

LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY FOURTEEN

The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21

God is love. That's His nature. That's the essence of His person. That's one of His attributes, His characteristics. When you are in God and God is in you, then the same life in God pours out through you. You're like a string on His instrument, a sound from His trumpet, a photograph from His camera. His love flows out through you and that love of God is revealed.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE seasoned apostle John energetically repeated the truth with plain and simple terms. He never shrank from categorizing life in basic, unmistakable language like right and wrong, light and dark, good and evil, Christ and antichrist, love and hate.

John witnessed time and again how deceptive teachers had sneaked into the church as wolves in sheep's clothing. He warned how "there are many false prophets in the world" (1 John 4:1). These wolves cater to the depraved *I-ME-MINE* nature of humanity. If unbroken by the Spirit of God, that nature can spiral people into a self-absorbed, spiritual blindness.

Because John had a clear-eyed view of the practical outcome of those false doctrines, he gave one last address on the supreme significance of love. In doing so, he dealt a deadly blow to the beasts who stood poised to devour.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study on 1 John 4:7–21, we read John's exalted reminder how our identity as a child of God frees us from endless self-grasping, self-exalting, and self-preserving, so that, instead, we can be self-giving people . . . just as God is a self-giving God.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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1 John 4:7–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Consider how no other religion or worldview teaches God’s love for you in the way Jesus Christ teaches God’s love for you. Think of the immense privilege and grace God has shown us by opening our hearts to that truth, wooing us to receive His Son. Let that reality simmer in you. Then ask for the Spirit’s blessing on your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Meditate on John’s prior statements on love:

- 1) “Those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him” (1 John 2:5).
- 2) “Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light” (2:10).
- 3) “Do not love this world nor the things it offers you” (2:15).
- 4) “See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children” (3:1).
- 5) “Let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions” (3:18).

Then write a personal reflection on love as you have come to understand it through this study.



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When the message of the cross finally comes through, you realize you are not important—Christ is. Then love just flows freely. Love doesn't flow freely when we're self-important. Self-importance brings the spirit of entitlement, "I deserve this. I've earned this. This is mine. It's only right." But at the foot of the cross, we say, "I see Jesus who died and paid the supreme price for my sins. I'm reduced to nothing. May I love others as He loved me."
—Chuck Swindoll

Now we'll turn to a passage on love that just might soar above all other passages on this lofty subject.



Observation: Love Comes from God

Begin your study by observing [1 John 4:7–21](#).¹ Notice how often John repeats “love” and “God.” Take summary notes below.

A Repeated Command—1 John 4:7–12

Review [1 John 4:7–12](#). What does loving others demonstrate in a Christian's life (1 John 4:7–8, 12)?



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How did John define the nature of God's love (1 John 4:9–10)?

John gave three reasons for the supreme significance of love. First, love comes from God. Second, the love of God binds the people of God. Third, as the love of God pours through the people of God, non-believers see a divine and supernatural light at work in the world. When they ask about that light, Christians can then share the good news of Christ's love for a lost world.

Divine Enablement—1 John 4:13–16

Turn to *1 John 4:13–16*. How did John describe the divine enablement we receive when we love like God loves?



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Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: The Holy Spirit

On our own, we are completely unable to manifest this kind of love. But God hasn't left us on our own. When we trusted Christ, God gave us the third member of the Trinity to indwell us and empower us. The Holy Spirit enlightens our minds to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ; He also opens our hearts and empowers our wills to accept it. . . . But the Spirit doesn't stop there. The permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, who unites us to the life of God, continues to enable us to confess Jesus as the Son of God (4:15). This same Spirit who unites us to the life of God also unites us to the love of God, so that we're not only recipients of His love but also conduits of His love (4:16).²

Only the Spirit of God can generate the love of God in a believer. When the Spirit comes to dwell in us, we never have to pray for God to keep His Spirit in us. God dwells in us *forever!* Nor do believers have to fear God's abandonment because He has promised He'll never forsake us or fail us (Hebrews 13:5).

