

Intro —

- A brief contextual note —
 - We're picking up in the second to last chapter of the book of 1 John.
 - The text itself doesn't give us any authorial note, but there are a bunch of clues that suggest it was John the disciple of Jesus we read about — John the son of Zebedee.
 - What we know about it is that the people on the receiving end are thought to have been part of a network of house churches that had recently undergone a significant crisis.
 - A group of people who were a part of that church left because they thought that Jesus was no longer the messiah.
 - The people John is writing to are those who stayed, but were being tempted away towards the break-off group.
 - We haven't said much about the context this text comes from, not because it is irrelevant but because there were other important things we needed to cover first.
 - I bring it up now because this text seems to be a poetic sermon — with repeating themes, ideas, and words — that John intends for his followers to apply in particular situations.
 - Tonight will be the third time that the author speaks directly about those who are in Christ compared to those who are not in Christ.
 - John will define love in some really particular terms, and admonish his audience towards a particular posture, holding it even with regard to those who are viewed as enemies.
 - I think in the context of division, John's words ring even more powerfully than if they stand alone.
- John addresses his audience twice in this chapter as "beloved" — those who are the object of God's affections.
 - In his gospel account, this same author calls himself the "disciple whom Jesus loved" or "the beloved disciple."
 - Both of these names give us the sense that he share a special relationship with Jesus, one of obedience but also affection.
 - As we'll see in this chapter, John doesn't shy away from the fact that obedience and affection go hand-in-hand.
 - Those who love God obey His commands because God's commands *come from God*.
 - Those who love God aren't after the reward or the prize, but after the intimacy with God himself, the person to whom the commands draw us.
- My hope for us is that as we study this chapter of 1 John, it will give you a new approach for what it means to obey God.
 - What if following Jesus was about returning the love lavished upon us instead of living up to a moral standard from a disembodied arbiter?
 - John thinks that if you experience the love of God in the form of Jesus, that you can't see the world, yourself, or others in the same way.
 - No he thinks that to know this love is to follow Jesus and all he commands.
 - That we abide in this love because Jesus first loved us.
 - The revelation of the love of God in Jesus is worth running after, especially in comparison what John calls the antichrist — everything that points away from Jesus.

Break into small groups and read 1 John 4.1-6, then answer the following two questions.

As you read, consider that John instructs his audience to "test the spirits." What do you suppose this means? Why do you think John wants his audience to test the spirits?

- Call back to 1 John 3.21 → "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."
- Perhaps it's that John wants his audience to be able to discern between what is and is not of God.
 - The theme has appeared in both 1 John 2 and 3 as well.

What does John mean by “the antichrist” in this section? How does that compare with the spirit of God?

- The antichrist is something the beloved should be familiar and is already in the world (4.3)
- The antichrist is anything that points away from Christ (4.3)
- Implied that the antichrist is not from God; Jesus is greater than the antichrist (4.4)
- Those who confess Christ as Lord and follow his commands are “little children” and are “in Christ” (4.6)

Next, we’re going to tackle 1 John 4.7-16. Before we read anything, take 30 seconds for each person to define “love.” You can use an illustration, write a definition, or any other means. Just write it down (even in a text on your phone). Then read through 1 John 4.7-16 and answer the following questions.

What does John say about love in this passage?

- God is love (4.7)
- God first loved us (4.7)
- God’s love was revealed to us by Jesus who came into the world to save it. (4.9-10)
- God wants us to love one another in the same way he loved us (4.11)
- God lives among us when we love one another (4.12)

Read 1 John 4.9-10 in both the NLT and the ESV translations. (1) What do you notice is different about these two translations? (2) The ESV calls Jesus the “atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Based on the two translations, what do you think “atoning sacrifice” means?

- A sacrifice that “takes away our sins” (NLT)
- Jesus came into the world to take away the sins of the world, not because we have earned it or loved God first. But only because God loves us and wants to be reconciled to us.

Read 1 John 4.11 three times, once each from the ESV, CSB, and NRSV. How do these translations differ? According to John, how do we know what love looks like?

- Compare ESV, CSB, and NRSV. How do these translations differ?
 - NRSV speaks of the *quantity* of God’s love (i.e., “loved us so *much*”)
 - ESV, CSB speak of the *quality* of God’s love (i.e., “loved us *in this way*”)
- According to John, how do we know what love looks like? → 4.9-11 = it was revealed to us through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Love *reconciles* us back to God by paying the debt that drove a wedge between us and God.

