

S T U D Y G U I D E



Loved by God

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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God Is Love

INTRODUCTION

Scripture tells us that God is love. For this reason, many Christians boldly proclaim that their God is a God of love. Is it possible that the God of love some people are talking about is actually an idol? If so, then how should we understand 1 John 4:8? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul teaches us about the biblical nature of the God of love and what it means for how we ought to love one another.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To consider the fullest meaning of the statement “God is love”
2. To recognize how the sin of idolatry is often committed by overemphasizing God’s attribute of love against His other attributes
3. To show how the biblical nature of God’s love informs Christians how to love one another

SCRIPTURE READING

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

—1 John 4:7–11

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. Introductory thoughts about love

1. An evangelist can get a crowd if he speaks in meaningless terms about the love of God.

2. There is no word in the English language that has been stripped of the depth of meaning such as the word *love*.
 3. Love has come to have almost a mystical, magical meaning in the secular culture.
 4. The tendency is to come to the biblical text with ideas of love that have been drawn from the romanticism of secular culture, popular music, art, and literature.
 5. The goal of this series is to glean from Scripture the biblical concept of the magnificent attribute of the love of God as it relates to His work of redemption.
- B. First John 4 provides the classic statement with respect to the love of God.
1. The Apostle John enjoins Christians to demonstrate love for one another by grounding this admonition in the very character of God.
 2. This love is *agape* love, Christian love, which is a love that comes from God Himself.
 3. This is not a natural love or a love that is found in the flesh of mankind but is a love that has its origin in God Himself.
 4. It is a divine gift and is one of the fruits of the Spirit that is awakened in our souls when we are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 5. It is a love that comes from God, and in this kind of love God is seen as the foundation, fountain, and the source of all true love.
- C. First John 4 provides further details about the love of God.
1. Not every human being who experiences human, natural love is therefore born of God.
 2. True biblical love only comes from regeneration, from those changed inwardly by the power of the Holy Ghost.
 3. If a person has that ability to love, that is a clear indication that he has been born of the Holy Ghost.
 4. No one who is un-reborn or unregenerate has this kind of love and no one who has been regenerate lacks this kind of love.
 5. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
- D. John's usage of the literary expression "God is love."
1. John makes a distinction between equating "God is love" and "love is God."
 2. This does not mean that anyone who has a romantic feeling in their heart or any sense of affection for another person thereby has encountered God.
 3. God is so loving, and love is such an intimate aspect or attribute of His character which is so closely linked with love, that He is love.
 4. The problem in the culture of our day is a view of God that carries a cheap view of love, in which all of the other attributes of God are removed from His character and swallowed up by the attribute of love.
 5. The most fundamental inclination as fallen human creatures when contemplating the character of God is to exchange the truth of God for a lie.

E. The sin of idolatry

1. Any time we exchange the glory of the true God for a lesser concept, or one that is constructed by our own minds, we are engaged in idolatry.
2. When God is stripped of His attributes of justice, holiness, and sovereignty, it is just as much an idol as something made out of wood or stone.
3. We have to be very careful that we do not substitute for the biblical God a god who is exhausted in his character and being by this one attribute of love.
4. God is not made up of parts, like one part sovereignty, one part justice, one part immutability, one part omniscience, one part eternality, and one part love.
5. God is all of His attributes at all times, so to understand any single attribute of God you must understand that attribute as it relates to and connects with all the other attributes of God.

F. The holy love of God

1. There is a profane view of love in our culture that is celebrated in popular entertainment that has nothing to do with the love of God.
2. The term *holy* in Scripture has two distinct meanings:
 - a. That which is other, different, or apart.
 - b. That which is absolutely pure without any blemish or touch of evil.
3. God's love is transcendent, not common, not profane, not ordinary but instead is majestic and sacred and goes far beyond anything the creature can ever manifest.
4. The love of God is always a love that has no mixture of selfishness, wickedness, or sin within it.
5. His love is *sui generis*—in a class by itself. He shares in part this love with His creatures and expects us to manifest to each other.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. There is no word in the English language that has been stripped of the depth of meaning such as the word *love*.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Upon what does the Apostle John ground his admonition for Christians to love one another?
 - a. Natural abilities
 - b. The very character of God
 - c. The character of Christians
 - d. Faithful obedience

3. Where does true biblical love come from?
 - a. It is born from God through sanctification by the power of the Spirit.
 - b. It is born from God through glorification by the power of the Spirit.
 - c. It is born from God through regeneration by the power of the Spirit.
 - d. It is born from God through justification by the power of the Spirit.

