

1 John 4:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Analysis

And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. John concludes the chapter by affirming that loving God and loving brothers are inseparably commanded together. "And this commandment have we from him" (kai tautēn tēn entolēn echomen ap' autou)—this command comes from God Himself (likely referring to Christ's teaching recorded in the gospels). It's not human invention or optional suggestion but divine commandment requiring obedience.

"That he who loveth God love his brother also" (hina ho agapōn ton theon agapā kai ton adelphon autou). The present tenses indicate habitual action—the one who characteristically loves God also characteristically loves his brother. The "also" (kai) emphasizes the inseparability—both loves must coexist. We cannot truly do one without the other. Love for God and love for fellow believers are two sides of the same coin, inseparably linked.

This commandment summarizes the chapter's teaching and Jesus's own instruction (John 13:34-35, 15:12, 17). The greatest commandments are loving God and loving neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40); John applies this specifically to loving fellow believers. This isn't suggesting we don't love unbelievers (Jesus commanded loving enemies, Matthew 5:44), but that love for Christian brothers specifically evidences genuine love for God. The family of God should be characterized by mutual love reflecting the God who is love. When Christians fulfill this command, they authenticate the gospel and glorify God.

Historical Context

Jesus's "new commandment" to love one another (John 13:34) was new not in content (Leviticus 19:18 commanded loving neighbors) but in foundation ("as I have loved you"), standard (Christ's sacrificial love), and community (the church). The apostles consistently taught this (Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Peter 1:22). Mutual love within the Christian community was Christianity's distinguishing mark in the ancient world.

This command challenged both Jewish exclusivism (loving only fellow Jews) and Greco-Roman class distinctions (preferring social equals). Christianity united Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, rich and poor in one family commanded to love one another. This radical social leveling based on shared identity in Christ was revolutionary. John's reiteration of this command addressed communities where social divisions threatened Christian unity and love. The command remains perpetually relevant wherever Christians fail to love fellow believers across racial, economic, or cultural lines.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the inseparability of loving God and loving fellow believers challenge your current priorities and relationships?
2. What specific actions toward fellow believers would demonstrate that you're obeying this command to love your brother?
3. If this is God's explicit command (not optional suggestion), what areas of disobedience regarding love for fellow Christians must you repent of?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ταύτην	τὴν	ἐντολὴν	ἔχομεν	ἀπ'	αὐτοῦ	ἵνα	ό
And	G3778	G3588	commandment	have we	from	him	That	G3588
G2532			G1785	G2192	G575	G846	G2443	
ἀγαπᾶ	τὸν	θεὸν	ἀγαπᾶ	καὶ	τὸν	ἀδελφὸν	αὐτοῦ	
he who loveth	G3588	God	he who loveth	And	G3588	brother	him	
G25		G2316	G25	G2532		G80	G846	

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 19:18 (Love): Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

1 John 3:11 (Love): For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

1 Thessalonians 4:9 (Love): But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

John 15:12 (Love): This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Galatians 5:14 (Love): For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

1 Peter 3:8 (Love): Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

1 John 3:23 (Love): And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

Luke 10:37 (Parallel theme): And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

1 Peter 4:8 (Love): And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

1 John 3:14 (Love): We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

