

**THE LOVE OF GOD FOR US AND IN US**

1 John 3:14-19

**Intro:** In the Oregonian on last October 23, two and a half weeks ago, an article appeared in the Oregonian entitled, *Marketing Methodism*. The article described how the Methodists have been losing about 1500 members nationwide *every week* for the last 30 years. They say that young people today are not interested in the traditional type of service which churches have had for many years, and so they are doing what many evangelical churches have done, they are turning to marketing experts in an attempt to give people what they want in order to get them to come to church. And there is a definite attempt to avoid theology. The bishop for the Oregon-Washington conference of United Methodists says they give people some of the basic Christian tenets, but that they don't tell people what to believe. Instead they are concentrating on what they call "joyful celebrations." The people sit in circles on padded chairs, not in pews in the sanctuary. They sing songs which are projected on the wall, but do not use hymnals--although some of the greatest hymns of the church were written by Charles Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist church. In practice they are like the megachurches of today, but with a definite attempt to stay away from anything that sounds like evangelical doctrine. One of the local men who is all excited about the new emphasis in his Methodist church said that once a month they go out with six other Methodist couples, they may drink beer, have dinner, play darts, and go bowling. He is going to start a Harley-Davidson motorcycle group, and they also have plans for a band which will make it possible for them to "rock and roll." And this is all from a man who got convicted because his family did not have "a spiritual home," and now he believes that he has found what he wanted and needs--and he loves it!

I wonder if it ever occurs to any of the present-day Methodists to go back to find out what Charles and John Wesley believed, what they preached, and why it was that God used them as He did. They apparently have bought the idea that people today are different, even from what they were thirty years ago. And so the church has to change to meet the changing needs of people today. You can go into many churches today where, although they may have some place for Bible reading in their services, they don't really believe what the Bible teaches. Any talk about sin is taboo. The Bible is not accepted as the Word of God. Jesus Christ is not worshiped as the Son of God. They may say that Jesus was a great man and an outstanding teacher, but they don't believe what He taught, and they certainly don't believe that He died to save sinners from their sins, and that He arose bodily from the dead, and that He is coming again.

People use the word *Christian* but never think that it might have some relationship to Christ!

One place we have to agree with the Methodists is that people are not going to church like they used to. Church attendance is as low or lower in the Northwest than in any other part of our country. But what is the solution? Are we to turn our backs on what Christians believed in the past? Are we to abandon the Bible and all that it teaches? Or is it that people have turned away from churches because they don't get anything for their souls when they go? There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that as times change, the church has to change. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that the needs of people today are any different from what they were 30 years ago, or 300 years ago, or 3,000 years ago. The message of Scripture is unchanging because God never changes, and the basic, spiritual needs of people do not change. And in spite of all that is being done today by conservatives and by liberals in our churches to *update* the church, it is still true and will always be true, that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. And what is the Gospel? It is the message that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised from the dead. It is the message that by His death and resurrection our Lord guaranteed the forgiveness and eternal life of all who would ever put their trust in Him. And, contrary to what even some evangelical leaders are saying today, Jesus Christ is the only way to God. He is the only Savior, and there never will be another. He ever lives at God's right hand to make intercession for all who have believed in Him.

What the professing church needs to realize today is that our task is not to give people what they want, but to give them what God wants them to have--and that is what they really need. When the church again with boldness and love, depending upon the Spirit of God, returns to preach with conviction and power the great truths of the Word of God, then we are going to see the blessing of God restored, and not until. What we need to be concerned about in this last decade of the twentieth century is not what is going to please men, *but what is going to please God!*

Today, as we continue with our exposition of 1 John, I want to read to you from the third chapter, verses 14 through 19. Let us notice what the Apostle John had to say about men and women and their needs, and also about the church. And let us examine what John said then with what we are seeing and hearing in many churches today.

**(Read 1 John 3:14-19.)**

Will you notice in verse 14 that the Apostle John spoke of:

**I. PASSING FROM DEATH TO LIFE (1 John 3:14).**

— If you were to ask most people who attend church if they are Christians, they would say, Yes. And you would get the same response from many people who don't attend church. But if you were to ask those same people if they have "passed from death unto life," they would not know what you were talking about. Thank God, many would, but most probably would not. What did the Apostle John have in mind?

Well, this is one way of describing what a Christian is. This is a way of stating what it means to be a child of God. Being a Christian is much more than going to church, although if you are truly a Christian, you will want to go to church where you can hear the Bible taught. Being a Christian is much more than being a church member, much more than being baptized. You can even be confirmed in a church without being a Christian. You can seek to live a good, honest, respectable life, and not be a Christian--although a Christian is going to be concerned, very concerned, that his life is pleasing to God.

— Let me explain to you what it means to pass from death unto life. The Bible teaches that we were all born sinners, that we were alienated from God and enemies toward Him in our minds. Being spiritually dead means that we were separated from God, that we probably lived as though God did not exist, but it also means that we were utterly unable to do anything to change our condition. In fact, it means that we weren't even interested in getting right with God. Our condition was 100% hopeless.

But this expression obviously means that something happened to us so that we are no longer "dead in our trespasses and our sins," but that now we have life, eternal life. Now instead of being ignorant of God, we know God. Instead of being at enmity with God, now we love Him. And now instead of seeking primarily to do what we want to do, we want to do what is pleasing to God. We were spiritually dead, but now we are spiritually alive.

— Well, let me say, first, that it means that God has done something for us. Just as our Lord raised Lazarus from physical death, so He has raised us from spiritual death. In other words, salvation is a work of God; it is not something that we do for ourselves. But you will always find that every person who has passed from spiritual death to spiritual life, has trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin. Listen to these familiar words which

give us the truth about salvation:

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

Did you notice in those verses the contrast between *perishing* as compared with having *eternal life*? And the contrast between being *condemned* as opposed to being *saved*?

Because of our sin we are under the judgment of God, condemned. We are dead and unable to give ourselves life. We can't work for it because it doesn't come by works. "It is the gift of God." And the reason that it is important to *believe in Christ* is because He has taken the penalty which should have fallen upon us. His death was the price of our forgiveness; it is through His death that we have eternal life.

So a Christian is one who has "passed from death unto life." A Christian is one who is trusting in Christ for his salvation. None of us deserves to be saved. God would have been perfectly righteous to forget all about us. But look at the first half of verse 16: "Hereby perceive (know) we the love of God, because he laid down His life for us."

So this is *the love of God FOR us*--the first part of the title I have given to my message for today. We have the same emphasis in a verse written by the Apostle Paul in Rom. 5:8:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us.**

In Rom. 6:23 we read these words:

For the wages of sin is **death**; but the gift of God is **eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is why we read what we do in 1 John 5:11-12,

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

And let me say again: our salvation does not rest upon our worthiness (because we are all completely unworthy, deserving of eternal death). No, it is not because we are worthy that we are saved, but because God loved us and sent His Son to die for us. Ephesians 2:8, 9 tells the story:

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

The first evidence that we are saved is that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We give Him all of the glory for our salvation. *But there is a second evidence which the Apostle John has spoken of before in this epistle, and now he speaks of it again because it is so important.*

## **II. HOW DO WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE? (1 John 3:14-15, 16b-18).**

The Apostle John's answer is very clear: "Because we love the brethren." And I call this:

## **III. THE LOVE OF GOD IN US.**

And I take this from the latter part of verse 17. (Read.)

Now let me say a word about John's use of the word "brethren." "Brethren" is an Old English way of saying *brothers*. And when he says *brothers* he means *sisters*. The term stands for all of the people of God: men, women, young people, children--all who are in the family of God and so have "passed from death unto life," and who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. These are the people who make up the true church. Instead of simply wanting to get people on the rolls of their church, and what they can do to offer them a program that will please them, church leaders ought to be concerned about preaching the Gospel so that they will be able to see, by the grace of God, sinners passing from death to life. And then once they have come to Christ, it is the business of the church to teach their people about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, and what it means to live lives that are pleasing to God. It is all in this precious Book which is being so tragically neglected in our day. One reason that I have read as many verses of Scripture to you as I have because the Bible tells us that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). I want you to hear the Word of God because I want you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through the Word of God, as the Apostle Peter wrote, that we are born again. And to be born again means that you have passed from death unto life.

But let me say a little more before I close about loving the people of God.

We know that church is not a place where people who are still spiritually dead want to come. They feel uncomfortable and out of place among the Lord's people. But when a person is really saved, and has by the grace of

God passed from death unto life, he or she wants to be with the Lord's people because in saving us, God puts a love in our hearts for all other people who know the Lord.

I am always a little, or more than a little, suspicious of the person who says that he doesn't need to go to church because he can worship God just as well at home--or someplace else. Of course we can worship God in our homes. Most of us do it every day. But that is not the point. The point is that we love God's people, and if we love them, we are going to want to be with them. But it isn't limited to attending church. It was because God loved us that He was determined to help us, and if we love each other, we are going to want to help one another. Love is active. Love demands expression. It did with God, and it will with us because when you and I pass into life, we received "eternal life" which is the very life of God. And if it is His life, just as He loved us, so will we love one another. A person who claims to be a Christian but does not love the people of God, is self-deceived, and still abides in death. (See vv. 14b, 15.) On the other hand, if we love the people of God, we will be willing to lay down our lives for them (v. 16b), but short of that we will do all that we can to help a brother in need--recognizing that we can't do everything, but that we will do what we can. And it is not because people make demands of us (as they often do); it is because of the love of God in our hearts.

The love of God in our hearts makes us compassionate toward all people, but our main concern is for the people of God, and, in particular, the people who are under our care.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations as to a ways in which the Apostle Paul experienced the love of the people of God for himself--and it was all unsolicited.

