

Perfect Love

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Date: 28 January 2024

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[0 : 0 0] 1 John 4, verses 13-21 will be our text this morning.

! If you're there in your Bible, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together? By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and He in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love, we love because He first loved us. If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. In this commandment we have from Him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? Two weeks ago we looked at this first portion, this section of John's letter about love and God's command that we love like Him. In verses 7 through 12, if you remember, John explains that love's source is God. And then in verse 8, he says, God is love. God defines love. Love does not define Him.

In verses 9 through 10, John directs our attention to the cross as the supreme demonstration of love. God's love. God's love motivated Him to send His Son, Jesus, to atone for our sins by dying on the cross in the place of sinners. Jesus willingly gave His life. He shed His blood, enduring the wrath of the Father to bring us peace with God through faith in Him. Thus, He demonstrated that true love is selfless and sacrificial. In verse 12, John says, the love of God is perfected in those who have received it.

[3 : 1 6] When Christians love one another the way God commands them to and in the way the Holy Spirit enables them to, the love of God is perfected in them. And it serves as a visible testimony to the truth and the reality of who God is to a lost and sinful world. In verse 13, John continues now to unpack what it means and what it looks like when the love of God is perfected in the church, which brings us to the main idea for this morning's message. God's love is perfected in those who love Him.

God's love is perfected in those who love Him. Now, before I continue, it's important that we grasp how John intended for us to understand his use of the word perfected as it pertains to love in verses 12 and in verse 17. John isn't talking about sinless perfection, but maturity, a love that is confident, a love that has substance and depth, a love that is pure and is true. For example, compare the love of a high school couple and their romance to a Christian couple who's been married for 25 years or more. That marriage is based on something. It's based on commitment. It's based on a covenant, the joining of two people into a one flesh relationship.

And as such, they don't need to express their love for one another in public displays of affection. They don't need to give one another cute little pet names. They don't break up and they don't fight over silly things that make people constantly wonder, are they together or not? Mature love has substance. It has depth. When it comes to the Christian faith and a Christian's relationship with God, mature love, love that is being perfected by God in us, it doesn't ask questions like, or it doesn't say things like, or it doesn't pray things like, God, if you love me, then fill in the blank. It doesn't make such commands or requests of God because those whom God has saved, they know. They know that God loves them. And they know that God loves them because they know what Jesus did for them. And the question of does God love me has been answered totally in the

life and the death and the resurrection of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As they contemplate then their sinfulness and God's holiness, their love for God just deepens. It matures. It's being perfected as they seek to live their life, to glorify him in accordance with his will because they know him and his love and they love him too. They desire to obey him. They agree that the commands that he's given them in his word aren't burdensome, but they are for their good, both to protect them and to bless them, both for, again, their good and for the good of other people. John argues in this passage that only those who truly experience God's love through salvation will have it perfected in their lives.

And the supreme test of that, the supreme test of that is ultimately demonstrated in their willingness and in their desire to love others as God has loved them.

[7 : 39] Is the love of God being perfected in you? Our text today will answer that question. But to get to that answer, there are three subsequent questions that need answering first. And my hope is that as we move through these questions, you will either be assured that yes, yes, God's love is being perfected in me as evidenced by the love that I do have for others. And that if that is yes, that you will be encouraged by that and that you will excel still more in reflecting the love of God that you've received to other people.

But as we go through these questions and you realize that the answer is no, no, you haven't seen the love of God perfected in you. Well, I hope that today God will open your eyes to see what his love, what true love is, and that whatever ways sinful people have distorted your understanding of love before, you will be changed today by the Holy Spirit as we look at his word.

In addition, it could be the case that you are saved, but you haven't understood God's command and your duty to love others like him. And if that's the case, my hope is that you will renew your commitment to love others like him, having better understood the love that you've received from God through Jesus Christ, his son. God's love is perfected in those who love him. Is God's love being perfected in you?

Let's find out. First question from this text to help us discover the answer is this. Do you abide in Christ? Do you abide in Christ? Look at verse 13, just the beginning of verse 13 with me again. John begins with a familiar statement.

