

If we only had one portion of Scripture, one chapter to convey what the Gospel is all about, this would be a good choice. John gets down to the real substance behind all God's ordained history, the substance of the teachings and life of Jesus. It all comes down to this. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself, of man, and of how we can be in relationship with Him. This passage sums up those key issues. These truths are not only what separated the churches of Asia from the new teachings of Cerinthus, but from all false teaching as well.

Lets go over his main points, focusing in on few of the details as we go. Verse 8 and verse 16 tell us that God is love. Just as we saw in chapter one that God is light does not mean that God is photons, so here it does not mean that God is an emotion, an attitude, or mindset. John is describing the nature of God. It is His nature to love. Love does not define God so much as God defines love. Agape, as we have seen before, is a resolution of the will to value and care for another. God's nature is to value us. After all, He made us in His image, and since He is the very definition of goodness, He sees in us the potential of restoring that image of Himself. He loves the world, meaning all of mankind. (John 3:16) He loves me. He loves you! He hates the evil we do, but He loves us.

It is similar to the love we have for our children. They are in our image in a sense. They are our likeness. We are drawn to their dependency on us. We nurture and care for them hoping that they can grow into their full potential. God does the same for us and feels the same toward us. God is love. Just as a mother can't help but love and care for the baby she has given birth to and nursed, so it is with God who designed us, gave us life, and planned our days. (Isaiah 49:15)

Unlike earthly parents, God knows exactly what we need and will see that we get it, even when it breaks His heart. If we need trials to bring us into our full potential of being more like Him in this life, He will let the trials come. (Romans 5:3-5) We hesitate to have our children endure refining fires for fear of the pain they and we will bear. God does not. His love is perfect and will pay any price, as we see in this passage. (Hebrews 4:15)

You might say, "But what about that God of the Old Testament that had kids mauled by bears, and slaughtered all those Canaanites, etc." Same God! How could He allow those things to happen? It is the same way He allows the tragedy in our day, wars, natural disasters, and crime. People are free to choose. (Joshua 24:15) Their choices have consequences, and innocent people are hurt. We live in a fallen world that is cursed because of our choices to rebel against this loving God from whom every good thing comes. Some of the worst tragedies have driven more people to God and shown the love of God in believers' response to the need. Christians demonstrate the first verse of our passage: *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

We can't stop people from making the choice to rebel against the goodness of God and face the consequences, but we can respond to the brokenness that inevitably

Commented [notes1]: John 3:16 (NIV)
16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [notes2]: Isaiah 49:15 (NIV)
15 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

Commented [notes3]: Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)
3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.
5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Commented [notes4]: Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)
15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

Commented [notes5]: Joshua 24:15 (NIV)
15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

follows with love, demonstrating the heart of God. We can't show God's love unless we are born of God and know Him personally. ⁸ *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.* Without God, we can be kind, but the motivations are ultimately selfish, hoping for some kind of recognition or reward. Agape love is more than worked up kindness or sympathy. It is a willingness to give whatever is necessary at whatever cost because there is the need for love in the one you have chosen to love. (Luke 10:35)

What does the love of God look like? ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* It looks like the love of Jesus that moved into the neighborhood and showed us how to live in love. But He didn't just show us; He invites us to live through Him. That is an unusual invitation.

If someone offered to let you live through them, what would it look like? You'd probably come alongside them, experience their heart, hear their thoughts, let them act and speak through you, and see the world through their eyes. Would it be their life in my body or my body in their spirit, or both? You'd just be along for the ride living through them. Jesus says to us, "Come on in," or maybe, "Let me in." Either way, it's, "Live through me." You could translate it, "find life in me" or "know what it really means to live by being in me". It's all the same. He is life! He is love. If we are in Him, we will manifest His love.

In case His righteous judgments and living in this fallen world confused us about God's nature, He gave us undeniable evidence. ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* He gave what was dearest to Him to meet our deepest need. This one verse says it all. Atonement means to cover. The sins that separate us from God were dealt with so that we could come into fellowship with Him. Only a sacrifice could do it, for sin demands death. (Romans 6:23) Sin is high treason against God and His goodness. (1John 3:4) Anything short of death would be unjust. God's great love sent His one and only Son who voluntarily chose to take on Himself the justice we deserve. What love! Do you love others enough to give what is costly to you to see them find life? ¹¹ *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* That's John's conclusion. How can we be recipients of such love and not pass it on? Won't we do so if we live through Him? Can we say we are His child if we don't resemble Him?

