

1 John 4:8 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 4:8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love:

Greek - o me agapon (PAP) ouk egno (3SAI) ton theon hoti o theos agape estin (3SPAI) .

- Jn 2:4,9 3:6 John 8:54,55
- **God is:** 1Jn 1:5 Ex 34:6-7 Ps 86:5,15 2Co 13:11 Eph 2:4 Heb 12:29
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NO LOVE, NO GOD

KNOW LOVE, KNOW GOD

Wuest - The one who is not habitually loving has not come to know God, because God as to His nature is love.

Amplified - He who does not love has not become acquainted with God [does not and never did know Him], for God is love.

One could subtitle this passages "**a stranger to love is a stranger to God**." (David Smith, Expositor's Greek Commentary)

John gives a clear marker by which we can all test our profession of faith in Christ. Children of God should emulate their Father. Since He is **love**, His children should demonstrate His **love**. To never demonstrate love indicates that one is not a possessor but a pretender. Be aware that there are some commentaries that say exactly the opposite of what John is saying -- they make statements such as "it is possible to be saved and not love." They try to rationalize this aberrant interpretation by saying such a person is saved, but they are just not mature. Others say the lack of love is because the person does not have intimate fellowship with God, and so they are not "connecting with the nature of God's love." While a genuine believer may not always manifest divine love to other believers, to never demonstrate such love John says is to demonstrate that one does not know God.

As **John MacArthur** says "**Those whose lives are not characterized by love for others are not Christians, no matter what they claim**. The Jewish religionists (scribes, Pharisees, and other leaders) of Jesus' day, as well as the false teachers in the church of John's day, knew a lot about God, but they did not really know Him (cf. 1Ti 6:20; 2Ti 3:7-**note**). The absence of God's love in their lives revealed their unregenerate condition as conclusively as did their aberrant theology." (Bolding Added)

Hiebert agrees writing that "The negative with the present-tense participle (ho mē agapōn) pictures one who is unloving in attitude and practice. Again John's picture includes all those so characterized. The absence of love in the life of any individual proves that he "knoweth not God" (ouk egnō ton theon); he has never come to know God personally. The aorist tense apparently refers back to the time of his professed conversion. Not knowing this distinctive love reveals that he is still a stranger to God. The absence of this God-given love in his heart and life disqualifies such an individual as a trustworthy representative and interpreter of God because of the nature of God as love." ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#)) (See also related journal article - [1 John 4:7-21 - Excellent](#))

Does not love does - This is an impossibility. Unbelievers cannot love with agape love for they do not have the divine nature (2Pe 1:4-**note**), do not know the Divine Source (God) and do not possess the Divine Power (Spirit).

Does... Love (25)(agapao) is an active, dynamic verb (not an emotional feeling per se) and here is in the **present tense** calling for this to be one's lifestyle (none of us will ever achieve "perfection," but it should be our "general direction!"). **A T Robertson** adds that "Present active articular participle of agapaō = *"keeps on not loving."* Considering that this agape love is divine love implies that it must have a supernatural source, the indwelling Spirit (Gal 5:22-23-**note**). So if a man loves with this quality of love, it is clear indication he has the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand the failure to demonstrate agape love is a clear indication that this person lacks the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

As **W E Vine** says "**Love** can be known only from the actions it prompts. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son, 1 John 4:9, 10. But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects, Ro 5:8-**note**. It was an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself, cp. Dt 7:7, 8. Love had its perfect expression among men in the Lord Jesus Christ, 2Cor 5:14-**note**; Ep 2:4-**note**; Ep 3:19-**note**; Ep 5:2-**note**; Christian love is the fruit of His Spirit in the Christian, Galatians 5:22-**note**. Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments, John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1Jn 2:5-**note**; 1Jn 5:3-**note**; 2Jn 1:6. Self-will, that is, self-pleasing, is the negation of love to God."

Does not know God - John uses the negative **ou** which conveys absolute negation. This individual absolutely does not know God. In other words they have never been born again and are not genuine believers regardless of what they claim! This is not being judgmental. This is God's Word and He alone is the Judge (Who is also love!).