He says, by this we know. Now that statement appears in one form or another nine other times in this letter.

[10 : 13] Let's review all of those. The first in 1 John 2, 3. And by this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments.

Next, 1 John 2, 5 through 6. But whoever keeps his word in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him.

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Next, in 1 John 3, 10. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is the one who does not love his brother. 1 John 3, 10. Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. 1 John 3, 24.

[11 : 23] Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him. By this we know that he abides in us by the spirit whom he has given us. 1 John 4, 2.

By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. 1 John 4, 6.

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 5, 2. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commands. And the last of these statements appears in 1 John 5, 13.

And it serves as John's thesis statement. This is the purpose for which he wrote the letter. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

[12 : 25] Now before writing this letter, John authored the gospel that bears his name. And in chapter 20, verse 31 of that book, he states his purpose for writing. He says there, But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So taking all of this together, it's clear that what John is saying is a truth that all of the rest of the Bible affirms. When God saves someone, he changes them.

You cannot be born again and remain the same. Good works do not produce salvation. Salvation produces good works. Because as John continues in the rest of verse 13, By this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us his spirit.

In John 3, Jesus informed Nicodemus of the necessity of being born again, the need for sinful people to be spiritually transformed.

And this perplexed Nicodemus. As he wondered how such a transformation could take place. And Jesus said to him in John 3, 7 through 8, Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

[13:51] The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit. Now here in Oklahoma and being from Kansas, we know when we see the wind, don't we?

We feel it. We can see its effects in everything around us. Likewise, when a person is saved, the Holy Spirit indwells them. The spirit of God makes his home within them.

As Paul said in Romans 8, 9, You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. If in fact, the spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

You are not saved if you have not received the Holy Spirit in salvation. And when a person is born again, when they are saved, they are transformed from death to life.

And the evidence of that transformation is seen in how they live. The fruit that is produced out of their life. Paul lists the fruit of the spirit in Galatians chapter 5, verses 22 through 23.

[15:02] And the first fruit he mentions, the first evidence of that transformation is love. The love of God saves a person.

And love for God is seen in that person. As he has made his spirit, caused it to dwell within them.

And John says believers will reflect God's love because God abides in them.

And his spirit is at work in their hearts, perfecting that love, bringing it to maturity. Verses 14 through 15, John says, And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him. And he in God. The person who is genuinely saved has experienced a love from God that exceeds all other loves.

Agape love. Selfless, sacrificial love as demonstrated through the cross of Jesus Christ. They can't help but confess this truth, share this truth, abide in this truth.

[16:20] Like Peter, they confess to Jesus, Lord, to whom else should we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

It's you and it's nobody else. No love is greater than God's love. And if you've received God's love, you desire to abide in his love.

In John 15, Jesus used a vine and its branches to illustrate his relationship with his disciples, his relationship with those whom he's saved. The vine is the branch's life support.

It cannot live. It cannot produce fruit if it is disconnected from the vine. And then Jesus says in John 15, 9 through 10, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Abide in my love. How do we know if we're abiding in his love? If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

[17:33] So the one who is truly saved is the one in whom God's love is being perfected. They are committed to Jesus.

That commitment is seen in their desire to obey him as evidenced by their ability and willingness, as John says in verse 21, to love their brothers and their sisters in Christ as God has commanded them to, and as the Holy Spirit who indwells them has enabled them to.

Again, God's love is not something you earn by obedience. You receive God's love as a result of his grace by the indwelling of his Spirit.

And again, you desire to abide in him, to remain in Christ, to seek him in prayer, immersing yourself in his word and surrounding yourself with fellow believers, people whom you can reflect the love of God to.

In verse 16, John says, so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

[18:54] Have you come to know and believe the love of God? You know, it could be the case, and I'm sure unfortunately it is for more than some of you, that you've been hurt deeply, and you've

been wounded by someone who said they loved you or who should have loved you, but the way they mistreated you has distorted your understanding of love.

Maybe they've made you feel unlovable, and that hurt, that pain, has affected your ability to be a loving person.

