

Know and Believe the Love of God

Scripture Reading: I John 4:7-16

It is one thing to believe in God (i.e., to know about God). It is another thing to believe God (i.e., to respond properly to God because your knowledge of God compels you to (Hebrews 11:6; James 2:19-20). Even so, it is one thing to know about God's love and believe in it, factually. It is another thing to know and believe God's love, so that it is life-changing (Ephesians 3:19). Talking about God's love is more than a sentimental journey. This merits careful examination.

When certain words are used often, the familiarity sometimes makes us pay less attention to the significance of those words. In John 4:16 we want to consider the words "*known*" and "*believed*." At the beginning of this letter, John spoke of an intimate knowledge of the Lord that came through experience. This knowledge was being passed on to us – offered to us through the communication of words, so that we could share in the apostles' fellowship (partnership) with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The reception of these words would also bring fulness of joy (I John 1:1-4). Think of it! Without having personally met Jesus, we can have intimate fellowship with the Father and with the Son of God by believing the words of the apostles (John 17:20; 20:26-31; I John 4:1-6; I Peter 1:8-9,18-25; Romans 10:17).

I John 4:16, John used the word "*believe*" often – The verb form of the Greek word is used 99 times in the Gospel of John and 10 times in the book of I John. This Greek word means "to believe in such a way that you are persuaded to trust and rely upon something." The KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV are very similar in translation. But let's compare two other translations:

"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us..." (NIV)

"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in His love..." (NLT)

We see that such belief creates confidence and evokes decision with action. Hence, we have the expressions "*obedience to the faith*," "*the obedience of faith*," "*obey the truth*," "*obey the Gospel*," etc. (Romans 1:5-6; 6:16-17; 10:16; 16:19; 26; II Thessalonians 1:7-8; Hebrews 5:9; I Peter 1:2,22; 4:17).

I John 4:16 is telling us that we need to have a knowledge and belief in the love of God that creates an environment of love for us to dwell in. We need an understanding that provides a wonderful unity with the Father, with His Son, and with each one who mutually shares this living faith. This understanding – this knowledge and belief separates us from the world and its unloving environment. Please consider I John 2:15-17; 5:19-20; John 17:1-3,11,14-21; Galatians 1:3-4; 6:14; Romans 12:2; 8:28-39.

What does it look like to know and believe the love of God? I John 4:1-21 gives us some basic ideas:

- Love the truth of the gospel and exercise discernment (I John 4:1-6).
- Love the brethren (I John 4:7-8,11-12,20-21).
- Continue in the knowledge of and dependence on the source of true love – God (I John 4:9-10,13-16,19).
- Exercise God-given confidence that overcomes fear (I John 4:17-18).

What other Scriptures describe this knowledge of and dependence on God's love?

- Perceiving/knowing/understanding God's sacrificial love and turning it into an active love towards the brethren (I John 3:16-19 – note how God demonstrated His love through action: Romans 5:6-11).
- Christ's love constrains/compels us to live unselfishly (II Corinthians 5:14-15).
- Comprehending and knowing the love of Christ results in being filled with the fulness of God (Ephesians 3:14-19 – we become like Him. See II Corinthians 3:18).
- God's love is an environment that protects and preserves us (Jude 1:20-21).
- God's Spirit communicates God's love to us, so that fear, shame, and confusion are dispelled from us (Romans 5:1-5; II Timothy 1:7; Romans 8:15-18,31-39; I John 4:13-19).

Note: When considering perfect love (I John 4:17-18) we should not only consider love to the brethren, but also love to our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).