First, from Rom. 16:3-4:

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:  
4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Second, from 2 Tim. 1:16-18:

16 The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus;  
for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:  
17 But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.  
18 The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the

Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

And then to think of how the love of God was manifested by Paul toward the people of God, I read to you from Phil. 2:17-18. Paul was writing, as you know, from his Roman prison. This is what he said:

17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

Throughout the Bible, and throughout church history down to the present hour, mostly in ways that are never noticed by anyone but God and those who are immediately involved, the people of God have shown in many, many ways that they have “passed from death unto life” by demonstrating their love for each other as the people of God. But let us remember what the Apostle John said in verse 18 of 1 John 3. (Read.)

We must not be hypocritical in our love. Nor are we to let our love be limited just to what we say. Let it be as Matthew Henry said in his commentary on 1 John:

Compliments and flatteries become not Christians; but the sincere expressions of sacred affection, and the services or labours of love, do (VI, 1079).

**Concl:** Two final words:

- 1) Make sure that you have “passed from death unto life.”
- 2) Let us be faithful to God in loving each other in the Lord, but let it be “not [just] in word, neither [just] in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

There are probably no two truths which need our most constant attention today than these. Let us not only make sure of our own salvation, but let us delight in showing our love for each other “in deed and in truth.”

**CONFIDENCE TOWARD GOD**

1 John 3:19-24

**Intro:** A Christian is a person who has eternal life, which means, as the Apostle John has taught us in this epistle, that he (or she) has Christ. The Apostle John was speaking of Christ in the first two verses of chapter 1 when he spoke of his personal acquaintance with One Whom he called, “the Word of life,” and also, in verse 2, “that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.”

Now if being a child of God means that we have eternal life, and that life is Christ, then it follows that we can expect to see in the life of a Christian some evidence of the very life that the Lord Jesus Christ lived when He was here on earth. The Apostle John actually said this in 2:6: “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.” The Apostle Peter said the same thing in his first epistle, chapter 2, verse 21, where he wrote,

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.

Peter did not mean that we merely study the life of our Lord, and then try to be like Him. That is impossible! We can’t live like He lived by just following His example in our own strength. But he meant that the Lord’s life is the pattern which we are to follow, but it is only possible as we live and walk in fellowship with Christ who dwells within each one of us.

We also have learned from the Apostle John that there are two outstanding characteristics of the life of Christ which we need to observe in our lives. One is righteousness (which John used of practical righteousness, or holiness); the other is love. The Lord’s life was indelibly marked with love, both for His Father in heaven, and also for His people. That is why the Lord Jesus died for us. It was because of His love for us, and for the Father’s love for us. So you can expect to see in the life of anyone who is truly a child of God, both a love for God the Father, and for all others who are the people of God. And always a love for God the Father includes a love for the Lord Jesus.

Here in the latter part of 1 John 3 the Apostle John was writing for the second time about our love for each other as an evidence of salvation. For example, let me read to you 1 John 3:14. (Read.) And read also verses 16, 17. (Read.)

However, we need to be careful that our love for each other is not just



something that we talk about, or express only in words, but, according to verse 18 of chapter 3, we are to love each other “in deed and in truth.” It all has to come from our hearts.

— I don’t think there is any question but that, as the Apostle John was writing about the love that we have for each other, he was thinking about what the Lord had said to the apostles as they gathered with Him in the Upper Room shortly before the Lord was crucified. And I am referring to the words we find in John 13:34, 35. I have reminded you of these verses before in this series, but let me do it again:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

— To love each other is what contributes to our unity--a word which is greatly misunderstood by many in the professing church today. We aren’t to seek unity by abandoning the truth of God’s Word, nor by turning our backs upon Christ, but it is a unity based upon Christ and based upon the truths of the Word of God. And it is this love, this unity, that our Lord declared more than once would be that which would convince the world not only that we belong to the Lord, but that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God sent by the Father. So our love for each other is not only what makes our fellowship with each other such a blessing, but it is one of the mightiest weapons that we have for the proclamation of the Gospel in the world. And what is even more important, it brings the blessing of God upon us. Read Psalm 133 and you will see what I mean.

But there is another benefit that comes to us when we experience in our hearts a genuine love for the Lord’s people. It is:

## **I. THE ASSURANCE OF OUR SALVATION (1 John 3:19-20).**

— All through the Bible we find teaching which helps us to know that we are saved, but no book of the sixty-six books of the OT and NT is more helpful in giving us assurance than this first epistle of John. To be “of the truth,” as we read in verse 19, means that it is because of the truth of the Word and because of Christ Who is The Truth, that we now are the children of God. So if we want to know that we are truly saved, we need to look in our hearts to see if we truly love the Lord’s people. In the latter part of this verse the Apostle John added, “And shall assure our

hearts before Him.”

In view of the fact that in verse 22 the Apostle John went on to speak of prayer, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said in a message he brought on this passage, that the words “before Him” means, *before Him in prayer!* There is nothing that will give us any greater confidence when we pray than the assurance that we are really saved. Without that assurance we may simply resort to saying prayers which somebody else has written out for us, or we won’t pray at all!

But let me point out how the relationship between verses 19 and 20 can become a little clearer for us.

Bishop Westcott translates the two verses this way:

In this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, whereinsoever our heart may condemn us; because God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.

Listen to the way these two verses are rendered in the NASB:

19 We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him,

20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things (1 John 3:19-20).

The NIV translates it practically the same way:

19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence

20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 John 3:19-20).

Do you see how this clarifies the KJ translation. The Apostle John was saying that sometimes, perhaps most of the time, when we come before the Lord in prayer, our hearts smite us with the feeling of our unworthiness to come before God. And perhaps things have been going on in our lives which have made us doubt our salvation, or at least have made us wonder if the Lord will hear us when we pray. The Apostle John said that as many times as our hearts are right, and we need to pay attention to them, yet in a case like this where we have shown evidences that we are saved, such as loving the Lord’s people, God understands our feeling of unworthiness, and it is His decision which overrules what our hearts seem to be telling us.

This is a tremendous illustration of the sovereignty of God in action when we come to the Lord in prayer. We do fail the Lord often. And there are

times when we fail to show God's love toward His people the way we should. But instances of failure are far different from a life where there is no love for the Lord or His people. And we can be assured even when we fail when we know that we have seen the signs of spiritual life in our own hearts and in our behavior.

These are two very important verses. And sometimes we have to say like the Apostle Peter said after he had denied that he even knew the Lord, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17).

David's Psalms of confession give us some other important illustrations. David had sinned against the Lord in committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then had her husband killed. His heart condemned him for what he had done, but it did not keep him from coming before the Lord. Instead, he came, pouring out his confession before the Lord, and found forgiveness and cleansing even though he had to experience some of the consequences of what he had done. But the point is, he came before the Lord.

I hope that we can all take heart and great encouragement from these verses. Don't close your eyes to all of the evidence in your life that you are saved when you feel unworthy to come before the Lord, and you do not think that he will hear you. Of course, if the evidence of salvation is not there, that is another matter. But the Apostle John was speaking of a believer whose heart was telling him that he was not worthy to come because of something wrong that he had done, or some good which he had failed to do. Remember 1 John 2:1, 2.

How wonderful it is to remember in our times of need and discouragement, that "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

But let us move on in our text. In verses 21 and 22 the Apostle John was speaking of those precious times:

## **II. WHEN OUR HEARTS AND GOD AGREE (1 John 3:21-22).**

Please don't take what I have been saying as meaning that we should ignore our hearts, used here of our consciences (which is a part of our hearts). No, we must pay attention to what our hearts are telling us. But we cannot let anything keep us from coming to the Lord. However, the greatest assurance we have is when we are keeping the commandments of the Lord and doing what is pleasing in God's sight. **"Confidence toward**

**God,”** my subject for today, is another word for *the assurance of our salvation*.

Have you notice in your own life, as well as in the lives of other Christians, that the times when we are inclined to doubt our salvation, and to neglect coming before the Lord in prayer, are times when we have sinned in some way, or ways, against the Lord? On the other hand, when we have been seeking to be obedient to the Lord, that is the time when we are not only assured that we are saved, but we are assured that when we pray, the Lord will hear and answer.

We all should know from what we learn in the Scriptures about prayer, that God has ordained that we pray because He expects to answer when we cry unto Him. Notice the certainty expressed by the Apostle John, that dear aged saint of God, the last of the apostles. (Read verse 22.) This is a verse all of us should memorize if we haven't already learned it. And we need to think about it, and perhaps even quote it to the Lord, when we pray. The Lord wants us to pray expecting that He will answer. But to be effective in prayer, we need to be obedient in our lives, obedient to what the Lord has told us to do, or not to do, in His Word. The life of obedience is the life of fellowship with the Lord, and the life of fellowship is the life in which we experience answered prayer.

We need to “keep” and “do” continuously the commandments of the Lord. *Keeping* means that we are taking the time to find out what the commandments of the Lord are, and *doing* them means that we live our lives carrying out His will. And the more obedient we are, the more our lives will be like our dear Savior who said,

And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; **for I do always those things that please Him** (John 8:29).

This was the passion of our Lord's life, and would that it were the passion of each of our lives--*that we live for one purpose: to please God*. This was the passion of Paul's life, and indicates how much Paul was like the Lord. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:9 as it is translated in the NKJ:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

This is what David said would be true of the Lord Jesus when he wrote Psalm 40:7-8:

7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,

8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is

within my heart.

And these may also have been the expression of David's heart.

