

**International Sunday School Lesson**  
**Study Notes**  
**April 19, 2015**

**Lesson Text: 1 John 4:13-5:5**  
**Lesson Title: Believe God's Love**

**Introduction**

The author of First John is believed to be the Apostle John. He is known as "the apostle of love." He was also a man of strong emotions and strong personality. He and his brother James were called "*the sons of thunder*" (Mark 3:17). On one occasion in the gospels they were so upset when a Samaritan village refused to let Jesus stay overnight that they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy it (Luke 9:54). That's not very loving! On another occasion they were bold enough to ask Jesus to let them sit on the right and left side of Him in His kingdom (Mark 10:35-37). Again, not very loving.

The Apostle John may have started his Christian life with strong emotions and quick responses, but his writings are proof that he learned much about the Lord and how to temper his emotions. James was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:1-2) and many other apostles died young because of their commitment to Christ. It is believed however that John was the only one of the original apostles to die a natural death. He is said to have passed away toward the end of the first century while living in Ephesus. He had a long life to think about God's love.

In John's day, there were false teachers in the church teaching things that were untrue, like denying that Jesus was fully human and fully divine when He came to save us from our sins. They also claimed to have truths and spiritual knowledge that was not revealed in the word of God. This always leads to division within the body of Christ. That's why John keeps coming back to love. Love is a test of truth. And the biggest truth is that God is love and if God dwells in us, we will love. Without a doubt John believed God's love.

**God's Love and the Believer's Testimony (1 John 4:13-21)**

Verse 13

"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

John says that one test of knowing that believers "dwell" in God and God "in us," is that He has "given us of his Spirit." That is a *fact*. It's not about whether or not you feel the Holy Spirit or have some type of emotional experience. The Bible says when sinners are saved God the Father gives them "his Spirit."

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is evidence that believers are God's redeemed children (Romans 8:14-17; 1 John 3:24). "Hereby we know" means it is easy to understand that we live and remain in God and He is in us because the Holy Spirit lives within us. But how do we know the Spirit of God has taken up residence in us? John answers that question in verses 14-15.

#### Verse 14-15

"And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

While verse 13 gives us the *fact* that believers have the Holy Spirit living within, verses 14-15 give us the *evidence* of His presence. John gave a personal testimony in verse 14 to the fact that God sent His Son into the world to save the lost. John opened this epistle with the words, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us*" (1 John 1:1-2). John actually "seen" the incarnated Christ. He was close to Jesus and was there when He died on the cross (John 19:25-27). He also was with Jesus following His resurrection (John 20:19-23; 21:1-2, 20-23). So, in John's case, his own experience of seeing and being with Jesus gave him a solid testimony of salvation and the Spirit's presence in his life. But what about us today?

John says you know you have been given the Holy Spirit because "we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." In other words, it is your belief in the gospel that is evidence of the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit. Remember, you couldn't believe or know "that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" without the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

What John saw by sight, we see by faith. And if we are able to "confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth" in us and we dwell "in God." To "confess" is to acknowledge "that Jesus is the Son of God." To "confess" is more than just an intellectual acknowledgment with words. John is not talking about reciting a creed. He is talking about a saving relationship. John understood the important fact that a sinner must acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the divine Son of God and thus be the only Savior from sin (Romans 10:9). Salvation is based on a living Lord. God. Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and believers are united with Them.

## Verse 16

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

This is a transitional verse because it repeats several truths which John had already stated, and it sets the stage for what he wants to say in the following verses. Christians “know” and “believe the love that God hath to us.” A true Christian knows that “God is love.” That means that God personifies the self-sacrificing love that He is and proved on the cross. “God is love” doesn’t mean that is all God is. He is much more but He is essentially “love.” That is His nature. That is His character.

If “God is love,” and we know He is, then those that “dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” Look at your life. Search your heart. What do you see? If you believe by faith that God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, you believe that because the Holy Spirit revealed that to you. And by that you can know that the Holy Spirit lives within you. If you understand and believe that, you also understand that God did this out of love because “God is love” and therefore if you are God's, you are characterized by “love.” Although none of us love perfectly, the gospel we believe and the Holy Spirit within us causes us to love. This is evidence that the God of love is in you because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **God’s Love and the Believer’s Certainty (1 John 4:17-21)**

## Verse 17

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.”

Having dealt with God’s love toward believers, John now deals with the believer’s love and how it affects them. “Herein” refers to our abiding relationship with God referred to in verse 16. Because the believer abides in God, “our love is made perfect.”

