

LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS

A Study of John's Three Letters.

Our study begins in: 1 John 4:7-11

In our study last week, we defined God's love. His love is different than human love; it's comprehensive, unconditional and sacrificial. In verse 9 we read that God is love. He does not simply show love, it is who He is. John taught us that the way we can determine if we know God is whether we imitate Him, especially in our love for one another. As God grows us, we become more loving and display the characteristics listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. It's a long process, but be encouraged – we have made progress!

In verses 9-10, John wrote about the ultimate expression of the Father's love: that He sent His only Son. God wanted us to live fully, as He created us to live. The only way that could happen was if He sent His Son to us. In this we learned what love really is. In His daily life on earth, Jesus demonstrated the love of God. If we want to know what God's love looks like, all we need to do is study Jesus' words and actions.

Verse 10 also described that God loved us before we loved Him. Real love, like God's love, does not wait to be loved in return – it reaches out first, taking the initiative. Often, the person who needs love is either incapable or unwilling to take that first step. So, like God, we need to be willing to reach out and initiate love first, before we receive any love in return.

God reached out to love us first by sending His Son, Jesus, to be the propitiation for our sins. "Propitiation" means to cover or wash away. Jesus' blood washed away the stain of our sin, making us pure. This purity offered to us by Jesus makes fellowship with God possible. Unless we are washed clean, we cannot enter the presence of God because He is completely pure and holy.

In verse 11, John taught that as we are cleansed, we should love one another. In John 13:3-15, Jesus washed His disciples' feet and directed them to do the same for each other. Instead of asking for their love and service in return, he told them to love and serve each other. Just like the disciples, we should respond to Jesus' "washing our feet" by washing each other's feet. We can figuratively wash feet in many ways – by setting aside our will to instead serve others. As God loves and pours Himself out on us, we need to love and serve our brothers and sisters.

Discussion Questions

Compare God's love to human love. What are the limitations of human love?

How have you seen yourself grow in love? Where do you see God working on you right now in that area?

What things did Jesus say and do that revealed who God is? What have you learned about God by studying Jesus?

Talk about a time when someone initiated love with you. What did that feel like? How did you respond?

Read John 13:3-15. Talk about the act of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. How can you respond to Jesus' love and "wash someone's feet" this week?

Next Steps

Start each morning by praying, asking God to show you how you can "wash the feet" of those around you. Be obedient to initiate love toward people who might not return your love.

If you're on Twitter, use the hashtag #cfchurch to talk about what the Holy Spirit is teaching you this week about God's love and what it looks like to love others.