.

I want you to notice that word at the end; well, toward the middle of verse 14. Look at verse 14 once again: *“And we have seen and (we what?) testify.”* Testify. What does it mean to testify?

You guys know, I told you, I just got done in December doing grand jury every Thursday over in Vale, and we heard a lot of testimony. And people get up and

they testify about what happened and so forth. As believers, we're doing the same thing to a lost and fallen world.

We're testifying, but what are we testifying about? The reality of God, that He would love so much that He would send His Son to die on the cross. And that is what we're supposed to be testifying to the world. We're supposed to be telling the world, "Do you know how much God loves you? Let me explain it to you. He loved you so much that he sent His Son to stand in the way of His holy wrath that His Son might consume that wrath and that you would get none of it. If you are trusting in what His Son did on the cross, that's how much He loved you." And that's our testimony and that's what John is saying in these three verses.

But what does it take to have that testimony? We must abide in Him. He must abide in us. Right? Verse 15 says,

¹⁵ *"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."* (ESV)

Now, the word "confesses" is a little bit different than just simply giving a testimony. The word "confess" in the Greek means to be of one mind; in this case, to be of one mind with God and to speak the same. That's literally the long Greek version of the word "confess," to be of one mind and to speak the same. So he says whoever is of the same mind and confesses the same, that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in that person, and he in God. So you're speaking in agreement concerning who Jesus is. Verse 16:

¹⁶ *"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love (in other words, His love) abides in God, and God abides in him."* (ESV)

The interesting thing about verse 16 is this statement, "so we have come to know and to believe." Do you know that it's possible to come to know something but not believe in it? You can know something but not believe it, not truly embrace it with your heart. And that's why John says, "we have come to know *and* to believe."

I have discovered, once again, a good many Christians who know the love of God as an intellectual reality, but they have not come to believe it from a personal living standpoint. In other words, if you gave them a piece of paper and said, "Write down the answer to this question: Does God love?" They

would say yes, and they would get that answer correct because intellectually they know it.

But then if you make it more personal and say, “Does God love you unconditionally?” they would struggle. Many Christians would struggle and say, “Well, I'm just not sure sometimes.” And yet John says, “we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.”

If you are one of those people who would struggle a little bit on the second part of that quiz, can I just encourage you to make it a matter of prayer? And it sounds strange to ask God to help you understand His love. We think we should just naturally just kind of get it, but often we don't just get it. And I don't think there's anything wrong with asking God to help you understand His love. If you have struggled by truly believing that God loves you, then ask Him to help you with that: “Lord, help me not just to know of your love, but to believe it on a personal level.”

John goes on to say in verse 17,

¹⁷ “*By this (and that means...this means believing in his love for us) is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is, so also we are in this world.*” (ESV)

So again, I ask you the question: Do you have confidence for the day of judgment? Once again, I talk to so many Christians who are just not confident. I've talked to Christians who cannot read certain passages of the Bible that speak of judgment because they're so fearful. I've had people tell me, “I have never been able to ever get into the book of Revelation because it scares me too much.”

And again, that breaks my heart because you're talking about a person here who does not understand propitiation, who does not understand that the wrath of God has been averted away from them, that there is now no condemnation for them. They haven't truly embraced it and they are still under this sentence of judgment. And it's really, truly sad.

And so, He speaks here of the confidence that we have for the day of judgment. The day of judgment is coming. Do you have confidence that on that day you're good? It's like, “okay, I'm good,” or do you struggle: “well, the day of judgment, I don't know.”

You know I've said many times, I've said many times, if God brings up one single sin on the day of judgment that you committed, then what Jesus did on the cross wasn't enough and it wasn't finished. If He brings up one sin, just one, then what Jesus did on the cross wasn't enough. Because when God spoke of the new covenant in the book of Jeremiah through the prophet Jeremiah...and we won't take time to look at it. You can, if you want to make a note it's in Jeremiah chapter 31. Beginning at verse 31, God prophesied through Jeremiah that God would remember our sins no more. And He will remember their sins no more.

Why? Because they've been consumed. The punishment, the penalty, has been consumed in the person of His Son, right? So now do you have any more confidence for the day of judgment?

Now, the Bible does say that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and we will; but your judgment is going to be different from the unbeliever. Yours is what we call the bema (BEE-ma) or bema (BAI-ma), depending on how you pronounce it, seat of judgment, which speaks of a judgment of rewards.

Jesus told parables to speak of that, about a master who gave money to his servants to invest and to use on his behalf while he went away on a long trip and then came back to settle accounts with them (Matthew 25:14-30). And there is going to be that settling of accounts for you and me, for all believers. And that is going to be that bema seat judgment that we will experience as believers.

