
KINGDOM FAMILY [PART 6]

Love Each Other – 1 John 4:7-21

Every good story has its pivotal scene.

The first letter of John is no different. We now come to what some people consider the high point of the letter.

John is writing to people who don't have this letter in their Bible, so they would have listened to it in one sitting. As a letter of encouragement and written to teach them, John is compelling them toward a specific response that God has laid on his heart.

He is working in the context of those who think that Jesus didn't come in real life, or that He wasn't really a real person, or that Jesus taught that there is secret knowledge that you need to know to ascend to a higher understanding or relationship with God – the Gnostics.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The test of the person and the community that has been 'born' of God is that they love one another. This isn't how they come into relationship with God, but instead, throughout this passage, this is the evidence of the family nature.

God is love. John's not saying that God is an abstract concept, a feeling, emotion or state of being that we call 'love'. He's showing us, and is about to unpack, the fact that God, at the core of His nature, is loving, acts out of love, works in love, gives and receives Love.

9 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. 10 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.

John now reminds us of how this whole thing works: this passage reminds us of John 3:16.

Love isn't defined by us, by the world, by our own finite efforts; love is defined by God sending Jesus.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

If this is what God is like, it has to mean something!

“God’s love for us is only complete (perfected) when it’s reproduced in us” (Stott 165)

13 By this we know that we abide 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 Saviour of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Here, John starts to do a reciprocal thing, not just God in us or us in Him, but both.

This sums up the first section of this passage. John restates the gospel message in the context of love.

16 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.

A deep and essential key here is that we “have come to know and to believe the love God has for us”.

17 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.

This abiding love, that perfects God’s love in our lives, gives us confidence for the day of judgement.

Because as he is, so we are, in this world.

18 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.

God loves you, He's not mad at you.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(Romans 8:1-4 ESV)

Notice John says the one who fears is not perfected in love, not the one who is punished. Even if you haven't got it all sorted yet (and who does), you're not going to be punished, you are just going to notice that fear still seems to show up.

This means that any place where there is fear in your life, God wants you to experience His love at a deeper level.

19 We love because he first loved us.

And so, the only way we can love, is because God took the initiative to love us first. Notice 'we love': there is no object defined here, not God or people or others. We are in a state where our interface with everything is love.

20 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. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

"If you love me, you'll obey my commandments" – Jesus (John 14:15)

Discussion Questions:

Q: What does 'love one another' look like for you personally?

Q: What could it look like for our church community?

Q: What would be the impact on our community outside the church if we loved them in the same way?

Q: John talks about the Gospel here, when he mentions Jesus as 'God's only son', and talks about His sacrifice for us. How does Jesus' sacrifice set a standard for you in your love to other people?

Q: Have you ever thought about the importance of love in the Gospel?

Q: John exchanges the talk about "eternal life" here for the importance of being loved by God and loving each other. How would this be good news to the people in your life who don't yet know God?

Q: If God's love is only fully 'perfected' when we are loved by Him, we love Him, and we love others, does that mean God isn't sufficient in Himself? Or does it mean something else?

Q: What does it say about the nature of God and His love if it isn't 'complete' until we abide in it?

Q: If love and fear don't mix, what aspects of your life reflect fear instead of love?

Q: In these areas discussed in the above question, where do you feel the expectation of punishment?

Q: What would it feel like if God wasn't planning on punishing you, but instead loving you?

Q: How would you approach daily life if fear was pushed away by God's love? What would you do differently?

Spend some time praying, taking the time to exchange with God areas where there is fear of punishment and failure, and receiving from Him an awareness of His love and acceptance. Pray for one another where appropriate. Make sure you journal down God's responses and the encouraging words of others as you pray.