4. What is the most fundamental inclination as fallen human creatures when contemplating the character of God?
 - a. To deny that God exists
 - b. To believe that God is sometimes unfair
 - c. To presume upon His grace and mercy
 - d. To exchange the truth of God for a lie

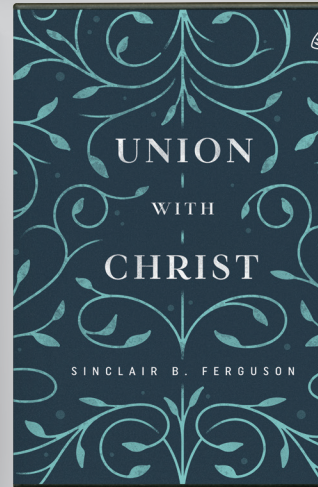
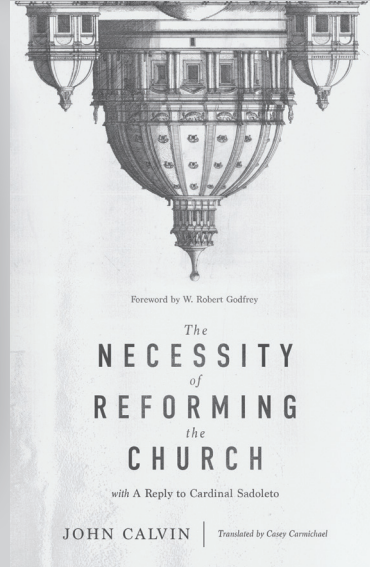
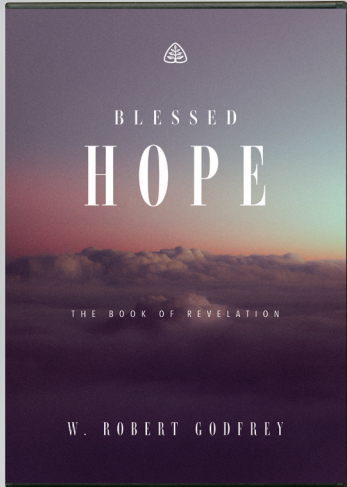
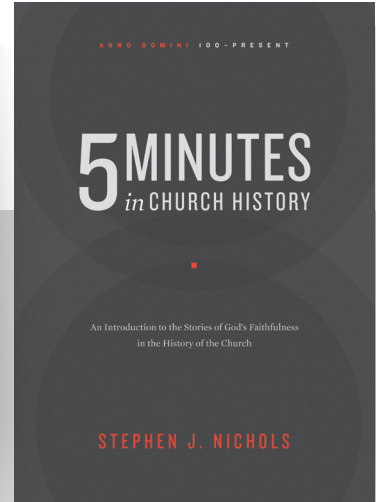
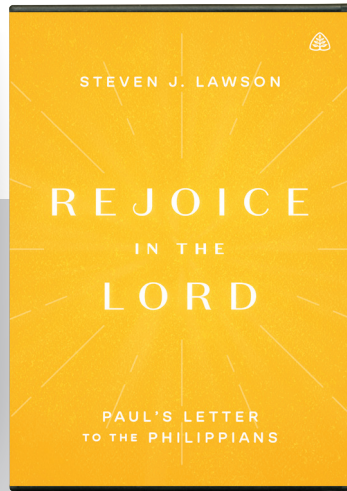
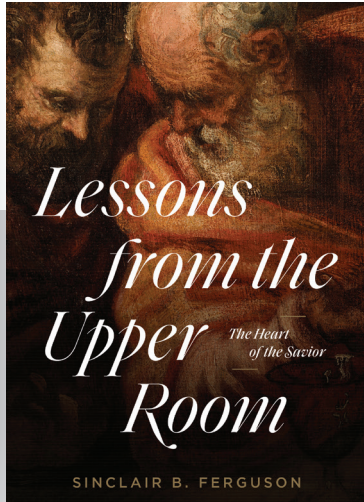
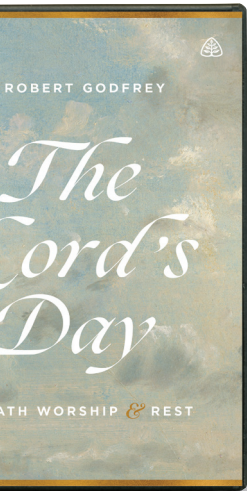
5. When it comes to the attributes of God, it can be said that:
 - a. God is all of His attributes some of the time.
 - b. God is all of His attributes at all times.
 - c. God is some of His attributes at all times.
 - d. God is some of His attributes some of the time.

6. God's love is a *holy* love that is different or set apart from other forms of love. What other meaning does Scripture ascribe to the term *holy*?
 - a. That which is internally blessed and externally prosperous
 - b. That which is somewhat pure without noticeable blemish
 - c. That which is absolutely pure without any blemish or touch of evil
 - d. That which is morally good, admirable, and to be emulated

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever found yourself interpreting Scripture based upon your own culture or situation? What is the danger in doing this with the concept of God's love?
2. Describe how your concept of love has changed over the years. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your ability to love God and others?
3. How might overemphasizing God's attribute of love versus His other attributes create an inaccurate view of God? How has our culture become more sophisticated in this kind of idolatry?
4. What are some examples of the profane, common view of love that is celebrated in our culture, yet has little or nothing to do with the love of God? In what specific ways is God's love set apart?

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