

## R12.2 February 2023 Blog Perfect Love

God is love...

“We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. **God is love**, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” (1 Jn 4:16)

These words written by the apostle John and inspired by the Holy Spirit are fundamental to the follower of Christ. The phrase, “God is love” is one of the most powerful statements in all of Scripture, but it is also one of the most misunderstood and misapplied passages from the Bible. Let’s take a few minutes to explore what John meant and then discuss how we can apply it in our lives today as modern-day followers of Jesus Christ. [Please note we can only scratch the surface in this short piece, but it is my prayer that it will inspire each of us to plumb the depths of His perfect love throughout the days we have left on this side of eternity.]

First, remember that the apostle John was one of the twelve, “...whom Jesus loved” (Jhn 13:23). He was an eyewitness and constant companion of Jesus, and one who experienced the love of Christ during His earthly ministry (1 Jn 1:1-4). John is a credible and trustworthy witness; therefore, let us pay close attention to what is contained in his letter. It was instructive for his audience all those years ago and it is instructive for us today.

“And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.” (1 Jn 1:4 NASB 95)

Note John’s stated purpose for his letter in this verse. The New King James renders this statement, “And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” John also tells us this in the opening verse of the second chapter, “My little children, these things I write to you, **so that you may not sin.**” I don’t know about you, but I desperately do not want to sin. John has my full attention! God’s love for His believing children is the catalyst for the pursuit of righteousness, and it is the power for us to truly love another. We cannot earn God’s love by pursuing righteousness on our own, nor can we truly love one another outside of God’s love. What God requires He provides.

I believe every single verse in John’s letter is replete with meaning and wisdom. Take for example this passage from chapter 4:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 Jn 4:7-11 NASB95)

Note with me too what the apostle Paul says about the order of things in his letter to the Romans:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8 NASB95)

The natural person does not love in the sense of agape love. It is only because of God’s perfect love of a believer that the believer can love his brothers and sisters in Christ. John tells us in 1 Jn 4:19, “We love, because He first loved us.” Absent an abiding relationship with Jesus, a person cannot know true and lasting love, nor properly love another human being.

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn 4:20 – 5:3 NASB95)

Two observations: A) Christ died for us while we were still sinners; and B) The only reason we love is because God loved us first. Contrast these two facts with the natural man’s approach to love. The natural man seeks to satisfy his own interests in a reciprocal relationship. He will give little by little, but not commit to another until reciprocity becomes a pattern in a relationship (and even then with reservations). In the case of God’s love for His children, He gave His only begotten Son before the subjects of His love surrender/submit to Him. Christ gave Himself by dying on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins before we even potentially considered Him as our only hope of eternity with God. This is indeed **perfect love!** Praise God! To Him be all glory and honor forever and ever.

Application: How shall we respond to God’s perfect love?

- 1) Let’s strive to keep His commandments. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 Jn 5:3 NASB95)
- 2) From J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, “Is it true that God is love to me as a Christian? If so, certain questions arise:
  - a. Why do I ever grumble and show discontent and resentment at the circumstances in which God has placed me?
  - b. Why am I ever distrustful, fearful or depressed?
  - c. Why do I ever allow myself to grow cool, formal and halfhearted in the service of the God who loves me so?
  - d. Why do I ever allow my loyalties to be divided, so that God has not all my heart?

John wrote that 'God is love' in order to make an ethical point, 'Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another' (1 Jn 4:11). Could an observer learn from the quality and degree of love that I show to others – my wife? my husband? my family? my neighbors? people at church? people at my work? – anything at all about the greatness of God's love to me?

Meditate upon these things. Examine yourself."