John Stott - For the loveless Christian to profess to know God and to have been born of God is like claiming to be intimate with a foreigner whose language we cannot speak, or to have been born of parents whom we do not in any way resemble. It is to fail to manifest the nature of him whom we claim as our Father (born of God) and our Friend (knows God). Love is as much a sign of Christian authenticity as is righteousness (1Jn 2:29-**note**). ([The Letters of John - Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

Steven Cole - The false teachers claimed to know God in a secret, deeper sense, but John is saying that they do not know God at all. They are not born again, because they do not practice biblical love. Their teaching and their behavior simply promoted self, not Christ. John's main application here is that children take on the characteristics of their parents. If we have been born of the God who is love, and thus have come to know Him, we will be growing in love. Or, the opposite is also true. The one who does not love shows that he does not know God. We need to take this to heart in a serious way. There are many in evangelical churches that claim to be

born again, but they do not love others and they do not even make an effort to do so. They are angry, unkind, impatient, abusive in their speech, self-centered in their daily lives, and judgmental of others. They spread malicious gossip with great delight, and they are defensive if you try to point out any of these sins to them. Of such people, **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** says (The Love of God [Crossway], p. 45), "*Oh, my heart grieves and bleeds for them ...; they are pronouncing and proclaiming that they are not born of God. They are outside the life of God; ... there is no hope for such people unless they repent and turn to Him.*" **John's first point is, because God is love, if we are His true children, then we must love one another.** ([1 John 4:7-11 Why We Must Love](#)) (Bolding added)

Vincent on **does not know** - "(Know is in) The **aoist tense**: did not know, from the beginning. He never knew... Truth and love stand related to each other. Loving is the condition of knowing.

A T Robertson adds that this is "Timeless aorist active indicative of ginōskō = has no acquaintance with God, never did get acquainted with Him.

Does... know ([1097](#))(ginosko) refers generally to knowledge gained by experience, not just by an accumulation of facts. In this case the knowledge has to do with the fact that there is absolutely no evidence that this person has experienced the enabling power of God's **Spirit**. For them "the old things (have not) passed away" and "new things have (not) come." (2Cor 5:17**note**) The only way to love with **agape love** is enabled by the Spirit (Ro 5:5**note**, Gal 5:22-23**note**) This person has no inherent power to manifest this supernatural God-like love. Thus they do not know the God Who is love!

Harris - This is in context most likely a reference to the opponents, who (in the author's opinion) have demonstrated by their failure to love their fellow believers that they are not genuine Christians. The only specific moral fault the author ever charges his opponents with is failure to show love for fellow believers when they are in need (1John 3:17**note**).

Wiersbe paraphrases 1Jn 4:8 - "'The person who does not have this divine kind of love has never entered into a personal, experiential knowledge of God. What he knows is in his head, but it has never gotten into his heart.'" ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Compare 1John 3:17 - "But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

GOD IS LOVE

For - Always pay attention to this **term of explanation** and ask at least "What is the author explaining?"

For God is love - John is simply explaining that they **do not know God** experientially as evidenced by the fact that they have no power to manifest the quality of love which God is (**See God's Attribute of Love**). Stated another way, they don't know Him because they don't "look" like one of His children! There is no "family resemblance."

God's love is: spontaneous in its **source**; universal in **scope**; long-suffering in **intensity**; self-sacrificing in **character**, aggressive in **action**; and constant in **duration**. (W Griffith-Thomas)

A E Brooke - Love is not merely an attribute of God, it is His very Nature and Being; or rather, the word expresses the highest conception which we can form of that Nature. (Critical and Exegetical Commentary- [1 John 4 Commentary](#))

God is love is not just a "quality" of God, but is the essence of Who God is forever and ever. Amen. There is an off-Broadway musical that has a song entitled "Our Love Is God." However that is **NOT** what the Bible teaches. You **cannot** reverse "**God is love**" 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.

Another reason you can't say, "love is God" is because love doesn't completely describe God, but God

does completely defines love. He is love. His nature is loving, and love can never be absent from His being or any of His actions. Everything God does He does in love because He is love. He is the source and origin of love. The climatic demonstration of His love came when He sent His own Son to die for us on the cross. Love must have an object of its affection! How can one say he loves, when there is nothing to love, there must be an object of your love... You are the object of His love!!! (Brian Bell)

Stott adds "Not only is God the Source of all true love; He is love in His inmost being... It is the most comprehensive and sublime of all biblical affirmations about God's being, and is repeated here twice (1Jn 4:8, 16)." ([The Letters of John Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

Hiebert explains that "Although John has just said that "love is of God" (1Jn 4:7**note**), 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). 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."

John Stott adds "Yet, if his judging is in love, his loving is also in justice. He who is love is light and fire as well. Far from condoning sin, his love has found a way to expose it (because he is light) and to consume it (because he is fire) without destroying the sinner, but rather saving him." ([The Letters of John Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

Marshal 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."

Adam Clarke - God hates nothing He has made. He cannot hate, because He is love. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends His rain on the just and the unjust. He has made no human being for perdition, nor ever rendered it impossible, by any necessitating decree, for a fallen soul to find mercy (cp 2Pe 3:9-note, 1Ti 2:4). He has given the fullest proof of His love to the whole human race by the incarnation of His Son, Who tasted death for every man. How can a decree of absolute, unconditional reprobation, of the greater part or any part of the human race, stand in the presence of such a text as this?

