

1 John 4:21 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
Click chart to enlarge
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - [Charles Swindoll](#)

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

1 John 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also([NASB: Lockman](#)): kai tauten ten entolen echomen (1PPAI) ap autou hina o agapon (PAPMSN) ton theon agapa (3SPAI) kai ton adelphon autou.

- 1Jn 4:11 3:11,14,18,23 Lev 19:18 Mt 22:37-39 Mk 12:29-33 Lu 10:37 John 13:34,35 15:12 Ro 12:9,10, 13:9,10 Ga 5:6,14 1Th 4:9 1Pe 3:8 4:8)

Amplified - And this command (charge, order, injunction) we have from Him: that he who loves God shall love his brother believer] also.

NLT - And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.

Wuest - And this commandment we have from Him; the one who is constantly loving God, should constantly be loving also his brother.

COMMANDMENT TO LOVE REITERATED

The principle is straightforward - Love of God is validated by love of our brethren and this love is not a nice suggestion but a serious commandment. And remember that God's commandment always comes "prepackaged" so to speak with His enablement. He never asks us to do anything that He does not empower us to do. He is commanding supernatural agape love which is only possible as we rely on the Spirit Who He has given each believer.

Steven Cole - John... knows that it is easy to make up excuses for our lack of love: "I've tried, but this person is impossible to love." "If you knew how difficult this person is, you'd understand why I don't love him." So he shows, Love that gives us confidence in the day of judgment is God's commandment, not just a nice suggestion (1Jn 4:21). The Bible calls them the two great commandments (Mt. 22:36-40), not "the two great suggestions, if you'd maybe like to give it a try." John reminds us that the commandment comes directly from God (see also, 1Jn 3:23-note). **This means that we are not free to shrug it off if we claim to be Christians** The fact that love can be commanded shows that it is not primarily a feeling, but rather an action: a caring, self-sacrificing commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. By God's grace and in dependence on the Holy Spirit, you can and must practice such love, even toward those who are difficult to love. The fact that God commands us to love shows that it is not always effortless or easy. If love just gushed out of us like a mountain spring, then John wouldn't have labored the point as much as he does. Some of you have experienced deep wounds from those who profess to be Christians. I'm not saying that loving them will be easy, but I am saying that it is not optional. God gave us this commandment, and He didn't attach a list of exceptions for difficult cases. ([1 John 4:17-21 Facing the Judgment with Confidence](#))

Henry Alford - And besides this argument from common sense (1Jn 4:20), there is another most powerful one, which the Apostle here adds (**this commandment**)... where have we this commandment? In the great summary of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, ... and thy neighbor as thyself," so often cited by our Lord; see Mt. 22:37-39). ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

Stott - The folly of the liar's position (in 1Jn 4:20-note) is seen not only in its inherent inconsistency, but in the fact that love for God and love for our brother form one single command (cf. 1Jn 3:23). Jesus himself taught this. It was he who united Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18, and then declared that all the Law and the Prophets hung upon them (Matt. 22:37-40). We may not separate what Jesus has joined. Besides, if we love God we shall keep his commands (1Jn 2:5-note; 1Jn 5:3-note), and his command is to love our neighbour as ourselves. ([The Letters of John - Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

Spurgeon - This is that "new commandment" which our Lord gave to his apostles, and through them to his whole church. "That ye love one another as I have loved you." John was, in a special sense, "that disciple whom Jesus loved." It was meet, therefore, that he should be the apostle to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to bring "this commandment" to the remembrance of any who had forgotten it. "This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." God help us so to do, of his great grace!

Vincent on that (hina) - Not defining the contents of the commandment, but expressing its intent. Compare John 13:34, and see on John 15:13.

LOVE OF GOD CALLS FOR LOVE OF OUR BROTHER

To love (25)(agapao) "speaks of a love which is awakened by a sense of value in an object which causes one to prize it. It springs from an apprehension of the preciousness of an object. It is a love of esteem and approbation. The quality of this love is determined by the character of the one who loves, and that of the object loved." (**Wuest**) While this quality of love is not devoid of feeling, it does not depend upon feeling. We don't always feel like showing this love, but as John writes we are commanded to do so.

Agapao (143x in NT, with 28 uses in 1John) - 1John 2:10, 15; 3:10-11, 14, 18, 23; 1Jn 4:7-8, 10-12, 19-21; 5:1-2. (Other used by John in his epistles and the Revelation - 2John 1:1, 5; 3 John 1:1; Jude 1:1; Rev 1:5; 3:9; 12:11; 20:9)

(1Jn 4:7-8-note) Beloved, let us **love** one another, for love is from God; and everyone who **loves** is born of God and knows God. 8The one who does not **love** does not know God, for God is love.

(1Jn 4:10-12-note) In this is love, not that we **loved** God, but that He **loved** us and sent His Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so **loved** us, we also ought to **love** one another. 12 No one has beheld God at any time; if we **love** one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

(1Jn 4:19-21-note) We love, because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Vincent sees **his brother** as referring to Christ's brethren and quotes Augustine "To the persecutor Saul, Christ said, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? I have ascended into heaven, yet still I lie upon earth. Here I sit at the right hand of the Father; there I still hunger, thirst, and am a stranger'."

