

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 4:13-21

Confidence and Love

INTRODUCTION

The Epistle of First John is 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 4:9-12 emphasizes that God’s love is uniquely revealed through the sending of His only Son, Jesus Christ, as an act of sacrificial atonement for humanity’s sins; this demonstrates and defines love according to God. Believers do not initiate love toward God; rather, believers are responders to God’s love. Believers are implored to respond to His love, but not in the manner that is expected. In response to God’s love, we are obligated to love one another. Through careful analysis of Greek wording and theological context, the passage clarifies that loving one another doesn’t cause God to reside in believers, but rather reflects the reality that God already abides in them and His love has been completed in them. This perfected love results in confidence, absence of fear, and the ability for believers to genuinely love others as an outflow of God’s work in their lives.

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Verse 13 – The author continues his emphasis on assurance by restating that our knowledge of abiding in God stems from “the Spirit whom He has given us.”

We must keep in mind the use of spirit in the context of 1 John 3:24 through 1 John 4:6, we discovered that the way the author uses the word does not mean the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In 3:24, the giving of the Spirit is the basis of knowing; not in a mystical way but in alignment with what is affirmed in 4:2: “Every spirit that confesses...” There’s clearly a pattern where “spirit” isn’t pneumatological in terms of indwelling but refers to the revelation of God with the Spirit as the source of the message.

In 4:13, the phrase “He has given us of His Spirit” needs to be understood as what the believer has received, not in the presence of the Spirit of God, but in content. This flows directly into verses 14–16, which aren’t describing mystical, introspection, but doctrinal consideration: the apostles have seen, testified, and the believer responds through agreement and belief.

The grammatical structure reinforces this: ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν (by this we know). To repeat, this isn’t vague assurance. It’s rooted in the giving of the message by means of the Spirit. What is the message that Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world.

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The assurance is propositional: we know because the Spirit has testified through the words of the Apostles. The divine message revealed by the Spirit is proclaimed in the apostolic witness.

Verse 15 continues this point: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

Confess – ὁμολογέω *homologeō* means an outward expressed agreement not merely verbal but doctrinally substantive.

The beginning point is the most important, who do you say Jesus is? Now this is not a universal litmus test. The problem facing the original audience of 1 John are dealing with antichrists who say that Jesus is not the. That Jesus is not the son of God. So, the statement here is in direct refutation of the current problem.

The mutual abiding described is objective reality and is promised to those who believe the message as proclaimed by the Apostles.

The abiding in this text is not relational but positional and reflects the truth about the believer.

In verse 16 two perfect tense verbs are used “γινώσκω *ginōskō*” and “πιστεύω *pisteuō*.” We have come to know and have believed “the love which God has for us.”

The one who abides in love is an articular participle “the abider in the love” which identifies the believer as “the abider in love.” With the perfect tense verbs and the adjectival nature of “the abiding one” we can safely say that this is a one-time act which makes someone “the abiding one” and it is by believing and knowing the love God has “for” us.

That person according to verse 16 abides in God and God in him. Verse 17 shifts to love completed which we previewed last lesson. Love completed in the believer is an understanding and a belief in the love God has for us.

There is a test of our comprehension of reality. Do we understand the reality of God’s love? Do we believe that God loves us and in spite of our sin and rebellion died for us? Do we know and believe that the sacrificial atonement truly makes us undefiled and unblemished before God?

If Jesus were to come back right now, would you run to him in full confidence or cower in fear before a holy God? Because of whom Jesus is and because of our identity in Him, no matter what happens we are safe and secure in Christ, not because of my faithfulness or goodness but because of His faithfulness and goodness.

Once that is understood we have no fear of God, we have no fear of punishment. If you cannot say, in honesty, that you will approach the Jesus and the Father with full confidence, fix it (Read about, consider, ponder the love of God).

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We have assurance because of the promises of Jesus. We have confidence because we stay in His love and not stray to the false promises of the world.

The author closes the section in verses 19–21 with an ethical challenge of the reality of the love of God and is a repetition of verse 11. “We love because He first loved us.”

The question that is often wrote in this section is how is our capacity altered by God’s love for us?

Our capacity for love arises from God’s initiative—love defined by sacrificial giving, as seen in the sending of the Son. The author characterizes this response it in cognitive-ethical terms: “We love because he first loved us.” This is not described as a vague, ineffable “spiritual power” suddenly swelling within us, but as a truth understood and believed, and acted upon positively in response to God’s love. Knowing God’s steadfast love becomes the foundation for our volitional choice to love one another.

Main Point – Reading from 4:7 through the rest of chapter 4 we know the point of John writing is to provide instruction, incentive, and reason to love one another. There are 10 main points:

1. Love Is Sourced in God
2. The Loving One Is Born of God
3. The Loving One Knows God
4. The One Not Loving Does Has Not Known God
5. God Is Love
6. God Demonstrated Love to Us
7. Love Is What God Has Done
 - a. Sent His Son
 - b. Be A Propitiation for Our Sins
8. God’s Love for Us Is The Main Reason to Love One Another
9. Love Does Not Involve Fear
10. The Proper Response to The Love of God Is to Love One Another

Coming to verse 20 we have to remember that the author’s point is not to disparage but to encourage believers to make the volitional choice to love one another having been empowered to love as Christ does by abiding in Jesus Christ: His Word and His Love

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Verse 20 introduces a concept: saying that one loves God and yet hates his brother has an inverse correlation. The two statements are in opposition to one another.

How is the love of God demonstrated in this context? Through love for one another. The two inverse statements demonstrate a sad reality. This points to the antichrists as the contrast.

“The one who does not love his brother” This is a lie and points back to the father of lies. The antichrist seem to state that they love God yet they do not love the brethren.

We understand this is an inconsistency because of the main command, which is restated for third time in this letter and also understood from the Upper Room Discourse in John 14-16. And a reiteration of what we have established. Our love for God is demonstrated in our love for one another.

1 JOHN 4:13-21 CONCLUSION WITH MORE OBSERVATIONS

The author builds an unbreakable chain from God’s initiative to human response by means of precise grammatical choices.

Every key movement (knowing, believing, confessing, abiding) is anchored in perfect and aorist forms that point back to a completed action that has abiding results.

The message through the Spirit “has been given” in verse 13 and the Son “was sent.” We “have known” and “have believed” God’s love in verse 16; this is not as an ongoing process but a settled reality; These concepts establish our foundation for our interaction in love

There is also a chiastic design. Verses 7–10 move outward from the source—love is from God; God is love; the love that He is was manifested in Christ; this underscores why we “should love one another.” Verses 11–16 turn inward, grounding our knowledge and belief in God’s love as the basis for mutual love for one another. Verses 17–18 then press us upward to eschatological assurance (“love perfected...confidence...no fear”), and verses 19–21 take us back out to the imperative force “we love because He first loved us.”

When we read this section in its entirety, we see the logical flow. Love begins with God, this has three basic impacts:

1. Our logical inferential love for one another,
2. Provides confidence in our standing before God
3. Is the basis for the commandment from Jesus