

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 4:7-21

Love: An Overview

INTRODUCTION

We have traversed through the main body of the letter where the author is leading the children (τεκνίον teknon), who have permitted antichrists to spread their false message that Jesus is not the Messiah, to come into conformity with the Apostolic teaching about Jesus the Messiah.

What we also have come to understand in the second half of John 3 is that the antichrists' lack of love has influenced the children as well. Throughout the letter, the author pulls the reader into an understanding that love is vital. I am not big on pithy statements, but I want to give you something that I thought of.

If maintaining doctrinal truth is the highest responsibility of the believer, love is the highest expression of our fellowship. Doctrine is the backbone—love is its expression. One upholds truth, the other expresses it (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Peter 1:5-8).

Remember the nature of this letter. The letter takes the form of a fatherly appeal—gentle in tone yet deliberate in guiding the reader's thinking. Its purpose is to draw the audience into alignment with apostolic truth concerning the identity and message of Jesus Christ. Through thoughtful repetitive layering, variation in phrasing, and utilizing contrast and tension, the author leads the reader not merely to hear, but to think about the truth—wrestling with the question, understanding the answer, and the outcome is to return (or maintain) to belief in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ and love one another.

1 JOHN 4:7-21 – GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- The contrast between the children and the antichrists ceases. There is one reference to “the one who does not love” in verse 8. After that there is no mention of the enemy until Chapter 5 verse 10 with a simple reference to “the one who does not believe God” and in verse 18 “the evil one does not touch him.” This indicates that the remainder of the letter is not a contrast between the antichrist and the children is over and the point of the rest of the letter is to inform and challenge the children.
- The repetitive layering is very evident in this section. We can count how many times it mentions God in connection with love. There are eight statements of such a statement but notice they are all stated a little differently.
 - Love is from God
 - God is love
 - Love of God manifested
 - He loved us
 - God loved us
 - The love which God has for us
 - God is love
 - He first loved us

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- The basic concept is: “God loved us so we should love one another.” This begs the question: “Why take 15 verses to say that?” Whenever any of us take the long way around to get to a simple point we all know why we do it. The author does this for the same reason.
 - He builds context which leads to greater clarity
 - He uses repetition to emphasize importance
 - He engages the audience emotionally
 - He causes the audience to reflect and think critically through the content
 - He establishes credibility of the instruction

1 JOHN 4:7-21 – 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 – COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Both of these passages are beautiful regarding love. But one has been called “the love passage” while one is known but not emphasized. This study is to demonstrate how these passages should be used to complement each other to help us see the big picture of the believers responsibility

- **1 John 4:7-21:** This passage emphasizes that love originates from God, who is love. It highlights how God’s love was revealed through Jesus Christ coming into the world and sacrificial atonement and urges believers to love one another as a response to God’s love. It also addresses the absence of fear in perfected or completed love, and the inseparable link between loving God and loving others.
- **1 Corinthians 13:1-13:** This passage underscores the supremacy of love. It begins by asserting—such things as speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith—are meaningless without love. It then describes love’s characteristics and contrasts its permanence with the temporary nature of spiritual manifestations, concluding that love is the greatest of faith, hope, and love.

Both passages emphasize love and the fact that is it paramount to how believers live together. In 1 John the letter focuses on its source (God) and reason why we love. In 1 Corinthians, the letter emphasizes its practice (characteristics) and superiority over other functions.

1 John 4:7-21	1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Philosophical, logical thesis with conclusion	Reflective, teaching through imagery
Theologically weighty	Highly emotional
God is love; we ought to love	If I..., Love is...
The repetition is layered for depth	The repetition is anaphora
Use of logical flow	Use of poetic metaphor
Love is intrinsically connected to God	Love is necessary above all other behaviors
Love is demonstrated through Jesus’ sacrifice	Love is characterized in ideals
The absence of love results in fear	The absence of love results in profitless life
Love is the epitome of the believer’s behavior	Love is the epitome of the believer’s behavior
Grounds love in God’s identity	Practical outworking and eternal value

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1 John 4:7-21 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 both highlight love as central to God's character and a core duty for believers, though from different perspectives. 1 John stresses love as God's identity reflected in believers through Christ, urging sacrificial action in response to God's love. 1 Corinthians focuses on love's essential role, portraying it as the greatest virtue that gives lasting value to all actions and surpasses even faith and hope. Together, these passages affirm love as the primary work of believers.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 – WHY LOVE IS GREATER

Encompassing Nature of Love

1 Corinthians 13:2 – If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. Paul is speaking in hyperbole in verses 1-3 demonstrating the full human experience in every way. The definition of Faith is “that which is believed.” The content of Bible is called the Faith of God, The message of the message of salvation is sometime referred to as the Faith of Christ. When a person believes the message, it becomes “their faith, your faith.” To have all faith then would be the whole content of God’s doctrine and Paul understands it and believes it.

1 Corinthians 13:7 – bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Paul expresses love as encompassing hope. Love fully encapsulated will never doubt the future promises of God.

Love is greater because it integrates and expresses faith and hope, directing them toward the good of others.

Love’s is Eternal – Faith and Hope are temporary:

1 Corinthians 13:8-10: Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of* prophecy, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away

Faith and hope, tied to this world and are limited and temporary. Love is a quality of God and is eternal in nature.

Faith will cease when truth is fully revealed in eternity. The object of faith (God, Christ) is fully seen, doctrinal transmission becomes obsolete.

Hope is fulfilled when those expectations arrive (Romans 8:24)

Love, however, “never fails.” Since love is founded in God’s eternal nature it will persists in eternity. Without the encumbrance of sin, our love for each other will be full realized as well.

Implication: Love’s eternal endurance makes it greater than faith and hope, which are bound to this age’s limitations.

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Love Is the Foundation for God's Ideal Society:

Matthew 22:36-40 – God gave this to Israel back in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Jesus repeats this responding to the question of the greatest commandment. The two: Love God and Love Your Neighbor is the foundation for all the Law and the Prophets.

Every law is tied to either one of these. The principles are there, and they lead to the believers' function in our assembly society as well (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14; James 2:8).

Love's Practical Supremacy:

In 1 Corinthians 13 that you can know every thing, have all abilities, even be martyred, but if you do not have love it is pointless. The grace and knowledge of God are about the love of God. To grasp the love of God, should result in a greater love for one another, for each of us are made in the image of God.

Faith, Hope, Knowledge, and Service, are vital and are not to be diminished but they are pointless for both the believer and the community if not joined with love.

CONCLUSION

Love is one of those words, ideas, concepts that I am not sure we truly understand. It can be defined, it can be demonstrated, we can even emulate it, we are commanded to and we do to some extent. But do we fully understand the love of God? I think it is something that we will ponder for eternity.

In Scripture the love of God, and love in general is something that can be studied for many weeks and months and years. Similarly, the instruction and description of love that we are to have for each other in the Bible is vast. We did not even touch Romans 12:9-21. Furthermore, love is used over 200 times in the Epistles.

As we return to 1 John 4:7-21 we have a lot to consider and ponder. Let's take this opportunity and learn about love.