

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 1 JOHN 4:7-5:21

John was the only original disciple to live long and die of natural causes. One-hundred-plus years old, he was known as “[John the aged](#).” *Yet historians say John attracted crowds like a rock star!* He was with Jesus during His earthly ministry. That’s why folks flocked to hear what the wrinkled old preacher had to say. His followers would carry John in their arms into the arena, while everyone moved to the edge of their seat eagerly waiting to hear a story about *the Word made flesh*.

Yet John usually gave the same brief sermon. He would utter just six words. The same six words he writes in verse 7, “[Beloved, let us love one another](#).”

One of the early church fathers named [Jerome](#), in his commentary on Galatians, tells us that one day after John had delivered his single sentence sermon, a disciple asked, “[Teacher, why do you always say this?](#)” To which John replied, “[It is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient](#).” John saw love as the heartbeat of his faith - as the anthem of Christianity!

Thus, the theme of 1 John is stated in 4:7, “[Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God](#).” Most of us inherited a birthmark from our parents. Let’s say a mom has jet black wavy hair, and her daughter has jet black wavy hair - someone will said, “[There’s no mistaking that girl’s mother](#).” Or a dad with a muscular frame, has a son with a similar build. We say, “[He’s his spitting image](#).”

When a child shares a parent’s most distinguishable trait you can be confident they were born to that parent. **And this is true spiritually.** God’s most distinguishable trait is love. All true love “[is of God](#).”

Thus, those who are born of God will love as He loves. In other words, [love is the believer’s birthmark!](#)

And certainly, the reverse is also true. “[He who does not love does not know God, for God is love](#).”

Understand, when John says, “[God is love](#),” he’s not reducing the concept of “[God](#)” to a mere emotion, or force, or feeling. The Bible reveals God as a person.

God is a person capable of exhibiting a full range of emotions - love, but also anger, and joy, and grief, and jealousy, and patience... Yet God’s dominant emotion - the trait which lies closest to the surface - is love!

It's said, "Love does not define God, but God defines love." What we know of true love we learn from God.

In fact, when you think it through, the truth that "*God is love*" necessitates the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Bible teaches that God is one God, yet He exists in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For love to exist it has to have an object. So, for an eternal God to have always been characterized as love; then there had to have always been someone for Him to love.

Before time began and creation commenced - the members of the Godhead dwelt together in a beautiful, harmonious love. And, for reasons unknown to us, God has amazingly now focused that love on you and me!

John says in verse 9, "*In this the love of God was manifested toward us...*" "*Manifested*" means "*to put on display.*" Like a grocery store display that sits at the end of the aisle to grab your attention, God has showcased His love... *But where can we see His love?*

John tells us, "*That God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*" God put His love on display in a Bethlehem manger, in a humble village called Nazareth, on the shores of Lake Galilee, on dusty Jerusalem streets, in Temple porticos - even on a hill of execution called Calvary.

God's love for us, and the life He offers us - is on display in His Son, Jesus. God's plan points to Jesus!

God's **empathy** is seen in His Son's coming as a human... God's **wisdom** is revealed in Jesus' teachings... God's **power** was displayed in Jesus' miracles... God's **mercy and grace** was made visible in His dying... And God's **redemption** was unveiled in His resurrection... Lost people hungry for life and hope should look to Jesus. *He's God's love on display.*

It's sad that so often, people brag about their great love for God... *the sacrifice they made - the gift they gave - the extremes to which they went...* **just hush!**

Verse 10 tells us, "*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.*" I like CS Lewis' observation. He wrote, "*On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.*"

Our love for God pales in comparison to His love for us. It's a drop from an eyedropper. His love is the sea!

It's been said, "Love always flows downward." Love, like water, flows downhill. A parent's love for his child is stronger than the child's love for their parent. *And who among us will ever loved God with a thousandth of the love with which He has loved us?* Here is love... God loved us enough to send His Son to die in our place!

I love you guys. I love our church, but I don't love any of you enough to sacrifice one of my three sons.

If it were you or one of my boys I'd make sure you got a nice funeral service... but I'm sorry, I could never sacrifice one of my three sons. Yet God sacrificed His *only* begotten Son, so that He could show us mercy.

