

3f - God Is Love

Read 1 John 4:7-5:5

Why are we so infatuated with love? It dominates our songs, poems, movies, and novels. We value it above every virtue. We long to find it and fight to keep it. Everyone has an opinion about it, but no one seems to have enough of it. How can we explain our insatiable appetite for love?

Love is central to the Apostle John's first letter. He helps us to understand its source, its nature, and its significance for our lives as Christians. Most importantly, John enables us to see what the often-quoted statement "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16) really means.



1. Why do you think love dominates music, movies, literature, and so many other aspects of our lives?

God our Creator said "it is not good for man to be alone" and created a helper who was like Adam to be with him. Hashem has made us social creatures. We instinctively recognize this in ourselves and thus experience externally imposed "aloneness" as psychic pain. Consider the use of solitary confinement as a punitive measure.

However, humans need more than human companionship. We were created to experience *d'vekut* with God. God's original intent was for humanity to bear His image and to be in communion with the Godhead. We see what made that essential difference in humanity's creation. In Genesis¹, we read, "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

All the other creatures were created with souls, but only in humankind was the "nephesh," the breath of God, breathed. The original golem named Adam received a spirit to complement his soul and passed it on to all other humans ever since. Unfortunately, that wonderful gift is a double-edged sword because it was passed on infected with sin².

However, it is in our spirit that true worship takes place. After all, doesn't it say "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"³?

That communion, that mystical union between the spirit of man and of God called "d'vekut", was exemplified when the Son of God came walking in the Garden in the cool of the day⁴. We lost the right to a full enjoyment of that communion when Adam and Eve willfully and unrepentantly chose to disobey their Creator.

However, God is always prevenient, which means He always initiates the relationship. Adam and Eve sinned and sought to withdraw and hide. God came looking for them. He sought Abraham's friendship⁵. He referred to David as a man after His own heart⁶, let John lean against His chest⁷, and restored traitorous Peter to fellowship⁸. He even used mass-

¹ Genesis 2:7

² Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10

³ John 4:24

⁴ Genesis 3:8

⁵ 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8

⁶ Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:13-14

⁷ John 21:20-24

⁸ John 21:17

murdering⁹ Paul who “ravaged the church”¹⁰ to write two-thirds of the New Testament and bring the Good News to the Gentiles¹¹.

It was never God’s intent that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life¹². If we end up in hell, it is literally over His dead body¹³. However, if we are willing to submit our will to His and trust His Son’s sacrifice on the cross to be sufficient for our salvation, we can go to heaven.

Yet, He’s not satisfied with that. He wants to give us more. According to the Master, He is inviting us into d’vekut – a deep, intimate, passionate communion, a mystical union with the Godhead¹⁴.

2. Read 1 John 4:7-5:5. Children usually resemble their parents. How does this principle relate to those who claim to be God's children (1 John 4:7-8)?

1 John 4:7-8 HCSB Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (8) The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

As Moshe stood in Yahweh’s presence and as a result walked away with a shining face, so only those who are to some degree like God truly know Him. If you are “humanish” it is likely that you only hang out with humans. If you are “devilish” it is because you’ve been listening to and following the Devil. Those who have been truly following the Lord become “godly” or “god-like”. As it is written,

- **Leviticus 11:45 HCSB** For I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy.
- **Matthew 5:48 HCSB** **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**
- **Romans 12:2 HCSB** Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Now, here in 1 John, the Apostle John essentially tells us “You must be loving because God is loving. Be loving as your heavenly Father is loving. Do not be conformed to this self-centered, narcissistic, egocentric age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you can be loving.”

3. Does this mean that everyone who loves is God's child, regardless of his or her beliefs? Explain

All humans are God’s children in the sense that He created them all. However, Hashem does not claim all His creatures as His. Here, Jesus identifies the religious leaders who were refusing to accept the Mashiach’ on His own terms as children of the Devil.

- **John 8:43-44 HCSB** **Why don't you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to My word. (44) You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of liars.**

He identified them as Lowlanders.¹⁵

⁹ Acts 9:1-2

¹⁰ Acts 8:3

¹¹ Acts 9:15-16

¹² 2 Peter 3:9

¹³ Romans 5:8

¹⁴ John 17:20-21

¹⁵ Highlander/Lowlander: Genesis 13:5-17; John 8:23; Galatians 4:26 (cp Philippians 3:20 and Revelation 21:2ff); Hebrews 11:9-10 (cp John 14:2-3; Hebrews 12:22-24), 13

- **John 8:23 HCSB** "You are from below," He told them, "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

In fact, He not only challenged their identity as God's children, but even as Jews! Only those who exercise the same faith as Abraham and imitate Abraham's obedience are truly "sons of Abraham."

- **John 8:38-39 HCSB** I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father, and therefore you do what you have heard from your father." (39) "Our father is Abraham!" they replied. "If you were Abraham's children," Jesus told them, "you would do what Abraham did.
- **Romans 9:6-8 HCSB** But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. (7) Neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants. On the contrary, **in Isaac your seed will be called.** (8) That is, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but the children of the promise are considered seed.

We are only sons of Abraham's legitimate wife Sarah when we do good and practice faith.

- **1 Peter 3:6 HCSB** just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do good and aren't frightened by anything alarming.

4. What does John mean when he says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8)?

Lowlander culture encourages a shallow and selfish view of love. It has turned these words around and contaminated our understanding of love. Lowlanders think that love is what makes them feel good and that it is acceptable to sacrifice moral principles and even others' rights in order to obtain such "love". However, that is not real love; it is in fact the direct opposite – selfishness. God is not that kind of love. God is real love. He is holy, just, and perfect. If we are His children, we will strive to love in the same way that He does.

