

TEST 1: EXPERIENCING GOD'S INCREDIBLE LOVE

1 JOHN 03:01-03

Introduction

The love of God — there is no greater subject in the entire world. Why? Because if God loves us, it means that He is not far off in outer space someplace. It means that God is not distant, unreachable and unconcerned with the world. It means that God is not mean and vengeful, that He does not cause all the bad things that happen to us, things such as accidents, diseases and death. It means that God is not hovering over us looking for every mistake we make so that He can punish us.

On the contrary, since God is love, it means that He is bound to show us His love and act for us. It means...

- that God cares and looks after us.
- that God will help us through all the trials and temptations of life.
- that God will save us from the sin, evil, corruption and death of this world.
- that God will provide a way for us to be delivered from the coming judgment of His holy wrath against sin.

But note: if God loves us and has demonstrated His love to us, then He must expect us to respond. He must expect us to love Him. Love expects to be loved in return. In fact, if someone loves us and we do not receive his love, then his love never touches us. We never experience his love. To know love, we must receive love and share it. God loves us, but we have to receive His love in order to experience it. We have to enter a loving relationship with God in order to know the love of God. If we do not love God, then we can never know or experience God's love for us. His love will never touch us. It is absolutely essential that we love God if we wish to experience the love of God.

But note this: few people truly love God. Therefore, they have to walk through life without knowing God's love and care.

- ⇒ They have to face all the terrible trials and temptations of life alone. They have no help except what help man can give. They have rejected the love and help of God.
 - ⇒ They have to face suffering and sorrow and the death of loved ones all alone. They do not have the supernatural power of God to help. They have rejected His love.
 - ⇒ They have to confront death without really knowing if God is on the other side waiting to judge them.
 - ⇒ They have no hope beyond this life, feeling that this life may be all, but not quite sure, wondering if perhaps there might be something after death.
-

We could go on and on listing the things that a person has to face if he does not love God. And note: he has to face them all alone. But thanks be to God, He loves the world. He loves all of us. Therefore, any of us who want to know God's love and care can do so. All we have to do is respond to His love — open up our lives and receive His love and love Him in return.

This is the discussion of this section of John's letter: the love of God and our love for Him. How can we really tell if we love God? How can we make sure that God is pleased with us, with what love we show Him? There are six tests that measure our love for God, six tests that will show if and how much we love God (1 Jn. 3:1-4:21). The first test is the discussion of the present passage: Have we experienced God's incredible love?

- I. The privilege of God's love: we are called children of God (v. 1).
- II. The great hope and mystery of God's love: eternal transformation (v. 2).
- III. The incentive of God's love: purity (v. 3).

I. 1 John 03:01 *Believers, Children of God*

There is the great privilege of God's love, the great privilege of being called the *children of God*. Think how astounding this is, to be called a child of the Supreme Majesty of the universe, of the Supreme Intelligence and Power that created all things. There is no greater privilege than to be called a child of God. Two significant points are made.

- 1. It is the love of God that has given us the privilege of adoption. No man is a child of God because of any merit or work of his own. Man has rebelled against God.

Man has chosen to go his own way in life and to do his own thing. He has wanted little if anything to do with God. He has not wanted the restraints of God upon his life; he has preferred to make his own way through life. Therefore, man has rebelled against God:

- => ignored God => neglected God => cursed God
- => disbelieved God => rejected God => denied God
- => disobeyed God

It is this that makes the love of God so amazing. It was while we were rebelling and opposing God — while we were sinners and enemies of God — while we were standing against God — while we were in wrath and hostile with God — while we wanted little if anything to do with God — that God lavished His love upon us.

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Rom 5:9-10 *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Note that God's love is the giving of His Son to the world. God lavished His love upon us by giving His Son to die for our sins. We know that God loves us because He gave His Son to die for us. It is the death of Jesus Christ that makes it possible for us to become children of God. How?

=> When Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself, our sins were removed from us.

=> When Jesus Christ died and paid the penalty for our sins, the penalty was removed from us.

