

1 John 4:11-21 – God is Love

Many false prophets and antichrists are already in the world. They either deny Jesus' humanity or they deny Jesus' deity, or both. No one can rightly claim to know God while they deny that Jesus is the Christ who is fully God and fully man and who came to die for our sins and then rise from the dead. John said to test the spirits. That is, we should test teaching to determine if it is really from God. We can detect false teaching by the content. How do they answer the question, "who is Jesus"? We can also detect false teachers by the conduct of their lives. The test is whether or not they love as Christ loved. In words that echoed Jesus' teaching in John 10, John said that those who know God will listen to those who truly speak God's word. Those who do not know God will listen to and follow the worldly doctrine of false teachers.

Read 1 John 4:11-16.

What should God's love motivate us to do? (4:11)

We can't see God because God is spirit. How can we show that we love God? How is God's love perfected (or completed) in us? (4:12)

Based on verse 13, how do we know that we abide in God and that God abides in us?

John saw and bore witness to the plan of God. Why did the Father send the Son into the world? Some people say that Jesus came to "show us how to live". While Jesus is a model of conduct that we should follow, that was not his primary purpose in coming. What are some other reasons people give concerning why Jesus came? (4:14)

What is true of someone who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God? What does it mean that "Jesus is the Son of God"? In 2:22, John said that the antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ. (4:15) John wrote the Gospel of John, "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31

In verse 16, what is "the love that God has for us"?

Part of verse 16 repeats part of verse 8. God is love. What is true of the person who abides in love?

Read 1 John 4:17-21.

Some texts put a paragraph division between the first part of verse 16 and the second part of verse 16. Verse 17 starts with "By this is love perfected with us". How does verse 17 connect back to the end of verse 16? What does "this" refer to? If we abide in God's love, what confidence do we have? The phrase "as he is so also are we in this world" has caused some commentators to do fancy contortions with the text. From verse 16, "God is love". It makes sense to me to take "as he is" to mean "as God is love". Verse 16 also says that we need to abide in God's love. The meaning may be "as God is love, we also are filled with a godly love for one another in this world". John has already told us that love is a test of a true Christian. If we love as God loves us then we can have confidence in the day of judgment. What else might this phrase mean? Compare this phrase with 1 John 3:7. (4:17)

What is the relationship between fear and love? (4:18)

Why do we love (agape love)? This verse is short but it is powerful. Have you ever heard Christians imply that God's love comes in response to what we do? (4:19)

What is true of someone who says that he loves God but hates his brother? Why is it easier to claim that "I love God" than it is to claim that "I love my brother"? See verse 4:12. (4:20)

What command do we have from God? (4:21)

God is love. We embrace that truth and we need to love as God loves us. This is not the only statement made about God in 1 John. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. God is holy and we are sinful. Because of God's love, he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to be the atonement and propitiation for our sin. People who only focus on "God is love" are ignoring the parts of the Bible that they don't like. God is not a Mr. Potato Head doll that we can fashion any way that pleases us. God is the one who is revealed in scripture, ALL scripture, and not just the parts we like.