Notice, John says Jesus is our "*propitiation*" - the word means "to satisfy God's wrath toward sin." God hates sin. It angers God for He realizes its destructive consequences. Thus, when Jesus paid sin's penalty He satisfied God's wrath toward our sin. Now, He extends mercy. Today, our world is all about exacting vengeance and justice. Yet Jesus is "a place of mercy."

Years ago I saw a clip shown on an episode of "America's Funniest Home Videos." It illustrates God's mercy. It's a little grainy, but here's mercy on display. \*\*

I love the visual. The brother has no issue crossing the crack in the sidewalk, but his little sis is stranded. So he bridges the gap, and she crosses via him. And this is the Gospel. Jesus bridged the gap caused by our sin - *the gap between us and God*. Jesus has satisfied the righteousness of God, extended mercy to us, and is now the way for us to cross over to God.

And here's John's conclusion, verse 11, "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*"

*If we've been impacted with such strong love, how can we not love others the way we've been loved?*

I recall a common theme in the old science-fiction films. A space ship would travel too close to a hostile planet, and be unable to escape its gravitational pull. And this is what John says happens to a Christian. When you get caught in the pull of God's love, you can't escape. You'll love others with that same 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." God is spirit. He's invisible to the physical eye. Thus, the closest this world comes to actually seeing God is by observing His love through us. We reveal God when we demonstrate His love.

Once a Salvation Army worker met a bag lady on the street. She invited her into the chapel to receive help. But this lady ignored her invitation, until something unusual

happened. The worker said later she'd never done it before. But she felt impressed to kiss this lady on the cheek. When she did, the woman began to sob. That night the bag lady got food, AND received Christ.

Later she shared, "You said God loved me, but when you showed me; that's when I wanted to get saved."

John writes, "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."

Remember Galatians 5:22, "the fruit of the Spirit is love..." God's love comes to us in three ways: *He speaks it to us... He does it for us... He puts it in us...*

**God's love is proclaimed in the Bible. It's proven on the cross. And it's perfected in our hearts.**

In fact, the Greek word in verse 12 translated "*perfected*" means "complete." The love of God comes full circle. God proclaimed it, then proved it, then it ultimately flows through us to begin afresh in others.

Verse 14, "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." The true God abides in the heart that embraces the truth about Jesus. And it's not just *what Jesus does*, but *who He is* that matters. He is both *the Savior of the world* and *the Son of God*.

And realize what this means in the Hebrew mind. In Jewish thought the son of a horse is a horse - the son of a man makes me a man - thus being the Son of God makes Jesus God Himself. He was every bit as much God as the Father God. John keeps reiterating, **you can't be wrong about Jesus, and be right with God.**

"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us." The love of God is not just speculation. We're not just hoping God loves us - *we're certain He does. And why are we sure?* Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross, and said, "I love you this much!"

We can be assured of God's love by trusting Jesus.

"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." God loves to love, and He'll team up with the person through whom He can love.

Verse 17, "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world."

Jesus was despised and rejected - unappreciated for who He is. And *“as He is, so are we in this world.”* Loved by God, but hated by the world - this is the predicament that every Christian has to navigate.

Yet one day - *on judgment day* - those who know God's love will be free from fear. Our sin has been judged on the cross of Jesus. Thus, we'll stand boldly, assured of God's forgiveness, confident in His love.

Thus, John tells us, *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”* Fear is a mountain some people can't climb. It's one of our fiercest foes. There's *the fear of failure*, and *the fear of people*, and *the fear of the unknown*. Yet, it's the love of God that conquers all fear.

There's no *fear of failure* when I'm sure God's love **accepts** me... There's no *fear of people* when I know God's love will **protect** me... And there's no *fear of the unknown* when I'm confident God's love **perfects** me.

Here's the truth, God's *“perfect love casts out fear.”*

And verse 19, *“We love Him because He first loved us.”* The source of my love for God is His love for me.

*Would your child love you if you didn't love your child? Of course not!* And neither would you love God if He had not loved you first! Romans 2:4 drives home this point, *“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”*

I grew up on the kind of religion that was designed to scare you into repentance - hellfire and damnation. You'd come home from church and have to brush off the ashes. And though this may have temporarily kept us in check, trust me it did little to capture our hearts.

Only when I discovered God's love for me did it draw me in. His love caused me to love Him in return.

