

God Is Love

1 John 4:7-21

WHAT WE FOUND

Both folds are open, and the letter's two great sentences are complete: **God is light** (1:5) and **God is love** (4:8, 16). The pair is the point: light without love is a searchlight; love without light is sentiment; God is both. And the grammar runs one way only: God defines love, love does not define God, and the definition has an address: "God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (4:9).

The letter's greatest sentence: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the *expiation* for our sins" (4:10). Session Two's word came home: hilasmos, expiation (cousin to hilastērion, the mercy seat), is what love looks like when it meets sin, and the Father is the sender, not a reluctant deity whom the cross persuades to love us. The Son's self-offering is truly made to the Father in satisfaction for sin, but the love comes first: the Father sent the sacrifice he receives. "We love, because he first loved us" (4:19): grace is previous to every good motion in us. Sinai's self-proclamation ("merciful and gracious... abounding in steadfast love," Exodus 34:6) has been made manifest, with a face.

The invisible God's visibility strategy is us: "if we love one another, God abides in us" (4:12), which makes every loving community an unanswerable apologetic and every loveless one a veil. Perfect love casts out punishment-fear progressively (4:18): remaining fear is a growth chart, not a verdict; its treatment is more abiding at the mercy seat. And the exam is always visible: the brother we have seen (4:20). Loved first, go first.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Homily 7*

Preaching on this very passage, Augustine dared the summary the Church never forgot: love, and do what you will. He did not mean license; he meant that love, real love, the kind defined at the cross, is the root from which only good can grow: whether you hold your peace or cry out, correct or forbear, let it be from love, for from that root nothing can spring but what is good.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 23, a. 1*

Thomas defines charity with a warmth his reputation conceals: charity is friendship between God and man, founded on God's sharing his own happiness with us. Not admiration from a distance, not employment in a cause: friendship, mutual, conversational, and destined for the vision of the Friend. Tonight's verse stands behind that definition: only because God is love can the creature's final end be friendship with him.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux *Story of a Soul, Manuscript B*

Searching Scripture for her place in the Church, Thérèse found it in tonight's summit: in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love. She understood that love is not one vocation among the others but the vocation inside all of them, the heart that makes the whole body act, and her little way is 4:19 lived at kitchen-sink scale: loved first, she spent her life loving back in small things.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Memorize 1 John 4:10 this week, the letter's greatest sentence, and pray it every morning before your feet hit the floor: loved first, sent-for, expiated. Let the day start from initiative received.

2.

Do one act of first-mover love: toward the brother-exam you named, take the initiative you have been waiting for them to take: the text, the apology, the invitation, the forgiveness. He first loved us; go first.

3.

Read Hosea 11:1-9 once this week, slowly, and let God's own soliloquy over Ephraim be his soliloquy over you. Write down the phrase that undoes you.

MEMORY VERSE

"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **1 John 5:1-12** and count the witnesses you find in verses 6-8. The letter is heading toward the single sentence that explains why it was written, and the Knowing thread we planted on night one is almost home. Two sessions remain in the epistle.

Catechism Connection: CCC 221; 733; 1822-1829