

7. 1 John 4:7-21 of a Verse by Verse Study of the Letters of John and Jude

The first part of chapter 4 establishes the Christian's obligation to resist the antichrist and the false prophets. In the rest of the chapter, he establishes the place of love in the Christian life. Verse 6 tells Christians how to recognize the difference in the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. In 1 John 4:6, John writes, "6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood." Under the general theme, God is love; John summarizes the Christian obligation to love.

God Is Love

1 John 4:7-12:

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

John uses the affectionate phrase, "Dear friends," in order to discuss the subject of love. The love of one another comes from God, for love comes from God. John remembered, perhaps, the words of the savior that he recorded in John 3:16-17:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Those that love have been born of God and know God. Both love and knowledge of God are important to the Christian's salvation. John had recorded Jesus in John 6:44-45 teaching:

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Paul made knowledge of God a condition of salvation in 2 Thess 1:7-8, "When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." God showed his love by sending his one and only son that we might live. This is the free gift of God to us, according to Paul in Rom 6:22-23:

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins repeats itself from chapters 1 and 2. In 1 John 1:7, 9, he taught:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

In 1 John 2:2, he introduced the idea of an atoning sacrifice, "2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

The premise of this passage is that since God loved us, we ought to love one another. The corollary to this premise is that God lives in us, and his love is complete in us.

Relying on the Love of God

1 John 4:13-16a:

13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

The conclusion in verse 12 is that God lives in us and his love is made complete. The way that we know we live in him and he in us is because of his Spirit that he has given us. John saw the Son of God, the Savior of the world and testified to that fact. Once again, John refers to the beginning of the letter where he establish the empirical evidence by which the apostles knew assuredly that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. In 1 John 1:1-2, John wrote:

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

To have God live in us and we in him requires us to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. Otherwise, why would we ever rely on the love of God?

God Is Love and There Is No Fear

1 John 4:16b-18

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Since God is love, we do what we do because we live in God and God lives in us and not out of fear. The day of judgment is coming with the expectation of possible destruction by fire. The Revelation pronounces its certainty in Rev 14:7, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” According to the Hebrew letter, a raging fire will consume the enemies of God in Heb 10:26-27:

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Yet, because of the love of God in us and because we are like him, there is no fear. The perfect love of God drives out fear. Those who fear the judgment are not made perfect in love.

Loving One’s Brother

1 John 4:19-21

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

John concludes with the assertion that if anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. The next word, “For,” draws a conclusion that is the gist of the entire passage: “For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” The most basic requirement in living the Christian life is to love our brothers.

He summarizes most succinctly, “Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” This love of the brother must be in the same manner and degree with which God first loved us:

He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.