

1 John 4:16 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
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Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

1 John 4:16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him:

Greek - kai hemeis egnokamen (1PRAI) kai pepisteukamen (1PRAI) ten agaphen en echei (3SPAI) ho theos en hemin O theos agaphe estin (3SPAI) kai o menon (PAPMSN) en te agaphe en to theo menei (3SPAI) kai o theos en auto menei (3SPAI)

Amplified - And we know (understand, recognize, are conscious of, by observation and by experience) and believe (adhere to and put faith in and rely on) the love God cherishes for us. God is love, and he who dwells

and continues in love dwells and continues in God, and God dwells and continues in him.

NLT - We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

Wuest - And as for us, we have known the love which God has in our case, and have that knowledge at present, and we have believed and at present maintain that attitude; God is as to His nature, love, and he who dwells in the aforementioned love, in God is dwelling, and God in him is dwelling.

- **we:** 1Jn 4:9,10 3:1,16 Ps 18:1-3 31:19 36:7-9 Isa 64:4 1Co 2:9
- **God is love:** 1Jn 4:8,12,13
- **and he:** 1Jn 4:12, 3:24
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ABIDING IN LOVE AND IN GOD

John has just described the amazing relationship of all who confess Jesus as the Son of God, that now "God abides in him and he in God." (1Jn 4:15-**note**)

We - **NAS** leaves out the **and** (kai) so it is literally "**and we**." **We** here refers to the apostle and his readers (contrast "**we** [apostles only] have beheld... the Son" 1Jn 4:14-**note**), all who have made the confess in 1Jn 4:15.

Hiebert writes that "God's love for us has evoked a response on our part: '**we have known and believed**' God's love. The two verbs "**have known** and **believed**", both in the perfect tense, indicate the resultant experience flowing from our initial faith and confession." ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#)) (See also related journal article - [1 John 4:7-21 - Excellent](#))

Plummer says of **know** and **believe** that "each completes the other. Sound faith is intelligent; sound knowledge is believing."

We have come to know ([1097](#))(**ginosko**) refers to knowledge gained by experience, not just by an accumulation of facts. As **Wiersbe** says "**know** (**ginosko**) has a much deeper meaning than simply intellectual acquaintance or understanding. For example, the verb **know** is used to describe the intimate union of husband and wife (Ge 4:1 -**Ed**: Lxx translates the Hebrew yada with **ginosko**). To know God means to be in a deep relationship to Him—to share His life and enjoy His love. This knowing is not simply a matter of understanding facts; it is a matter of perceiving truth (cf. 1Jn 2:3–5). ([The Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Wuest - Both verbs (**know**, **believed**) are in the **perfect tense**, emphasizing not only a past completed act but abiding results in present time.

Spurgeon on **we have come to know and have believed** - How far is this true of all of you? How many here can join with the beloved apostle, and say, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us"? We know it; we have felt it; we are under its power. We know it still, it remains a matter of faith to us; we believe it. We have a double hold of it. "**We know**," we are not agnostics. "**We believe**," we are not unbelievers.

Have believed ([4100](#))(**pisteuo** from **pistis**; **pistos**; related studies **the faith**, the **obedience of faith**) means to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. To accept as true, genuine, or real. To have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something or someone. To consider to be true. To accept the word or evidence of.

Note that **believed** is in the **perfect tense** signifying the permanence of this belief. They believed at a point in time and continue to believe.

Wiersbe - Abiding in God's love produces two wonderful spiritual benefits in the life of a believer: 1. He grows in knowledge, and 2. He grows in faith (1 John 4:16). The more we love God, the more we understand the love of God. And the more we understand His love, the easier it is for us to trust Him. After all, when you know someone intimately and love him sincerely, you have no problem putting your confidence in him. A man standing in the greeting card section of a store was having trouble picking out a card. The clerk asked if she could help, and he said: "Well, it's our fortieth wedding anniversary, but I can't find a card that says what I want to say. You know, forty years ago it wouldn't have been any problem picking out a card, because back then I thought I knew what love was. But we love each other so much more today, I just can't find a card that says it!" This is a growing Christian's experience with God. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Steven Cole sums up this verse - John comes back to the theme of God's love that he developed in 1Jn 4:7-8**note**: When we know and believe God's love for us and we abide in love, we abide in God and He in us (1Jn 4:16). It is important to know that John is not saying in these verses that the way to abide in God and have Him abide in us is to confess that Jesus is the Christ and to abide in

