

Love Comes With a Family

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as I said, we're studying John's first letter, and we're going to turn there now for our Bible readings to 1st John, chapter 4. Josh has been leading us through studies in this letter, and we come today to the second part of chapter 4, and we're going to read from chapter 4, verse 7, and the first few verses of chapter 5.

1st John, chapter 4, then, at verse 7. Beloved, says John, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this, the true love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

[1 : 3 5] And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

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.

By this is love perfected within us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. Because as he is, so also are we in this world.

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.

We love because he first loved us. 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.

[2 : 5 0] And this commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God. But we love God, and obey his commandments.

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God, overcomes the world.

Amen. And may God bless to us. This is his word. Amen. Well, do turn in your Bibles once again to 1 John chapter 4.

When you hear the word love, what is the first thing that you think of? Love. It's a word that is wheeled out and celebrated in all kinds of ways by all kinds of people.

[4 : 07] And it's an easy sell to talk about love, isn't it? Who doesn't love love? So much, Sue, that many of the slogans that are used to push dangerous changes in society grab on to the idea of love.

Free love. Love is love. And others of a similar kind. And even in the so-called Christian church, there's a great misunderstanding about love.

I'm not sure there are many Bible verses more abused and taken out of context than the phrase, God is love. Taking God is love to be the definitive description of God, and the definitive truth about God.

And in so doing, setting God's love over and against the rest of his nature and his character. That's a theologically difficult and dangerous thing.

Why God is love over God is light? Both expressions are found in this letter. To set these things against each other is deeply unhelpful because God is always, only, ever himself.

[5 : 19] He is all of himself, all of the time. And very often, God is love, as a slogan, as a phrase, is used as a justification for all kinds of things.

Well, a loving God would never fill in the blank. A loving God would never do or say anything that might upset me, is very often the sense and the meaning of such things.

And love is often a stick that's used to beat Christians with, I thought you were meant to be loving. And in today's world, that sort of statement usually betrays a shallow understanding of love that means little more than affirming me in whatever I think is best.

And with all of the talk in the world about love, with the way it's portrayed in rom-coms, the way it's sung about in songs, we need to be mindful that the way the world talks about and thinks about love can and will drift into the church.

And so as we come to a passage like this one, we need to see through ideas of love as being some sort of soft sentimentalism. And we need to see through love being hyped up and feelings driven.

[6 : 36] John, in these verses, lays before us the key command of the letter, chapter 4, verse 7, love one another. And he spends a great deal of time unpacking that idea.

In fact, this is the longest section of the letter so far. And that alone is worth noting. Love one another is a really significant idea in this letter.

Not just by length, but also because look at the other commands that John gives in this main section of the letter. Remember, he began the main body, the main section of the letter in 2.15, with a very strong command about love.

Do not love the world. John was made very plain that when he says do not love the world, he's talking there about the departed.

Those who have gone out from the apostles, those who have departed from the fellowship, departed from fellowship with the Godhead, by abandoning the only gospel, which is the apostles' gospel.

[7 : 47] They've gone out from the apostles to 19. And what have they done for one? Gone out into the world. Notice at 4.4 that we looked at last week.

John says, Little children, you are from God and have overcome them. That is, you've overcome the departed, the antichrists and false prophets. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them.

For he who is in you is greater than he who is in them. Except John doesn't say greater than who is in them. He says he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

So John says, Do not love the world or the things in the world. Don't love those who abandon the biblical gospel.

Don't love those who pervert Jesus or promise another Jesus. Don't love those who have unhitched from the Jesus of Scripture and don't love what they offer.

[8 : 51] It's a big early command, but John deals with it in just a matter of verses, 2, 15 to 17. And then the next command in this flow of logic is in chapter 3, verse 13.

John says, Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. Don't love the world. Don't love the departed. And be very aware that the world, the departed, do not love you.

In fact, they hate you. And again, John deals with this second command in just a matter of verses. And so now John comes to the big command.

We've had the necessary negative. Do not love the departed, however much they promise and however much they lure and entice. We've had the clarification. However much they dress it up, they hate you.

And then the big command, 4, 7. Instead, love one another. And look at all the detail that follows this command, the longest section.

[10 : 06] And so as you get into the detail of this passage, it's worth us pausing to note as we live in this passing away world, as we live in passing darkness, all of the realities and implications that flow from life in this dark world cannot subvert or bury John's key command.

