

Deep Love -Lesson 7

1 John 2:9–11; 3:16–18; 4:7–21

Part 1 Identify the Issue

It was John who quoted Jesus as saying, “By this will all people know you are my disciples, that you love one another.” It’s John who’s been described as “the apostle of love.” In fact, an ancient tradition says that when John was an old man, the elders in Ephesus would carry him into the assembly and sit him down to teach. When they did, John would simply say, “Dear children, let us love one another.”

Discussion Questions:

[Q] How would you define love in just one sentence?

[Q] What kind of person is hardest for you to love?

[Q] Why is love so crucial to “living deep” as a Christian?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: There are schisms in the church.

John structured his letter in a unique way. It’s not in a linear, outline format with sub-points under each main point (Point 1: the ethical test; Point 2: the doctrinal test; Point 3: the relational test). Instead, John lays out his letter in a cyclical fashion, introducing his three themes and then coming back to them again and again, drilling a little deeper each time.

Read 1 John 2:9–11 where he first introduces the subject of love.

It’s a rather abrupt transition, and John uses pretty strong language: love and hate; light and darkness. Apparently, there was a problem in the church at Ephesus. Remember that John is writing as a pastor to the congregations in Ephesus, and it turns out there were some serious relational issues in the church. We don’t know the details, but it appears to have begun as a doctrinal disagreement over the person and work of Christ, but as so often happens, the doctrinal dispute led to other things—infighting, power struggles, factions, etc.

It's hard to imagine brothers and sisters in Christ hating each other, but it must have been pretty serious for John to use such strong language. And it's disappointing to learn that the church is having problems so soon, even with an apostle pastoring them! It's equally disappointing to realize that 2,000 years later the church is still struggling with unity and lack of love.

[Q] If someone were to ask you how we were doing relationally at your church, how would you answer?

[Q] How deep is the love in your church? To determine that consider the following:

- Are you satisfied with the levels of intimacy, care, and prayer you experience together?

- Are you able to have hard conversations with each other?

- Do you love each other only when it's convenient, or do you truly make sacrifices for one another?

- Is yours the kind of love the world would stand up and take note of? Why or why not?

Teaching Point Two: Love is giving of yourself for the good of others, even those with whom you have differences.

People want to know what love is. They want to see it and feel it and experience it. But what exactly is love? John speaks to this question the second time he raises the topic. Read 1 John 3:16–18.

[Q] How does John define love?

[Q] With that in mind, how can we know if we are truly loving someone else?

[Q] How can we love those who are different from us, who disagree with us, and even those who may be actively against us?

Note: A pastor from Oxford named Vaughn Roberts put it this way: “When you love people who are like you, that’s ordinary. When you love people who are unlike you, that’s extraordinary. When you love people who dislike you, that’s revolutionary.” That’s the kind of love John is calling us to—the kind of revolutionary love the world is waiting to see.

Teaching Point Three: God’s love and our love for each other cannot be separated.

Why is love so important? We can understand why John makes such a big deal about truth and about righteousness. Certainly, a Christian needs to believe the right things and behave the right way. But why is love so essential? Read 1 John 4:7–21.

[Q] Verse 7 says that love comes from God. What does that tell us about our ability to love?

[Q] Verse 8 doesn’t say, “God is loving,” as if love is just one of his many attributes and activities. John says, “God is love.” Explain the difference.

Note: His very essence and nature is love. Every other aspect of God- His wisdom, His justice, His mercy, His goodness- is ultimately an expression of love.

[Q] How does verse 10 motivate you to love?

[Q] Why is love a witness to the reality of God according to verse 12?

[Q] How is love a test of faith (vv. 13–16)?

[Q] According to the rest of this passage, why is it impossible to say we love God while acting unloving toward others?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

When you disappoint someone who loves you deeply, they love you anyway! So instead of punishing you or rejecting you, they forgive you. They're patient with you. They give you a second chance—and a third, and a fourth, and however many it takes. That's how God has loved us, so that's how we love one another. When you're loved like this, you're free. You're free to make mistakes. You're free to disagree. You're free to take a risk. You're free to be yourself. That's why love is the greatest gift we can give to one another: it gives us the freedom to become the people we long to be and are meant to be in Christ.

Action Point: Love is very practical, according to John. It's not just words; it's action. It's giving of ourselves every day. It's doing good for people in ordinary ways. James Bryan Smith wrote a book called *The Good and Beautiful Community*. In one of his chapters, he offers some simple suggestions for living unselfishly. Consider how to implement these this week:

- At home, ask your spouse or roommate how they're doing, and really listen. Even if you have other things to do, practice putting his or her needs ahead of yours.
- If you have children, give them the honor of choosing how to spend one evening this week, any way they want.
- At work, stop by a coworker's desk and ask, "What are you working on today that I might be able to help with?"
- Make some fresh coffee for the office or clean up the break room.
- At church, sit near the front of the sanctuary or in the spaces where people seldom sit, leaving the more desirable seats for others.
- When driving, be on the lookout for opportunities to let people get in front of you.