Series: That You May Know

Inductive Bible Study Guide: 1 John

Inductive Bible Study of 1 John 4:7-21

John traces Christian love back to its source in God. God revealed His love by sending His Son as the propitiation for our sins, so those who have received His love must love one another. As God's love reaches its intended goal in us, it gives confidence for the day of judgment, drives out fear of punishment, and exposes the contradiction of claiming to love God while hating another believer.

Step 1 – Observation: *What does the passage say?*

Read 1 John 4:7-21 slowly at least three times, using more than one translation if possible. Pay attention to repeated words, commands, statements about God's character and actions, and the contrasts John makes between love, fear, and hatred.

Observation Prompts

- What words or ideas are repeated?
- What commands are given?
- What has God done to show His love?
- What statements begin with whoever or if?
- What is said about abiding and the Spirit?
- What contrasts do you see between love, fear, and hatred?

Read the Passage and Record What You See

1. What command is given in verse 7, and what reasons does John give for it?

2. What does loving or failing to love reveal about a person's relationship with God?

3. How was God's love made visible, and for what purpose did He send His Son?

4. How does verse 10 define love, and what did God send His Son to be?

5. According to verses 11-12, how should believers respond to God's love, and what happens as they love one another?

6. What evidence of abiding appears in verses 13-15?

7. What statements about knowing, believing, love, and abiding appear in verse 16?

8. What result of perfected love appears in verse 17, and what reason is given for it?

9. What does verse 18 say about love, fear, punishment, and being perfected in love?

10. What source, contradiction, and command concerning love appear in verses 19-21?

Step 2 – Interpretation: *What does the passage mean?*

John does not teach that loving others earns new birth or God's acceptance. Love begins with God, who loved us first and sent His Son to deal with our sin. Our love for others is the result and evidence of His life within us. God's unseen character becomes visible as His people receive His love and extend it to one another.

Perfected love is love reaching its intended goal, not flawless emotion or human performance. Because Jesus has dealt with judgment, believers can approach the day of judgment with confidence rather than terror of punishment. This does not cancel reverence for God or mean Christians never experience ordinary fear; John is addressing fear connected with condemnation.

Questions to Explore

1. If love is from God, how is loving others evidence of being born of God rather than the cause of salvation?

2. What does the statement God is love reveal about His character? What misunderstandings should be avoided when using this statement?

3. What do verses 9-10 teach about God's initiative in salvation? Why must our understanding of love begin with what He has done?

4. What does propitiation mean? How does Jesus' sacrifice deal with both our guilt and God's righteous judgment against sin?

5. Since no one has seen God, how does believers' love make His presence visible? What does it mean for His love to be perfected in us?

6. How do the Holy Spirit, confession of Jesus as the Son of God, and mutual abiding give believers assurance?

7. What might John mean by “as he is so also are we in this world”? How does our relationship with Christ give confidence for the day of judgment?

8. What kind of fear does perfect love cast out? How is fear of punishment different from reverence for God and from ordinary human fear?

9. Why is it impossible to separate love for the unseen God from love for a visible brother or sister? What does continuing hatred reveal?

Word Study Suggestions

- **Love:** Greek agape - self-giving love that seeks another person's good.
- **Propitiation:** Greek hilasmos - an atoning sacrifice that deals with guilt and God's righteous judgment against sin.
- **Abide or remain:** Greek meno - to remain, continue, stay, or dwell.
- **Perfected:** Greek teleioo - brought to completion, maturity, or its intended goal.
- **Confidence:** Greek parresia - boldness, openness, or freedom to approach without fear.
- **Fear:** Greek phobos - fear or dread; in verse 18 it is connected specifically with punishment.

Step 3 – Application: *How should I respond?*

John invites us to begin with receiving God's love rather than trying to manufacture love by our own strength. The cross shows both the seriousness of our sin and the depth of God's love. As we remain in Him, His Spirit helps that love become visible through the way we treat people.

This passage also calls us to bring fear and hatred into the light. Confidence before God is not denial of sin; it rests on what Jesus has done and produces a life increasingly shaped by His love. We cannot claim closeness with God while refusing to love the people He places before us.

Personal Reflection

1. Are you living as though God's love must be earned, or are you receiving the love He has already shown through Jesus?

2. How does Jesus becoming the propitiation for your sins reshape your understanding of both sin and love?

3. Who is difficult for you to love right now, and what may God be revealing about your heart through that relationship?

4. Where does your love need to move beyond words and become visible through patience, sacrifice, forgiveness, or practical help?

5. Do you approach the thought of judgment with fear of punishment? What truth about Jesus and God's love do you need to trust?

6. Is there resentment, hatred, or avoidance that requires confession, forgiveness, a conversation, or another step toward reconciliation?

Summary Truths

- Love begins with God; everyone who truly loves gives evidence of being born of God and knowing Him.
- God revealed His love by sending His Son so that we might live through Him.
- Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, so the cross defines love and deals with God's righteous judgment.
- God's unseen presence becomes visible as His people love one another and remain in Him.
- Love reaching its intended goal produces confidence before judgment and drives out fear of punishment.
- We love because God loved us first, and love for God cannot be separated from love for one another.

Optional Memory Verse

*"We love because he first loved us."***1 John 4:19 ESV**

Prayer Prompt

"Father, thank You for loving me first and sending Your Son for my sins. Help me receive Your love, remain in You, and let Your love become visible through my life. Replace fear of punishment with confidence in Jesus. Expose hatred, resentment, and selfishness in me, and teach me to love the people You have placed before me. Amen."

For Further Study

- **John 3:16-18**
  - How do God's love, the sending of His Son, faith, and judgment fit together?
- **Romans 5:6-11**
  - How did God demonstrate His love while we were still sinners and enemies?
- **John 15:9-17**
  - How are abiding, obedience, sacrifice, and love connected in Jesus' teaching?
- **Romans 8:31-39**
  - What gives believers confidence that accusation and suffering cannot separate them from God's love?

Homework for next week

Read 1 John again

- Notice how John connects God's love, faith in Jesus, assurance, obedience, and love for others.

Prepare for the next lesson

- Read 1 John 5 and watch for believe, born, love, commandments, overcome, faith, and Son of God.