Love one another. Love those who continue the apostles. Never give up loving the true people of God. Friends, love within the church family isn't a bonus.

It isn't an add-on. It isn't a nice goal to have. It isn't an end in itself. It isn't tangential to what we are as a church.

It doesn't fall into the criteria of desirable. Brotherly love is essential for all of us. It is a very important means of us remaining, abiding, continuing in fellowship with the apostles and thus with the Father and the Son.

And that's what John goes on to explain and unpack. And he says three key things that we've got time to look at this evening about brotherly love.

[11 : 22] Three key things about brotherly love. First, it's character. The character of brotherly love in chapter 4, verses 7 to 10. The church is distinguished in this dark world by its proactive, wrath-absorbing love for one another.

John makes clear who and how the true people of God are to love. And such love is either an encouragement or an exposure.

Do you see how John begins this section? 4, verse 7, whoever loves has been born of God. Belongs to him. Then 5, verse 1, whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

5, verse 4, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. All through this letter, John is exposing the departed, making clear what's unclear about them, and he's encouraging those who remain, making clear what is unclear about them.

And John says it's love that distinguishes between the departed and the remainers. 4, 7, those who love have been born of God, but those who don't do not know God.

[12 : 47] John is saying to his recipients, you are the real deal, not them. And if I haven't managed to convince you of that yet, he says, love reveals what's true.

If you're in any doubt about those who know God and who love God, then here's the question to answer. Who loves the brothers sacrificially? Who loves the brothers, not for any gain that it brings, not for recognition, not for devious ends.

Who loves the brothers in costly ways? Those who do know God and are known by God. They abide in God and God in them.

Because love has a clear character and origin. Love is demonstrated and revealed in a very particular way. Now, John does say twice in these verses that God is love, verse 8 and verse 16.

And before we make that into a pet truth, we need to see how John uses the word love here. Love isn't warm, gushy feelings. Here are the things John says about love.

[13 : 56] Verse 7, it's from God. So it's best understood in the context of how God relates. Verses 7 and 8, it's manifested most truly only in those who belong to God.

Maybe that's a jarring thing to hear. But with John's definition of love, that must be true. He says, love makes play in those who belong to God. Love makes play in who have the seed of God in them.

He also says, verses 9 and 10, that love is proactive. God's love is made manifest by Him taking action first. God sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him.

God acted to bring life to death. Notice, not because we loved Him, not reactive, not responsive. God took the initiative.

God has loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And linked to that, love is costly. Verse 10, God's own Son was the sacrifice, the propitiation for our sin.

[15 : 15] Love is costly. The costliest of sacrifices was paid to shew it. And so finally, love is able to turn away wrath.

It's implicit here that love is linked to judgment because propitiation was necessary. And notice again, the next time that John states that God is love in verse 16, he goes on straight away to talk about judgment.

God's love is proactive in saving people from disaster. Love is wrath absorbing, wrath overcoming.

So love is defined by God Himself and demonstrated by the sending of His Son. And so if that is the case, the love that God shews and the love that is from God, John is saying, whoever loves has been born of God.

Then the implication is that God's love exemplifies the kind of love we are to have for the brothers, the kind of love that marks out the true people of God. That phrase in verse 7, born of God, that identifies John's recipients as Christians it's identifying who they belong to, but it means more than that, doesn't it?

[16 : 46] It also speaks to who is at work within them. To be born of God isn't simply to move family as it were, so that we're known as God's children.

To be born of God means to be reborn, to be, verse 13, indwelt by God's Spirit. And so to be shaped towards and influenced by the very nature and character of God, the God who is love.

With His Spirit's help and prompting, we grew up into His likeness, increasingly carrying the family resemblance because we're born of Him. And so we can take it that what John lays before the true people of God is not beyond us.

We can be sure that what John lays before the church is already being worked within us. Real love is only possible when God's seed is in us because real love only comes from those who have been crucified to self.

Real love is from God Himself. brothers and sisters, John's big command, which doesn't mean that the rest of what he says doesn't matter, John's big command, the one that proportionally receives the greatest focus, John's big command for a church that knows well what it is to see many depart from the apostolic faith, his big command for a church that knows well what it is to be hated, not just by the world in general, but by many who claim to be Christians, his big command for the church when many gospels and alternate versions of Christ are encircling you, his big command for the precious people of God embattled in the midst of life in this dark world, his big command is love one another in the way that you've been loved.