Brian Bell - So the end of this matter is this: loving God and loving others is a package deal. You can't have one w/o the other. There is a natural, logical kind of loving that loves lovely things and lovely people. That's logical. But there is another kind of loving that doesn't look for value in what it loves, but that CREATES value in what it loves. Like a small child's rag doll. When a little girl, has a little rag doll, it is often an inseparable companion. She has other toys that are intrinsically far more valuable, but none that she loves like she loves the rag doll. Soon the rag doll becomes more and more rag and less and less doll. It also became more and more dirty. If you tried to clean the rag doll, it became more ragged still. And if you didn't try to clean the rag doll, it became dirtier still. The sensible thing to do is to trash the rag doll. But that was unthinkable for anyone who loved the little child. If you loved the little girl, you love the rag doll - it is part of the package. We're under a new law—the law of LOVE. (Ed: But we have a NEW power enabling us to keep this law, out of love, not legalism -- the indwelling Spirit. Let Him love through you!) ([Sermon Notes on 1John 4:7-21](#))

Brother (80)(**adelphos** from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman. "**Adelphós** generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family (Mt. 1:2; Lk 3:1, 19; 6:14); members of the same tribe, countrymen, and so forth (Acts 3:22; 7:23; Ro 9:3)." (Zodhiates) Figuratively, **adelphos** describes members of the Christian community, spiritual brother, fellow Christian, fellow believer (Ro 8:29). Jews used **adelphos** to describe fellow countrymen (Acts 3:22).

Steven Cole concludes with a short story - An 11 year-old girl and her 8 year-old brother fought over the slightest thing. So their father was surprised when the girl made an artistic card for her brother's birthday. Inside she wrote, "Happy birthday to my nine-year-old brother. I am so glad to have a brother to love. So God gave me you. P.S. Don't read this out loud or I will twist your head off." (Reader's Digest [Jan., 1999], p. 78.) Well, she's got a ways to go, but at least she's working at loving her brother! I encourage you to work at it with those you live with and with those in this church. Remember, the payoff for obedience to this command is that you will have confidence before God in the day of judgment. Our primary source of confidence is that we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood as the propitiation for our sins. It is only His blood, not our works, that atones for sins. But, how do we know that our faith in Christ is genuine, since it is easy to be deceived? One evidence of genuine faith is when we see God's love flowing through us to others, especially to others that we would not naturally love. The more you see God's love surfacing in your life, the more you will "have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1Jn 2:28-note).

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Porcupine People - Deep in a Wyoming canyon I came across the biggest porcupine I've ever seen. As he lumbered toward me, I watched him closely and gave him plenty of room. I was not about to get near a guy whose quills looked like missiles. No wonder he was alone!

But he's not alone all the time. Every November and December, porcupines get close enough to produce offspring. During that time they choose to relax their quills, then they return to their prickly selves.

In nearly every church, there will be a porcupine or two, with sharp quills of criticism or sarcasm or arrogance. We want to avoid them, but God places us in communities of believers for fellowship. He commands us to love one another—including the porcupine types. And in our honest moments, we have to admit that we have quills too.

John wrote, "He who loves God must love his brother also" (1John 4:21). To do this, we need to ask God to help us "relax our quills," even when other people are prickly. The Holy Spirit will help us stop being so defensive or critical or controlling, and enable us to love our Christian brothers and sisters. It's the way we show the world that we love God (John 13:35). By David C. Egner

Some people can be difficult to love
And so we do not even try to care,
But God says, "Love them just as I've loved you—
You'll bring Me glory as My love you share."

**God loves you and me-
Let's love each other.**

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The Measure Of Love - While visiting a Christian's home, I saw these words displayed on a wall plaque: "You love Jesus only as much as you love the person you love the least." I squirmed at those revealing words. Later I found similar words in 1 John 4:20-**note**, "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

After that I often caught myself criticizing others while overlooking my own glaring faults. If I loved Jesus only as much as I loved the people I criticized, then I loved Jesus very little. This grieved and frustrated me, as I seemed unable to love Jesus and others as I should.

In 1 John 4:10-**note**, we learn that the key to knowing love isn't found in our love for God, but rather in His love for us. He showed the depth of His love in Jesus' sacrificial death for our sins. That's our example. "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1Jn 4:11-**note**).

Now when I fail to love others, I seek God's forgiveness. I ask Him to help me show to others the kind of love He showed to me.

Do you long to love Jesus more? Start with loving the people around you. Remember, love for Jesus and love for others always go together. — By Joanie Yoder

Unfailing is God's matchless love,
So kind, so pure, so true;
And those who draw upon that love
Show Christ in all they do.

—D. De Haan

Love is God's will in action.

1 John 4:20 Commentary <> 1 John 5:1 Commentary