— Is this the desire of our heart toward the Lord? Is pleasing Him the main purpose of our lives? This will lead us to new heights in prayer. When this is our desire, the Lord does not hesitate to say that He will do "whatsoever we ask." To want to please the Lord makes a difference in the requests that we bring to Him--and gives us the assurance of an answer.

And now we come to our final point for today:

### III. THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD (1 John 3:23-24).

Now the Apostle John said here that he was giving us "his commandment" (singular), but I see two commandments in verse 23. Do you? Why did John call it His commandment" (singular). Was he mistaken, and should have said *commandments* (plural)? No, this is not a mistake. The two commandments are so inseparable that they make a single commandment. Neither did the Apostle John mean that these are the only commandments in Scripture. There are hundreds of them! But he did mean that all of the commandments are contained in these two.

— What did the Apostle John mean, "that ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ," when he was writing to those who had already *believed on the name of His Son Jesus Christ*? Was he trying to get them to believe again, to be saved a second time? No! He was saying that we need to keep on trusting the Lord, loving the Lord, doing His will. And we need also to keep on loving each other "as He gave us commandment." Was the Apostle John referring here to John 13:34-35? I think he was. We are a step above loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. We as the people of God are to love each other *as the Lord loves us*. This means that we can never love each other too much, but that daily we need to be growing in our love for each other if we are ever to love one another the way the Lord loves us. What a goal! And what a prospect!

— And to encourage us more in lives of obedience to the Word of God, John, in the last verse of this chapter, links our obedience with our fellowship with the Lord. Fellowship, true fellowship, the richest and most precious fellowship with the Lord and with each other that we can experience here on earth, results from our obedience to the Word of the Lord. And it is the Spirit Who brings us to the fellowship which is a foretaste of heaven on earth. This is the first mention of the Holy Spirit in 1 John, but not the last. But this shows that this second treatment of

love in the epistle is a step beyond the first that we had in chapter 2:7-11.

**Concl:** Guy King, in his brief but very delightful commentary on 1 John, pointed out that these expressions in verse 24, “dwelleth in Him, and He in him, suggest an intimate, personal fellowship in which we really learn to know the Lord. And knowing the Lord, we learn more about His will. And we will be careful in our prayers not to ask for anything that we would not request, but to ask for all that would be pleasing to Him. This seems to have been the heart-cry of the Apostle Paul as well as the heart-cry of the Apostle John, when Paul said in writing to the Philippian church these words found in Phil. 3:10-17:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

May God give us such a desire to know our Lord and to walk with Him, seeking above all to do the will of God as we find it in the Word of God, and to do it because we love God and want more than anything else to be pleasing to Him.

**THE INFALLIBLE TEST**

1 John 4:1-3

**Intro:** We have seen how the Apostle John deals with a subject, such as love, and then goes on to other subjects related to his main theme of fellowship with God, and then comes back to deal with the same subject, such as love, again. In the verses I want to consider with you today John returns to a subject which he introduced for the first time in chapter 2, verse 18 (down through verse 23)--*the subject of false teachers, or antichrists*. In the Apostle John's day there was a concentrated attack upon the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, which meant that there were men who denied that He was the Messiah, the One Who had come in fulfillment of all of the Messianic prophecies in the OT. Note in 2:22 that John called them *liars*. And that is exactly what they were.

Now, in chapter 4, verse 1, and continuing down through verse 6 (which is a little farther than I intend to go today), we have the same emphasis. The Apostle said here that "many false prophets are gone out into the world." So this means that every child of God needs to be prepared to know who is telling the truth, and who is a liar. Therefore, he began chapter 4 with what we might call,

**I. THE NEED TO BE DISCERNING (1 John 4:1).**

Any attack upon our Lord Jesus Christ is an attack upon the Word of God, and it is also an attack upon our fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and with God. So we are not to believe every teacher who comes along, regards of how nice he is, nor even if he seems sincere, and not even if he uses the Bible, because "many false prophets are gone out into the world."

False teaching is one of the first things we run into when we begin the book of Genesis. God had told Adam that in whatever day they would eat of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would "surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Then the Devil with all of his subtlety came along using a serpent as a disguise (which probably was a beautiful creature before God judged him), and said, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

Now Eve was deceived, and she ate the fruit, and gave her husband a bite, and he ate it. What Eve needed to do was to "try" as the Apostle John has told us to do in 4:1, meaning *to test*, what the serpent told her. And that would have been a very simple thing for her to do. She could have done

it this way: She could have said, "If God says anything, it is true; if anyone contradicts what He said, it cannot possibly be true." But she didn't do that. Instead, what the Devil told her sounded so reasonable, and even good, that she took the fruit, and gave it also to her husband, and he ate it.

The Devil was a false prophet. He was *the first false prophet*. Our Lord called him "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). And we can certainly say that he has been behind every lie that has ever been told about God, or about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The exhortation which the Apostle John has given us in 1 John 4:1 indicates that there were good prophets as well as false prophets. So let me spend a few moments describing what the word *prophet* means in a good sense as it is used in Scripture.

I am sure that we are all familiar with the prophets of Scripture. We think of men like prophets who wrote books of the Bible, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and so on. But there were also prophets who did not write books of the Bible, such as Elijah and Elisha--and many others. Now the common idea that many people have about prophets is that they were men, or in the case of the prophetess, women, who foretold what was coming in the future. Now prophets did that, but that was not the primary function of a prophet. *A prophet was primarily a man who was a preacher. The main Hebrew word for a prophet, means one who announces something. He was a preacher of the Word of God.* But we need also to know this: He was not a preacher in exactly the same sense that men preach the Word today; they were men who, before the Scriptures were completed, were used by God give truth from God which had not previously been revealed. You can see the twofold task of the prophet in the ministry of Jonah. He went to Nineveh to tell them that in "forty days... Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). There he was foretelling. But his mission was one in which he called the people to repent. There he was preaching. He was telling forth the Word of God. And so we can call him a foreteller. But I repeat, the prophet's main job was that of declaring the Word of God.

God called Abraham a prophet in Gen. 20:7. Moses, speaking prophetically of our Lord Jesus, said this in Deut. 18:15:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.

cf. DEUT.  
34:10.

And so the Prophet of all prophets was our Lord Jesus Christ. The four



Gospels show Him in His prophetic ministry--telling forth the truth of God, and foretelling the future to the end of time.

We learn of other prophets in the NT. Barnabas and Paul are named among the “prophets and teachers” who were in the church at Antioch. See Acts 13:1. In Acts 15:32-34 we learn of a certain Judas and Silas who were prophets. Acts 21:10 says that “thee came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. In 1 Cor. 12:28 Paul declared that “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers...” The church is said to be, in Eph. 2:20, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”--NT prophets.

It seems that the ministry known as “the prophets” did not continue into the second century, and probably not beyond the last of the apostles (with the exception of John who lived much longer than the other apostles and who gives no indication of a prophetic ministry in his final days). There were preachers, and so prophets in that sense, but when the Scriptures were completed, the need for a foretelling prophetic ministry came to an end.

However, along with the good prophets there have always been the false prophets. Jeremiah refers to the false prophets several times in his prophecy. For example, in Jer. 23:21 we read, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.” In Jer. 27:15 we read,

For I have not sent them, saith the Lord, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, and the prophets that prophesy unto you.

In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord said this:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15).

He also said, and we have these words recorded in Matt. 24:24, speaking of the end times,

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect.

And a final verse: Peter said, and his words are recorded in 2 Pet. 2:1,

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

Going back to our text in 1 John 4:1, the Apostle John said that we are not to be gullible, but we are to be prepared to “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”—used here of preachers and teachers who preach the wrong things, and who predict things that have not been given to them by God. Always beware of a teacher who claims to have insight as to when things are going to happen and who is going to be involved in them. Some otherwise good men got into trouble during and after World War II by predicting that Mussolini was the Antichrist.

So there is a need for what Martyn Lloyd-Jones called “an infallible test.” I have taken my subject for today from a comment he made in his message on this text. See *The Love of God*, p. 26.

What is this test?

## II. THE INFALLIBLE TEST (1 John 4:2-3).

Perhaps you have wondered, as I did, why the Apostle John speaks of *spirits*. When you look at verse 2 you can see that the main spirit is “the Spirit of God,” the Holy Spirit. He is a Member of the Godhead, the One Who we learned in chapter 2, has been given to us as our *anointing*. One of His offices is to teach us the Word of God. He is unseen by us, but He is a real Person, and acts as a person. But there are other spirits, some good and some bad. The good spirits are angelic beings who work with the Holy Spirit in teaching and spreading the truth. But always, behind every false teaching, are the bad spirits, demons, whose concern is to draw us away from the truth and to get us to believe a lie.

The Apostle John’s words here are supported by what the Apostle Paul had written many years before. Most of you will recognize the passage when I read it to you. It is found in Eph. 6:10-13:

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The Devil showed his interest in the Word of God from Genesis 3 on, as we have seen, and ever since he has been out to do everything that he can, by his own personal intervention, or through evil spirits, to turn us away from the Word of God, and to get us to believe that which is not true.

So, of all of the doctrines of Scripture, what is *the infallible test* which we are to apply to any teacher who comes our way? There are many tests which can apply, but the most basic of all is this: ***What do they teach about Jesus Christ?*** But what are we to believe about Jesus Christ? We are to believe what the Scriptures teach us about Christ. We are to believe what the OT teaches us about Christ, and we are to believe what the Gospels and the epistles of the NT teach us about Christ.

I have reminded you many times since we started studying this epistle that the Apostle John was the last surviving member of the apostles. He was speaking of the apostles and of himself when he wrote the first three verses of this epistle. (See 1:1-3.) And note what he wrote in 2:24 immediately after the first time he mentioned anti-Christian teachings. (Read 2:24 and 27 with it.)