[18 : 46] Wouldn't it be easy in the midst of the trials of life in this age to become engrossed in the conflict, battle mood, time to still ourselves, harden ourselves to get through this?

Wouldn't it be easy to be engrossed in steving off the false prophets? Wouldn't it be easy to ploy on with our own cares and stresses? Wouldn't it be easy to allow any difficulty to swell up into grudges and bitterness?

Wouldn't it be easy in the midst of the many false prophets and the hatred and the feeling of friendly fire coming our way? Wouldn't it be easy to take offense, to hold grudges, to put up barriers, to maintain some sort of gap between your church life and family and the rest of life?

love is of God and so loving our brothers and sisters is embracing who we are.

It is fulfilling our purpose and it has at least two wonderful benefits for us that we will see shortly. it is essential for us as we are embattled in this world.

[20 : 08] It's essential for the prospering of the church family that we're given in love. Before we go on to see the two wonderful benefits, first, love the way John talks about it means being crucified people.

it means that self has to have died, that self-regard has been left aside because love is self-giving not self-regarding and in any church isn't that rather important?

Love means proactively going towards our brothers and sisters, not hanging back. It means taking initiative. Maybe you know someone struggling right now.

you're aware of someone in need, someone carrying big burdens. Love moves towards them, lays self down and does so for the better flourishing of others.

Maybe you're carrying around hurt and disappointment about how relationships with others in the church family have been conducted. Love takes steps to absorb wrath and anger even deserved wrath and anger.

[21 : 31] The reality is that there are a million ways that we can love our brothers and sisters because love isn't a mushy feeling. It's a decision to act like the one who is love and by his enabling it is holding brothers and sisters as more dear than ourselves and so that can be in gestures of concern, gifts, cards, kindness that expresses support and encouragement.

It can be in manner and tune, taking every opportunity to be gracious to one another so that interactions and relationships are marked by understanding, patience, long-suffering, forgiveness.

It can be in taking a deep breath and having a hard conversation with someone that's born out of love and concern. It can be by modelling joyful sacrificial service of the church family, formally in ministries on Sundays or informally, beavering away to care and support and show that brothers and sisters are more dear than oneself.

There are a million ways that we can show love. But here is why it's such a key thing. John says secondly, it's all about confidence.

Confidence. Chapter 4 verse 11 to 21, the confidence that comes from brotherly love. Love keeps us in the truth.

[23 : 05] When a church family is given to brotherly love, then it gives sight to unseen realities. A church's love for one another serves to reveal the unseen God and grants reassurance for the last day.

John begins and ends these verses with the language of seen and unseen, verse 12, and then again in verse 20. And infused throughout these verses is the language of to be perfected.

Verse 12, and then again in verses 17 and 18. And the word perfected means brought to completion, bearing its fruit, achieving its proper purpose.

And there are two things that God's love does as it achieves its proper purpose within us, as it's perfected within us. So God's love fulfilling its proper purpose in us means firstly, it shows us something of the unseen God, verses 11 and 12.

It shows us something of the unseen God. Verse 11, John starts at this new point in a very similar way to the way he started in verse 7.

[24 : 26] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. And then look at what John links that to, verse 12. No one has ever seen God.

It's an interesting phrase to throw in here, isn't it? But that is a reality that the New Testament talks of at various points. It's a reality that the Lord's people have to reckon with.

Moses was told the same too, wasn't he? He couldn't look God in the face and live. So he got a glimpse only of his back as God's glory passed by.

We live in the age of faith, not sight. And so we have wonderful revelation from God. We're granted very great privileges in what has been spoken of God by God.

But we cannot see him. A day will come when we will behold him face to face, when darkness, when the world have passed away, when these sin-stained bodies that are perishing will be transformed into imperishable ones and will be gathered at the great feast.

[25 : 41] But until then, we live by faith and we cannot see him. But look at what John says. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us, it bears its fruit in us.

I take it that John is saying, no one can see God, but when his people love one another, that's the strongest glimpse of him that can be seen in this world. Because our loving one another is only possible by him abiding in us.