love. Rather, he is saying that if we do these things, it is evidence of God's abiding in us and us in Him. When John says, "We have come to know and have believed," he uses a verb tense (the Greek perfect) that means, "We have come to know and believe in the past with continuing results in the present and future." Faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It is based on knowledge. John and the apostles came to know and believe God's love for them in the person of Jesus Christ and His voluntary sacrifice on the cross. Then John repeats what he already said in 1Jn 4:8: "God is love." He is not only love. He also is holy and righteous. His love never negates any other of His attributes, nor do those attributes negate His love. The supreme demonstration of God's love is the cross, where He gave His only begotten Son to die in the place of sinners. There love and justice met and both were satisfied. God's love was demonstrated to us as sinners. God's justice was satisfied when Christ paid the penalty that we deserved. John then concludes, "The one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." By "abides in love," I think that he means both, "abides in God's love" and "abides in love for others." As we saw in 1Jn 4:11-**note**, you cannot separate the two: "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." If you have come to know and believe God's love for you, then you are under obligation to be the channel of His love to others, including those who do not deserve it. Remember, you didn't deserve it either! It is crucial that each of us be able to apply personally God's love in Christ. The apostle Paul did. He wrote (Gal. 2:20-**note**), "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." That is John's confession, "I have faith in the Son of God." It also is John's love, which God has for us: He "loved me and gave Himself up for me." Can you say those things personally? "I believe in the Son of God. I have come to know and believe that He loved me and He gave Himself up for me." If so, John says that it is evidence that you abide in God and God abides in you. **Some may still be thinking, "I do believe in Jesus as the Son of God and as my Savior, but I don't have strong faith. I often have doubts. I do abide in His love and seek to be the channel of His love to others, but I often fall short. How can I have assurance that I abide in Him and He abides in me?"** As we've seen throughout 1 John, the issue is not **perfection**, but rather, **direction**. The important questions are, "What do you do when your faith wavers? Do you come before the Lord in confession, asking Him to strengthen your faith? What do you do when selfishness dominates your life, rather than God's love? Do you grieve over your hardness of heart and ask God to fill you with His Spirit and to produce the fruit of His Spirit in you? Fruit is not an instant product. It takes time and cultivation. Faith and love take time to grow (Phil. 1:9-**note**; 2Thess. 1:3). John wants you to know that if these qualities are growing in you, you can be assured that God abides in you and you in Him. If you do not see faith and love growing in your life, then do as Isaiah (Isa 55:6-7) directs: "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." ([1 John 4:12-16 Assurance of Abiding](#))

John Piper - So the main point of these verses (1Jn 4:13-16) so far is that there is an aroma about God that can't be concealed. It's the aroma of love. When he comes into your life, the aroma comes into your life. The aroma is the sign of God's saving presence, and if you smell it, you know he is there. You have assurance. If you don't smell it, then you lose assurance and you cry out to God to cause his love to abound in your heart. ([1 John 4:13-16: God Abides in the One Who Loves - This is an important sermon for evangelicals to read - click for the entire message](#))

GOD IS LOVE

God is love - This is not just a "quality" of God, but is the essence of Who God is forever and ever. Amen. Notice that you cannot reverse the statement and say "Love is God," for that would border on pantheism. In 1Jn 4:7-**note** the apostle says "love is from God" but that is not saying that "love is God." It would be like saying "light is God" (reversing "God is light")! Light is not God. Neither is love God. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#)) (See **God's Attribute of Love**)

Hiebert explains that "Although John has just said that "love is of God" (1Jn 4:7), one cannot say that "love is God," just as one cannot say that "light is God." Without the article, "love" is qualitative, depicting the nature of His being. The fact that God as a person "is love" does not invalidate the fact that He is also holy and righteous. All aspects of His nature belong together and unite in determining His action and response. In His attitude and actions He is totally consistent. "Because He is love, God works against whatever works against love." ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#)) (See also related journal article - [1 John 4:7-21 - Excellent](#))

John is the apostle of three foundational statements about the nature of God - God is spirit (Jn 4:24). God is light (1Jn 1:5-**note**). God is love (1Jn 4:7-**note**). Each gives us some small insight into the nature of our **Transcendent** God. Each of these attributes of God interacts with the other. For example, everything that God does is governed by His love because that is Who He is even when He is led to dispense judgment or wrath. Of these three aspects (Spirit, Light, Love), clearly love is easiest for us to identify with as it is the most personal and closest to our human experience.

Dodd on God is love - All His activity is loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature, is—to love.

Wiersbe says **God is love** "is the basis for a believer's relationship with God and with his fellowman. Because God is love, we can love. His love is not past history; it is present reality." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

William Barclay on **God is love** - In this passage there occurs what is probably the greatest single statement about God in the whole Bible, that God is love. It is amazing how many doors that single statement unlocks and how many questions it answers.