I think the world has such a hard time understanding Jesus' sacrifice because they can't relate to that great a love. There will never be a greater display of love, for Jesus is the greatest gift that could ever be given. How is the world going to relate to it unless the Spirit reveals it or they see it in us? (1Corinthians 2:14) That's John's next point. ¹² *No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.* People can't see God. He is a spirit. (Exodus 33:20) But if we will live through Him and love one another, His love in us makes the love we express all that it should be. That is the only way the world can relate to a God who loves them enough to take the punishment they deserve. Only the very life of God in us can enable us to love with His kind of love. (John 15:12-13)

Commented [notes6]: Luke 10:35 (NIV)
35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Commented [notes7]: Romans 6:23 (NIV)
23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [notes8]: 1 John 3:4 (NIV)
4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

Commented [notes9]: 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV)
14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Commented [notes10]: Exodus 33:20 (NIV)
20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Commented [notes11]: John 15:12-13 (NIV)
12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Verses 13-16 are a kind of insert that reminds believers that we have the indwelling Spirit (*God lives in us* – verse 12) who gives us the power to testify of what Jesus has done for us and for the world. (Acts 1:8) If we acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, we live in God and He lives in us. Because of that life in us, we can rely on God's love in us instead of our meager efforts. There are people I just can't love. I know. I tried. That reminds me I need to rely on God's love. God's love might share a word of instruction or correction, but it will be done with gentleness and love just like the Spirit does with me. (1Peter 3:15) Agape love and life in God can't be separated. One is evidence of the other.

Commented [notes12]: Acts 1:8 (NIV)
8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Commented [notes13]: 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)
15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

John continues by expanding on the love that is made complete in us as is mentioned in verse 12. ¹⁷ *In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.* Living in God and allowing His love to flow through us, giving sacrificially to help others as directed by the Spirit gives us confidence that we'll be fine on the day of judgment. It shows we have been redeemed. It shows we live through Jesus. We can stand boldly before God and point to our defense attorney, Jesus, and say, "Behold, my righteousness!" (Jeremiah 23:6) Why? Because we love like He loves, sacrificially, obediently, and willingly.

Commented [notes14]: Jeremiah 23:6 (NIV)
6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

¹⁸ *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* This is one of those verses we often take out of context. John is speaking of fear of judgment, worrying about whether or not we are on our way to the fires of hell. If you live in the love of God, there is no need to fear that at all. Why? It's because the love of God is being demonstrated daily in your life. It verifies that you are in relationship with Him. It proves you live in Him and He in you. Why would He punish someone who is experiencing life through Him?

Most fears are ultimately a fear of death, and the reason death concerns us is the judgment that follows. In that sense, it can apply to other fears as well. If you are afraid of death and judgment, John says, you have yet to be made perfect in love. You either don't understand what Jesus has done for you, or you haven't accepted Him as Lord of your life. Are you concerned this morning about your eternal destiny? If you aren't sacrificially loving others, you should be concerned, even fearful. If you are living in the love of God, living through Jesus, that fear has been cast out. You have evidence of a relationship with God that is chiefly demonstrated in the main fruit of the Spirit, love. (Galatians 5:22)

Commented [notes15]: Galatians 5:22 (NIV)
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

No wonder the Apostle Paul wrote, ¹ *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

² *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

³ *If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.* 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV) And again, ¹⁰ *Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* Romans 13:10 (NIV)

God's laws given to Moses were given in love to help the new nation of Israel to live righteously and therefore be blessed. His food laws were for their health. The worship

laws were to help them understand the depravity of sin and the coming sacrifice for all sin. His societal laws were for peace, order, and health. It was all about love and justice, which must go hand in hand. The greater the love and the more righteous the justice the better the society will be. (Isaiah 42:1; Psalm 33:12)

On the cross justice and love met. The love of God sent Jesus for us. Jesus' love for God and us made Him willing to go. The justice we deserved was poured out and Love took it all in and came out victorious. John is telling us to go and do likewise. You can't pay for another's sin, but you can love them until it hurts. You can give and give and be misunderstood and yet continue to love. We no longer fear God's wrath, and we no longer fear loss.

Again, I ask why? John answers, ¹⁹ *We love because he first loved us.* (Note that the KJV incorrectly adds "him" – the context is loving others.) We have been won by the love of God. His persistent love captured our hearts. We want to live through Him. We want to put on the Lord Jesus rather than fulfilling our lusts. (Romans 13:14) We want to be like Him in this world. We want others to see the invisible God in the way we respond to them because He first loved us!

