

# Because He First Loved Us

1 John 4:7-21

For the third time John lays out the assurance of salvation we have in loving one another. Each pass through is deeper and richer. We love because the light is already shining (2:8), because we've passed from death to life (3:14-15), and now because God is love whom we have known and received in Christ. This is the Christian's whole life: being known by and transformed into loving people by Him who is love.

## Love Himself

God is called a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28; cf. Deut. 4:24), spirit (Jn. 4:24), light (1 Jn. 1:5), and twice in the passage, love (vv8, 16). Love is not one of the things God does. He is love itself and everything He does is loving—His judgments, justice, mercy, faithfulness, discipline, deliverance, *ad infinitum*. This is why nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35). A good definition of love for us is obedience from the heart, doing what God says with sincerity. For God, love is whatever He does because He is love. He never changes, and so everything He does is in keeping with His holy character and a blessing to those who love Him. The one who loves is born of Him and knows Him (v7). Conversely, the one who doesn't love doesn't know God (v8). John reasons from the action back to the relationship, either born of God or not. You are not born of God by doing loving things; you love because you are born of Him. This is not a sentimental or merely emotional definition of love. God's love was seen, declared, showcased, and manifested toward us in the sending of His only-begotten Son into the world so that we would have eternal life through Him (v9). Love, in order to be love, must have an object. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons in one God, have been loving one another from all eternity. When God created the world, His love radiated throughout every atom in the universe. He loved mankind in a supreme way, and when we rebelled against Him, we definitively rejected that love. His loving purpose to send Jesus was *not* in response to our love or even our plea for Him to love us. *This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (v10). Because God is love, He chose to take the punishment for your sins, not because you loved Him, but so that you would. This is fundamental identity: beloved (vv7, 11). John does what he telling these Christians to do, and He does in the greatest way, telling them they are God's beloved. To know God is be loved by Him. Apply this to your life. Run your experiences through the filter of this fact, that God was loving you from before you were born, even in the midst of your selfishness and rebellion. His purposes were at work and His kindness evident. Define yourself by His love now and look to be like Jesus Christ, loving not just those who love you, but those who don't. Never are we more like Christ than when we love our enemies and pray for those who are against us. Since we are loved by God, we should love one another (v11). This means we know one another, care for one another, and are glad to serve and sacrifice for one another.

## Perfect Love

Because God the Father is spirit, you can't see Him, and no one has (v12). He sent Jesus, but He died, rose, and ascended into heaven. When we love one another, He abides in us, and His love is perfected, matured, and brought to completion in its intended effect by the person of the Holy Spirit. This is not a metaphor or way of speaking; the Holy Spirit Himself is given to us (v13). This is why we testify that the Father sent the Son to be the savior of the world (v14). Just because you may not have thought about the Trinity does not mean you haven't been completely shaped by it. We see the economic Trinity at work, the "household" of God: the Father sends the Son, the Son saves the world, and then the Spirit comes into our hearts to

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give us new life and to do what He does—testify to the Father and the Son. We don't just hear and think about God's triune love, but experience it through the person of the Holy Spirit. He applies the grace of God to us and so God's love has its intended effect, bringing us to maturity as we love one another. By the Spirit we testify that the Father sent the Son to save the world, and confess the truth that Jesus is the Son of God (v14). This testimony and doctrinal convictions reveals that God abides in us (v15). The Gnostics believed that God is light and spirit, but not that He is love, and thus they denied the Son. But knowing and believing in God's love means we abide in Him and He in us, and we're convinced of the love He has for us (v16).

## Fearless Love

God's love is completed among us when we love one another, but it has another effect "with" or "among" us: boldness in the day of judgment (v17). John already taught about boldness in prayer, that when we're free from condemnation we are confident to pray boldly for what we want (3:21-22). This is not a temporary confidence that disappears at the final judgment. The reason is even more mind-blowing: "because as He is, so we are in this world" (v17). We are "in" Jesus, and even though we don't have a resurrected body and full freedom from sin right now, we are to think and live and pray and act in this world as He is with us and everything He has is ours. Perfect love will tolerate no fear, but drives it out because it has to do with torment. You can only know Christ as crucified, dead, and risen for you. There's nothing left to suffer for your sins. God has no punishment for you, only plans. He disciplines in perfect love and kindness. The one who winces in fear of torment at His correction has not yet been matured by His love (v18). You've probably known people who seem to be free of fear and totally carefree, who can't be bothered about what anyone thinks or does. This is not who John is talking about. The one whose fears have driven out by love has been so mastered by and overcome with God's grace that he is free to love others. Perfect contempt and pride do not cast out fear. Only perfect love. It can sound easier to love God than to love your neighbor. Who is easier to get along with, your wife or your Lord? Your sibling or Jesus? Your husband or the Holy Spirit? John flips it on us and brings us up short: if you don't love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not (v20)? Your neighbor is the not the problem. He is the solution to teaching you how to love. One of the central ways we love God is by loving our neighbor: "inasmuch as you as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). God loved you first. If you want to love Him fearlessly and full of joy, love your brother.