False teachers always want you to change from what you have come to understand of Biblical theology. But of all of the grand doctrines of Scripture, nothing is more important than what the Scriptures speak of Christ. *If a person confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, what does he or she believe?*

Let me call your attention to the word “confesseth” in 4:2. To confess means that you are *saying the same thing* that someone else has said. Who is that “someone else”? John began the verse by saying, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God.” This gives us further evidence for what I have said about believing what the Bible has to say about Jesus Christ. Who led the writers of Scripture to write what they did? The Apostle Peter said that “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). *So to confess* “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” *is to express your total agreement with what the Bible says about Jesus Christ.* What does the Bible teach us about the incarnation of the Son of God.

The Name, “Jesus Christ,” is a Name that indicates that Jesus Christ was both God and man--a true human being, and yet in every sense of the word, God, Deity. The Bible teaches that when Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, He continued to be what He always has been, “the Son of the Highest.” Ask that teacher who comes to you with some new doc-

trines if he or she believes that the Name “Jesus Christ” means, as it does, that in this dear Person we have One Who is both God and man? Ask this teacher if he or she believes why He was called “Jesus.” Do they believe that His mission in the world was to “save His people from their sins”? And by this make clear that the Scriptures make Him the Savior. Salvation is not something that He and we do cooperatively; He does it all! Unworthy as we are, and incapable of seeking Him on our own, and of making any contribution to our salvation, Jesus Christ died and lives today as our Savior Who is able to save to the uttermost (completely) all who come to God by Him. And ask this teacher who comes to you if there is any other way of salvation except through Jesus Christ. The Lord specifically taught, and the apostles concurred 100%, that “no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” See John 14:6. Ask that teacher who comes to you about where Jesus Christ is now. Is He still the God-Man? Do they believe that He not only died for sinners, but that He rose again from the dead, ascended back to the Father, and that He is coming again, as the angels said, “This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11)—*this same Jesus! Not a different Jesus, but the same one.*

You see, the statement, “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,” is a statement that looks back into the OT, includes the purpose of His coming, and issues into all of the glorious results which follow from His incarnation. If it were not Jesus Christ Who came in the flesh, then the Bible is discredited, and we are of all people the most to be pitied. We are still in our sins, and our faith is vain.

**Concl:** So, if you want to apply *the infallible test* to what you believe, or to what you are hearing from any teacher (including the one who is speaking to you today), find out what is being taught about Jesus Christ. If it is in agreement with Scripture, then it is in agreement with the Holy Spirit, and you can be assured that what you believe is the truth.

But how can you apply this *infallible test*? This is too important a matter for you to let someone else decide for you. This is not just a matter of what is going to happen to you here and now in this world; this is a matter of eternal importance! Your eternal destiny is involved in what you believe about Jesus Christ, and whether or not your trust is in Him for your salvation.

Let us ask the Apostle John about who should apply this “infallible test.” What would he tell us if he were here today speaking, and I were sitting down with you. I know exactly what he would say, because he said it at

the beginning of this chapter. Listen to his words (and remember that he was speaking as the Holy Spirit led him. Here is what he said: **“Be-loved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.”** He said, putting the responsibility upon you and me, **“Beloved.”** He meant that everyone of us has to examine what we believe, and to make sure that we believe the truth concerning “Jesus Christ.” Now the only way you can do that is to study the Word for yourself, examine the evidence, and apply the test of Scripture.

You see, the Scriptures stand above every creed that has ever been written, it stands above the doctrinal statement of every church—even though creeds and doctrinal statements can reflect the teaching of Scripture. But it is the Word that we need to know.

This is why we spend our time here at Trinity Bible Church teaching the Word of God. We want you to know the Word of God. We want you to know the truth of God. And we not only want you to know *what* the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ, *but we want you to know Him as your own Savior and Lord.* And we not only want you to come and learn about the Lord, but we want you to follow up what you hear in our services with your own reading. Fill your mind and heart with the Word, asking the Lord to make the truth clear to you.

Next year in May of 1997 it will have been 50 years since I was graduated from Seminary. I have no doubt in my mind but that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.” I learned that long ago. But I am still learning how wonderful my Lord is. He is more precious to me today than ever before. I have failed Him many times, but He has never failed me once. But I am still learning more and more about Him. And as long as the Lord gives me life, I want to continue learning. And I ask all of you to continue doing what you are doing in reading the Word and trusting the Holy Spirit to show you more and more about the glorious character of our Savior.

I recently heard of a conversation two men had with a third man. One of the two asked the third man if he were a Christian. He said that he was. Then the questioner asked the third man where he went to church. The third man said that he didn’t go to church. So the two men who were talking to him recommended two churches—one was a church where there was plenty going on, lots to do, fun to be there. But the questioner gave the impression that if you went to the other church, about all you would do would be to sit and hear someone take the Bible and go from verse to verse explaining what it means. So the question that third man had to

face was this: Do you want to go to a church where you will have fun and where there will be plenty to do, or do you want to go where the emphasis is upon the teaching of the Word of God? Your presence this morning indicates that you have chosen one of those church that will help you to know God and His Son Jesus Christ, and where we trust by the grace of God, you can be helped to know the joy of all joys which is, as the Apostle John said, “fellowship...with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

This is why we are observing the Lord’s Supper this morning--that we may remember the One Who is our Savior, and be reminded of all of the humiliation and shame and suffering He experienced because He truly is Jesus Christ who came in the flesh, and Who has brought us to God. If you don’t know Him as your Savior, come to Him today. Put your trust in Him to save you from your sins, and to keep you as His very own for all eternity.

**OF GOD, OR OF THE WORLD?**

1 John 4:4-6

**Intro:** The world is full of people, and there are many ways in which we are divided. We are divided into nations. We are divided into races of people. We are divided into male and female. We are divided age-wise. The divisions that could be mentioned are more than we have time to speak of.

The Bible mentions many of these distinctions which we refer to constantly. But the Apostle John emphasized the one distinction which is the most important, and yet few recognize this distinction, or refuse to recognize it--the distinction which the Apostle John mentioned, for example, in 1 John 2:19. (Read.)

You find it again in 1 John 3:1--the distinction between those who are "the children of God," on the one hand, and the people who are identified as "the world," on the other hand. (Read.)

In John 17, our Lord's high priestly prayer, He spoke of His disciples as those whom the Father had given to Him out of the world. He said that they were no longer "of the world" even as He was not "of the world."

In our text for today we find the Apostle John making this same contrast. In verse 4 of chapter 4 He said, "Ye are of God, little children." But then in verse 5, speaking of those who are not the children of God, he said, "They are of the world." Now it is very important that we recognize this distinction which is made in the Word of God.

All of this follows from what we learned last week from the first three verses in this chapter. There are those teachers who confess that "Jesus Christ is come into the world. But there are others who do not confess that Jesus Christ is come into the world. Those who confessed that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, were "of God." Those who did not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, were "not of God."

Obviously this was a very important difference that the Apostle John was pointing out between people--a God-given distinction, one which we overlook to our own peril. So let me ask a question which we all should want to know how to answer, and to answer truthfully. The answer is to be found in the very language which the Apostle John used. This is the question:

## I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "OF" SOMETHING?

Literally the word that the Apostle John means, *out of*. So we are all either *out of the world*, or *out of God*. But that still does not help us a great deal. Actually the word translated "of," or *out of*, suggests two ideas: one, that to which we owe our origin, and second, that upon which we are dependent, the source of our resources and our strength.

Referring again to John 17 and our Lord's high priestly prayer, He mentioned that those who belonged to Him had been given to Him by the Father "out of the world." (John 17:6). When our Lord was speaking to His disciples as they went toward the Garden of Gethsemane, He had this to say,

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, **but I have chosen you out of the world**, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

So this means that originally all of us were *in the world* and *of the world*. We were, according to 1 John 5:19, under the sway, under the control of the Evil One. He is "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). But now we are "of God." This means that the change, the spiritual change, that has taken place in our lives is due to what God has done for us, and in us. God in His grace, and through what Christ did on the Cross, has made us different. He has made us new creatures. Old things have passed away, and all things for us have become new. Oh, we are not perfect—far from it. But we are not what we used to be. We have become the children of God. And this is not because we deserved it, nor because in some way we have earned it. But it is all traceable to God, His love for us and His power which has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has brought us into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

But there is another idea that is prominent in this word "out." It means that we are dependent upon that which we find the reason for our existence, whether it be as a part of the world, or from God Himself. When we were "of the world," all that we had was what the world could provide for us. But all of that was changed when we came to know our precious Savior. Now our resources are in God. He is our life, our strength, our wisdom, our holiness. All that God is, is ours! Whatever we need, we find it in Him. This does not mean that God gives us everything that we want, but it does mean that all that we have we have received from Him. Neither does it mean that we always trust the Lord the way we should, but it does mean that we are learning more and more each day about what it means to



live by faith, and that God is working through all of our circumstances to make us what He wants us to be. Oh, how blessed we are! We have riches in our God which we can never lose.

Let me say one more thing about these two terms before we go farther into the text. Whether we are "of the world, or "of God," it is to be expected that there will be what Bishop Westcott said was "a moral correspondence between the issue and the source." This means that if we are still of the world, we will manifest in our lives the character of the world. On the other hand, if we are of God, there will be in our lives those characteristics which are not natural to us, but which we have received from God! This does not mean that the people of the world are all as bad as they can be, but the potential is there. Neither does it mean that the people who are of God are as good as they can be, and should be, but the potential is there. This is the reason that I have said many times that the Bible knows nothing of a salvation that leaves us just like it found us. A person who knows Jesus Christ is different, different in a better sense, different because of what God has done in our hearts.