(i) It is the explanation of creation. Sometimes we are bound to wonder why God created this world. The disobedience, and the lack of response in men is a continual grief to him. Why should he create a world which was to bring him nothing but trouble? The answer is that creation was essential to his very nature. If God is love, he cannot exist in lonely isolation. Love must have someone to love and someone to love it.

(ii) It is the explanation of free-will. Unless love is a free response it is not love. Had God been only law he could have created a world in which men moved like automata, having no more choice than a machine. But, if God had made men like that, there would have been no possibility of a personal relationship between him and them. Love is of necessity the free response of the heart; and, therefore, God, by a deliberate act of self-limitation, had to endow men with free will.

(iii) It is the explanation of providence. Had God been simply mind and order and law, he might, so to speak, have created the universe, wound it up, set it going and left it. There are articles and machines which we are urged to buy because we can fit them and forget them; their most attractive quality is that they can be left to run themselves. But, because God is love, his creating act is followed by his constant care.

(iv) It is the explanation of redemption. If God had been only law and justice, he would simply have left men to the consequences of their sin. The moral law would operate; the soul that sinned would die; and the eternal justice would inexorably hand out its punishments. But the very fact that God is love meant that he had to seek and save that which was lost. He had to find a remedy for sin.

(v) It is the explanation of the life beyond. If God were simply creator, men might live their brief span and die for ever. The life which ended early would be only another flower which the frost of death had withered too soon. But the fact that God is love makes it certain that the chances and changes of life have not the last word and that his love will readjust the balance of this life. (1 John 4 Commentary - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible)

Marshall adds that '**God is love**' is rightly recognized as one of the high peaks of divine revelation in this Epistle. Logically the statement stands parallel with '**God is light**' (1Jn 1:5-note) and '**God is spirit**' (Jn. 4:24) as one of the three great Johannine expression of the nature of God... 'God is spirit' describes his metaphysical nature, while 'God is light' and 'God is love' deal with his character, especially as he has revealed himself to men."

Spurgeon on **abides in love** - This is not mere benevolence; there are many benevolent people who still do not **dwell in love**. They wish well to their fellow men; but not to all. They are full of indignation at certain men for the wrong that they have done them. John's words teach us that there is a way of living in which you are in accord with God, and with all mankind; you have passed out of the region of enmity into the realm of love. When you have come there, by the grace of God, then God dwells in you, and you dwell in Him.

Stott - The only way to love, as the only way to believe, is by living in God and God in us. For it is the divine indwelling which alone makes possible both belief and love. They are its fruit, and therefore its evidence: 'he who dwells in love is [i.e. is thereby seen to be] dwelling in God' (NEB)... Without the Holy Spirit our minds are dark and our hearts cold. Only the Holy Spirit can enlighten our minds to believe in Jesus and warm our hearts to love God and each other. So believing and loving are evidence that his Spirit is at work within us. ([The Letters of John - Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

Love (26)(**agape**) is a love that impels one to sacrifice one's self for the benefit of the object loved... (it) speaks of a love which is awakened by a sense of value in the object loved, an apprehension of its preciousness.

Abides (continues, remains, resides) (3306)(**meno**) means to remain in the same place or position over a period of time. Meno describes something that remains where it is, continues in a fixed state, and endures. In the present context John uses meno three times, each in the **present tense** which describes continual abiding.

Meno is used 24 times in First John - 1 John 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 9, 14-15, 17, 24; 4:12-13, 15-16. (Note: four verses have more than one use)

Wiersbe writes that **abide** "is used six times in 1 John 4:12-16-note. It refers to our personal fellowship with Jesus Christ. To abide in Christ means to remain in spiritual oneness with Him, so that no sin comes between us. Because we are "born of God," we have *union* with Christ; but it is only as we trust Him and obey His commandments that we have *communion* with Him. Much as a faithful

husband and wife "abide in love" though they may be separated by miles, so a believer abides in God's love. This abiding is made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1John 4:13-note)." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

OUR SPIRITUAL POSITION IN LOVE

Guy King on our **spiritual position, in love** - The whole passage is full of references to, descriptions of, and blessings in, the Love House - an exquisitely delightful residence.

- Double-fronted - love to GOD, love to others.
- Long lease - even for eternity.
- Sunny aspect - constantly lit by the Sun of Righteousness.
- Every modern convenience - for "charity never faileth."
- Safe from disturbance - for "perfect love casteth out fear."

Note that the phrase employed is "*dwells* in love," not "*lodges*," as if for a while - there is all the difference between visiting the seaside for a holiday, and living there permanently. It is this latter condition that is envisaged here. The house itself is a permanency - "now abides ... charity," 1Corinthians 13:13- and we are never to move elsewhere.

