

# 1 John 4:7-21: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     1 John 4, verses 7-21 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.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

[ 1 : 0 0 ]     So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love, abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

Because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. John has already argued that love for each other necessarily accompanies being born of God.

Now, in the latter half of 1 John chapter 4, he will make another argument for the importance of love, from a somewhat different angle of approach. He now focuses upon the fact that love is from God, and that God is love.

[ 2 : 0 7 ]     Love is not merely some secondary created reality. It finds its source in God himself. If the devil is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning, one who seeks to destroy, God is the one from whom love comes.

Hence, it manifests the spiritual paternity of all who love in truth, as they act in a way that reflects God's own character. Anyone who does not love cannot have been born of God, because they bear no resemblance to his character.

Love is a theological reality. John has previously affirmed, in chapter 1 verse 5, that God is light. Now he affirms that God is love. God doesn't possess qualities in the way that we do as created beings.

God is identical to his attributes. God doesn't just happen to be loving. He is love. This is an important theological statement. This should not be reversed to say that love is God, as our society is often inclined to do.

Nor should we think that love is whatever we feel love to be. By declaring that love is rooted in God, John challenges our belief that love is a human measure by which all things can be assessed according to us.

[ 3 : 15 ] Rather, if we want to know what love really is, we shouldn't look in our own hearts, which are deceitful and twisted, but should look to God instead. By declaring that God is love, we discover that, in its home country, as it were, love is neither a feeling nor an abstraction.

Love is God's very personal nature and existence. We will learn what love is, as we learn who God is. There is no true understanding of love, for which the love of God is not the North Star.

And what love is has been manifested to us because God has revealed his love to us in Christ. The revelation of love isn't found in our love for God, but in God's astounding love for us, in his sending of his own Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This theologically grounded love should spur us to love each other. No one has seen God, and this is a point that John also makes in John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 18.

John once again turns here to the issue of assurance.

[ 4 : 37 ] We know that we abide in God, and that he abides in us, because he has communicated his love to us by his Spirit that he has given to us. As we walk in the love of the Spirit, we will be assured of sonship, knowing assurance through our experience.

And as the Spirit bears witness to the Son, so the Spirit, in addition to leading us in the way of God's love, in which we know assurance of sonship, leads us to confess Jesus as the Son of God, the one that the Father sent to be the Saviour of the world.

The Spirit causes us both to look outside of ourselves to Christ, and gives us an assurance within, as we look to God's revelation of love in his Son, and walk in his footsteps.

God's love shouldn't just be an abstract thing in our understanding. It is a love for us, and we should know it as such. Love is a two-way, mutual thing. It is God's love for us, and it is our answering love that he has produced in us by his Spirit.

Our love feeds upon the knowledge of his love, and this is the way by which love is perfected. This gives us assurance and confidence as we face judgment. We know that we do not belong to the world, but that we are sons of God in Christ, those who are being conformed to his character by the Holy Spirit, which he has given to us.

[ 5 : 54 ] Here we might recall Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, verses 14-26. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you loved me.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me, because you loved me, before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me, may be in them, and I in them. In these statements, from Jesus' high priestly prayer, in John chapter 17, we see something of the meaning of the words, as he is, so also are we in the world, being unpacked.

The perfection of love in us, as it develops from our assurance of God's own love for us, casts out fear, and the terror and apprehension with which we might otherwise relate to God.

We know God as a loving Father, and so are no longer afraid of him in the way that those who do not know his love are. Fear cowers before the threat of punishment, but as we grow in love, we fulfil the great commandment of God, the commandment that sums up all other commandments, and our hearts are set at rest.

True love finds its starting point in God. God's love comes first, before our love for him. Our love is an answering love, a love that is learned through the experience of God's love for us.

However, love for God has, as its necessary companion, love for neighbour. The person who hates his neighbour lies when he claims to love God. Indeed, it is our love for the brothers, that our love for God can be most powerfully seen in.

In the Gospels, Jesus declares that the law can be summed up in two commandments, in Matthew chapter 22, verses 35 to 40, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment, and a second is like it.

You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. In 1 John chapter 4 verse 21, we see that these two commandments are inseparable, and that the second follows naturally from the first.

And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. The first commandment and the second commandment are two sides of the same coin.

A question to consider. What other statements in Scripture of the form God is love can you think of? What do such statements teach us about God?

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