When the Holy Spirit has done His work in your heart and has awakened your blinded eyes to see the darkness of your sin and has given you the light and caused you to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, then “is our love made perfect.” That does not mean we become sinless. It means the believer has a maturing love evidenced by confidence in the face of judgment. God’s perfecting love is in you and gives you confidence as you look ahead to the “day of judgment.” This “day of judgment” seems to be a reference to the Great White throne of Judgment scheduled for the end of time (Revelation 20:11-15). Believers have nothing to fear from that terrible event. They have the certainty

that the penalty of their sin has been paid in full by the blood of Jesus Christ. This is not just a theological fact. It is a living certainty and confidence. “Boldness” means “confidence” and “assurance.”

“Because as he is, so are we in this world” is a wonderful statement. But what does it mean? Commenting on this statement, Doctor J. Vernon McGee writes, “We are just like the Lord Jesus. He was raised from the dead, and He has life. Well, we have that life too, and He is at God's right hand for us.” Since Christ is righteous and He is in us and we in Him, we who believe in Him are righteous right now in this present world. In other words, our standing in the world is identical to Christ's. That is the ground of our confidence and certainty.

### Verse 18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

Verse 18 is a further explanation of verse 17. Part of the certainty of God's “love” in the believer is the absence of “fear.” The perfecting and maturing love of God within the believer dispels and dismisses any “fear” or *phobia* in regard to being judged or punished when we stand before God. That's what John means when he says, “because fear hath torment.” “Torment” means “infliction or punishment.” If you are afraid to stand before God there is a problem believing God's love.

“He that feareth is not made perfect in love” means if you are afraid of facing the Lord in judgment, then you are “not made perfect in love.” Someone who professes to be a believer but fears the Lord's return and standing before God gives evidence that something is missing. That something may be salvation or it may be a failure to mature in the love of God. Now please keep in mind that all believers will have regrets when we stand before the Lord to be rewarded for the deeds done since our conversion. But that is not what John is talking about here. He is talking about being afraid to meet God because you aren't sure you are saved or ready to meet the Lord. If you “fear,” then John says you are “not made perfect in love.”

### Verse 19

“We love him, because he first loved us.”

Think with me about this powerful statement of John in these eight words and then ask yourself why he says it. We often repeat this verse and rejoice in this verse because of what it means to us as believers. And that is perfectly appropriate and needed. The only way any of us who are saved could “love” the Lord is because “he first loved us.” The Greek word “first” is *protos* {pro-tos} and

means “foremost in time, place, order or importance.” John is saying, “We as believers are able to love because we were loved by the Lord first.”

Now, think what these eight words meant to the false teachers. Just as the false teachers claimed that they knew God and they possessed knowledge of spiritual things others did not, they must have also said, “We love God.” So John is speaking these eight words with powerful conviction. When he says, “We love him, because he first loved us,” John is sending the message that this *agape* love, this self-sacrificing “love” that is in us didn’t originate in our minds or our wills or our personalities. It originated with God Himself!

### Verse 20

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

After John’s eight words of conviction in verse 19, John makes a powerful application in verse 20. He calls the false teachers “liars.” You cannot “say” you love God if you hate your brother in Christ. The word “say” can refer to verbal or written declaration. John uses the word “say” here in kind of a boastful way. These false teachers were confidently and no doubt boastfully saying they loved God. John said they were “liars.” The word “liar” means “a falsifier.”

Furthermore, John asks, “For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” It is absolutely absurd to claim to love the invisible God while at the same time not loving the brethren, who are the visible representatives of God.

John’s message is simple and easy to understand, but it is difficult to live! It’s easier to teach this truth and talk about this truth than it is to live this truth. Lack of love for one another reveals that our claim to know God is false. If you “hate” or detest your brother in Christ and fail to show love in a practical way, your claim to know the Lord is not real.

### Verse 21

“And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Okay, enough John! Is he not saying the same things over and over again in each verse? Yes. And you want to know why? Those in the churches to whom John was writing were in deep trouble with these false teachers. And those who were following these teachers had a superiority or “better than you” attitude that was causing division in God’s family. So John says again, “This commandment we have from him, That he who loveth God love his brother

also.” God’s “commandment” requires a “double love.” If you “love God” you will “love your brother also.” It’s not something you do if you feel like doing it. It’s a “commandment.” It’s an obligation for every Christian.

### **God’s Love and the Believer’s Conformity (1 John 5:1-3)**

In the opening verses of chapter 5, it seems that John is saying the opposite of what he said in chapter 4. In chapter 4 he’s been telling us that the way we know that we love God is by the way we love each other. Now, John is going to tell us that the way we know we love each other is by the way we love God. In other words, how can a believer know that he loves his brothers and sisters in Christ? The answer is by loving God.