Maybe out of fear that you will get hurt again, you withhold love. Maybe you've been in a relationship where someone used love to force you to do things that you didn't want to do.

Maybe you've had a parent who's withheld their love from you, and they've used it to manipulate you and to tease you and to abuse you, confusing you as to what love is.

No one would want to abide in a love like that because it isn't love. Listen to me.

[20 : 30] Listen to me. God's love is not like that. It is not like that. It is perfect.

It is pure. It is undefiled. It's true. It's sacrificial. Jesus said again in John 15, 13 through 14, greater love has none than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. If as a believer you're led to doubt God's love or that there is more for you to do to earn God's love, the Holy Spirit is present to remind you of the gospel and to point you to the cross.

You didn't do anything to earn God's love. Jesus died the death that you should have died by substituting himself in your place.

And how can you doubt a love like that? If you are an unbeliever, our text today says to you that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

[22 : 00] And you are in the world and Jesus is your Savior, your only hope, your only hope to be rescued from your sin and its eternal consequences.

For you there is no other hope because there is no other Savior. And for you there is no greater love. God's desire is that you know him.

You know his love. You abide in it and that his love will be perfected in you. God's love is perfected in those who love him.

Those who have asked, are you abiding in his love can answer, yes, I am. Now the second question. Are you confident in Christ?

Are you confident in Christ? Beginning of verse 17, John continues, by this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

[23 : 06] Now in its broadest sense, the day of judgment refers to the final time of reckoning before God. John uses it to describe the day Jesus warned about many times.

The final, ultimate judgment of sinful humanity when everyone will stand before God and he will render final judgment. Paul talks of that day in Romans 2, 5.

But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. However, the believer can be confident in that day because the wrath of God that was stored up for them was absorbed by Christ on the cross.

And so John continues in verse 17, because as he is, so also are we in this world. If God has saved you, you are in Christ now.

God sees you clothed in his righteousness, his sinless life, his perfect obedience. God has credited that to your account.

[24 : 28] The person who has faith in Christ has already had judgment rendered in advance. And so they can say and they can live confidently, boldly, in the present knowing that they have nothing to fear on that day.

Verse 18, there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

You know, this got me thinking about a judgment day of sorts that is on the horizon for me, a dissertation judgment day. I will appear before my readers whom you know, Monty, who is here, and Andy, who has come before and preached here, and they will determine on that day whether or not to bestow a doctorate degree to me.

That day will be the most important day in my academic life. But you know what? I don't fear it.

And you know why? Because I know who my judges are. I know who my readers are. I know they don't want me to fear that day.

[26 : 00] And by that time, they will have thoroughly read through every page of my dissertation.

They will have already made their recommendations. As long as I've followed their instruction, it will

be more of a formality when I defend my dissertation before them.

I'm sure I'll be nervous, but I won't be afraid because I know my judges and I know that they love me and I love them.

I know they want me to do well. I know they want me to enjoy the process. They don't want me to fail or fear failing. They've never said or insinuated or given me any impression that I'm in for a world of hurt on that day.

Oh, we can't wait. Wait until we get you on that day. We're going to make you squirm. We're going to make you sweat. We're going to make you bleed and cry. On that day in Christ, when you stand before him in judgment, no doubt it will be awesome.

It will be awesome. But the love with which he saved you and kept you for that day when you are glorified, when you are made like he is in this sinful world and this sinful flesh is behind you, that will be the most incredible and joyful day.

[27 : 37] You'll probably kneel in worship but you should not and you will not cower in fear. But if you don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior, if you have not trusted in him, if you have professed Christ but fear his return and fear standing before him, then as John says, whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

And so I ask you, do you fear Jesus' return? Do you fear the coming day of judgment? I think one way that we can apply this, one way we could take it to mean is that as a believer, if you fear the Lord's return, it could be the case that you are truly saved yet the world has a tighter grip on you than it should.