It is his fruit, it is his work, and so it is he who is seen in us. And so our love pictures displays God to our brothers and sisters.

It gives sight to that which otherwise is unseen. And isn't that the case in our experience? When another Christian has modeled Christ-like love towards us, aren't we encouraged?

Encouraged chiefly because that's ministering to our souls, whispering to us that all that we believe and trust is real. God's love is real.

[27 : 04] It's achieved something. He is at work. He has changed people by his power. Touches of kindness and grace, of compassion and love toward or from brothers and sisters are shadows and glimpses and foretastes of God's love for us.

Who isn't encouraged to press on to the last day? Who isn't encouraged to keep going until faith becomes sight? Who isn't encouraged when real love is experienced in a church family?

when we forgive and deal graciously with our church family, that gives sight of the unseen God.

And who of us doesn't need reminders and encouragements like that? Well, that was the first way that God's love fulfills its proper purpose in us. And the second one, verses 13 to 21, notice John twice says that he and his recipients now knew, verse 13, that God abides in us.

And verse 16, they've come to know the love that God has for us. John's regular language of reassurance is here, God's people have come to know that they are joined to him.

[28 : 31] And such knowledge, this knowledge that they have come, this knowledge they have comes, verse 13, from the Spirit's testimony, and verse 14, from the apostles' testimony.

The apostles are the ones who had seen, heard, and touched Jesus, and were the ones who had testified to this. And so with these two things at work, the inner working of the Spirit alongside apostolic preaching, well, from that, verse 15, comes faith.

Confessing that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ. And that faith brings with it the knowledge and belief that verse 16, God loves us.

And so we see in verse 17 the second proper purpose of God's love. The result of John's reassuring words is confidence. confidence. As we are made alive to the love of God poured out in his Son, and as we model that same love in the church, as it is perfected within us, as love is fulfilling its proper purpose in us, the outcome is, verse 17, confidence for the last day.

Not just vague confidence, but notice confidence confidence in the face of judgment. I take it that brotherly love, love that is modeled on God's love, pictures and proclaims to God's people that there is grace for the last day.

[30 : 14] That every way in which we absorb and turn away wrath towards our church family, even when it's deserved, then that pictures for us how God will deal with us.

Grace at work in a believer is seen in their graciousness towards others. For how can one who has been forgiven much, as we all have, how can one who has been forgiven much then respond by claiming every pound of flesh that we feel belongs to us?

How can one who comprehends the love that God has for us then deal with fellow Christians with disdain or with cold heartedness or with disinterest? No, that cannot be because verse 17, as he is, so also are we in this world.

That is what casts out fear. When the people of God love one another, they also reassure one another that at the last day we will not be treated as we deserve.

Friends, there may well be many of us here who lack assurance for the last day, those who trust Jesus but are burdened with a nagging sense of what if I'm not a Christian?

[31 : 36] What if the last day I'll be turned away? What if I'm too wretched? John says our love for one another can give confidence to many like that as we picture in miniature, in shadowy ways, the love of God that has really and truly made propitiation for our sin and has turned wrath away.

So the next time you feel wronged by someone in the church family, that may just be an important opportunity to encourage and give confidence to a wavering brother or sister, an opportunity to picture in a small but a significant way what God has done for us.

Because verse 19, we love because he first loved us. I wonder if the fear in verse 18 comes from the departed's claims.

They offer more. they claim a different, a superior Christ. They've got the key. And so I wonder if the remainers, if they were wondering, what if we don't have all that we need?

What if we are missing out? What if it won't be okay at the last day? What if they are right? What if they are the ones who really do have no sin?

[33 : 03] God's love? And so John says to the remainers, look around. A loving church is already a picture of heaven.

It is already a picture that Jesus has done what he said he would do and will do what he said he will do. A loving church family, that is a proactive, sacrificial, forgiving church family, pictures the resurrected people of God who will be vindicated at the last day.

And so verse 20, if the departed or anyone who claims to have the key to God, the key to eternal life, if they make great claims that they love God truly and deeply and unlike anyone else ever, look at their love for the brothers.

Because the brothers that can be seen, picture the God he has not seen. Well, finally, John also talks about the commandments.

The commandments. Chapter 5, verses 1 to 4, the commandments are brotherly love. God's law is ultimately the law of love and it is in our grasp.