So to summarize, to be "of something" or "of someone," means:

- 1) that of which we are a part,
- 2) that from which we derive all of the resources that we have,
- 3) that which will determine the moral character of our lives. If we are of God, we will live like God wants us to live. If we are "of the world," we will be content with the world's standards, and willing to live by them.

Let us now look more into the details of our text.

In verse 4 we see:

## II. THE VICTORY OF THOSE WHO ARE "OF GOD" (1 John 4:4).

In the light of what we have seen about the difference between being "of the world" and "of God," it might seem surprising that the Apostle John would speak of those who are "of God," as "little children"--meaning *little born ones*. But this is entirely consistent with what God has done for us. Paul told the Corinthian believers that God has not chosen us because of our great wisdom, nor of our great strength, but it is just the opposite. He has chosen those who are foolish, and weak, and lowly, and despised--those who are nothing in themselves, to bring to nothing those who feel that they are OK the way they are. A Christian is a person who, among

other things, knows that he cannot make it on his own, neither in time nor in eternity. We know, or ought to know, that without the Lord we can't do anything. We need the Lord every moment of every day. The theme song of a Christian is that old Gospel song, "I Need Jesus." Do you remember the words? Let me read them to you.

I need Jesus, my need I now confess;  
No friend like Him in times of deep distress;  
I need Jesus, the need I gladly own;  
Thou some may bear their load alone,  
Yet, I need Jesus.

I need Jesus, I need a friend like Him,  
A friend to guide when paths of life are dim;  
I need Jesus, when foes my soul assail;  
Alone I know I can but fail,  
So I need Jesus.

I need Jesus, I need Him to the end;  
No one lie Him, He is the sinner's Friend;  
I need Jesus, no other friend will do;  
So constant, kind, so strong and true,  
Yes, I need Jesus.

I need Jesus, I need Jesus,  
I need Jesus every day;  
Need Him in the sunshine hour,  
Need Him when the storm clouds lower;  
Every day along my way,  
Yes, I need Jesus.

It is only because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that we can hope to experience victory in any sense--victory over Satan, victory over temptation and sin, victory over fear, victory over those who would harm us, and ultimately victory over death. In short, victory over the world!

But what victory was the Apostle John speaking over here in verse 4 when he said that we "have overcome them." To whom was he referring? Well, he had to be referring to those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. He was referring to the victory that we experience over false teachers and false teaching just because we are "of God," and have had our

hearts established in the truth of the Word of God. Professing Christians by the millions are being turned aside from the truth every day because they do not know the truth of the Word of God the way they should.

But why is it that we haven't fallen for false teaching? Is it because we are so very smart? No, it is because of the One Who dwells within us! To whom was the Apostle John referring? Well, he could have been referring to one of three Persons, and perhaps to all three. He could have been referring to our heavenly Father (because He dwells in us). Or he could have been referring to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is our very life. Or He could have been referring to the blessed Holy Spirit, because He, too, lives in us. And any one Member of the Godhead is greater than the Devil who is in the world.

So it is God, all Three Persons of the Godhead, Who keeps us from the dreadful effect of false teaching. And today, if you have come to love the truth of God, the truth of the Word of God, don't pat yourself on the back, but lift your heart in thanksgiving to God.

But now, what about those who are "of the world."

### **III. THOSE WHO ARE "OF THE WORLD" (1 John 4:5).**

When the Apostle John said, "They are of the world," he had to be speaking of those "many false prophets" who "are gone out into the world." They profess to be teachers of God, but when they deny what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ, they are simply showing that they are men, or women, unchanged from the way they came into the world. And they speak the sentiments "of the world." "And the world heareth them." That is why Neale Walch of Medford could write his phony book, *Conversations With God*, and have people excited about teaching which is a denial of the teachings of God's Word. Paul told Timothy long before Walch came on the scene that people will turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned to fables. So we shouldn't be surprised to see things like this happening in a day when the people of our country have, to an alarming degree, turned their backs upon the true God, and the Word which He has given to guide us out of the darkness of this world. Matthew Henry had this to say about the people of the world:

The spirit that prevails in them leads them to this world; their heart is addicted thereto; they study the pomp, the pleasure, and interest of the world: and therefore speak they of the world; they profess a worldly messiah and saviour;

they project a worldly kingdom and dominion; the possessions and treasures of the world would they engross to themselves, forgetting that the true Redeemer's kingdom is not of this world. This worldly design procures them proselytes: The world heareth them, v. 5.

Today this is not something that we have to look for outside of the professing church because it is in the church. And because of our failure to teach the Word of God, church people are in no position to test what they hear. Humanistic psychology has replaced the Scriptures in so much of the church's teaching, and, as a result, we glorify self-esteem and self-love, and seek to deify man and humanize God. The world loves this stuff, and many people in our churches who are still "of the world" are doing all that they can to push such teachings within the church itself.

But finally in our text let us hear:

#### **IV. A WORD OF HOPE (1 John 4:6).**

Regardless of how dark spiritually the days may get, God will always see to it that there will always be people who can truthfully said, as the Apostle John said here in verse 6, "We are of God." Can you truthfully say that from the heart? Can you say today that you are what you are by the grace of God? Can you say that your life is different today because the Lord Jesus Christ has called you out of the world, saved you, and made your life what He wants it to be, and not like it used to be, "of the world"?

If you can say, "I am of God," you know that you say it to the glory of God, and not to your own glory.

But look at what else the Apostle John had to say. He said, "He that is of God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us." Those who are ready to hear the Word of God never are a large group, but they are a wonderful group. They are people, as the writer of Hebrews said, "Of whom the world is not worthy." You see, this is one thing that makes me certain that many people have gotten into our churches today who are still "of the world" because they don't want to hear the Word of God. There is no place in which this division among people is more apparent than when the Word of God is being preached.

When the Apostle John spoke of people *hearing us*, he meant that they hear again and again, not as people who know all about the Scriptures that

is possible to know, but who *hear*, never getting enough, but always hungry to hear more, and to learn more, about our God, His Son, as They are revealed in Scripture.

— This how we distinguish between “the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” The people who reject the truth of the Word of God are still “of the world.” The people who hear and believe the truth of the Word of God are those who can say, “We are of God.”

**Concl:** The Holy Spirit here has given us guidelines here so that we can distinguish between those who are “of the world,” and those who are “of God.” Let no one deceive us into thinking that it is otherwise than what the old apostle has told us.

I know that as I have spoken about these things today, most of you have had a positive response in your hearts. You love God, and you love His Word, and you want to hear His Word when you come to church; you would be greatly disappointed to hear anything else. And how I thank the Lord for every one of you who can honestly say, “I am of God.”

— But what about those of you who cannot say, “I am of God,” and you know that you cannot honestly say that—at least, not yet! Let me give you a word of encouragement as we leave today. It is found in that prayer of our Lord to which I have referred before in my message. The verse I am thinking about is John 17:6. Listen carefully to it as I read:

I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

Did you notice that our Lord said that those whom the Father gave to Him out of the world were His before they were given to Him by the Father? This was true of all of us who today know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and so can say that we are of God. God chose us before we knew anything about Him. He chose us before the foundation of the world. We were His, but we needed to hear of Him, and come to Him and to put our trust in Christ as our Savior. Perhaps that is what the Lord may be doing in your heart today if we have not yet put your trust in Christ as your Savior. I have said that the fact that any of us is “of God” is nothing that we can take credit for. Salvation from start to finish is of God. He chose us. He sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die for us. He seeks us, and calls us, and when He calls, we come to Him. Are you aware of the call of God today, as He calls you to put your trust in Christ as your Savior. Come to Him now. Don’t delay another day. Today is the day of salvation.

**THE LOVE OF GOD**

1 John 4:7-11

**Intro:** Of all the subjects which the Apostle John touched upon this epistle, by far the one most frequently mentioned is *love*. Let me point out the verses up to 1 John 4:7 where we begin today, in which he spoke of *love*.

The first reference is 1 John 2:5.

We learned in chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, that the “new commandment” to which the Apostle John was referring, was the commandment regarding the love we are to have for each other--probably going back to our Lord’s words in John 13:34-35. And so verses 9-11 would also have to be included.

In verse 15 we have “the love of the Father” mentioned.

Next we go to 3:1, followed by verses 10-11, 14, 16-18, and 23.

In our text for today we have *love* mentioned in every verse: 7-11.

I won’t take the time to point out the others. Hopefully you will discover them in your own reading. But there are at least 21 more times that love is mentioned from 4:12 on. This would make a total of 47 times that love is mentioned, and we can add 2 more if we include what 2:15 has to say about not loving the world, nor the things that are in the world. So, very clearly this is one of the strongest, and I think I would be right in saying, *the strongest subject in the whole epistle--the subject of love!* The Apostle John must have felt that it was greatly needed in his last days, and it certainly is needed for us as the people of God today.

There is a lot of hatred in this world in which we live. There is hatred among nations. There is hatred among races within the nations. There is class hatred. Political campaigns stir up the wrong kind of feelings in our hearts. It is sad to say that there is hatred within families--and this is very sad wherever and why-ever it exists. And often people get so depressed and hopeless that they even hate themselves, and such feelings often lead to suicide. In fact, we would have to say that there is far more hatred in the world than there is love, and much that we call love is not at all what the Apostle John had in mind when he spoke of love. There is much that passes for love which is really a perverted form of love, or, at best, human

love, which falls far below the standard of love which the Apostle John was encouraging--THE LOVE OF GOD! And where are you going to find it today? The only place you are going to find it, or should find it, is in the hearts of the people of God. But what a tragedy it is if you don't find it there. In homes which claim to be Christian, and in churches which claim to be true to God and His Word--*that is where everyone should be able to find love, not mere human love, but the love of God lived out in the lives of people who know God and His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.* But the sad fact is that too often we don't find that people really love each other in Christian families, and that is many times the case in our churches.