You love it too much. You're living for it too much. And if that's the case, I hope the Holy Spirit reveals that to you today in those idols that you love, but cannot give you life and the joy and the love that God alone can, that you would not waste your life anymore in pursuit of those things. It could mean that the Holy Spirit will be at work to mature your love. That could be an application to take away from this verse, but there is a definite application to take away from this verse. If you fear the day of judgment, it's because you have not known the love of God. You have not truly believed the gospel.

[29 : 42] you are not truly trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. And if that's the case, the good news is it's not too late.

God has you here to hear this message, this good news, and he has been gracious to grant you this day, this time, to hear this gospel, to turn from your sin, and to trust in him and receive the love of Christ, and have the bold and the confident assurance that in him the debt has been paid.

In him the love of God will cast out the fear of punishment and death. And so I ask you, again, do you know the love of God?

Do you know the love of God? The apostle Paul knew the love of God. In Romans 8, 31-39, he talks about how awesome it is for him to know, for believers to know.

Do you know this love? He says, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, all?

[31 : 10] How will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[32 : 22] God doesn't play games. He wants you to know with certainty that you are saved and that you are loved.

God's love is perfected in those who love him and it's evidenced by their being able to answer yes to the question. I abide in Christ and yes to the question.

I am confident for the day when he returns in judgment. Now the third question. Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Verse 19 John says we love because he first loved us. Now the theological order of that statement is very important.

God took the initiative not us. Our love finds its origin in God's love. He loves and the love that now abides in us is perfected in us and that love should flow out of us through our words and our actions.

[33 : 31] In verse 20 John says if anyone says I love God and hates his brother he is a liar for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Now John's logic is plain here. If you say you love God but you hate others that's a very serious problem.

If you lack the capacity to love God's children then you cannot love their father. That's what he's saying. Imagine it this way.

It's like a mother or a father hearing someone say this to them. You know I love you but I hate your kids.

How would you respond to that? Would you think that that person really loved you? Or to take it another way it would be like you hearing someone say to you you know what I love you but I hate your wife.

[34 : 39] I hate your husband. The church the Bible says is the body of Christ. It is the bride of Christ. Christ. How can you say that you truly love God when you hate his children?

How can you say that you truly love God when you hate his bride? God? You cannot truly love God and hate those he loves and hate those who he has commanded you to love.

God's love is perfected in those who love him. It's a mature love that transcends feelings. love. It's a love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13.

I want to read a portion of that chapter. Verses 1 through 8. If I speak in the tongues of men and angels but have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but not have love I am nothing.

[36 : 03] If I give all that I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrong doing but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love, God's love, pure love, true love, never ends.

You know, Paul here isn't so much defining love in 1 Corinthians 13 I think as he is showing Christians how to apply it. The Corinthian church had a lot issues.

That's a church that I would not want to pastor. Their congregation was fractured by divisions. People saying, I follow this teacher, I follow that teacher.

[37 : 07] Some were arrogant in their wrong doing. They were boasting about their sin. Others were taking each other to court. They were suing each other in public for all to see.

many of them were insisting on their own way. There were cliques. Their congregation was segmented into different groups.

Those who are inside, those who are outside. These are my people. Not, these aren't my people. It was, it's like a high school cafeteria lunchroom.

Remember that? Well, you look this way, you like that thing, you belong with these people, and if you don't, then you should go sit somewhere else. And that kind of immature attitude, that kind of immature love, which wasn't really love at all, was on display in their church.

And again, segregating themselves into little groups based on looks and likes. If our church looks like that, and acts like that, what does that communicate?

[38 : 24] It doesn't communicate love. You know, one of the worst feelings is to walk into a church and have no one acknowledge your presence.

Whether you're a visitor or you've been going there for a little while or for a long time. Or to walk by a group of people and them not so much as give you a smile or a nod or just a hey, how are you doing?

Good to see you. Or say hello. No church is perfect. Like siblings, we will get on each other's nerves.

And from time to time, we'll hurt each other's feelings. And we will let each other down. love. But that's not an excuse to hate or to be rude or to exclude one another and withdraw or withhold our love because God isn't like that with us.

Dustin Benj, I read a quote from him this week. I shared it on Facebook as well. He said, if the gospel can reconcile a holy, perfect, and sinless God to a depraved and vile dead person, it can surely reconcile a person to another person.

