



## International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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### **1 John 4:7-12 Commentary New Revised Standard Version**

#### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

**(1 John 4:7) Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

Thus far in 1 John 4, John has given two tests for Christians to use to discern a false teacher or false prophet from a true Christian teacher or true Christian prophet, and to distinguish true Christian teaching from false teachings.

First, to test teachers and prophets, people must know that a teacher or prophet is influenced by or indwelt by a spirit. A true Christian teacher or prophet is influenced by and

indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of God (see John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:13, 1 John 4:2,6). False teachers or false prophets are influenced and indwelt by evil spirits that John called “spirits of error” (see 1 John 4:6). In Colossians 2:8, the Apostle Paul called these spirits “elemental spirits” and warned about deceptions from false teachers and false prophets with the words: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” Jesus called these spirits “unclean,” (Matthew 12:43; Mark 5:8, Luke 11:24). Evil spirits are unclean morally and spiritually, and they will try to influence people to do what is unclean. The entertainment industry (which is often influenced by unclean spirits) seems to specialize in showing what is unclean, and what they show can influence people to do what is unclean or think uncleanness is okay to practice. The unclean spirit, the spirit of error, the devil, the father of lies, influenced and directed the actions and teachings of the religious leaders who plotted to crucify Jesus, and Jesus said of them in John 8:44, “You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” False leaders, false teachers, and false prophets worked in the days of Jesus, John, and Paul, and they still work in our days when unclean spirits of error

influence and indwell them and lead them to teach and try to mislead God's people. Many have gone out into the world that John called "antichrists;" they were once in the church, but they have left the church mentally and spiritually, if not physically. They try to mislead the true followers of Jesus Christ in the church and those who want to believe the truth about Jesus Christ according to the Bible, come to faith in Jesus Christ, and enter the fellowship of believers.

Second, to test teachers and prophets, John wrote that Jesus Christ and His Apostles were "from God," and false teachers and false prophets were not from God. John grouped himself with the Apostles when he wrote in 1 John 4:6, "We are from God." John wrote that true Christians, Christian teachers, and Christian prophets "listen to" (hear, learn from, study, and obey) those who are from God. The Apostles and the other Christians who eventually wrote the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit, were from God (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17). From reading John's Gospel and Letters, we know that it would not be too strong to say that today, true Christians, Christian teachers, and Christian prophets will "listen to" (believe and obey) the Bible, and the Holy Spirit within them will help them understand and teach the truth of the Bible. Therefore, the Bible must be the ultimate and final authority for true Christian belief and practice. A false teacher or false prophet will deny the fact that the Bible is true in all it affirms. They will reject some of the Bible's teachings about Christian ethics, Christian morality, and

how Christians should live (see Romans, chapter 1). They will promote uncleanness in ways evil unclean spirits influence them. They will denounce whatever in the Bible condemns the immoral and unbiblical ways they want to live. They will work inside and outside the church to take “captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits” those inside and outside the church who will listen to them and believe the falsehoods they teach. The Bible must be our only and ultimate guide and standard of truth, and false prophets and false teachers will always deny some portions of the Bible and ultimately deny Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible.

Third, to test teachers and prophets, in 1 John 4:7, John wrote, “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” A false prophet or false teacher will not abide in love and practice love as Jesus and the Apostles loved God and others as described and recorded in the Bible. John warns Christians and others that they may think and say they believe the truth and all the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, but the next test is “do they love one another”? Do they love their brothers and sisters who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? A false teacher or false prophet will not love others (or God) as God commanded because they are not born of God—they do not know God. They may know much *about* God, but they do not know God because they do not love—love is from God. If someone does not love, we know they are not from

God. As we read the Bible, we learn more about true love, especially as shown by Jesus—the perfect expression of the love of God in the world. False prophets and teachers will not listen to the message of the Apostles, the message of the Bible. Christians know and love God and they love to listen to the Bible’s teachings “because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” God’s people are born of God, and they know God; therefore, they love God, and they love Jesus, and they love to listen to God’s prophets and teachers in the Bible. As Jesus said in John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” They will refuse to listen to, believe, or follow someone who teaches what the Bible does not affirm. God’s people listen to the Bible’s teachings, and they love one another. These are some of the measures John gives us so we can discern false teachers from teachers who know and love God.

John heard Jesus teach on love, and especially on love for one another, even our enemies. God is love and all love comes from God. Without God, there would be no love anywhere in our world. Even as God created all things and makes life possible, with every living thing depending on God at each moment for existence, so we depend on God for all the love we give and receive. Those not born of God are by their moral and spiritual nature self-centered and selfish—they love themselves supremely. However, they cannot truly love even themselves, because if they truly loved themselves, they would live and do what is truly best for themselves; that is, love God more than themselves and

love others as they love themselves. At the foundation of their lives, any “love” we see them express flows from their personal self-interest, from what they want from God or someone else. Those born of God love God supremely, because God in Jesus Christ first loved them and saved them from sin by His sacrificial death and gave them the gift of eternal life. Jesus Christ has so changed true Christians by a new birth that their moral and spiritual nature is now God-centered and filled with love for God, love for others, and a right love for themselves—love that God has given them because God is love and God indwells them.

The first two tests John gives are intellectual and spiritual tests. Do we (and the teachers and prophets we hear) believe the truth about Jesus Christ, and do we (they) teach the truth about Jesus according to the Bible? Does the Holy Spirit (Who is the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of God) help us (and those we hear teaching and preaching) understand, believe, and practice the teachings of the Bible as we are learning them? The last test is ethical or moral and applies to the right application of Jesus’ teachings and the Bible—most notably regarding true love. Do we (and the teachers and prophets we hear) practice love for one another? Do we practice true love, a sacrificial love that seeks to obey all the commands of Jesus and the Bible’s teachings? Jesus taught, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal

myself to them. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (John 14:15; 14:21; 15:10). Remember what John wrote in 1 John 2:9-10, "Whoever says, 'I am in the light,' while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling." Christians do not love in order to be saved; rather, they love because Jesus Christ loved them, died and rose again for them, and has saved them from sin and death that they might live and truly love as God loves. There can be no cause for stumbling in those who truly love as God loves, because God lives in them.

