

LOVE ONE ANOTHER: GREATER HEART

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1 John 4:1-4, 7-12, 18-21

4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. ⁴Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since

God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context

There were many tensions in the early Christian Church. One debate and dispute centered on the nature of Christ: what significance was "the body." For Gnostic Christians, our human bodies are only a trap, an enemy to be overcome by a secret knowledge that liberates us from them. For Docetic Christians, Christ did not actually have a material body, but only appeared to have one. That's because God can't really have a body. A body is finite, limited, and bad. So "the real Christ" wasn't even crucified, only the appearance of one was nailed to the cross. 1 John calls these ideas the "antichrist" (or poor substitutes for Christ) with an affirmation of Jesus "in the flesh"--still thoroughly and completely God. In Jesus we see that humanity and divinity are not at odds, that God respects and loves material existence, including our bodies. Thus, loving one another means caring for the physical conditions of human life.

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Big Ideas

1. Through Christ we see God loves **everybody** and every **body**.
2. The antichrist is love as a noun, Christ is love as a verb.
3. Love is not the opposite of fear. Hope is. The problem: you can't think your way in to hope. Love is the only way in.

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. What difference do you think it makes for God to love each of us "in the flesh"? Why might God loving our bodies, not just a body-less inner "spirit" make a practical difference? How might we better love and care for our bodies?
3. Notice the order verse 8 when it reads "God is love." It does not say love is God. Does this matter? Why or why not?
4. How might love inspire hope and dispel fear? How have you seen this or experienced this in your life?

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