[39 : 51] To exclude others, to exclude yourself from the church is a sin. It displeases God because it contradicts his gospel.

It takes his love for granted. It weakens the church's testimony to the world. Since God has loved you and he's forgiven you of all your sin in Christ, all of it, how can you choose to withhold that same love, grace, and forgiveness from someone who has wronged you, to a much lesser degree. John summarizes his discourse on love in verse 21. In this commandment, this commandment, not a suggestion, not an opinion, not an option, this commandment we have from God, whoever loves God, and see the next word, must, no option.

You must love your brother, your sister, who is in Christ. Though you don't see God now, one day you will.

But until that day, you are commanded to love the brothers and sisters who you do see today. you must love them.

[41 : 36] So how do we adjust our lives? What is God calling us to do through his word? Put love into action. Do it. Do it. And the way you do it doesn't have to be this great, huge, big thing.

It's just every day. It's as simple as coming into a church or seeing another person and not thinking about yourself and asking them, what's going on with you? What's going on in your life and caring? I remember I was, maybe had been a pastor for two years. And as a pastor, you understand the role and the responsibility.

You are in charge for the care of the flock. And that means you hear a lot about what's going on in the lives of your people. And that's a good thing because you need to be praying for them and encouraging them.

And we were having a church fellowship one evening just like we're going to have tonight. And I was sitting down next to a guy, an elder gentleman, a friend, and it was just he and I at the table.

[42 : 42] And he looked across the table, he looked at me and he said, I want to know, how are you doing? And I'm not just asking it like, how are you doing?

Like, I really want to know. How are you doing? And you know what I did? I started to cry. Not like weeping, but just tears coming down my face.

And I think he was afraid that he had done something wrong. And I said, no, I don't remember the last time anybody asked me how I was doing and truly cared to know.

I'm a pastor in a church. church. Those things are important. They matter.

Just this past week, Jack's basketball team had a shoot-a-thon on Tuesday. And many of you, you know, were supportive of that. And we had about ten people from our church show up to this shoot-a-thon at Central Middle School.

[43 : 52] And a lady, one of the parents of one of our other athletes turned to Danny and said, who are these people? Are they your family? And Danny just kind of laughed and she said, well, yes.

Yes, they are. But not the kind of family that you have in mind. Little things like that. What a testimony. To show the love for my son and for our family, but more importantly to his teammates and to their parents and coaches who aren't saved and who haven't experienced that kind of love. Those little things, I'm telling you, God will use to do great big things. And my hope and my prayer is that our church continues to be a loving community, dedicated to the truth of God and his word, and committed to reflecting that and displaying that not just to one another, but to our city, to our state, to our world.

My hope and my prayer is that for Highland Park, for each person who belongs to it, they would consider it to be one of God's greatest blessings to them as a person. And my hope and my prayer for our community is that they would look at Highland Park and they would say, that is one of the greatest blessings that we have in our community.

And it starts with us loving one another. as Christ has commanded us to and as he's enabled us to. And so I encourage you, put that love to action.

[45 : 29] And God will do great things. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your love. Thank you for how you, God, have loved a sinful people.

Each of us, Lord, have gone our own way. And yet, Lord, in your love, you sent your Son. In your love, Lord, you revealed the truth to us. In your love, you have forgiven us our sins, all of them. You've given us eternal life. You've sealed us with your Spirit. And God, we know that on that day when you come, we stand before you in judgment, that we have nothing to fear, not because of how good we are or how many great things we've done, but because of who Christ is and what Christ has done for us.

God, you tell us that such love should cause us to be bold and courageous people. Such love, Lord, should cause us to not think so much about ourselves and our own needs, but to look to others and to see how we can be used by you to express your love to them.

God, I pray for our church, I pray for your church, the church, that we would love like you in a way that is pure, in a way that is truthful, in a way that is visibly communicating to the world our commitment to you.

[47 : 04] God, I pray that in doing so, you would be pleased, your name would be exalted, and that your gospel would go further and wider, that more would know your amazing love.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.