We are said to be Born there - "born of God" (1Jn 4:7-note). Not by natural birth, but by new birth. In the beautiful atmosphere where love reigns - that is, in effect, where GOD reigns, for "God is love" - there is no room for a spirit of hate, a spirit of fear, a spirit of greed, a spirit of jealousy, a spirit of self. It is a sign of a newly born body that it breathes life; likewise is it a mark of a new born soul that it breathes love for we cannot really know GOD without catching from Him some of His wonderful spirit of love (1Jn 4:8-note).

We are said to Grow there - "herein is our love made perfect" (1Jn 4:17-note). Love is not a merely static thing, but is for ever growing deeper as the days go by - from the cupboard love of the cat, to the childish love of the infant, the callow love of the youth, the awakening love of the sweetheart, the deepening love of a married couple, to the perfect love of a Darby and Joan. So does it come about, in the higher sphere, that the more we know GOD the more we love Him - and, incidentally, the more we love others. As the Christian should be always on the go, so should he also be always on the grow "as newborn babes, desire the sincere [the unadulterated] milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby," (1Peter 2:2-note).

We are to grow in all kinds of Christian excellencies - for instance, in grace, in knowledge, and in love. This love that the Epistle is so full of is a supernatural quality - "shed abroad in our hearts [not by our effort] by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," (Romans 5:5-note). The New Testament word for love is not found in heathen writers; and their word for it is not found in the New Testament - though it is given an exalted place in London's Piccadilly Circus! Let us see to it that, as members of the Fellowship we are growing in the Divine virtue.

We are said to Live there - "dwells in love" (1Jn 4:16). The Love life follows a pattern, "manifested" in the blessed fact that GOD sent His Son to be incarnate (1Jn 4:9-note) and crucified (1Jn 4:10-note) for us. A strange word is used of the latter fact - "the propitiation"; and we must give careful attention to it, in view of certain strictures that occur in certain quarters. They begin by quoting from this very Epistle, this very chapter, that "God is love". Very well, then, if that be the case, He will surely forgive "our sins", without any need to be propitiated on account of them. Yet the Bible does describe the Cross, not only as an example of love (how true!), but as a propitiation for sins. You see, there are two sides to the nature of GOD, as revealed to us - "God is love", (1Jn 4:8-note); but also, "God is light", (1Jn 1:5-note), and the two must be held in balance. The first word signifies, shall we say, His attitude towards our highest good; the second word embraces His attitude against all evil - in consequence of this latter capacity, innate in a Holy Deity, sin must be adequately dealt with. He cannot, from the very nature of this side of His Being, deal with it as if He were an easygoing, indulgent FATHER. A propitiation there must be - but note carefully the phrase that He "sent ... the propitiation." The same thought is in Romans 3:25-26-note, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation... that He might be [at the same time] just, and the justifier." The Cross dealt with the sin, and delivered the sinner who believed. So that we come to this "righteous" conclusion that, seeing there must be a propitiation, His love provided what His holiness demanded! "Herein is love" (1Jn 4:10-note) - indeed.

And now we have to remind ourselves that Life in Love lays upon us the obligation to reproduce, in our measure, the pattern of love that is set before us - not to do what He did, which was uniquely His work, but to do as He did. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (11). "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1Jn 4:19-note).

It is no use our saying that the copy is too remote, and the task too difficult, for, as we learned in an earlier study, GOD never

commands His children to do the impossible, Exodus 18:23, and "this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1Jn 4:21-**note**). This rule of the household is His command; the grace for the doing of it is ours to command! What further residence is there for the members of the Fellowship? ([1 John 4:7-21 The Position of the Fellowship](#))

The Lemon Tree - People who have given up on love probably agree with the words to the song "Lemon Tree" by the folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary:

"Don't put your faith in love,
my boy," my father said to me,
"I fear you'll find that love is like the lovely lemon tree."
Lemon tree very pretty and the lemon flower is sweet
but the fruit of the poor lemon
is impossible to eat.

Many people feel that way. "Love is bitter," they say, because they've been used or abused. But there is a love that is sweet: "God is love" (1John 4:16). The world wants to turn John's phrase around. "Love is God," they say, and seek love as the highest good. But John did not say that love is God. "God is love," he said. Author Frederick Buechner wrote, "To say that love is God is romantic idealism. To say that God is love is either the last straw or the ultimate truth." The last straw? Yes, for some it is. They have looked for love in all the wrong places and have no other place to turn. But when they give themselves to God, as He is made real and personal in Jesus, they find the love they've been looking for all their lives. God is not indifference, abandonment, and abuse, my friend. God is love. By David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know—
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so.

—Robinson

God's love knows no limits.