

Seeing God Through Love

1 John 4:12-16

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1 John 4:7-11 Summary: Describes how we get to know God through His love for us and how we should respond to that love by loving others.

Applications from this passage...

- Those who love God will love the children of God.
- The love of God is seen in everything He does.
- The love of God is demonstrated in sending the Son.

1 John 4:12 – Seeing God in the evidence of love

No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

What does it mean that *no one has seen God at any time*?

This is a basic principle about God the Father — that *no one, has seen God at any time*. Anyone claiming to have seen God the Father is speaking — at best — from their own imagination. In speaking of God the Father, Paul wrote...

1 Timothy 1:17 – *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible.*

Why has no one seen God the Father?

Jesus declared of God the Father, *God is Spirit*, (John 4:24) meaning that He has no physical body which may be seen.

How should knowing God the Father is invisible make us humbler in our relationship with Him?

God is not completely knowable by us; we can't completely figure Him out, or know all His secrets. He is beyond us.

What about the Holy Spirit, has anyone seen Him?

No one has seen God the Holy Spirit at any time either, though He has represented Himself in various ways...

John 3:8 – *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is like the wind which cannot be seen though you can see the effects of it. Likewise, we can only see the effects of the Holy Spirit.

But what about Old Testament theophanies and an apparently contradictory statement in Exodus 24:10?

Exodus 24:9-10 – *Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel.*

None of them involved a full revelation of God in all His Glory but were only a representation of Him in a form that humans could comprehend.

How do we know that God abides in us?

If we love one another, God abides in us:

This is the greatest evidence of God's presence and work in us — **love**.

- Since *no one has seen God at any time*, this provides evidence for the presence of God.

What other things besides love do people think constitutes the greatest evidence of God in us?

Some people think the greatest evidence of God's presence or work is *power*, or *economic success*, or *popularity*, or even *passionate feelings*.

- This is the false doctrine of the prosperity gospel.
- Where God is present and working, there will be love. Sometimes Jesus seemed weak and lacking in power, but He was always full of love.

What does it mean that God's love has been perfected in us?

Perfected uses the Greek word *teleioo*, which doesn't mean "perfect" as much as "mature" and "complete."

- If we *love one another*, then the love of God is "mature" and "complete" in us.

John comes back to the familiar idea: if we really walk in God's love towards us, it will be evident in our love for one another.

- The mature Christian will be marked by love.
- The true measure of maturity is not the image of power, or popularity, or passionate feelings — but the abiding presence of God's love in our lives, given out to others.

John 4:13-15 – Assurance of the work of God in us

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

By what do we know we abide in Him?

By beginning with the words *by this*, John connected the thought of this verse directly to the previous verse.

- We can *know by experience* that we live in God, if *His love has been perfected in us*.
- And we know that *His love has been perfected in us* if *we love one another*.

Should Christians know for certain they are going to heaven?

Yes, Christians can say, “*we know*.” We don’t have to merely “hope” we are saved, and “hope” we will make it to heaven, thus having no assurance of salvation before we pass from this world to the next.

- We can **know** now, on *this* side of eternity.

Can we abide in Him apart from Him abiding in us?

No, our abiding in Jesus is not a one-sided affair, with us struggling to abide in Him, and Jesus trying to escape us. Just as true as it is that we should **abide in Him**, it is true that He does abide **in us**.

- Jesus said in John 15:4, *Abide in Me, and I in you*. And in John 15:7, He said, *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you*. One of the ways Jesus abides in us — lives in us — is through His word.

How do we have Jesus in us?

He has given us of His Spirit: it is the Spirit of God in us that is the abiding presence of Jesus.

- the presence of His Spirit is how He abides in us.
- Also, it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit in us that makes it possible for us to *know that we abide in Him*.

Roman 8:16 – *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

...The Holy Spirit gives us this assurance.

Who is the “we” who have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world?

The “**we**” who give testimony in this verse are those who saw Jesus originally, the eyewitnesses to His presence. They *knew the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world*.

What are the essential truths about God and how He saves us from this passage?

- That the Father has sent the Son.
- That He (Jesus) was sent as Savior of the world.
- Knowing and understanding Jesus is the foundation for abiding in Him (*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God*).

What must one do to have a genuine relationship with Jesus?

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God: It isn’t enough to *know* the facts about who Jesus is; we must *confess* the truth.

- The idea behind the word *confess* is “to be in agreement with.”

How can we agree with God on who Jesus is?

We must first find out what God says about Jesus through His Word.

- You may *know* something without being in *agreement* with it; God demands our true *agreement*.

What is the role of truth in having a relationship with Jesus?

Though John has been writing much about love, he does not ignore the issue of *truth*. John does not think it is “enough” if a person has some kind of love in his life if he does not *confess that Jesus is the Son of God*.

- It isn’t a matter of deciding between love or truth; we must have both.

Can someone profess that Jesus is the Son of God and not believe it?

It happens all the time... to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God is not simply to make a statement about it but to express obedient trust in the One who is the Son of God.

- To believe in Christ and to love the brethren are not conditions enabling us to dwell in God but rather are evidences of the fact that God has already taken possession of our lives to make this possible.

1 John 4:16 – The Christian’s response to God’s love

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

What is the Christian’s proper response to who God is, and how He loves us?

And we have known and believed the love God has for us:

We are called to accept the love and grace God gives, to know it by experience and to believe it.

- This is what fellowship with God is all about.

How do people respond differently to the love of God?

- Some respond with a sense of self-superiority (“I’m so great, even God loves me!”).
- Some respond with doubt (“Can God really love even me?”).
- Some respond with wickedness (“God loves me, so I can do what I want”).

But God wants us to respond by *knowing* (by experience) and *believing the love God has for us*.

Why must the Christian *know* and *believe* the love God has for us?

We should consider what would it take to make us *stop* believing God loves us. Paul knew that *nothing* could separate him from the love of God that was in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:35-39), and each Christian should have the same confidence.

What does it mean that *he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him*?

The Christian who has a close relationship with God will be virtually “immersed” in God’s love; it becomes his environment, his place of abiding.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- We cannot see God the Father, but we can certainly see His love.
- Christians have eternal security; God in us is the assurance of our salvation.
- Truth and love go together; you can’t have one without the other.