In our text, 1 John 4:7-11, we have the word *love* mentioned 11 times, and we can raise that number to 13 if we add what the Apostle John called the people of God twice in these five verses. He called them, "Beloved," which comes from the same root as the other words for love used in this epistle. PLUS 3 OTHER TIMES IN THIS EPISTLE: 3:2, 21; 4:1.

There are three things which the Apostle John did in this passage which I want to point out to you today.

First, *his exhortation*. He gave this at the beginning of verse 7, and then we find it again in the last verse of our text, verse 11. It is that we should "love one another."

Second, the Apostle John has given us *a description of love*. And this is to help us to understand that he is not talking about human love, nor the way we like each other as people in the world. You find this description in verses 7b-8.

Third, we have *the illustration of love*, and this is in two of the greatest verses in all of this epistle: verses 9 and 10.

Now let us begin with

## **I. THE EXHORTATION TO LOVE (1 John 4:7a, 11).**

We have this exhortation on both ends of our text. I will deal with the one in verse 7 now, and save the other for the end of the message.

What place does this have in the context of the epistle? What have I been speaking about for the past two Sunday mornings? I have been speaking

about false teachers with their false doctrines--especially their refusal to believe "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." We as Christians are continually being bombarded with false prophets and false doctrine. And we need to know that the truth binds us together in love, but error always divides. It always causes trouble. It always hinders and sometimes destroys our fellowship with each other. We need to be aware of this, and always look with suspicion on any teaching which causes a division, or any person who causes a division.

On the other hand, it is extremely hard, and perhaps totally impossible for a false teacher to gain any headway among the people of God who really love each other. And so, while you wouldn't think that it is necessary for the Apostle John to say this, *he did!* "Beloved, let us love one another." And notice that he said, "us." He was speaking to himself as much as he was speaking to believers who would receive and read this epistle. "Beloved, let **us** love one another."

Now this is not just a suggestion which we can take or leave; *this is a command from God Himself*--and the Apostle John was God's spokesman in this instance. The Apostle John was writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit. So this applies to all of us. We shouldn't need to be told, but we do! We all are to love each other.

But remember that there are two sides to this. If we want people to love us, we need to be careful about those things which can be offensive, sometimes very offensive about us. We all have things about us that need to be changed. None of us is perfect--yet! We need to be more sensitive to other people--their likes and dislikes. Criticism makes it hard for people to love us. Sometimes we can be too pushy; at other times too cold and unfriendly. When we feel that some people are unfriendly to us, we need to examine ourselves to see if we are making them feel that way. We are to love one another, but each of us is responsible to see that we are not making it hard for people to love us. "Beloved, let us love one another." We all have a lot to think about in connection with that exhortation.

Second, the Apostle John gave:

## **II. A DEFINITION OF LOVE (1 John 4:7b-8).**

The best definition of love in Scripture has been given to us by the Apostle Paul, and most of you know that it is found in 1 Cor. 13:4-8a. Let me read it for you in the Williams translation, a translation not often referred



to today, but one that has been recognized by many Greek scholars as one of the best ever made. Written many years ago, it was heralded by J. R. Mantey, an outstanding Greek scholar himself, as “the best translation of the New Testament in the English language. Why don’t you follow in your Bible as I read. Here is how Dr. Williams translated 1 Cor. 13:4-8a:

Love is so patient and so kind;  
 Love never boils with jealousy;  
 It never boasts, is never puffed with pride;  
 It does not act with rudeness, or insist upon its rights;  
 It never gets provoked, is never harbors evil thoughts;  
 Is never glad when wrong is done,  
 but always glad with truth prevails;  
 It bears up under anything,  
 It exercises faith in everything,  
 It keeps up hope in everything,  
 It gives us power to endure in anything.  
 Love never fails.

When I read these verses in any translation, I realize how much I need to grow in love. You can see that God defines love in terms, not just in how we relate to other people, but by the way we act throughout any day. Let us take each statement and examine ourselves with them, and see how we qualify as showing love. And then think of each statement and relate it to the Lord Jesus (as we will all do in a moment), and see how perfectly He displayed the love of God in every situation during His lifetime here on earth.

We all should be asking, Where will we find such love? Let us see what our text says in defining *love*. Please look with me at verse 7. *The only way we can possibly love each other the way the Word describes love is to know that “love is of God.”* The kind of love the apostles Paul and John were describing comes *out of God, out from God*. This is not a human love raised to new heights; this is a divine love, the love of God, love from God, love which finds its source in God, a love which will never run dry.

More than that the Apostle John said here in verse 7 that the only people who can really love the way God means for us to love, is one who has been born of God. In fact, such love manifested through us is a proof that we have been born of God, and that we know God in a personal and continual fellowship. And that is why the Apostle John added, “He that loveth not knoweth not God, **for God is love.**” God’s very nature is love. And all of His glorious attributes are exercised in love. God’s will is

exercised in love. His works demonstrate His love. And what we say about God, can be said equally of the Lord Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit. This is so important that the Apostle John repeated it again in 4:16. (Read.) Love is not something that God acquired at some time or place, but it originates in Him! He has always been love, and always will be. We should be able to see love in all that God says and all that God does. The Bible is a book of the love of God. A person who is “born of God” has the very life of God within him, and so is capable of the same kind of love that we see in God. It may not be to the same degree, but it certainly is the same kind of love, or better, the same love.

Now truth always is made clearer if we have an illustration or example of the truth that we are seeking to understand. Where do we find an illustration of the love of God. Look at verses 9 and 10.

### III. THE ILLUSTRATION OF LOVE (1 John 4:9-10).

One meaning of the word “manifested” is that *it became visible*. It was *made known*. It was *clearly recognized and understandable*.

Every time I read through the prophets of the OT, as we are doing again this year, I am overwhelmed with *the love of God*. When we see the sinfulness of Israel and Judah, and how persistently they disobeyed God to do what they wanted to do, we can only marvel that the Lord did not cast them away and have nothing more to do with them. But He couldn’t do that! Why? Because He loved them--and that was the only reason. You don’t have to wait until you get into the NT to see the love of God; it is seen throughout the OT, from creation on! But the love of God had its most glorious demonstration, its unique revelation when “God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”

We see the love of God in the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. There can be no other explanation as to why a holy God would send His Son, His only begotten Son, into this wicked world, except for the fact that “God is love.” And why did He come? Did He come so that the whole world would be saved? No, but “that we might live through him.” The Scriptures plainly teach that God chose us in eternity past, that He set His love upon us then, that He ordained us for salvation. And He loved us so much that He would not even spare His own Son. In fact, how could the love of God be expressed in a stronger way than in what Isaiah the prophet had to say about the death of our Lord. I am referring to Isa. 53:10,

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

- Did God enjoy the sufferings of the Lord? Of course not! But it pleased the Lord to bruise His Son because of what was being accomplished through His death. How could the love of God be any clearer? It ought to move our hearts to tears of joy and to cries of praise when we remember what God did to His Son because of His great love for us.

But look also at verse 10. Here we see more about how we see the love of God illustrated and displayed in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The godly apostle said that love is not that we loved God. It is amazing, and further evidence of the spiritual blindness and depravity of our hearts that we did not love Him first. We are often hindered in our love for each other by things that we see in each others lives which we don't like. But can you and I find anything in God that we don't like? Is there anything unlovely in Him, or in His Son, or in the Holy Spirit. The whole world should turn to Him in love, but people never will--and neither would we have loved Him if He had not loved us first.

- No, this is love, "that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If that doesn't convince us of the love of God, nothing else will!

Let us think of our sins for a moment. We can't possibly think of them all, not only because they are so many, but also because we have committed many sins which we have not recognized as sins. Talk about that which makes people unlovely; there is nothing that makes us more unlovely than our sins. And yet instead of dealing with us as our sins deserve, He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

"Propitiation" is a long word that is hard to pronounce, and you will probably never see it except in the Bible or in books written about the Bible. But it is one of the great words of Scripture. Do you know what it means?

- It means that God is so completely satisfied with the work of His Son that He is favorably inclined to free the sinner from his guilt and to forgive all of his sins. The word is never used of what man can do or has done about his own sins. It is only Christ Who has satisfied God concerning our sins.

His righteousness has been satisfied, and God in mercy and absolute righteousness can forgive guilty sinners who come to Him through Christ.

I have never forgotten how Dr. Chafer used to love to say in our classes in theology, "God is propitious." No sinner can dare to approach God through his own merit, because he has none. All we have before God are demerits which can never be removed unless they are washed away in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has rendered God free to exercise His mercy and grace because He has put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. That is propitiation--not a work that we can do, but a work that Christ has done. And so we can sing that old hymn which was written by Horatius Bonar back in the last century:

Not what my hands have done Can save my guilty soul;  
Not what my toiling flesh has borne Can make my spirit whole.  
Not what I feel or do Can give me peace with God;  
Not all the prayers and sighs and tears Can bear my awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ, Can ease this weight of sin;  
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, Can give me peace within.  
Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,  
Can rid me of this dark unrest, And set my spirit free.

And the last verse goes like this:

I praise the God of grace; I trust His truth and might;  
He calls me His, I call Him mine, My God, my joy, my light.  
'Tis He who saveth me, And freely pardon gives;  
I love because He loveth me, I live because He lives.