Therefore, God is able to receive us as righteous men and women, as being free of sin. When Jesus Christ died for our sins, He removed all sin from us; He freed us of sin. Therefore, God is able to accept us into His family, the family of God. God is able to adopt us as children of God.

John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

Rom 8:15 *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

Gal 4:4-6 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

2. The world does not know nor understand believers. This explains why believers are ridiculed, mocked, ignored, opposed, abused, rejected and persecuted by the world. The persecution may come at work, at school, in the neighbourhood or anywhere else; the world just does not understand why believers act and live the way they do. The world does not understand...
 - why believers separate themselves from the pleasures and things of the world.
 - why believers deny themselves and live sacrificially so that they can carry the message of Christ to the world and meet the needs of the desperate.
 - why believers go to church so much and talk so much about Christ.

Note why the world does not understand believers: because the world did not know Jesus Christ. Think about it: God's very own Son came into the world, but the world did not know Him. They wanted nothing to do with Him; they rejected Him. Now if the world rejected Jesus Christ, God's very own Son, they are bound to reject God's adopted children. The world is just unwilling to recognize and acknowledge that God is righteous and pure and just. They want nothing to do with a lifestyle that demands all that a person *is and has*. They are just unwilling to give sacrificially to carry the gospel around the world and to meet the needs of the world. They do not understand the nature of believers — that they are the children of God; that they can live no other life than that of following God. Why? Because believers know God in all of His love and the majesty of His being. This the world cannot understand.

Mat 10:17 *“Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.”*

Mat 24:9 *“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”*

John 15:20 *“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”*

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

1 Th 3:3 *So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Heb 12:3 *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

1 Pet 4:12-14 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

1 Pet 4:16 *However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

Psa 119:86 *All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me without cause.*

II. 1 John 03:02 *The Eternal Transformation*

There is the great hope and mystery of God's love, the eternal transformation that believers shall undergo. Note the great declaration: "Dear friends, now we are children of God." It is not that we shall be God's children; we are already God's children. If we have trusted and given our lives to Jesus Christ, we are *now* the children of God. Now note the declaration again: "Dear friends, now we are children of God." We know what we are now, *but* "we know that when he [Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The contrast is emphatic: we know what we are now, the children of God, *but* we do not know what we shall be like when Christ returns. Oliver Greene has an excellent statement on this point:

Luke 24:36-43 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

"We cannot understand a body, a personality, like that, we cannot comprehend such tremendous truth with these finite minds. Therefore God did not explain in detail what it will mean to be like Jesus. We will just wait and let Him show us in that glorious resurrection morning" (Oliver Greene. *The Epistles of John*. Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966, p. 112f).

Note the words: "When he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." God is light; therefore, when we first see God face to face, His light will be transmitted to us and we shall become light even as He is light. *The Pulpit Commentary* has an excellent explanation of this fact:

"'We shall be like him, because we shall see him.' God is light (ch. 1:5), and light is seen. In this life we cannot see the light of the Divine nature 'as it is,' but only as it is reflected: and the reflected light cannot transmit to us the nature of the Divine original, though it prepares us to receive it. Hereafter the sight, 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12), of the Light itself will illuminate us through and through, and we shall become like it" (A. Plummer. *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 22, p. 71).

The believer is to be made just like Christ, conformed to His very image. This means that believers shall be like Christ in person and in character. Believers shall possess a perfect body and being. (1 Cor. 15:51-57)

Eph 1:4; 4:24 *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless — eternally.*

Eph 1:5 *He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, — forever.*

1 Cor 15:49 *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. (cp. Ph. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2)*

This is a precious thought. It is more than just a general idea that believers are to be like Christ. It is a definite idea — the idea that what Christ is, believers shall be. The Scripture says in Rom. 8:29, He is “a Son” (uios); so believers are *sons* (uioi). The Scripture also says in Ph. 2:6, He was “in the very nature of God” (enmorphē theou); so believers shall be in the *very nature of God* (summorphoi). The believer is to have a *nature* (morphē) just like the *likeness* (eixon) of Christ — resemble Him in perfection as much as His very image is stamped with perfection. The whole precious idea is that Jesus Christ took the believer and purified and exalted him; therefore, the believer is to partake of the purity and holiness of Christ (see notes, Rom. 8:29).

