

Believe and Love! 1 John 4:7-21

Throughout John's first letter there has been woven a theme of loving one another- not loving the things of the world- but loving others. The idea presented to us is: if we believe in the name of Jesus, then we are to follow His command to love. **Chapter 2 verses 10 and 11** say *"The one who loves his brother and sister remains in the Light, and there is nothing in him to cause stumbling. But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness..."* **Verse 15** of the same chapter says *"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* **Chapter 3**, the end of **verse 14** says *"The one who does not love remains in death."* **Verse 23** of chapter 3: *"This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us."* And the second half of chapter 4 that we'll be walking through today, in very detailed fashion, emphasizes that verse 23 very much- the concept of believing in Jesus and loving others going hand in hand. The idea is that you can't have one without the other. They are two sides to the same quarter.

And I think what we often do as Christians looking at a passage like this, is that we try to separate out believing in Jesus from loving others well. It feels more comfortable to imagine it being like- believing in Jesus is one separate thing, and then loving others is more like a sign of spiritual growth and maturity. But that's not the type of language that is presented here. John is basically calling it out as: if we don't love other believers, then we don't know God. If we don't love other believers, then we are still in darkness. If we don't love other believers and love rather the things of the world- then God's love is not in us. If we don't love other believers, then we haven't really believed in the name of Jesus.

So I'm going to slowly read through this passage, and let's allow it to examine our lives. After we read, I'll very quickly walk us through verse by verse and then I'm excited to bring on a special guest to have a conversation with me about some real world application of what God's word is telling us here. So let's dive in, verse 7 through the end of the chapter... **(vs 7-21)**

Ok, let's quickly walk back through this. As I mentioned earlier, the language presented doesn't seem to be in reference to spiritual maturity, but rather

salvation. **Verse 7-** our love for other believers is proof that we have been born of God and know Him- our love expressed is proof of our salvation. **Verse 8-** *“The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”* In other words, we can’t claim to be Christians, we can’t claim to be saved, we can’t claim to be in right relationship with God- if we aren’t loving other followers of Jesus. **Verses 9-10,** the very essence of the Gospel is that God expressed love by sending Jesus. God was the one who initiated love, not us, and this act of love served as “propitiation” for our sins. That big word means Jesus fulfilled the punishment that was owed to us because of the wrong things we do. Propitiation is the idea of reconciliation with God. The relationship between God and mankind had been broken since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, and Jesus’s death on the cross reconciled, fixed, that broken relationship for those who receive Him. And so, **verse 11,** since this sacrificial love is the very essence of our belief, since God loved us and we are now part of Him and He in us- then it is automatic that we should love in the same way that He loves. What this is basically saying is, if you join the tennis team, you’re expected to play tennis. Right? That’s what you do. You don’t try out for the football team if you don’t like playing football with other teammates. In the same manner, you don’t join God’s team if you don’t want to love who He loves. You can’t say you’re on God’s team if you aren’t loving and getting along with the other teammates.

Verses 12-13, no one has ever seen God. Now, Exodus 33:11 says Moses talked to God *“face to face,”* but a few verses later we see that Moses asked to see God, and God said that He would walk past Moses, but would cover Moses with His hand as He passed by because His face could not be seen. So the “face to face” phrasing most likely is meant to be taken as a figure of speech, specifically an “anthropomorphism,” which is a fancy word meaning to apply human qualities to God. Understood as a figure of speech, the phrase “face to face” conveys to us the simple idea that God and Moses talked intimately, with familiarity. Another example of an anthropomorphism figure of speech would be when the Bible tells us that God then “remembered” something. Again, that would be a phrase not to be taken literally, because our almighty God does not have memory issues like we humans sometimes do. Rather, God “remembering” something is a figure of speech used to describe in human words the idea that God, after a time period of waiting, worked and moved on behalf of someone. And yes, Jesus did say in John 14:9 that anyone who has seen Him has seen the

Father- but the idea is that yes while Jesus was God in human flesh, Jesus wasn't physically/visually the full image of God in all His Glory.

So John says no one has seen God, and I think what is being implied here through the context is that there would thus seem to be a problem in being assured of right relationship with a God you can't see. Right- how can we be sure that our relationship with God is good if no one has ever seen Him in His fullness? And the answer John gives is that we can be sure of our relationship with God because the love we express to one another IS in fact the presence of God in us. God *is* love, God *demonstrates* love- the way in which we are able to confirm our relationship with Him, the way in which are able to "see" Him on Earth without being vaporized by His intensity- is through expressing love to one another. His presence is manifested through our love displayed to one another.