So we will be judged based on our works, not for salvation but for rewards. Now Paul says in Corinthians that there are going to be some people who are not going to have anything to show for what they've done with the gifts and abilities that the Lord gave them. He talks about the person who's going to be literally saved as someone escaping through the flames.

He says the man himself, the person himself, will be saved, but only as someone escaping through the flames. And that's going to be a sad day for some people, when they have nothing to show for what they did. But that's the only judgment you're going to experience on the day of the Lord, which of course is more than just a day.

So do you have confidence for the day of judgment? Our confidence comes from the confidence in what Jesus did. It has nothing to do with you. When I ask that question of people, "Are you confident that you will never be judged by God?" They immediately think of themselves. They go, "Well, I don't know."

Last week, oh man, if you could have seen what happened in my life last week, or if you could see when I went to work the other day. I didn't have a good attitude at all.”

And it's like, no, no, no, no. Confidence has nothing to do with you. It's confidence in Jesus, that's what we're asking about. Are you confident that what He did was enough? That's the question. Yeah, I'm confident that what Jesus did was enough. In this, love is perfected, John says. That's what he's saying in this verse. In this, love is perfected: because you are so convinced of His love that was manifested through Jesus Christ, His Son, when He came to die for you and avert the wrath of God, love is now perfected in you.

And then John reminds us in verse 18,

¹⁸“*There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear. (He says:) For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.*”

He's still talking about the day of judgment. If there's a fear in your heart about the day of judgment, then you've not been perfected in love. I'm not saying that to condemn you. I'm simply saying, or making the point, that you've got a ways to go. That's all right, you'll get there.

Ask the Lord to help you get there: “Lord, I want to be perfected in love. I want to be perfected in love. Doesn't mean I'm going to be a perfect lover. It means I'm going to be so convinced of your love that I will have no fear of judgment, none whatsoever. Why? Because I'm a good person? Heavens no. Because you're a good God and you gave your life for me, and I'm convinced that what you did was enough. It was enough.”

Accepting what Jesus did on the cross is accepting God's love for you. You ever think about that? Accepting what Jesus did is accepting God's love for you. You remember, John 3:16 says, “for God so loved the world that he gave.” So if you're receiving what He gave, you're accepting His love. This is the thing about John. Everything about his understanding of salvation, his understanding of eternal life, his understanding of judgment, everything is colored by love and our understanding of God's love. It's all about love. Have you noticed that?

Our very salvation boils down to an expression of God's love for us, but it is also an act on our part of receiving that love through our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. God loved me, I received his love. I accepted what His Son did for me.

Verse 19, this is kind of a summary theme of the chapter, he says, ¹⁹“*We love because he first loved us.*” (ESV)

That puts us in our place, doesn't it? That tells us that love didn't originate with us, it originated with Him. And the reason we love is because He first loved. I like that.

You know what's interesting about that is that in the Old Testament, God put a requirement in the law that the people of God would love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind. But the law couldn't do anything to produce that kind of love. It was just the law. He said, this is what you should do. You should love the Lord your God. But, again, the law doesn't make you love. The law doesn't make you do anything. The law just tells you about the righteousness of God and how far short we fall from attaining the righteousness of God.

So God says we are to love Him with all of our heart, our soul, strength. Where does that come from? Where does that love come from? Well, God solved that little issue by sending His Son, the manifestation of his love, to give Himself for us.

And when we begin to get an idea of just how much He loved us, that He would be willing to suffer to save us...honestly, Christians, I don't think we think enough about how much He suffered. I really don't. I don't think we think about it enough. I think we should think about it more, just how much He suffered. It's just too easy to say He died for our sins. It rolls off the tongue, but it speaks nothing of the horrific element of what He suffered on our behalf.

I mean, the weight, the crushing weight of our sin that He bore on the cross. It just, it broke Him. It caused the Son of God to be separated from the Father for the first time in eternity, to the point that He would cry out in fear and agony from the cross and say, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

We don't think about those words very often. We don't think about the depth of His suffering. So when we do begin to understand just how much He suffered, and suffered willingly, we begin to get an idea of His love for us. And our hearts begin to well up with gratitude and a love toward Him because He gave it all. It's like, “You gave me everything, how can I not give you everything? You did it, you gave everything for me. And so I give everything to you, my whole life.” We love because He first loved us.