Now in the light of all of this glorious truth, we come at last to:

#### **IV. THE EXHORTATION REPEATED (1 John 4:11).**

We have in what Christ has done, the supreme illustration of the love of God for us. Now, in the light of that, if God could love us seeing more sin in us than we have ever seen, can we not then, having been born of Him, love one another.

The word "ought" suggests more than something we should do; it speaks of an obligation we have to God, a debt we need to pay, to love one another. If God could love us in our sin, then we have no excuse for not

loving each other. And by the grace of God we can, we must, we will.

**Concl:** Now the responsibility rests upon us, but the love we need comes from God. And so, with all of the hatred we see around us, let us pray that the Lord will continue to work in our hearts that we may show His love for each other so that, as our Lord prayed in John 17, because of our love for each other, people in the world who know us “may believe,” at this Christmas time and throughout the year, not only that God sent His Son into the world, but that God has loved us with the same love that He loves, and always has love, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I hope that if any of you are without Christ as your Savior, from what you have learned about the love of God today, you will not leave this place today until you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and as your Lord.

## THE SIGHT OF GOD

1 John 4:12-16

**Intro:** If someone were just listening to the Scripture reading without following it in his Bible, he might feel that what was being read was from John 1 instead of 1 John 4. I say that because in both chapters you have these words: “No man hath seen God at any time.” We have it here in 1 John 4:12, and you will find it also in the Gospel of John, 1:18. Let me read to you what John 1:18 tells us:

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

The verse actually means that no one has ever seen God as God, but that God has seen fit to reveal Himself in His “only begotten Son.” Jesus Christ is the most complete revelation of God that God has ever given to man, but, as glorious as the Lord Jesus Christ was in the flesh, yet His glory was only revealed in part. There is more to be known about God than has yet been revealed. Evidently we are incapable of understanding any more than we have in Christ and in the Word. In fact, we will never live long enough to completely comprehend all about God that He has been pleased to reveal. *But the point that we need to understand from John 1:18 is that although no one has ever yet seen God in the fulness of His glory, yet God has revealed Himself in His Son--not fully, but as fully as He intends to reveal Himself for now. The day is coming when we shall see Him, that is, the Father, as He is, as God, in the fullness of His glory. This is what the people of God have been waiting for from the beginning of time!*

The other night Lucille and I were reading Spurgeon’s daily devotional book, the reading for the evening of January 10, and the text for the reading was Job 19:26. This is what that verse says:

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

Later on in the same reading Spurgeon referred to the next verse (27) also where Job added, “Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another...” Putting the verses together Job said, “Yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.”

Isaiah said in another passage (33:17), “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty.” Undoubtedly he was speaking of our Lord, but to see the Lord in His beauty, in His glory, will be a sight that only Peter, James, and John witnessed in part when they were with the Lord on the Mount of Transfig-

uration.

Our Lord gave this wonderful blessing and promise when He said in Matt. 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

And then I am sure many of you will remember Rev. 1:7:

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

What a marvelous day that will be when we actually see God, and see Christ, in the fulness of Their glory. But for now we have to say with the Apostle Paul,

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor. 13:12).

It must be that all of us have thought a great deal about those times in the OT when God displayed His power and His glory. And we have wished that we could have been on earth when the Lord was here so we could have seen Him. It must have been wonderful indeed to have seen the Lord, and to have heard Him as He taught, and to have seen Him as He performed miracles. It is hard to imagine how anyone could have experienced a greater blessing than to have seen the Lord. King David was surely speaking the truth when he wrote in Psalms 16:11,

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

And yet the Apostle John wrote truthfully, "No man hath seen God at any time..." (John 1:18).

When the Apostle John wrote 1 John it was approximately 60 years, more or less, since our Lord had gone back to heaven. John had received some fresh revelations of our Lord such as we have in Revelation 1 and Revelation 19, but here in our text for today, 1 John 4:12, we find him saying again, "No man hath seen God at any time." Even with all that John had seen, yet even he had not seen God as God. He was yet to experience the fulness of God's glory.

But, and here is the point that I want to make with you today: In John 1:18 after stating that "no man hath seen God at any time," the Apostle John went on to say how God had seen fit to reveal Himself. In that case, it was in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Now as we come to that statement

again, this time with the Lord back in heaven, does the Apostle John tell us how God is revealing Himself in the world today?

We all know that God reveals Himself in nature. We learn that in such chapters as Psalm 19 and Romans 1. And we know that God has given us a permanent revelation of Himself in the Word of God. We also know that what the Bible tells us about Christ is the most complete revelation that God has ever given of Himself. *But is there any other way that God reveals Himself to people today, and yet just in our day, but ever since our Savior went back to heaven?* I believe there is, and furthermore, I believe that this is what the Apostle John was speaking about in the verses we are considering today. Undoubtedly what I am about to point out has always been true to a certain degree with the Lord's people, but it is important for all of us to understand the amazing truth which the Apostle John was explaining here.

The point that the Apostle John was making here is (see it in the middle of verse 12):

#### **I. "GOD DWELLETH IN US" (1 John 4:12).**

What an astounding truth this is! We would not dare to claim such a relationship with God if it were not specifically taught in Scripture. Think of it: "God dwelleth in us"--in all of us who are His children. He dwells in you! He dwells in me! This is very difficult to comprehend, isn't it? As we sit here today, we can say that we are indwelt by the living God.

And to show you that this is not a relationship that is reserved just for those of us who have been saved since the Lord was here on earth, but that it was true of the people of God before Christ came. Let me direct your attention to 2 Cor. 6:14-16 where Paul was exhorting the Corinthian believers to live in separation from the world. Listen to what he said:

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, **I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

Where did God say that? He said it in Lev. 26:12. The Spirit of God



enlarged upon it here, but the truth is there. *God dwells in us, and reveals Himself through us!*

This was true of our Lord in His humanity. Do you remember what Nicodemus said to Him? The Apostle John reported this about Nicodemus:

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:2).

Nicodemus recognized God in what our Lord was doing. He knew that God was “with Him.”

You and I claim to know God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We claim that God is our heavenly Father, and that we are His children. Do you suppose that there are people we know who recognize by the way we live that we have a personal knowledge of God, and that God is with us? Apparently from what we read in Scripture, there should be! Let me take it a step farther. Do you suppose there are people who would like to have what we have, and be like we are, because of what they see in our lives?

But let me point out from our text that the Apostle John was not speaking about what we are individually (although that is implied in what he wrote). His emphasis, however, is on what we are in our relationship with each other. Let me read verse 12 for you again. (Read.) What does it mean to love each other? It means fellowship. It means that we are concerned about each other. It means that we pray for each other. It doesn't mean that we go around hugging each other all of the time, or even telling each other that we love one another. The Lord manifested His love for us by laying down His life for us, and we are to lay down our lives for each other. And so we are not talking about human love, but we are talking about “the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” Who has been given to us. We are talking about genuine fellowship.

And this brings me to my second point about God revealing Himself through us. It has to do with:

## **II. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH US (1 John 4:13).**

Here is another astonishing truth: We are the recipients of the Holy Spirit. We are not only indwelt by God, but also by the Holy Spirit. We are

taught by the Spirit. We are empowered by the Spirit. We are kept by the Spirit. What an amazing person a Christian is! With all of our weaknesses and failures, with all that we can't do and with all that we don't know, God is still pleased to manifest Himself through us by the power of the Holy Spirit within us so that the world can see that a child of God is truly a new creature in Christ. And because of the Holy Spirit we are able to know the will of God, and to do the will of God, and to glory even in our infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon us.

But there is yet a third way in which God makes Himself known through us, His people, and this has to do with:

### **III. THE TESTIMONY THAT WE GIVE OF GOD'S SON (1 John 4:14-15).**

Did you realize that the very fact that you know that the Father sent His Son "to be the Savior of the world," and that you and I firmly believe that "Jesus is the Son of God" is proof that God dwells in us, and that we dwell in Him?

And I hope that at this point you realize that we have been talking about all Three Members of the Godhead. And that all that the Apostle John has written here is proof that God dwells in us, and that His dwelling in us is one way today that He is making Himself known in the world. We have become so accustomed to the great truths of Scripture that we forget what it has taken to get these truths in our hearts, and what it means that we are continually bearing testimony to relationship that exists between Jesus and God. And yet it all is evidence that God is at work--at work in us, teaching us, and at work through us, ministering the truth to others that more people may know Who God is, and Who Jesus is, and Who the Holy Spirit is, and why Jesus came into the world. Verse 14 emphasizes that He came to save sinners, and verse 15 indicates that as God's Son He came to reveal God. We believe these truths, and we talk about these truths, and as such God is using us as instruments by whom, through what we say, we are being used to reveal God to our generation.

As such we are shining as lights in a world of intense spiritual darkness. Once we, too, were darkness and in darkness, but now, as Paul said, "are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). And this is why also, our Lord said,

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.  
16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16)..

The Lord said concerning Himself when He was here in the world, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). But He also said this, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). He is still the Light of the world, but since He has gone back to heaven, one of the main ways in which He shed His light is through what we are, and through what we say. May God enable us to be faithful bearers of the light.

And now, in coming to the last point in our text, we get back to the place where we started because of how important it is in this world.

#### **IV. DWELLING IN LOVE AND DWELLING IN GOD (1 John 4:16).**

The real difference between verse 12 and verse 16 is that in verse 12 John was speaking of our love for each other; in verse 16 he was speaking of God’s love for us, and implied (at least) is our love for God.

Notice that the Apostle John did not speak of God’s love for us as a thing of the past. It is not that God love us and saved us, but that His love stopped there. We have known and believed “the love that God hath to us.” It is not past tense, but present tense. And the Greek is better translated, *in us*.