A Love Perfected—1 John 4:17–21

Look at [1 John 4:17–21](#). Pay attention to John's contrast between perfect love and imperfect love. Write that contrast below. Then specify the benefits and results of having God's love perfected in us.

God perfects His love in us through His relationship with us. We don't have to fear divine shaming on the day of judgment—as Paul reassures, “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Jesus can care for us far better than we can care for ourselves! Knowing this truth frees us to love others.



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Interpretation: Real Love

During interpretation, we ask higher level questions like, “What does this mean?” “Why did the author write this?” and “What truth carries over from the text into our day?”

Remember to consult your extra-biblical resources. Netbible.org, Biblegateway.com, and Biblestudytools.com offer useful Bible study tools. Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with one of these sites if you haven't before.³

In [1 John 4:10](#), John gets into cosmic theological meaning. What is the significance of God's love in this verse? How did John connect the first idea on God's love with his second idea on Jesus' sacrifice?

Now look at [1 John 4:14](#). What emphasis did John place on Jesus' saving activity in this verse that expands on what he said in 4:10? Based on John's statement about Jesus' saving activity in 4:10 and 4:14, what can we reasonably assume the false teachers propagated about Jesus? (Hint: think of spiritual teaching that is opposite to the teaching in these verses.)

If we fail to understand God's love for us, as demonstrated by Jesus' sacrificial death, our love for God and others will fail to reach its full God-ordained potential. If our love for God and others fails to reach its full potential, then we will fail to fully reflect the image of God, and we will miss out on the full joy of God. Love and joy build on each other.



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Correlation: The Holy Spirit

John wrote his gospel to spark belief in his readers and he wrote the letter of 1 John to foster spiritual assurance in believers. Although the purposes differed, the same theology threads both works. John simply applied them to different situations. That's the treasure of knowing God: He's with us and helps us no matter the situation.

Like 1 John 4:7–21, the encouragement of Jesus in John 14:15–30 contains complementary thoughts on God, love, and the Holy Spirit. Read [John 14:15–30](#). Summarize overlapping truths in this passage with the one we just studied. Then note a few distinctions between John 14:15–30 and 1 John 4:7–21.

No matter how low you sink as a child of God, He'll never write you off. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Loving When It's Difficult

Application installs handles on God's Truth to help you pick it up and take it with you no matter where you go. If anyone is in Christ, God reckons that person a new creation by virtue of his or her relationship to Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). But fully expressing our new nature takes a lifetime. Through that journey, we must always remember the supreme significance of love.

First, consider your relationship habits in the home. Pick just one way you think you can do better in your love for others in your home or in your daily routine of life.



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Next, think of those times when you feel most crippled by fear instead of confidence. Describe how your connection to Jesus through the Spirit can help you in those situations. Then note what you can do to foster confidence in those situations to help you weaken the grip of fear.

After our deep dive into the pool of God's love, we can easily see and feel the superiority of His way of life over the *I-ME-MINE* way of life. We give and love selflessly because Christ provides us all we need.



A FINAL PRAYER

Take a few more moments to meditate on what you learned about God's love as He reveals it to you and pours it through you. Lastly, write a fitting prayer to end your time in God's Word.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 115.
3. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store. Chuck also recommends the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.

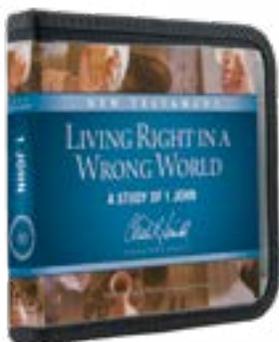


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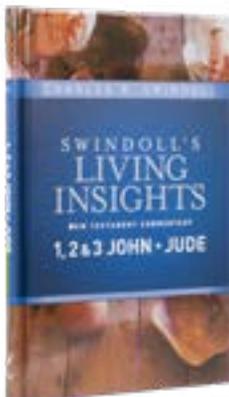
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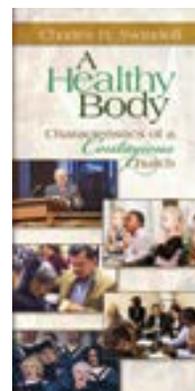
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