#### Verse 1

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”

“Whosoever believeth” are those people who have been “born of God.” “Belief” is a consequence of the being “born of God” or as it is called in Scripture, the new birth.

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” means every person who believes by faith that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah sent from God and the Savior of the world, “is born of God.” “Born of God” literally means “to be born out of God.” The words “is born of God” is speaking about the new birth. What does it mean to be “born-again?” Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:7, “*Ye must be born again.*” When God the Father works a supernatural work that brings the sinner out of darkness into the marvelous light of saving grace, the new birth takes place. The new birth comes from above. There is no possible way for a sinner to give spiritual birth to himself because he is “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1). There is no possible way to inherit the new birth from your relatives or grow up into the new birth. It is a supernatural act of God whereby the old life of the sinner passes away and all things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

“And everyone that loveth him that begat him loveth him also that is begotten of him.” That means that if you have been born again and became a child of God by believing that “Jesus is the Christ,” you love God because He has birthed you into his family and you also love “him” or those in the family of God by the new birth.

#### Verse 2

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”

If you “love God, and keep his commandments,” you will “love the children of God.” In 1 John 4:20-21, we learned that it is impossible to claim love for God and then hate a brother. That is contrary to God’s commandment to love one another. John states the same truth here in verse 2. We know that our love toward other believers is genuine when it is rooted and grows out of our love for God Himself. This makes obedience to His commandments possible.

There were people in John’s day who claimed to be Christians but they had no sense of relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ. “By this,” by the way they love, they are declaring themselves not to be born of God. John says, everyone who loves the Father loves His children as well. It’s the very nature of a child of God to love other children of God.

*Note: Sometimes it is difficult to love people because the love we attempt to have toward them is rooted in things such as likes and dislikes. The believer’s ability to love one another must be rooted in our love for God.*

### Verse 3

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

The reality of the believers love for God is proven by obedience to “his commandments.” Notice that “commandments” is plural. Sometimes when the word “commandment” is singular, it refers to the law in general. But when the word is plural, “commandments,” it refers to all the “commandments” of God. Especially the Ten Commandments. Every one of them. That’s why John say, “His commandments are not grievous.” For those who are born again, loves God, loves God’s children, it is not a burden to obey God’s commandments.

The word “keep” in verse 2 means “to continue to do them.” It refers to the activity of the believer in simply obeying and doing what God requires. However, the word “keep” in verse 3 is a different Greek word. Here, the word “keep” means “to regard, to protect.” The word “keep” in verse 2 speaks of *action* and the word “keep” in verse 3 speaks of *attitude*. There are some professing believers who “keep” or do the right thing but their attitude is all wrong. They become a burden. But the child of God who is loving as God teaches us to love will demonstrate that love and obey God’s commandments without them being a burden.

*Note: Sometimes unbelievers say, “I’d hate to be a Christian and have to live by a bunch of rules and commandments.” They have a wrong picture of what the Christian life is. Obeying the commandments of the Lord is not “grievous.” His commandments are not a burden or something that weighs us down.*

## **God's Love and the Believer's Victory (1 John 5:4-5)**

### Verse 4-5

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

John had already written about false teachers and how they were to be tested to prove that they had the wrong spirit (1 John 4:1-4). He had also assured his readers that they could overcome these wicked individuals because *“greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). He takes up this subject again, reminding born-again believers that we are victorious over the world.

The “world” in verses 4-5 refers to “Satan’s world system” of deception and wickedness. Those who have been “born again” has “overcome the world.” Someone who has “overcome” is someone who is “unconquerable.” It is someone who has “defeated all opposition.” Through Jesus Christ the believer is an “overcomer,” a victor over the invisible power of evil that is designed to doom men and women to eternal hell.

John repeats his statement in verse 4 in the form of a question in verse 5. “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” No unsaved person can hope to overcome the powers of evil and darkness. Only those who have been born again and believes by faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God have victory here and now and for all eternity. The Apostle Paul said it best, *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift”* (2 Corinthians 9:15).

### **Conclusion**

Without a doubt John believed God’s love. He knew the meaning of love well, and he shared what he had learned with his readers. John also knew that the unseen God reveals Himself through the visible love of believers. It is vital that those who profess Christ as Lord and Savior love one another (John 15:13; Ephesians 5:1-2). Love is the evidence that God dwells in us and we in Him.

Do you believe God’s love or do you find it difficult to love the Lord and your brothers and sisters in Christ? Is obedience to God’s commands more a burden than they are a blessing? Have you truly been born again? If not, John says it’s time for you to believe God’s love.

Amen.