

1 John 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

Analysis

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. This verse begins John's most concentrated teaching on divine love, establishing love's origin, nature, and evidence. The address "Beloved" (agapētoi) identifies readers as objects of God's love before commanding them to love—we love because we are loved. "Let us love one another" uses the hortatory subjunctive, calling for mutual, reciprocal love within the Christian community. This isn't natural affection but supernatural agapē—self-giving, sacrificial love patterned after God's love.

"For love is of God" (hē agapē ek tou theou estin) declares love's divine origin. Agapē love doesn't arise from human nature or effort but flows from God's nature and works. The preposition ek ("of/from") indicates source and origin—God is love's wellspring. This explains why genuine love between believers is possible: it's not manufactured human sentiment but divine life flowing through redeemed hearts.

"Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" presents love as evidence of regeneration and relationship with God. The present participle "loveth" (agapōn) indicates habitual practice, not isolated acts. "Is born of God" (ek tou theou gegennētai) uses perfect tense—they have been born and remain in that state. "Knoweth God" (ginōskei ton theon) indicates experiential, relational knowledge. This isn't saying love saves, but that love evidences salvation. Those genuinely born of God will love because they've received God's nature (2 Peter 1:4).

Historical Context

In the Greco-Roman world, *agapē* was an uncommon term for love. Greeks typically used *eros* (passionate/romantic love), *philia* (friendship/affection), or *storge* (family affection). Christians adopted and redefined *agapē* to describe God's unique, self-giving love demonstrated in Christ. This love wasn't based on the beloved's worth but flowed from the lover's nature. It was revolutionary—loving enemies, outcasts, and sinners not because they deserved it but because God first loved us.

John wrote against proto-Gnostic teachers who claimed spiritual knowledge (*gnōsis*) while demonstrating no love. They created elite spiritual castes, despising ordinary believers as ignorant. John's test devastates their claims: genuine knowledge of God necessarily produces love. Those lacking love, regardless of claimed mystical experiences or theological sophistication, don't truly know God.

The early church's practical love was noted even by critics. Emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363 AD) complained that Christians' care for widows, orphans, strangers, and even enemies made paganism look bad. This love provided powerful apologetic evidence and sustained believers through persecution. It wasn't mere emotion but concrete action—sharing resources, hospitality, caring for sick and dying, refusing abortion and infanticide.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding love's divine origin (not human effort) transform our approach to loving difficult people?
2. What's the difference between claiming to know God and actually knowing Him as evidenced by love?

3. How can churches distinguish between genuine agapē love and counterfeit emotional sentimentality or social activism?

Interlinear Text

Ἄγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶν ἀλλήλους ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ
 Beloved let us love one another for G3588 love of G3588
 G27 G25 G240 G3754 G3588 G26 G1537 G3588

Θεόν ἐστιν καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ Θεόν
 God is and every one G3588 let us love of G3588 God
 G2316 G2076 G2532 G3956 G25 G1537 G2316

γεγένηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν Θεόν
 is born and knoweth G3588 God
 G1080 G2532 G1097 G2316

Additional Cross-References

1 John 4:8 (Love): He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

1 Peter 1:22 (Love): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

1 John 2:10 (Love): He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

Galatians 5:22 (Love): But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

2 Timothy 1:7 (Love): For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

1 John 4:12 (Love): No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 2:29 (Parallel theme): If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

John 17:3 (References God): And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (References God): For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 30:6 (Love): And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

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