You may have heard the story of the church that was doing a series on homosexuality. A large group of gays gathered to picket the church. The church responded by bringing them bottled water, coffee and doughnuts. They invited them in to hear the message if they would not be disruptive. The picketing died out before the series was over. It's hard to pick a fight when the other side keeps hugging you.

Just this week I received the testimony of a businessman in India. He told of his heritage as a Brahman, the highest caste, and of his grandfather who was a Hindu priest. As much as he loved his grandfather and worked to be a good Hindu, he never felt any connection with God. One day while still a boy, a friend invited him to his house to pray. The friend and the friend's sister prayed for him that God would bless his life and reveal Himself to him. He couldn't forget the ease and love with which the two prayed. The prayer was eventually answered and he entered into a relationship with Jesus. Why did his young friend invite him to his home to pray for him? Love. The boy lived in God and God is love. The life of Christ flowed through the boy in the prayer. Love beget love. (1Corinthians 13:8)

The Apostle John's vision of the establishing of the Kingdom of God is the life of Christ expressed in every believer's heart as love. He sees that love conquering heart after heart in language after language as people find they can have a new life through Jesus, and that He can be the atoning sacrifice for their sin. They find they can live through Jesus and lose the fear of judgment and loss. Love becomes complete in them and is passed on to all they meet.

Finally, John gives us a warning. If we think the love of God is a reality in our life, but we hate someone, we are only deceiving ourselves. ²⁰ *If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*

Commented [notes16]: Isaiah 42:1 (NIV)
1 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Commented [notes17]: Psalms 33:12 (NIV)
12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.

Commented [notes18]: Romans 13:14 (NIV)
14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Commented [notes19]: 1 Corinthians 13:8 (NIV)
8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Again, love of God and love for mankind must go hand in hand. Because God is love, we can't love God and hate our brother who is made in God's image. We can certainly hate the evil in man's heart for that evil is destructive to man. But the eternal soul of that individual was valuable enough to God that He would allow His Son to die for them. If we love God, we will love those who He loves, all mankind.

There are three great lies that John describes in this letter. Notice that these three lies deal with moral, doctrinal, and societal issues. The first is to claim to have fellowship with God while walking in the darkness of disobedience. (1:6; 2:4) The second is to claim to have the Father while denying the deity of the Son. (2:22-23) And here in this verse, it is to claim to love God while hating men. (John R. W. Stott)

21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. MUST - get over it, let go of it, walk away from it and choose to let the love of God flow. It may take some time and a lot of prayer, but God will certainly work it into your heart. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Commentators believe that John is speaking only of brothers as the Christian community. Certainly if we cannot love our fellow believers, we will not be able to love those outside the Christian community. But remember that John knew the parable of the Good Samaritan. One's neighbor in the Jewish community was their brother. So one legalist asked who should be considered a neighbor? (Luke 10:29) Jesus explained that it was anyone we came across in need, regardless of cultural disdain or preference. Whoever loves God must love whoever they come across who is in need. (James 1:27) That covers a lot of territory. That is a difficult command. How can we possibly do that? John already told us. We must live through Christ. We must let His love birth love in us. We must allow His love to flow through us to others. God is love.

It is a natural by-product of the life of Jesus in you, and yet, you must choose to participate in that life. (Romans 8:4) It's a love greater than we can muster, and yet we must be willing to pay whatever price the Spirit may call on us to give.

Unselfish love is very attractive. I think that is one reason we are growing. You are learning to let Jesus' love flow through you to those you meet. A godly congregation is a loving congregation and loving congregation will grow. A loving congregation reaches out and draws others to their warm, loving fellowship. There is no other motive than the love of God for them. We don't love others so they will join. We love others because we are in Him who is love. Has the Lord been laying someone on your heart as we went over this passage? What steps is He leading you to take? How can you demonstrate the love of Jesus for them?

I don't think this message came at the end of the year by accident. It is a light for the year ahead of us. (Psalm 119:105) Let us be known as the church that loves. Let's focus on love because it is the nature of God. Our motto is, "To know Christ and to make Him known". The Holy Spirit speaks to us through this passage, "OK, Christ showed you love by laying down His life for you and now you ought to lay down your life for others. God sent His only Son into the world that you might live through Him, and His life is a life of love."

Commented [notes20]: Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)
37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'
38 This is the first and greatest commandment.
39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Commented [notes21]: Luke 10:29 (NIV)
29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Commented [notes22]: James 1:27 (NIV)
27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Commented [notes23]: Romans 8:4 (NIV)
4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Commented [notes24]: Psalms 119:105 (NIV)
105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.