Verse 14, what *has* been seen, at least by John and a few others still alive at this point in history, is that God sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. John says "I've at least seen that." In **verses 15-16** there are two requirements listed in order to *remain* in God. We've seen this kind of language recently in 1st and 2nd Peter- language conveying the concept of *sustained* faith, remaining in God/God remaining in you, perseverance, abiding in right relationship with Jesus. Here John describes the idea of sustained faith through the word "remaining," and the way he says to do that is through 1.) confessing Jesus as the Son of God and 2.) remaining in love. If we confess Jesus as Son of God and remain in love- then we remain in God- we live in sustained faith. This is just echoing what was said in verse 23 of the previous chapter- the commandment we are to fulfill is: belief in Jesus as we love one another. **Verse 17** goes on to say, if we fulfill this commandment, then we can have confidence when the day of judgement comes. In other words, we don't have to fear God's judgement, we don't have to fear death, Hell, punishment, separation from God- no, we can be fully assured that we are saved and that we're good with God if we believe in Jesus and express His love- because in doing so we are becoming more like God in a sense. The idea is that we have to be more like God in order to live in His Kingdom where He lives. Those who are *not* like Him will face the judgement of being cast away from His presence, and thus have everything to fear.

Verse 18, but rather, that's not us- no, we don't have to fear if we are loving. Love actually pushes fear out of us. **Verse 19**, again God initiated this love, and

we are to follow Him in it. **Verse 20**, as has been stated earlier- we can't see God, but His presence is shown in us by loving; yet when we *don't* love our Christian brothers and sisters (whom we can see) we are proving that we don't really love God.

And **verse 21** summarizes the whole argument of the passage- if we love God, if we believe we are His, if we say we are saved, if we call ourselves Christians- then we must love our brothers and sisters. Period. And the way in which we are to love one another is not through just mustering up a sentimental feeling or emotion inside us, or through just saying words like "I love you," but **verse 18** of the previous chapter just told us to love with *action*. It says "*Little children, let's not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.*" I want us all to figure out *actionable* ways to love each other well in deed and in truth, as well as love well other believers outside these walls, and may that love lived out amongst believers around the world, may it be a catalyst that draws nonbelievers into the Kingdom of God.

If we back up into **chapter 3**, we'll see there that John gives us at least 2 specific ways to apply the love he speaks of. Look at **verses 16-17** with me... Here the idea is presented that we are to love others as Jesus sacrificially loved us, to love other believers (brothers and sisters) by helping them when there is a need that they can't meet on their own. Now there's a whole host of needy people in the world, and that can get very overwhelming thinking about all the needs out there, but the Bible seems to simplify things a bit and tells us to, at the very least, focus in on the needs of other like minded believers. Now, I'm not necessarily saying we as Christians shouldn't be concerned with the needs of the world, but there does seem to be a large focus in this passage, as well as many other passages, that a first call of duty is to take care of one another within the church.

The second application I want to draw your attention to is back up a few more verses, look at **verses 11-12** with me...

Cain killed his brother Abel out of resentment. There was a contrast between Abel's goodness and Cain's sin, and instead of dealing with his own sin and humbly repenting, Cain choose to instead just get rid of Abel. These 2 verses aren't just saying "love doesn't kill another," but rather that love doesn't

resent when someone else is doing better than you in a spiritual or moral way. Typically you and I don't resent another's success so much that we kill them, but I imagine that sometimes when a weakness or bad habit in our lives is contrasted with someone else's victory in that area, we don't kill them, but instead of dealing with our weakness or bad habit we perhaps just keep away from or ignore those who make us feel guilty. Or maybe we find ways to attack them, or criticize them, or expose a different weakness so that we hope to lessen the conviction in our own lives and protect ourselves from feeling the need to step up our game and humbly change.

And then sometimes, I think we aren't able to love well, just because we don't know or fully understand the perspective of another brother or sister in Christ. Recently one of our very own here at One Church, had the opportunity to visit other believers living in Israel. And I'm excited for him to share a little bit of what he experienced as he interacted with *Israeli* Christians as well as *Palestinian* Christians who are living in Israel, both whom are currently experiencing much tension. Ben, please come join me.

So, please first share with us the motivation behind this trip. What compelled your heart to purchase the plane ticket and organize this experience?

And so briefly, what was the overarching game plan once you got boots on ground there?

And how long where you there?

Ok, so let's jump into it- tell us a little about your time interacting with Israeli believers.

Alright, now tell us a bit about your time with the Palestinian believers.

What do you think it will take in order for these two groups of believers to be reconciled to one another, to love one another in the way Jesus and the New Testament authors express?

After meeting with these brothers and sisters of ours, how can we, not just "we" as in One Church, but "we" as in Christians in general here in the USA and

around the world, how can we better love both of these groups of brothers and sisters in Christ?

How do you sense the Lord leading you concerning future engagement with the people of Israel?