He says in verse 20, and in these last two verses John returns to the whole idea of the command that we have received to love one another. Now, we've been talking a lot about how much God loves us, how much He manifested or how He manifested that love. Now he returns to how we are to love others. He says,

²⁰ *“If anyone says, ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he's a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (And then he reminds us) ²¹And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”* ESV

Does this, these last couple of verses, sometimes do they ever make you kind of feel convicted? Like, I mean, the reason I say that, if all this just came perfectly natural to us to love one another and even, frankly, to love God, John wouldn't be exhorting us about it over and over again. He says to you and me over and over again, love God. Love your brother. Love God. Love your...listen, if it was just a foregone conclusion for believers to do that without any hesitation or without any hiccup, he wouldn't have to say it again and again. But the reason he's saying it again and again is that John knows that it comes with hiccups, it comes with challenges.

In the body of Christ we sometimes work very closely together. And some...and when we do, we step on one another's toes and we can actually...let's just face it, we can develop a sense of dislike for someone within the body of Christ. And then we come along, we read these passages that say anybody who says “I love God” and hates his brother, he's a liar. And we kind of go, oh man alive. I guess I'm on the outs here. Because I don't even want to talk to so and so. I see him in church, I want to walk the other direction.

It's very important to note and to understand that John is not saying that this is a perfect...this is the perfect life of Christians, that we never struggle in these areas of loving God and loving others. We do. But we are convicted by the Holy Spirit when these things are not as they should be, and we ought to respond in obedience to the conviction of the Holy Spirit as it relates to getting those things in order and taking care of them.

And that's messy business because the vast majority of people really hate confrontation. I mean, they'd much rather die, literally, than confront issues that are uncomfortable to confront, like going to someone and saying, “We need to get this right, because there's bad blood between us. And we're going to spend eternity together. And we ought to probably get this squared away now because otherwise. I don't want to sit and hate you in front of the Lord.”

That's hard to do. It's especially hard when you go to somebody with an ovation of reconciliation and they don't receive it, they're just not ready. And you think to yourself, now what am I going to do? Well, it's important that you made that first step.

You can't be the Holy Spirit for somebody else, but you can listen to the Holy Spirit in your own heart. And if the Lord is speaking to you about reconciling with a brother or sister in Christ -- and that's who we're talking about here -- with whom you have an issue, then you should take care of that. However the Lord leads you to take care of it, whether it's a phone call, a text, a card in the mail or talking to them in person or whatever, we want to work toward the ideal.

And John is laying out the ideal here: love God, love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Is it going to be a perfect life? No. Is it going to be easy? No. Is it going to come with challenges? Yes. Are you going to stumble and fall? Oh, yes.

And that's what forgiveness is all about: "Lord, I've been harboring ill will toward this person. I'm sorry, you told me not to. You showered love on me when I didn't deserve it. I have no right to withhold my love and affection from that person." And sometimes you have to go to the Lord and say "Father, help me to love them like you love them. Because I'll tell you right now, I don't love them."

And that's okay to admit to the Lord because He knew anyway. It's not like you're telling him something and He's going to go, oh, you're kidding! I didn't know that! Of course He did. But for you to be able to go to the Lord in all honesty and sincerity, "Lord. I just haven't had the right feelings for this person; it's not what it should be. Change my heart. Give me your love." I think He wants to do that. I think He wants to see us loving like we ought to love, but also confessing and recognizing when we don't and coming to Him for the help that we need. Because I don't know about you, we need help. We need lots of help sometimes.

But that's okay. It's okay to admit that. That's where we're going to stop. We'll pick up 1 John chapter 5 next time. All right. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for the reminders we get in this chapter of John's letter. And Lord, it is convicting. It is convicting. And heavenly Father, we'll just say right now and confess that we do lose sight of our gratitude and our understanding of just the ends that you went to that we might be saved.

And we remember that you died on the cross and we remember that you gave your life for us. But Lord, sometimes we just, we forget about the depth of that sacrifice and how much you suffered. And Lord, if He...if we'd been there that day, and if we'd have seen you up on that cross and watched as the people mocked, cursed at you, and as you hung there in shame, we'd have a different perspective about what you did for us, and it would probably change the way that we love others.

And so we pray, Father God, that you would help us to remember the depth of your love and how you showered it upon us when we least deserved it, so that we might shower love on others. And Heavenly Father, we ask you to forgive us for any ill will that we have retained for anyone in the body of Christ. We ask you to forgive us, Lord, for that, and we pray in Jesus's name that you would help us to bring reconciliation to that, at least as it is in our power to do so.

Lord, we recognize that we are very imperfect in the way that we love others, and we ask you to change that in our lives. Help us, Lord, not to be critical but rather compassionate. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your goodness. Thank you for the manifestation of your love that is clearly seen through the work that Jesus did for us on the cross.

We are confident tonight in that work, and therefore we have confidence for the day of judgment. Our confidence is in Jesus and it is in His name that we pray.

And all God's people said, amen. Amen. God bless you. Have a good rest of your evening.