Spurgeon - Never let it be thought that any sinner is beyond the reach of divine mercy so long as he is in the land of the living. I stand here to preach illimitable love, unbounded grace, to the vilest of the vile, to those who have nothing in them that can deserve consideration from God, men who ought to be swept into the bottomless pit at once if justice meted out to them their deserts.

Love (26)(agape) is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. Do not mistake what the world calls love as God's love! While **agape** is not primarily a feeling, it is certainly not without feeling. It might be called "caring commitment." While it is a command to love one another, and it is thus a "duty," it is also and predominantly a delight. Agape is an attitude manifest by actions, caring, committed actions. **Agape** often involves sacrifice, and is supremely exemplified by Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the Cross.

Harris on God is love - a quality of God's character is what is described here. But this is more than just another way of expressing "God loves" because, as C. H. Dodd has pointed out, all God's activity is loving activity, so that 'loving' is not just one more activity that God carries out like ruling or judging. Because this is so, because all God's activity is loving activity and involves the expression of love, the author can rightly conclude that the person who does not love must not know God. If they did, they would act in love, because all God's activity is loving activity. Once more, as so often in 1 John, **conduct** is the clue to **paternity**. (Bolding added)

Warren Wiersbe - God is spirit as to His essence; He is not flesh and blood. To be sure, Jesus Christ now has a glorified body in heaven, and one day we shall have bodies like His body. But being by nature spirit, God is not limited by time and space the way His creatures are.

God is light. This refers to His holy nature. In the Bible, light is a symbol of holiness and darkness is a symbol of sin (Jn 3:18-21; 1Jn 1:5-10-note). God cannot sin because He is holy. Because we have been born into His family, we have received His holy nature (1Pe 1:14-16-note; 2Pe 1:4-note).

God is love. This does not mean that "love is God." And the fact that two people "love each other" does not mean that their love is necessarily holy. It has accurately been said that "love does not define God, but God defines love." God is love and God is light; therefore, His love is a holy love, and His holiness is expressed in love. All that God does expresses all that God is. Even His judgments are measured out in love and mercy (Lam 3:22-23). ([The Bible Exposition Commentary - recommended](#))

Steven Cole on the statement **God is love** - Almost everyone readily embraces that concept, but it is often misunderstood and taken to unbiblical extremes. Some misconstrue it to mean that because **God is love**, He overlooks or is tolerant toward sin. Some go so far as to say that because God is love, He could never condemn anyone to the eternal punishment of hell. But the Bible is

clear that God's love does not negate His holiness and justice, or vice versa. In 1John 1:5-**note**, the apostle stated, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." John also has said, "He is righteous" (1Jn 2:29-**note**). God's holiness and His love are both a part of His nature, and neither negates the other. In Revelation 20:15-**note**, the apostle of love writes about the final and eternal condemnation of all whose names were not found written in the book of life, that they were thrown into the lake of fire. So John did not see any contradiction between the concept that "**God is love**" and the concept of His punishment of the wicked in hell. So while it is vital that we affirm, "**God is love**," it is also vital that we affirm, "God is holy," and, "God is the righteous judge." We also need to think biblically about the statement, "God is love." On the surface, it sounds simple, but when you begin to consider all that Scripture teaches on this, it gets rather difficult. D. A. Carson wrote a perceptive little book, [The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God - free download](#) pp. 16-19) that the Bible speaks about God's love in at least five different ways:

- (1) The peculiar love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father (John 3:35; 5:20; 14:31; 17:24).
- (2) God's providential love over all that he has made. He cares for all of His creation, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission.
- (3) God's salvific stance toward his fallen world. God so loved the world that he gave His Son (John 3:16). Carson argues (p. 17, correctly, I think), "On this axis, God's love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect."
- (4) God's particular, effective, selecting love toward his elect. Many passages in both the Old and New Testaments affirm this aspect of His love (Deut. 7:7-8; Ro 9:13-**note**).
- (5) God's love is sometimes said to be directed toward his own people in a provisional or conditional way³ conditioned, that is, on obedience. Jesus tells us (John 14:21), "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

I might add that, perhaps another aspect of Christ's love was His special love for the apostle John, who refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23). Of course Jesus loved all of the disciples with a special love (John 13:1), but He loved John in a unique sense. Carson goes on (pp. 21-24) to point out that if we do not recognize these various aspects of God's love, and we make any one of them absolute, exclusive, or controlling all the others, we will get into difficulty. If all that we talk about is God's love for the whole world, we end up with a God so weak that He can't intervene to save us according to His sovereign purpose. On the other hand, if we only speak of God's love for His elect, we will not be able to offer the gospel freely to sinners. At the same time, Carson points out that we must not compartmentalize the various loves of God, as if they were each independent of the others. We must integrate these truths in biblical proportion and balance. And, he argues, we must be careful about various evangelical clichés. For example, to say that God's love is unconditional is true if you are referring to His elective love, but it is not true with regard to His disciplining love of His people. A sinning Christian needs to understand that he abides in God's love only when he obeys God. So, the seemingly simple statement, "**God is love**," is not quite so simple after all! But John wants us to know that the foundation for our love for one another is God, Who is the source of love and whose very nature is love. ([1 John 4:7-11 Why We Must Love](#))