Today, when I sense my passion for God cooling I recall His love for me. It refuels my love for him. This is why Jude tells us, *“keep yourself in the love of God.”* The key to loving God is realizing His love for you!

Verse 20 is the narrative John is determined to maintain. He's been adamant, *“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And*

**this commandment we have from Him** (here it is again): **that he who loves God must love his brother also.**”

This is the drum that John has beaten continually. In 2:9-10, 3:10-11, 3:16, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11-12, and now in 4:20-21 we know that we know God - the world knows that we know God - if we have love for one another!

That’s eleven verses - over 10% of his letter John repeats this point. *You know you know God - you’ve been born of God* - if you have love for your brother.

Love is the pulse - the heartbeat - that indicates a person is alive with the life and the Spirit of God. But lack love - harbor hatred in your heart, and though you might say you love God, it’s a lie. There’s a disconnect.

And here’s a big characteristic of love. **It maintains the narrative.** It stays focused on the issue at hand. Real love doesn’t get distracted and lose focus.

On October 7th when we awoke to the Hamas attack on Israel we were concerned about the hostages - 237 innocents abused, violently seized, taken captive... *But how easy has it been, under life’s daily grind, in just a few weeks, to let the memory of those hostages fade?*

As always in these tragedies it’s left, not up to the public in general, but to the victim’s family - the people who love them individually - to keep the love alive. My point is, it’s always **love that maintains the narrative.**

In May, 2020 we were all appalled to see a black man, George Floyd, handcuffed and on the ground. A white police officer’s knee was on his neck, as he kept saying he couldn’t breathe. There was not a sane person in America who wasn’t gripped by that video.

But over the summer that followed, all across our country protests and riots overshadowed the real issue. Stores were looted, black businesses were ransacked, minority owners and police suffered in the mayhem. Folks rightly angered, erupted in ways that muddied the waters and distracted from the real issue. *What did any of the chaos have to do with addressing the legitimate racial injustices that exist in America?*

I thought George Floyd’s death would start a serious discussion in America about racism and racial injustice. Instead, it invoked anger, retaliation, revenge, and now three years later, very little constructive work has been done. *We got distracted and took our eye off the ball.*

For it’s love that keeps the narrative alive. Not hatred, not rage... It’s love that keeps us focused on what’s needed for progress and betterment. So often we let the noises of this world muffle out the real issues. It’s love that keeps our best interests at heart.

Chapter 5, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ (“Christ” means “Messiah” or “God’s Anointed,” “the Savior”) is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.”

The greatest kindness you can do for me is to be nice to one of my kids. Do my son a favor - or lend my daughter a helping hand - and you’ve done me a solid!

*And so it is with God!* Jesus is the **only begotten** Son of God. You and I are born of God spiritually. But Jesus is God’s **only** physically begotten Son. The Holy Spirit hovered over the virgin’s womb. God became a man. Thus, **to love God is to love His Son Jesus.**

And the opposite is true. Deny or defame God’s only begotten Son, and you reveal your hatred for God.

This is what you realize when you stand on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, before the Dome of the Rock. Across the eave are words, written in Arabic, that read “**God does not beget and God is not begotten.**”

It’s a direct denial of I John 5, and Jesus’ unique birth. It reveals Islam’s hatred for the Christian God.

Verse 2, “**By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.**” Again, how do we know our salvation is legitimate - *do we love God and do we obey Him?*

“**For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**” God’s commandments aren’t difficult, or complicated, or onerous. His commands are for *our good* and *His glory*. In Matthew 11:30 Jesus said, “**My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**” Love Jesus and you’ll want to obey. You’ll look for ways to please Him.

Verse 4, “**For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.**” The world is pressuring us to conform and give in to sin - but God plants His Spirit on the inside of us. He counters the external temptations with an inner resistance. Thus, the key to overcoming is learning to live from the inside out. You’ve got to learn to draw on the inner resources, God’s Spirit embeds in your spirit.

The Christian life is like a helium balloon. Fill a balloon with helium and it rises, despite the gravity that wants to keep it down. The life of the Spirit gives us the same kind of buoyancy - a spiritual lift. It enables us to *overcome hardships*. And stay above the temptation.