**(1 John 4:8) Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

Whenever we meet a person who is obviously always self-absorbed or self-centered, we know they do not know God as God wants them to know Him. They may know a great deal "about" God and "about" the Bible's teachings and "say" they believe in God. But only through trusting in Jesus Christ with sincere faith will they be transformed, born again, and come to know God personally through the Scriptures, prayer, praise, singing, and worship. Only through Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit will they turn from selfishness to devoted, loving, God-directed living, to praying for others, and to serving God and others without concern for selfish advantages over others. They will not try to use God or others for their selfish personal

benefit. True love flows supernaturally from knowing God.

**(1 John 4:9) God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.**

From creation and the Scriptures, we know something of the love of God, but God made His love real to us and personal to us by revealing His love supremely through Jesus Christ—God’s one and only begotten Son, fully God and fully man. God is not self-centered, and He proved His love for us by giving Jesus Christ to us to be crucified by us and die for us to save us from sin and eternal death. Yes. Our sins led to the crucifixion of Jesus just as though we had nailed Him to the cross with our own hands. To save us from the punishment we justly deserved, Jesus died as a sacrificial substitute for us and then rose again to live and love within us, within all who would trust Him as their Lord and Savior. In Romans 5:8, Paul wrote, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” In self-giving love, God focused on us and our needs despite our sins and rebellion against God and His Kingdom. In self-giving love, the Father sent us His Son as a gift that we might be born again and love as God intended. We can truly live our lives now and forever to the fullest within the circle of God’s love—both God the Father and God the Son deserve our love and undivided loyalty.



**(1 John 4:10) In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**

God did not send Jesus Christ into the world because we loved God and sought God. Before Jesus came into the world, we did not know God and we did not love God, but God knew us, and God loved us. God knew us through and through, but God still loved us. God did not love our sin or our sinful ways or our morally degrading habits, but God loved us. Another good word to describe the love that God the Father has for others and us is “charity.” A truly needy person needs “charity,” because they cannot help themselves. Before Jesus Christ came into the world we were so morally, spiritually, and intellectually bankrupt and needy that we needed “charity” from God. In charity, God gave us what we needed when He sent Jesus Christ to die in our place as a sacrifice for our sins; thereby, Jesus’ sacrifice enabled God the King and Judge of the universe to uphold His law and justice when graciously, lovingly, and mercifully forgiving us for our sins and rebellion against Him. Because Jesus Christ died in our place as a sacrifice, God did not need to punish us in order to uphold His law and kingdom. In charity, God gave Jesus to us to meet our needs and now Jesus lives within us to meet our needs and the needs of others through us. In charity, we give to others what we wisely can to meet their honest needs. To give, we deny ourselves some time and treasure, even if we would not consider our giving to be sacrificial or costly. We came to understand true love or true charity

when God extended His love toward us and sacrificed His Son for us to free us from slavery to sin and satan, so we could turn from our sin and selfishness to love God and others. We love after first receiving God's love through Jesus Christ. And now, we love as God the Father and Jesus love, but in a much smaller way, when we share the gospel to save and bless others, even sacrificing our time, treasure, and talents. Perhaps a better definition of the word "love" than "charity" would be "benevolence." To live with a spirit of benevolence means to live with a "disposition to do good," to live "looking for ways to do good." When Jesus walked and talked in our world, Jesus demonstrated benevolence. Jesus always showed His "disposition to do good" to others; for this reason, He always healed the sick. When Jesus lives within His followers, they show forth their "disposition to do good" to others. The Holy Spirit will empower and guide the followers of Jesus to love in ways that show forth their "disposition to do good," which will draw others to them and to Jesus who loves and lives within them.

**(1 John 4:11) Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.**

Notice how John expressed his love for all who would read his letters. To love others, especially those in the family of God, we need both the loving and indwelling Holy Spirit and sound instruction (telling us what we ought to do as Christians). We need to be told to love one another sometimes and to fulfill our moral obligation to love

others, because we can easily forget to do so in tense situations, especially when fellow believers (and those of the world) forget to show love for us and instead express their dislike or even hatred for us in ungodly ways.

**(1 John 4:12) No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.**

We cannot see God with our physical eyes: they are not equipped to do so. The finite physical cannot see the infinite spiritual. We could never see or understand God in His fullness with our limited intellectual capacity. I doubt we know any created thing (not even ourselves) completely. But we can assuredly see and know some truths about God; the truths God revealed in the Bible, and we continue to expand our knowledge of God as we study the Bible. We can also see and know whether we are acting in loving ways toward others. If we are expressing love as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we know we are God-centered and not living like those of this world (see 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians 5:22-23). We can know that God is living in us and helping us love God and others. We can know if we have a disposition to bless and help others, if we look for opportunities to do good to others, and if we do some things that meet the needs of others. As we grow in knowledge of God and the truth (Jesus said, He is the way, the truth, and the life: John 14:6), and as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit more and more, God's love is made complete in us; God's love is perfected in us—God

loves in and through us as He loved in and through Jesus, and some will be drawn to Jesus as He loves them through us.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What reasons did John give for the followers of Jesus to love one another?
2. What two truths did John say about a person who is born of God?
3. What did John say about a person who does not love?
4. How did God reveal His love to us and why did God do so?
5. How did John describe God's love compared to our love?

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