Based on 1 John 4.9-11, what do you think it means to “love” someone? How does this compare with the definition of love you wrote down earlier?

Read 1 John 4.17-21. This section describes some of the tangible ways love is displayed among God’s people. Let’s take a look at it.

How does John describe what “perfected love” looks like? What does this have to do with Jesus?

- “that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.”
- How was Jesus “in the world”? →
 - Love looks like loving those who don’t love you back. (4.19)
 - Love looks like self-sacrifice for the other

What does John think love between Christians should look like?

- Perfect love is not fearful (4.18)
- Love means that we cannot hate one another (4.20, 21)

In your own words, how would you describe John’s vision for love according to this passage?

Concluding/Interpretation Questions

What parts of John's discussion about God's love is new for you? Is there anything you found surprising? Difficult? Encouraging?

Who have you seen model this kind of love well?

What do you suppose would be a next faithful step for you in loving like John describes?

Options may include:

- Confessing Christ as Lord and Savior
- Interacting with those who you find difficult to love
- Sacrificing for the sake of another
- Repenting to someone you have not acted lovingly towards

Outline

- Context —
 - 1 John 3 sees John comparing and contrasting lives that are marked by God vs. those marked by the adversary/Satan; he wants his audience to be able to distinguish between the two, to know God by his voice and the fruit which comes from his presence in our lives.
- Addresses the audience as “beloved” (4.1, 7)
 - John the author refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” or “the beloved disciple”
 - Communicates a high level of intimacy with Jesus that he includes his audience in
- 4.1-6 — A continuing theme of children of God vs. children of the antichrist
 - Test the spirits (4.1) — criteria for those that come from God are that they confess Christ as Messiah (“...Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...”)
 - Call back to 3.21 — “And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”
 - The antichrist (“is already in the world”; 4.3) does not confess Christ
 - Those in Christ are “from God” (4.4); the “little children” (4.4) are in Christ they have conquered the antichrist because “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (4.4)
 - Comment on the power of Christ to resist all that is the antichrist (i.e., resist the lying, deceit, and isolation that comes from the evil one)
 - Those who listen to us (who confess Christ) know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error (4.6)
- 4.7-16 — the nature of those who are in Christ
 - God is love, so we imitate God who loved us first by loving one another (4.7)
 - In the context of 4.7 (“everyone who loves is born of God and knows God”), what does it mean to love? How might that differ from how we understand love today?
 - 4.9-10 — The definition of Love → “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”
 - What does “atoning” mean? → compare several different translations for context clues. Have the group come up with a definition for “atoning”. You can use the NLT, ESV for comparison.
 - Based on these verses, what does it mean to “love” someone? How does this compare with your own understanding of what “love” means?
 - 4.11 — Because God loved us *in this way*, we ought to also love one another.
 - Compare ESV, CSB, and NRSV. How do these translations differ?
 - NRSV speaks of the *quantity* of God’s love (i.e., “loved us *so much*”)
 - ESV, CSB speak of the *quality* of God’s love (i.e., “loved us *in this way*”)
 - According to John, how do we know what love looks like? → 4.9-11 = it was revealed to us through Jesus’ death and resurrection.
 - 4.12 — “If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”
 - What does it mean that God lives in us and his love is perfected in us?
 - My suggestion: that God’s lives in us because we only can love *because* he first loved us. It is perfected in us by that love being revealed to the world through us loving one another.
 - 4.13-16 — What do these verses say about how God’s love interacts with us? Changes us?
 - If we have God’s spirit, we know that we abide in God. (4.13)
 - If we confess that the Father has sent his Son to be the savior of the world (4.14) and lives in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of the Father (4.15)
- 4.17-21 — God is love.
 - What does perfected love look like? → “that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.”
 - How was Jesus “in the world”? → Answer based on what you know about Jesus. Answer based on the rest of the passage (4.18-21)
 - Love looks like loving those who don’t love you back. (4.19)
 - Why do you think John includes 4.18 (“Love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment...?”)

- Perhaps because one cannot simply “love” God as an escape from punishment. That’s not actually love. In that case, you fear the consequence more than you desire the reconciliation.
- Interpretation questions —
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