

Module 16: 1 John 4:7-12 (Part 1)

Group Exercise 1

What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 4:7-12? What title do you suggest for the paragraph in 4:7-12? Extra credit: There is justification for other paragraph divisions, such as v7-10, v7-16, v7-21, and perhaps also v4:7-5:5. What drives this paragraph division of v7-12 as opposed to the others?

Group Exercise 2a

At first glance this paragraph in 4:7-12 may seem like an abrupt transition from the previous paragraph (1-6). What do you observe about the transition to v7-12 from the following sets of verses?

1. 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11
2. 3:18
3. 3:23

Group Exercise 2b

This is the same question as Exercise 2a with the following verses.

4. 2:7-11; 3:10-18; 4:7-5:5

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 4:1-16 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 4:7-12? (There is justification for other paragraph divisions as well, such as v7-10, v7-16, v7-21, and perhaps also v4:7-5:5.)
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 4:7?
- d) Transition – links to previous verses
 - i) At first glance this paragraph (7-12) may seem like an abrupt transition from the previous paragraph (1-6). However, looking deeper....
 - ii) Beloved (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11)
 - iii) Third time in 1 John on the topic of love
 - (1) 1st time – 2:7-11, love is a sign of fellowship with God
 - (2) 2nd time – 3:10-18, love is evidence of a believer's sonship
 - (3) 3rd time – 4:7-5:5, the nature of love and its perfect outworking
 - iv) The connection between truth and love
 - (1) 3:18 – love in truth
 - (2) Truth (4:1-6) & love (4:7-5:3)
 - v) The connection between belief and love
 - (1) 3:23 – God's commandment is to believe in Christ and love.
 - (2) Belief (4:1-6) & love (4:7-5:3)
- e) "Let us love one another"
 - i) See 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12 for all uses of "love one another" in 1 John.

- ii) Command
- iii) Mutual
- iv) Present tense – calls for continued, repeated expressions of love
- v) Seeks the welfare of the one loved
- vi) Within the Christian brotherhood
 - (1) Not focusing on the love of Christians to unbelievers, though not expressly prohibited.
 - (2) God-prompted love cannot find full mutual realization with unbelievers (Hiebert)
- f) “Love is from God”
 - i) The above exhortation is based on the divine origin of this love.
 - ii) Definite article “the” is used with “love” in the Greek. “The love” centers attention on the kind of love, namely, the one that has its source in God.
 - iii) The preposition “from” (*ek*, “out of”) denotes that this love flows from God, unbroken from this source. (Westcott)
- g) “And”
 - i) The call to love is connected to the practice of love. “Its practice is a sure revelation of spiritual identity.” (Hiebert)
 - ii) The resultant revelation is stated positively (7b) and negatively (8).
- h) “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God”
 - i) Identifies the true believer
 - ii) Includes every individual actively practicing the kind of love John describes.
 - iii) No object of love is expressed. Expressed love can be Godward or manward.
 - iv) Two verbs together framed by references to God in the original – “from God has been born and is getting to know God”
 - (1) Perfect passive verb “is born” refers to the past definite experience of new birth (as wrought by God) with the result that he is now a member of God’s family. (Hiebert)
 - (2) Present tense verb “knows” points to the believer’s daily experience as getting to know and understand God better and better. A living knowledge of God is not static but actively increasing. (Hiebert)
- i) “The one who does not love does not know God”
 - i) The negative with the present tense participle describes one who is unloving in attitude and practice. (Hiebert)
 - ii) Includes all who have this characteristic.
 - iii) This characteristic of not loving reveals that he has never come to know God personally.
- j) “God is love”
 - i) Not a quality that God possesses, but an essence of God’s being. (Jackman)
 - ii) Parallel to two other statements of John and one of the author of Hebrews
 - (1) God is spirit (John 4:24)
 - (2) God is light (1:5)
 - (3) God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29 from Deuteronomy 4:24)
 - (4) Neither spirit, light, consuming fire, or love is above the other. All are essential.

- iii) The Gnostics believed and taught that God was immaterial spirit and light, but to the truth that God is love they did not attain. (Stott)
- iv) “God is love” is repeated in v16. God is spirit, light, consuming fire is not repeated.
- v) “God is love” doesn’t mean that loving is only one of God’s many activities, but that all His activity is loving activity. (Alexander)
- vi) “He who is love is light and fire as well. Far from condoning sin, His love has found a way to expose it (because He is light) and to consume it (because He is fire) without destroying the sinner, but rather saving him.” (Stott)
- vii) Not “love is God”.
 - (1) Definite article is only with “God” – “The God love is”
 - (2) “Love is God” would open the door to pantheism (the belief that identifies God with nature or the universe).
- k) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

2) Interpretation

Beloved, my dear fellow believers in Christ, we (me, John, included) are to love one another continually and repeatedly in mutual fashion. We must do this, because self-sacrificing love originates in God and flows unbroken from Him. And it must be that every person who habitually expresses this love, either for God or for his brothers in Christ, has experienced a birth brought about by God into His family at a definite time in the past, is now and forever a member of God’s family, and daily is getting to know God better.

In contrast, the person who does not practice love has never come to know God personally. This must be the case, because God is love. Not merely possessing love as a quality, God is love in His essence.

3) Applications

- a) Does it make any impact in your life that God is the source and the essence of self-sacrificing love? Explain.
- b) In what ways can you express “one-another” love to a brother/sister-in-Christ in a mutual fashion, continually and repeatedly?
- c) We often see unbelievers express love continually. How do you reconcile this with John’s teaching (v7) that such a person must be a believer?
- d) What other application do you have?