“And this is the victory that has overcome the world - **our faith.**” What’s the key to inside out living? It’s *faith!* Our trust in Jesus activates His life and power in us...

“Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Again, faith in Jesus is what overcomes the world! The Greek word translated “*victory*” in verse 4 is “*Nike*,” which was the name of the Greek goddess of victory. Apparently, she wore fancy sneakers, with a swoosh logo on the side.

But don’t follow her motto: “**Just Do It**” Remember the key to victory in the Christian life is **not just do it**. It’s “*our faith.*” We need to trust in the victory that Jesus has won. It’s faith that unlocks His power in our lives.

Remember from our first two weeks in 1 John, this letter was written to address the dangerous heresy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics couldn’t concede that the divine would take on human flesh. Certainly, that God would subject Himself to a cruel crucifixion. Thus, they had different theories that denied Jesus’ humanity.

There were actually two types of Gnosticism. Both were named after the men who championed them...

First, was **Docetic Gnosticism**. It taught that Jesus was a ghost, a phantom. He had not really come in the flesh. His body was only an illusion - an apparition.

The other branch was **Cerinthian Gnosticism**. It taught that the Spirit of Christ came on the man, Jesus, at His baptism. But departed before He was crucified.

But here in a single verse John blasts both camps...

Verse 6, “**This is He who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.**” The water refers to Jesus’ birth. Mary’s water broke. Jesus was born of a human birth. He wasn’t a phantom or ghost. He was flesh and bone.

And the blood refers to His death. The Savior of men, God’s Son, spilled literal blood upon the cross.

“**For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.**” Now if you read from a newer translation of the Bible verse 7 might not be included, *and let me tell you why...* We no longer have the original writings of the NT. What we have today are manuscripts - copies of the originals. This is true of most all ancient writings.

*And here’s how you judge the reliability of a writing from antiquity. First*, how many copies do we have, and **second** how old are those copies? If we have a lot of copies, and if they’re very old, we can assume that what we have today faithfully represents the originals.



And what we have of the NT is amazing. There are 5800 Greek copies of the NT, dating back to the 2nd or 3rd centuries. And they're in 95% agreement. The few variations are due to spelling or grammar, not doctrine.

Which brings us to our problem with verse 7...

The verse is not in the oldest manuscripts. It's only in a couple of very late copies. And none of the early church fathers quoted it to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, as they surely would've if it had been available.

Thus, it's possible verse 7 was added in the 14th or 15th century by an over-zealous scribe, and shouldn't be included. If true, it's inclusion is a mistake of the King James translators, *not John, and surely not God*. The original writings were inerrant. God saw to it that the biblical authors wrote exactly what He intended.

The well-meaning scribe who included verse 7 may've done so since it teaches the nature of God taught elsewhere in Scripture. It's true, *"The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."*

*"And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one."* Jesus was born a man - of water. The Holy Spirit came upon Him as a dove at His baptism. And Jesus remained both God and man on the cross.

Thus, all three witnesses - the **Spirit**, the **water**, and the **blood** - **His baptism, His birth, and His death** - all agree on the nature of Jesus. Jesus was fully divine and fully human - 100-proof God, and 100-proof man.

Verse 9, *"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."* The Spirit, water, blood - testified of Jesus. This was God's *objective* stamp of approval on Jesus.

But the fourth witness is the indwelling Holy Spirit. A true believer has an inner, *subjective* witness of Jesus. Christians have an inner assurance that Jesus is God.

Verse 11, *"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."* I've seen men kick back by the lake with a fishing pole - or tee off on a golf course on a stellar day - and say to their friends, **"This is the life!"** *But is it? "Some folks are satisfied with so little."*

If participating in a temporary pleasure, or a physical thrill causes you to say, *"This is the life!"* - then think again! If all life is to you is scratching an itch, how sad!

**Real life** is being touched by the God who created you... **Real life** is brushing up against eternity, and knowing your life will count forever... *"He who has the Son has life."* **Real life** is encountering Jesus Christ...

*"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."* Notice, John's desire is not just for them to believe, but to *"continue to believe."* He wants them to persevere in their faith.

And John says God wants us to know that we have eternal life. Today, you can pray, and leave knowing your sin is forgiven and you'll spend forever with God.