This much is known about the body that we shall receive: it will be a body just like the body that Jesus Christ has. This is made abundantly clear by the glorious promises of Scripture:

=> “Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Ph. 3:21; cp. Mt. 13:43; Rom. 8:17; Col. 3:4; Rev. 22:5).

=> We shall be “conformed to the likeness of His Son” (Rom. 8:29. Cp. 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18.)

=> “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2).

The body of the believer is to undergo a radical change just as the Lord's body was radically changed. Several changes are promised the believer.

1. The body will not be perishable but imperishable.

1 Cor 15:42 *The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.*

Our earthly body is corruptible, perishable; our resurrected body will be incorruptible, imperishable. Corruptible, perishable means that our bodies age, deteriorate, die, decay and decompose. But our heavenly bodies will differ radically. They shall be incorruptible, imperishable: never age, never deteriorate, never die, never decay and never decompose. They will be transformed and never perish. They will be completely free from defilement and depravity, from death and decay.

2. The body will not be a body of dishonour but a resurrected body of glory.

1 Cor 15:43 It [the earthly body] is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

Our earthly body is buried in dishonour; our resurrected body will be raised in glory. Our body is dishonourable, and nothing shows the body's dishonour any more than its death and burial. Every human body is ultimately shamed and disgraced, degraded and deprived of all it has. Even human body is doomed to become nothing more than a handful of dirt. Think about it. Nothing could be any more dishonourable than to take the wonderful mechanism and beauty of a man's body and see it become nothing more than dirt. Yet that is exactly what happens.

But not the resurrected body. The human body will be transformed into a body of glory. Glory means to possess and to be full of *perfect light*, to dwell in the perfect light, brilliance, splendour, brightness, lustre, magnificence, dignity, majesty and grace of God Himself.

3. The body will not be a body of weakness but a body of power.

1 Cor 15:43 It [the earthly body] is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

Our earthly body is buried in weakness; our resurrected body is raised in power. While on earth our body is ever so weak: subject to sickness, disease, and a host of other infirmities and limitations; and eventually it becomes so weak that it dies. In death the human body is utterly powerless: helpless, devoid of any strength and capability whatsoever. In death the human body is so powerless it is unable to lift a single finger. It can do nothing, absolutely nothing.

The resurrected body, however, is raised in power. It shall have a mind and body filled with strength, might, health, authority and control. It will be a perfect body, never subject to disease, accident or suffering. It will be a body so powerful that it will be able to control its acts and the circumstances around it — all for good.

III. 1 John 03:03 Motive: Purity, Holiness

There is the great motive of God's love — purity. God wants a people just like Himself, a people who are pure and holy and righteous just like Himself. God wants us living with Him in fellowship and communion; He wants us worshipping and serving Him forever and ever. This is the reason God has saved us in Jesus Christ and given us the great hope of being eternally transformed: all so that we can live with Him in glory. If we keep our eyes upon the great glory that lies ahead, it stirs us to live pure lives. God has done so much for us — He has loved us with such an incredible love — that we are stirred to live as

Christ lived. We are aroused to please God, aroused to live a godly life. God is going to purify us, make us perfect in every sense of the word. In appreciation we must purify ourselves now, while on this earth. We must seek to be pure even as Christ Jesus is pure.

This is the test, the proof that we love God: Do we understand the incredible love of God? Are we stirred to live pure lives because of His incredible love for us?

Mat 5:8 *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*

Acts 22:16 *‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’*

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

1 Tim 1:5 *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

2 Tim 2:21 *If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

Heb 9:14 *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

James 4:8 *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

1 Pet 1:16 *For it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

2 Pet 3:11 *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*

2 Pet 3:14 *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

1 John 3:3 *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

Isa 1:16 *Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong.*

Jer 4:14 *O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbour wicked thoughts? ■*