[34 : 29] John finishes by making plain, as he does elsewhere, that love is spilt out not only in the person and work of Christ, but in God's law and his commandments.

Do you see that? Verses 2 and 3? And these things aren't contradictory. It isn't a clash to say that the definition of love is seen in Jesus and that love is defined by God's law.

for God's law reflects his character. It pictures life in his kingdom. Jesus, after all, was the one who fully and perfectly fulfilled the law.

Jesus himself summarized the law in two ways. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. love. And so as a tonic to the vapid and vacuous understanding of love that's so prevalent today, the people of God have the fullest, truest understanding of love.

And it's spelled out for us in great detail, picturing wonderfully what the church can and should and will look like. The law of God, the law of love, pictures God's kingdom.

[35 : 50] It pictures life in God's kingdom, life in God's church. And so when any church is given wholeheartedly to God's law, it pictures a truly loving community where each person will flourish.

It pictures the place where no rival gods are worshipped, gods that mislead and destroy and pervert, darkening our souls and robbing us of our true purpose. It pictures the place where no idols are tolerated, idols that ensnare and destroy as they consume us, claiming all of our waking energy and time and substance and grunting us no mercy.

It pictures the place where the one true God is worshipped, cherished, and in turn the place where his gracious voice is heard week by week, offering life, speaking words from heaven, picturing the place where priorities are in check.

there's always a day set aside to be renewed and restored as we're fed from heaven, the place that keeps laying before us that this life isn't ultimate and that better is coming, eternal rest is coming.

Picturing the place where family is given its rightful place and it's honored and esteemed and encouraged and supported, the place where it thrives, the place where life is cherished, including the life of the unborn, where anger and hatred and murder and negligence towards life is not tolerated or permitted or present, where such things are wept over, the place that truly honors the marriage relationship that is the foundation of a flourishing society, the place where no concern need be had for indecent proposals and illicit behaviors and soul-wrenching heartbreaks, the place where marriages flourish and are a blessing to the world, the place where our material things are appreciated with appropriate regard, preserved, free from the threat of theft and carelessness, the place where integrity is present and one's word can be taken to be true, where our names and reputations will not be wantonly sullied by others, the place where other people aren't seen as competitors with things that outdo us and where we don't have to worry about people holding on to our coattails for their own personal gain.

[38 : 17] Aren't these things a picture of something we all want, something beautiful, a community modeling love, love for God and love for one another, God's precious law.

God's law is the manual for brotherly love and look at what John says, echoing the words of Moses. Verse 3, God's commandments are not burdensome.

Or as Moses says, for this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It's not in heaven that you should say, who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it.

Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it. But the word is very near you.

It is in your mouth and in your heart. It's abiding in you so that you can do it. It is in our hearts so that we can do it because, 5.1, we have been born of God.

[39 : 32] And 5.4, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world, seeing through falsehood, seeing reality and truth, and empowered to take hold of it.

Moses says, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and keeping his commandments, then shall you live and multiply.

And the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you're entering to take possession of it. Those same gospel promises stand today. Love is not too far from us.

It doesn't need to be burdensome to us. John's message and purpose isn't to get you to question if you're loving enough to be a Christian. Rather, he's reassuring that those who continue with the apostles can love, will love, can't not love because of the Spirit's help and prompting.

So don't ask, am I loving enough? Rather, look around at the brothers and sisters gathered here with you and let God's Spirit work in you to love more and more, that you might be a means of growing confidence in your church family.

[40 : 55] we are assured that there is a well of infinite help available to us. God will always help us if we ask him. He will always help us to grow in brotherly love.

He has given his Spirit to live within us for that very purpose. And so as we close, listen to James Philip. And speaking of a Spirit's help, he says, the new birth gives men the victory in and over the world and every other power that would militate it against the keeping of the commandments.

It is not the man but his birth from God which conquers. God is the love of God.

That we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome. John says to us, beloved, let us love one another for love is of God.

Let's pray. Lord God, grant to us a greater understanding of the depth of love that you have poured out for us.

[42 : 21] That we in turn would be convicted and enabled and empowered to love one another because you first loved us. How we need your help.

And as we knew that you delight to give it, we do pray that you would grant us the grace that we require so that it truly would be our delight to be a crucified people given to one another in the love that we've received.

Lord, we ask it in your son's name. Amen.