Verse 14, *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him..."* and speaking of confidence, prayer is the one area in which God has given us great confidence...

For *"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."* If God hears our prayers we can be confident He'll answer them in His time and way.

**So, the key to prayer is to make sure that your prayers get heard! *But does God hear all of our prayers?*** And the answer to that is *"yes"* and *"no."*

Sure God is omniscient. *He sees all, He knows all, He hears all!* But in a sense God doesn't hear every prayer - *and we should be glad!* Here's a riddle, *"What do you get when you cross a termite with a praying mantis?"* Answer: *An insect that says grace before he eats your house.*\*\*\*\* (just trying to help you) Trust me, you hope God doesn't hear the prayer of that termite.

There are prayers I've prayed I'm glad God didn't hear. After I prayed it, I wished I could take it back.

If you have kids you know when they're little they whine a lot. They ask for everything, and when they don't get it they ask again. When my little kids started to whine, I had a set response, **"I can't hear you!"** I would refuse to entertain their quibbling. *And I'm glad God takes the same approach with us adult whiners.*

God answers only the prayers He really hears - that make it past His ears and down into His heart. This is why when we pray according to God's will, we can pray confidently knowing that our prayer will be answered.

Verse 16, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” The Bible is full of examples of sin that led directly to someone’s death.

In **Leviticus 10** when the priests defiled the altar they were struck down... In **Numbers 16** when Korah defied God’s authority the ground opened and swallowed the rebels... In **2 Samuel 6** when sinful hands touched God’s holy Ark the guilty man died...

And in the NT... In **Acts 5**, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead when they pretended to be more spiritual than they really were, and lied to God’s Spirit.

The sin that leads to death is not always the same sin - and a person who might commit the same sin under a different set of circumstances may be spared.

Face it, if every Christian, like Ananias and Sapphira, who played the hypocrite and claimed to be more spiritual than they really were, were struck dead - *then we would have a much smaller crowd here today.*

But there are *certain acts* that in *certain situations* prove to be such a blight on the Body of Christ that God sees fit to arrange an early exit for the perpetrator!

John’s point is if you see a brother sin, pray for him. If it’s leading to death you’ll know soon enough. If it’s not; then your prayer might be what turns him around.

Verse 18, “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” I hope you don’t believe the devil lives in Hell, or hangs out in Hell. Satan doesn’t want to go Hell anymore than you do.

The book of Job teaches us that Satan is going “To and fro on the earth, and... walking back and forth on it.” Apparently, the whole world is his turf. As John puts it, “*the whole world lies under the sway of (Satan).*”

But there is one place the devil and his demons can’t intrude without God’s specific approval. That’s a man who’s been born of God! We are “*the untouchables.*”

Remember, Satan couldn’t harm a hair on Job’s head until he had first received permission from God. And the same applies to you! **We have a Father filter.** Nothing gets to us unless it first passes through Him, and He attaches to the trial a high and holy purpose.

Verse 20, “**And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true...**” Throughout this book John has dropped reasons why Jesus came into the world...

In 3:5 it was “**to take away our sins.**” In 3:8, to “**destroy the works of the devil.**” In 4:9, to “**live through Him.**” In 4:14 to be “**the Savior of the world.**” Now 5:20, “**that we may know Him.**” Jesus came to reveal the heart of God to us. God is revealed in His written Word, the Bible - **and** in His living Word, Jesus Christ.

“**And we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.**” Jesus was more than a man. He is the true God. Jesus alone has eternal life. We need to fall at His feet and worship!

Today’s notion that it really doesn’t matter what you believe in, as long as you believe in something, is ludicrous. Our faith is only as good as its object.

To say it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere, is like telling a doctor his diagnosis doesn’t matter as long as he tries his best. That’s no good. I want to know the true God. His name is Jesus.

John ends his letter, “**Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**” Don’t think idolatry was an ancient problem, with no relevance to modern Americans.

We’re just as vulnerable to idolatry as the pagan with the statue on his mantle. Anything we value in life more highly than Jesus has in essence become our idol.

St. Augustine’s definition of idolatry has been helpful to me. “**Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.**”

Material possessions are tools to be used for God’s glory - but when we forget they’re a means to an ends, and treat them as an ends in themselves we’ve made them an idol. Remember, “**Keep yourselves from idols.**”