5. How does 1 John 4:9-10 emphasize the nature and depth of God's love?

Jesus is God's only *begotten* son. The rest of us are adopted. All believers are sons and daughters of God, but only Jesus possesses this especially unique relationship. Yet, the Father was willing to sacrifice the sanctity of the Trinity, the special *d'vekut* that He shared with the Begotten Son, in order to make *d'vekut* with us possible.

Nothing sinful or evil may exist in God's presence because besides being love, He is also absolute goodness; absolute holiness. He cannot overlook, condone, or excuse our sin as though it never happened. He will not wink at our immorality, our pride, our addictions. He loves us but His love does not mean He will be morally lax in order to be with us. However, if we "kiss the Son"; "bow the knee" and acknowledge His kingship; sacrificially become the Mashiach's disciples; then we will not have to bear the penalty of our sins.¹⁶ We will be acquitted by His atoning sacrifice.¹⁷

6. "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). In what small or large ways can we sacrificially love each other?

- a. We consider each other family and show family affection for each other. (Romans 12:10)
- b. We are not afraid to say "I love you" or to show physical affection. (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14)
- c. We seek unity of doctrine, spirit, and goals. (Philippians 2:2; Ephesians 4:3)

¹⁶ 1 Peter 2:24

¹⁷ Romans 5:18

- d. We speak loving truth to each other. (Jeremiah 9:5; Zechariah 8:16; John 16:13; Romans 9:1; Ephesians 4:25)
- e. The only competition we have is in outdoing each other in honor. (Philippians 2:3; Romans 12:10)
- f. The greatest love is demonstrated by being willing to die for one another. (John 15:13)

7. How does our love for each other make the invisible God visible (1 John 4:12)?

As the Mashiach' became the "image of the invisible God"¹⁸ and did so by demonstrating humility and sacrificial love, so we too can help others to better understand the Father by not only humbly serving others but also by living holy lives.

- **1 Corinthians 14:24-25 HCSB** But if all are prophesying, and some unbeliever or uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all and is judged by all. (25) The secrets of his heart will be revealed, and as a result he will fall down on his face and worship God, proclaiming, "God is really among you."

8. In 1 John 4:13-16, what tests does John give us for determining whether "we live in Him and He in us"?

- a. We possess the Holy Spirit. We are demonstrating the Spirit's fruit.
- b. We are testifying of what we have personally seen and experienced.
- c. Our testimony matches that of the Word of God.
- d. We publicly and proudly confess the deity of the Son and the claims that truth makes upon our lives.
- e. We know and believe in God's love regardless of our external circumstances.
- f. We imitate that love.

9. If our lives are characterized by love, why can we be confident rather than fearful on the Day of Judgment (1 John 4:17-18)?

We know that if we are (to whatever limited degree is possible) "as He is here in this world", where sin is the norm and the Devil is the "god of this age"¹⁹ then the same will be true in *Ach'arit ha yamim* (Lit., "after the days"; the end of days) when *olam hazeh* ends and *olam habah* begins for everyone.

There is no fear in true love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. Because the Messiah has taken our punishment, has removed the "sting of Death", then there is no need for fear as we approach the Bimah Seat.

10. It certainly seems possible that we could love God and yet hate one of our brothers and sisters. According to John, why is this impossible (1 John 4:19-21)? Explain.

We may be able to do so temporarily, but God will prick our conscience. If need be, He is willing to even make us sick or even kill us if we stubbornly refuse His discipline.²⁰ In other words, He will conform us to the image of His Son if He has to kill us to do it!

11. If someone is really born of God, what will be true of that person (1 John 5:1-5)?

- a. They will believe that Jesus is the Messiah.
- b. They will believe that He was born of God.
- c. They will believe that the Father loves Him as His child.
- d. They will love all of God's children. (cp 1 John 2:9)

¹⁸ Colossians 1:15

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:4

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:30

- e. They will love God.
- f. They will keep His mitzvot.
- g. They will not consider this to be an onerous duty but a joy.
- h. They will have demonstrable results of victory over the “world”.

12. If some of these things are not true, does that mean a person is not a Christian? Explain.

The Bible does command us to be sinless and expects us to push for that goal just as Paul pursued his goal of Christ-likeness.

- **1 John 1:6 HCSB** If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.
- **1 John 2:3-4 HCSB** This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands. (4) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," without keeping His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Having said that, all humans sin, and no one may claim to have achieved perfection – even after salvation.

- **1 John 1:8-10 HCSB** If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say, "We have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.
- **Philippians 3:13-14 HCSB** (13) Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, (14) I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

So, the proper balance to hold is to understand God's demands for holiness and righteous living, to set our hearts to the pursuit of that goal, but to juxtapose those two things against the knowledge that we will often need an Advocate.

- **1 John 2:1 HCSB** My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father--Jesus Christ the righteous One.

We should not use the fact that we will undoubtedly sin at some point and that God has already provided an Advocate as an excuse for sin.

- **Romans 6:15 HCSB** What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not!

Victory over sin is ours for the taking. The only thing we lack is a sufficient desire to possess that victory.

- **Genesis 4:7 HCSB** If you do right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it."
- **Romans 6:13-14 HCSB** And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness. (14) For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under law but under grace.

13. How has this passage deepened your understanding of God, the children of God and love itself?