

SESSION 8 – WEEK OF 7 MAR. 2021

LOVING AN UNSEEN GOD

SCRIPTURE: 1JOHN 4:14-21

Theme:

Over the past few weeks, we have talked about what God's love is for us. The Apostle John described Jesus laying his life down for us as the embodiment of love. (1 John 3:16). Last week, we talked about what it means to live in Jesus' love and how God lives in us when we love one another. This week, we continue to discuss John's encouragement to complete Christ's love by loving one another as we approach the Day of Judgement. Our focus is on the question: if you cannot love a person you can see, how can you love a God that you have not seen?

Key Verse:

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." 1 John 4:20

Read 1John 4:14-21

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. The Apostle John says that someone that lives in love will live in God as well. What is the link between the two?
 - The Apostle John describes God as the embodiment of love when he says that God is love. He does not say that God is similar to what love is or that God reflects love. Rather, he says that God is love itself. When we acknowledge God's love, we live in God. Hence, when we live in love, we live in God and this duality completes Christ's love.
 - As we discussed in the previous week's study guide, the Apostle John understands the challenges of worshipping and loving a God whom we do not see. The people in the New Testament surely found this a challenge. Hence, the Apostle John offers a solution by calling us to live in the love of God.
 - Although God makes His love and salvation open to all, we acknowledge and receive God's love by placing our faith and believing in how He has loved us through the work of the cross. When we receive Christ's love, we are set right with God and the mark of sin is no longer on us.

2. The Apostle John describes God's love as 'complete' (v.17) and 'perfect' (v.18). Why does God's love need to be made complete and perfect?

- 'Complete' and 'Perfect' represent a wholeness and fullness of God's love. This is brought about through our actions when we reflect God's love. The Apostle John describes living like Jesus in the world as the way to complete God's love. (v.17)
- As Jesus embodied love itself, when we love others just as Jesus loved us, we overflow with the love that God has shown us to the people around us. When we live like Jesus, we aspire to live in harmony with both God and our brothers in Christ. In this way, this reflects the perfect harmony between Christ and God. We complete His love and His love is made perfect.

What does 'This' in verse 17 refer to?

John refers to 'This' as a concept that makes God's love complete.

Read verses 16-17 a few times with your group in both the NIV and ESV version. Ask your group if they can spot any differences as to what 'This' refers to in the two versions.

In the ESV, it is backward-referring. 'This' refers to verse 16 and the idea that God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In the NIV, it is forward-referring. 'This' refers to the clause: 'In this world we are like Jesus.'

"The NIV suggests that the *en toutō* ("in this"; NIV, "in this way") that opens this verse refers to what John has just said in v. 16, so that to "live in love" and have "God live" in oneself is the most complete form of love ... It seems more likely that John is using this phrase to introduce the test that follows the *hoti* later in the verse Those who pass the test that John is about to offer can be assured that love is perfected in them."

-Adapted from Tom Thatcher, "1 John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews-Revelation (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 482-484.

3. Why do we need to be confident as the Day of Judgement approaches? How does living in God's love provide us with confidence and overcome our fears?

- The Day of Judgement is mentioned several times throughout the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It describes a day where Jesus will return to Earth and He will judge every individual based on how they have lived their lives on Earth. Every individual will receive a reward or punishment according to their actions. On the Day of Judgement, Paul says that 'we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.' (2 Corinthians 5:10)
- The idea of being judged by the King of Kings by His standards of holiness can be a scary thought. For those that do not place their faith in Christ, the Day of

Judgement will be the day that they receive the penalty for their sins, which is death and condemnation to hell.

- Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." It is by the grace of God that we are saved, through us placing our faith in that grace given. Our confidence must be in the completed work of our Saviour, in His death and resurrection.
- Jesus offers us a way to receive salvation that is not by our works. Through His work on the cross, Jesus has taken the penalty of sin on His shoulders and has allowed us to receive salvation. We can be confident that we will receive salvation on the Day of Judgement. Hence, receiving Jesus' love transforms our worldview as we are assured of our salvation. When we live assured of our salvation, perfect love drives out fear (v.18) as we no longer need to fear death and we can live a life of confidence.

4. John encourages us to love others because we have received God's love. (v.19) What is something God is showing me that I can do this week for a brother or sister that will reflect Christ's love?

- John does not ask us to love one another to earn God's love for us or His salvation. We cannot love one another on our own strength or with our own human understanding of love. Instead, loving one another is the result of knowing God's love.
- We need to understand God's sacrificial love for us before we understand what it means to love the people around us. John 15:13 says that 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' When we understand God's love for us and what it means to love one another sacrificially, we can love one another with God's love.
- Take some time to think of something that you hold close to your heart. Is this something that God is calling you to sacrifice in service to Him and as an act of love to the people around you?
- Maybe, check-in on someone this week who might be stressed or unwell.
- Perhaps God is calling you to sacrifice time that can be used for leisure or work. Would you consider using the time to serve in a ministry in church? Would you consider taking a few hours a week or even a month to love and build up your fellow brothers in Christ? Our church has several ministries that provide many opportunities to love the people around you.
- Or perhaps you may consider serving in our church's COVID-19 crew. The time that you sacrifice goes a long way in making it possible for the body of Christ to have a comfortable and safe atmosphere to meet and worship God together.
- Perhaps God is calling you to give up some of your income to someone who is in need. Is there a family member or a friend that is struggling financially amidst the pandemic? Would you consider showing your love to them by bringing comfort to them in their time of need?

- Would you encourage the people in your small group to share how God is working in their lives next week?

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

5. *If you have time ...*

Take some time to ask your group if they are assured of God's love and their salvation. This is something we may take for granted as perhaps it is something we assume since we have been taught this since Sunday School. However, is this a truth that we believe fully? Perhaps there are some doubts or questions among your group members. Or maybe there are struggles of guilt that make receiving assurance challenging. Open up the floor for your group to be honest and vulnerable with their doubts and struggles and encourage one another as you share.

Prayer Suggestions

6. Would you consider praying for:

- a. Assurance of the salvation of every member in your group. Pray that they will know Christ's redeeming love personally and that they will believe that they are truly saved from eternal condemnation.
- b. Pray that we will understand the sacrificial nature of Christ's love and that the same love will overflow in our lives to the people around us. Ask God to reveal things that you hold close to your heart. If you find it difficult to sacrifice these things, ask the Holy Spirit to help soften your heart.
- c. Opportunities to reflect Christ's sacrificial love to the people around you. Ask God for His calling to a ministry that He may be calling you to serve in or someone whom He may be calling you to bring comfort to. May the Holy Spirit help you to use the time and resources that God has given you to bless the people around you.