God Is Love - A farmer placed a weather vane inscribed with the words "God is love" on top of his barn. One day a traveler stopped by the farm and watched the weather vane moving with the breeze. Then, with a smirk on his face, he asked, "Do you mean to say that your God is as changeable as the wind?"

The farmer shook his head and replied, "No. What I mean to say is that no matter which way the wind blows, God is love!"

The statement "God is love" implies much more than that God demonstrates His love regardless of the circumstances. It means that love is the essence of God's character. We will never be able to plumb the depths of His love—not even in eternity. But the apostle John pointed out that we can begin to understand it as we view the cross (1Jn. 4:9-10-**note**). As we see Christ dying there for us, we catch a glimpse of the beauty of the loving heart of God.

John went on to point out that if God is love, His children should resemble Him (1Jn 4:11-21-**note**). Consequently, if there is no warm glow in our hearts for our brother, if we do not thrill to the lovely name of Jesus, we may well question the reality of our conversion experience.

Do we know and reflect the love of God? By Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Unfailing is God's matchless love,
So kind, so pure, so true;
And those who draw upon that love

Show love in all they do.

—DJD

A person who knows God's love shows God's love.

Our Daily Bread - Deuteronomy 10:12-22 | Loved To Love - "A heart is not judged by how much you love, but by how much you are loved by others." I saw this quotation, attributed to the Wizard of Oz, on a wall plaque in a gift shop.

The Wizard of Oz may be a good story, but it's not a reliable source of spiritual information. God said something quite different. According to Him, the greatest commandment is to love—to love Him first and then others (Mark 12:29-31). Scripture says nothing about expecting to be loved in return. In fact, Jesus stated the opposite in His most famous sermon: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12-**note**).

When it comes to love, the important thing we need to know is this: All love starts with God (1 John 4:19-**note**). As Moses told the Israelites, God delighted in them to love them (Deut. 10:15), and because of that they were to love others, even strangers (1Jn 4:19). God's intent is that the people who receive His love will become the conduit of His love to others.

Apart from God—who Himself is love—none of us could truly love or be loved (1John 4:7-8). ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

"Love seeketh not her own," and so
He did not stay as God above,
But chose a manger and a cross
To show that He was Love.
—Wilmshurst

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. —1 John 4:8

1 John 4:7-11 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. —John 3:16

The words "For God so loved the world" are cherished by every believer. But without realizing it, their familiarity can dull our appreciation of their full meaning. I became aware of my own ingratitude one Christmas when I received a card that said, "God still loves the world!" That card has adorned my kitchen wall ever since. It reminds me that God's love is always and forever in the present tense.

John 3:16 also emphasizes that God's endless love for the world motivated Him to give His Son for its redemption. But what is meant by the word world? While God is concerned about our polluted planet, He is supremely concerned about the souls of those who inhabit it. Followers of Christ must love the world too. We must see it as a world of individuals who are lost and need to hear the gospel.

A mature Christian said to a young, enthusiastic believer, "You love to witness to people, don't you?" "Yes, I do," was the hasty reply. "But do you love the people you witness to?" he probed. He knew the possibility of witnessing to people without necessarily loving them as individuals.

Let's be careful we don't go through the motions without loving those we're talking to. Our witness will lack power without the force of God's love. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

To tell the lost about God's love
If we don't love them too
Is insincere and lacks the strength
Of words that should ring true.

—Sper

Those who love Christ have a love for the lost.

Love Hurts! - This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. —John 15:12

"Sometimes love sure hurts!" The mother and father were expressing the difficulties and heartaches of guiding their children through their teen years. "Maybe if we didn't love them quite so much it wouldn't be so hard," the husband added.

Even though love brings pain and sorrow, what would life be without it? In his book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis wrote:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness... The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers ... of love is hell."

To love is to take risks, to expose our hearts. Sometimes it hurts! It hurt Christ, but He kept on loving, even at the cost of His life. He commanded us, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12).

We must keep loving that spouse, that teenager, that neighbor, that co-worker. It is Christlike—and it's better than locking your heart in a coffin of self-centeredness. By David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Thinking It Over

How have you been hurt by those you've tried to love?

Have you been tempted to withhold your love?

How has someone shown patient love to you?

Nothing costs as much as loving except not loving.