

# 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 that John attracted crowds like a rock star. He was the only follower still alive who had been on site with Jesus.

Folks flocked to hear what the wrinkled old preacher had to say. His disciples would carry him in their arms into the arena, while everyone sat on the edge of their seat hoping 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 John 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 one day after John had delivered his single sentence sermon, a disciple asked him, “**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!

Here's the theme of 1 John, “**Let us love one another.**”

Chapter 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, and **love is the believer's birthmark!**

Let's say a mom has jet black wavy hair, and she has a daughter with jet black wavy hair - someone might said, "There's no mistaking that girl's mother."

Or a father with a muscular frame, has a son with the same build. We say, "He's his dad's 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.

And certainly, the reverse is also true. "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Realize, when John says, "God is love," he's not reducing the concept of "God" to a mere emotion, or a mystical force. The Bible reveals God as a person.

He's 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 an impoverished village known as Nazareth, on the shores of Lake Galilee, on dusty Jerusalem streets, and in Temple porticos - even on a hill 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 coming as a man.

God’s **wisdom** is revealed in Jesus’ teachings.

God’s **power** was on display in His miracles.

God’s **mercy and grace** was visible in His dying.

God’s **redemption** was unveiled in His resurrection.

Dying and lost people looking for life and hope should look to Jesus. *He is the love of God 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.

Jesus is our “*propitiation*” - it means “place of mercy.”

And this is what we need. Today, our world is about exacting vengeance and justice. Yet God has mercy.

There’s a clip shown on an episode of “America’s Funniest Home Videos” that depicts God’s mercy.

It’s a little grainy, but I want you to see mercy. \*\*

I love this 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.

This is the Gospel. Jesus bridged the gap caused by our sin - the gap between us and God. Jesus extends mercy and now becomes the way for us to cross over.

And here's what John concludes, 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 remember a common theme in the old science-fiction films. A space ship would travel too close to a hostile planet, and get caught in its gravitational pull.

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 want to 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. The closest this world comes to actually seeing God is by observing His love flow through our lives. You reveal God when you 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 the 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, “the fruit of the Spirit is love...” Galatians 5:22. God’s love comes to us in three ways: *He speaks it to us... He does it for us... Then 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 proclaims it, then proves it, then love finds its ultimate destination when it flows through us.

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 He does*, but *who He is* that matters. He’s not only *Savior of the world*, but also *the Son of God*.

And realize what this means - the son of a horse is a horse, being the son of a man makes me a man, thus being the Son of God makes Jesus God - just 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 was. And “*as He is, so are we in this world.*” Loved by God, but hated by the world - this is the predicament that the Christian has to navigate today.

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

“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.” Humans are besieged by various fears. It’s one of our fiercest foes.

There’s the fear of failure, the fear of people, the fear of the unknown. Yet the love of God conquers 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

**perfects** me... And there's no *fear of the unknown* when I'm confident God's love **protects** 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.

It was when I discovered God's love for me - *that drew me in*. His love caused me to love Him in return.

Today, when I sense my passion for God growing cold 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 letting God love you!

Verse 20 is the narrative John is determined to maintain. He's 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 beats 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 - in 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.

Three weeks ago America saw the video of the cruel and senseless death of George Floyd. It was horrendous. Floyd, a black man was handcuffed and on the ground, when a white police officer stuck his knee on Floyd’s neck and impaired his ability to breathe. No one I know wasn’t appalled by the video.

It came on the heels of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by racist vigilantes. Both events stunned us. They reminded us of the lingering reality of racism in 2020.

Once Jesus told the story of a shepherd who left his flock of ninety-nine to go after one lost sheep. *And I can hear the other shepherds criticize him, “Don’t all sheep matter? Why care for just that one sheep?”* **It’s because that one sheep is the sheep that’s lost.**

Jesus was specific. He went after the one lost sheep. He wasn't content insisting that **"All Sheep Matter."**

I ran across an interesting quote, "The fact that society has to clarify that any lives matter, should be concern enough." Black lives matter because they're the lives that are being threatened at the moment.

Yet over the last three weeks we've encountered all kinds of reaction that has distracted us from the fuse that ignited it all. Some of which is as outrageous as what occurred to George Floyd. There's been *riots and looting - the death of two black police officers - injuries to hundreds of other officers - attacks on innocent people - the destruction of minority businesses - cries to defund the police - even the takeover of Seattle.*

These are also horrendous events. *And do these issues need addressing?* Of course, they do. But here's what's happened, the legitimate concerns of black brothers that I love, are getting lost in the chaos.

We should remember that four centuries of slavery, and years of Jim Crow - *even our original Constitution considered the black man three-fifths of a person* - this kind of sin leaves scars on a society, and on a people.

Last week I mentioned two of our church employees, Vernon and JP, and the issues they face as young black men in America. Frequently, they encounter forms of racism. They have a justified fear of the police, that white folks know nothing about. *Trust me, in their minds, racial justice is still a goal, not a reality.*

I, as a white person, need to listen. The Bible says weep with those who weep. I need to show empathy.

James 1:19 is a fitting verse, “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Most importantly, as John did, **let’s maintain the narrative - let’s keep our eye on the ball** - and not allow all the noise to muffle legitimate grievances. *Here is love...* Let’s not forget the real issues, and learn to work in ways that can bring about real harmony.

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 give me is to be nice to my kids. Give one of my sons a job - or babysit one night for my daughter - and you’ve done me a favor.

*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 womb of the virgin and 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, and counters temptation with an inner resistance.

Thus, the key to overcoming is learning how 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...

“Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Again, it’s faith in Jesus that overcomes the world! It’s interesting, 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... And don’t follow her motto: “**Just Do It**”

But remember the key to victory... *It’s 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 two previous weeks in 1 John, this letter was written to address the dangerous heresy of Gnosticism. Yet there were two types of Gnosticism.

Both 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.

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.”** If you're reading 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 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 about spelling or grammar - not doctrine.

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

It's not in the oldest manuscripts. The verse is 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 centuries by an over-zealous scribe, and shouldn't be included. If true, it was a mistake of the King James

translators, *not John, and surely not God*. The original writings were inerrant. God saw to it that what the biblical authors wrote was 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.” John’s desire was not just for them to believe, but to continue in faith.

John says God wants us to know that we have eternal life. Today, you can pray, and leave knowing that your sins are forgiven and you’ll enjoy eternal life.

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 doesn't God hear all our prayers? And the answer to that is "yes" and "no."*

Sure God is omniscient. He sees all, and He knows all, and He hears all! But in another sense He doesn't hear every prayer - *and we should be glad!*

Here's a riddle for you, "What do you get when you cross a termite with a praying mantas? An insect that says grace before he eats your house."\*\*\* 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 would respond, "**I can't hear you!**"

I would refused to entertain their quibbling. *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, that's when we're certain our prayers 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.

In **Numbers 16** when Korah defied God’s authority.

In **2 Samuel 6** when sinful hands touched God’s Ark.

And in the NT... In **Acts 5**, Ananias and Sapphira were struck down dead when they pretended to be more spiritual than they 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 everybody who ever played the hypocrite and claimed to be more spiritual than they really were, were struck dead we’d have a smaller crowd 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're *“the untouchables.”*

Remember, Satan couldn't harm a hair on Job's head until he had first received God's permission.

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, *“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 in 5:20 *“that we may know Him.”* Jesus came to reveal the heart of God to us. God has revealed Himself 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. He 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 worshiping 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."***