

I JOHN: A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

XII. Discerning The Love Of God

(1 John 4:7-21)

I. Introduction

- A. 1 John was written to counter heretical views (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 881), so the epistle provides discernment, and is thus “filled with contrasts – light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:7-12, 16-21).” (Ryrie Study Bible KJV, 1978, “Introduction to the First Letter of John: Contents,” p. 1770)
- B. We view the epistle for much needed spiritual discernment today, and study 1 John 4:7-21 on discerning the love of God from false views of God’s love for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Discerning The Love Of God, 1 John 4:7-21.

- A. Due to the influence of the world’s view of love, one can easily define God’s love as mere kindness or compassion toward us human beings.
- B. However, Scripture’s exposition of God’s love reveals something that is far deeper and more profound than mere kindness or compassion, and 1 John 4:7-21 clarifies it (as follows):
 - 1. The Apostle John urged his Christian readers to love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and “knows” God in the sense of spiritually fellowshiping with the Lord, 1 John 4:7.
 - 2. If one does not love, he does not know God in the sense of spiritual fellowship with Him, for God is love, and love is “intrinsic to the character and nature of God,” v. 8; *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 899.
 - 3. God displayed His love toward us in that He sent His only unique Son into the world that we might live through Him, 1 John 4:9. The idea of sustaining the lives of others embodies the love of God much like true godly love in believers causes them to sustain the lives of fellow believers, cf. 1 John 3:16-18.
 - 4. However, **God’s love goes beyond even sustaining life to do so self-sacrificially**: John explained that God’s love led Him to send His Son to be the “propitiation,” namely, the satisfaction of God’s own wrath against us for our sins that we might not have to go into eternal punishment, but be forever saved from damnation, 1 John 4:10 with Romans 3:21-28. God had such great concern about saving us from His own wrath against us due to our violation of His righteousness that He sacrificially sent His own unique Son into the world to bear the full brunt of His wrath against us as our Substitutionary Atonement on the cross that we might be saved from an eternity in the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 20:15) and be given eternal life!
 - 5. John added that if God so exceptionally loved us, we ought to love one another with the same kind of love that seeks to preserve the lives of fellow brethren in Christ even in self-sacrificing ways, 1 John 4:11.
 - 6. This kind of love is full of great glory, and John describes several features of that glory in 1 John 4:12-21:
 - a. If we love self-sacrificially like God does, we experientially know that He dwells in us, and that His love is perfected in us, what is also confirmed to us by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, 1 John 4:12-13.
 - b. Then, if the whole local body of believers self-sacrificially loves as God loves us, the body has seen and testifies by that love that God the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, 1 John 4:14. Living “in the atmosphere of mutual Christian love produces a personal knowledge of God’s love and fresh experience of faith in that love,” 1 John 4:15-16; *Ibid.*, p. 899-900.
 - c. Besides, possessing God’s love that aims self-sacrificially to save lives produces a mature love in a believer that gives him confidence (*parresian*) in anticipating the Judgment Seat of Christ, “that God will approve the quality of his life if, through love, that believer while in this world becomes like Him,” 1 John 4:17; *Ibid.*, p. 900. Conversely, fearing the Judgment Seat of Christ reveals that God’s sacrificial love has not been perfected in the believer, for God’s sacrificial love “expels fear from the heart,” 1 John 4:18; *Ibid.*
 - d. John added that we love God because He first self-sacrificially loved us, and if one claims to love God but hates his brother, he is a liar since not loving one’s brother whom he has seen means that he cannot love God Whom he has not seen, 1 John 4:19-20. We are thus under God’s command that if we love Him, we must love our brother in Christ self-sacrificially like God has self-sacrificially loved us, 1 John 4:21.

Lesson: *God’s love so aimed to save us from the expression of His wrath against us that He self-sacrificially sent His unique Son to face His wrath against us in our place that we might be saved. If we have such a self-sacrificial love, it produces great glory to God, confidence in facing Christ’s Judgment Seat, and blessing in the local church.*

Application: *May we like God focus on self-sacrificially saving and sustaining the lives of fellow believers.*