What greater testimony can there be to the character of God and to the living presence of God than the deep and abiding realization in the hearts of the Lord’s people that regardless of what is going on in our lives, God loves us. His love never stops. His love never varies; it never changes. It is always the same wonderful love which sent our Savior into the world to die for us that we might live eternally.

**Concl:** So even though it is still true that “no man hath seen God at any time,” yet it is also true that God has not left Himself without a witness. And in this present age we still have the Word of God with all that it teaches us about the Son of God. And we still have what we see in nature around us, and in our consciences within us. And this is a testimony for all to see. But one of the most powerful of all testimonies as to the existence of God and the character of God and the love of God, is to be

seen in the lives of the Lord's people, in their fellowship with God Himself, and in the love that they manifest for one another.

Surely this is what the Apostle Peter had in mind when he wrote 1 Peter 3:15,

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

There is very little of this today, and it is very likely that the problem is that the world can see so little in the lives of the professing people of God which shows the One we profess to know and to love and to serve. May God help us to see how important it is that we live for the Lord so that our lives may be used by God to draw others to Himself.

**PERFECT LOVE**

1 John 4:16-21

**Intro:** In some respects the writings of the Apostle John are among the simplest books in the Scriptures. His words, for the most part, are simple, and easy to understand. Little children who are just beginning to read, can begin with John's writings. When I was in seminary beginning the study of the Greek NT, we started with the writings of John. So even his Greek is simple--far different from Luke whose writings are probably the most difficult.

But, in other ways, the writings of the Apostle John are the most profound. He deals extensively with truth relating to *our union with Christ*. He has given us what the Lord had to say about *abiding in Christ*. These are terms which are extremely important, but it is not easy for us to grasp what they mean. However, the Holy Spirit is the Teacher of all of the Word of God, and so we should not draw back from anything that we find in our Bibles. We probably don't depend upon the Holy Spirit as much as we should.

One of the expressions that the Apostle John used in the epistle which we are considering on Sunday mornings, is the expression, "perfect love." Or he speaks of love that has been *perfected*. We come to it first in 1 John 2:5. Let me read it to you, reading verse 4 as well because the two go together. (Read 1 John 2:4, 5).

The next time the Apostle John mentioned *perfect love* was in 1 John 4:12. (Read.) And then he mentioned it three times in two of the verses of my text for today: 1 John 4:17-18. (Read.)

So when we put all of these together we can see the perfection of our love is something that is very important for us to seek, something that we as the children of God need to be vitally concerned about.

Let me begin by pointing out from this epistle that when the Apostle John was writing about love, He was speaking primarily about:

**I. THE LOVE OF GOD (1 John 4:16).**

Notice in 1 John 4:16 the expression, "the love that God hath to us."

In 1 John 3:16 we find these words: "Hereby perceive we love of God,

because **He** laid down His life **for us.**" And then in 1 John 4:9 we read, "In this was manifested **the love of God toward us.**" So when we talk about "the love of God," the starting point is always God's love for us, not our love for Him! And yet at the same time we can see the connection between His love for us and our love for Him. The word "him," referring to God in 1 John 4:19 is not in all the Greek texts, but when we consider the context, it seems to me that there is little doubt but that the Apostle John was speaking about loving God. Paul told the church at Rome that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5b).

Do we need anyone to tell us that by nature none of us has the love of God in our hearts? We are aware that there is a God, but we have no desire to seek Him, and certainly no desire to please Him. He is not in any of our thoughts. And so it is not until we are saved, not until we are born again, that we begin to love God. And that love is not only directed toward God, but also, in a special way, toward all others who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. In 1 John 4:9-10 we read that God loved us and sent His Son that we might live through Him, but also that Christ came to be the propitiation for our sins. And the Apostle John followed those two statements with this: "Beloved, is God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

On the other hand, read verse 20 of our text. (Read.) It is not possible for anyone to truly love God, but not to love also his brother or sister in Christ. Our Lord Himself said (and you will find His words in John 13:34), "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Bishop Westcott said in his commentary on 1 John that the love of God is the love which he shows and bestows, which in turn is shown by us toward God and toward each other.

But now let me ask the question,

## II. WHAT IS LOVE?

Or, to state it another way, what does it mean that God loves us, and that we are to love each other? What does it mean to love with the love that God has bestowed upon us?

I have sought to answer this question before, but let me say it again.

God's love sought our highest good. And our highest good was the salvation of our souls. Our highest good was to be delivered from hell, and to be guaranteed heaven. Our highest good was that we be made new, new creatures. We were born in sin by human birth; we needed to be born again, born from above, by a new birth. We needed not only to be delivered from sin's penalty, but also from sin's power and bondage. Our highest good was, and is, that we be made like God's Son. That is the great goal of our salvation. When Paul said in Rom. 8:28 that God works all things together for our good, he did not mean that God gives us everything that we want. He meant that God so works in all of the circumstances of our lives so that the outcome is always good because He is continually working to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. This is love.

And so for us to love each other means that we are always seeking that which will benefit others spiritually. That is why we seek to be an example to each other. That is why we pray for each other. That is why we do all we can to encourage each other. The love of God is more than words; it means love in action.

So I trust that you will see this truth. God loves us, and He bestows His love upon us, and it is with His love that we love each other. We show our love for God first, and then with that same love we show our love for each other.

But this brings up another question:

### III. HOW DO WE SHOW GOD THAT WE LOVE HIM?

Now please keep in mind that I am speaking about those who are trusting Christ for their salvation. I am not speaking of people generally. In fact, what I am about to say is only possible to those who are the children of God by faith in Christ.

How we show that we love God was stated very clearly by our Lord Jesus Christ when He was with His disciples in the Upper Room shortly before He was to be crucified. I don't see how any child of God can possibly miss what the Lord said, or what He meant. These are His words: **"If ye love me, keep my commandments"** (John 14:15).

Where do we find His commandments? We find them in the Bible. It is there that He tells us His people how He wants us to live. Years later when the Apostle John wrote 1 John, he stated it this way:

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:2).

Do you know what “not grievous” means? It means that they will not be a burden to you. They will not make life unhappy for you. In fact, it will do just the opposite: it will bring you into the most wonderful fellowship with God that you have ever known. Let me prove that to you by reading another two verses from John 14. First, verse 21:

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

And then when the other Judas among his disciples, not Iscariot, asked the Lord how He would manifest Himself to them and not to the world, we read that the Lord said this in John 14:23:

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Obedience leads to fellowship, fellowship with God and fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ. For God the Father and God the Son to make their “abode” with us, doesn’t speak of just a visit, but it speaks of life-long fellowship. We would never describe such fellowship as “grievous,” a burden. We can’t think of anything that would bring us greater joy--to have such intimate fellowship with God and with His Son. But this fellowship can only be experienced as we live in obedience to the Word of God. Obedience to the Word leads to fellowship, and fellowship leads to fulness of joy. Read again 1 John 1:3-4. (Read.)

There is a great deal of difference in knowing *about* the Lord as compared with *knowing Him!* We need to learn all we can *about* the Lord, but not stop there. We need to search His Word to see what He wants us to be, and not be; how He wants us to talk, and not talk; and even how He wants us to think, and not think.. It is all in the Word. But you and I need to search out the commandments of the Lord, and then, by His grace, do what the Lord tells us to do, and refuse to do what He tells us not to do. No Christian can experience real fellowship with the Lord without obeying the commandments of the Lord.

Back before Lucille and I were married, the Lord showed us these verses from John 14 about obedience and fellowship, and it was a long time before we could talk about anything else. And we both started to mark the commandments of the Lord which are scattered all through the Word which apply to us today. I say, “which apply to us today,” because there



are some which do not apply. As an illustration, let me remind you that we don't bring the sacrifices that the children of God were required to bring in OT times. But don't let that keep you out of the OT. There are many things in the OT that God still asks us to do, or not do. And there are several hundred in the NT. Let me challenge you today to start this very day to mark in some way the commandments of the Lord, and then seek by the grace of God to obey them. I can guarantee you on the authority of the Word of God that it will bring you into a place of blessing in your life which you probably have never known before. Obedient children are a delight to human parents, and when we as God's children are obedient to Him, we are a delight to Him as well.

But now let me come to my final point for today:

#### **IV. WHAT IS "PERFECT LOVE"?**

What does this tell us about our love for the Lord? We have no question about the Lord's love for us. Without question that is perfect because there never are, and never will be, any flaws in it. His love for us is infinite. His love for us is changeless. He can never love us any more than He does because His love is infinite, and He will never love us any less than He does because He Himself is changeless. "God is love," and since God never changes, neither does His love.

But that is not true of us. Our love fluctuates. Sometimes because of our weakness morally, we are like Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Peter--we don't show our love for the Lord. So it is not "perfect." But let me explain to you what the Greek word "perfect" means so that we can understand 1 John 2:5 and 4:12 and 4:16-18. (Read these verses again.)

To have a "perfect love" is to have a love that is growing, maturing, a love that is being made complete, and which finds its consummation first in our character, and then in the life that we live. Obedience leads to fellowship and fellowship leads to a Christ-like life and this leads to a perfecting of our love for the Lord. And the more we love the Lord, the more we are going to love each other in the Lord. And when we love each other, there is going to be less criticism and more grace in our relationships with each other.

**Concl:** And what are some of the fruits of such a life besides those which I have already mentioned?

Verse 17 says that we will have “boldness in the day of judgment.” This means that as we face that final day of judgment when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we can do it with confidence, boldness, assurance, not in what we have done, but in what our precious Lord has done in our lives.

And did you notice that statement at the end of verse 17: “because as he is, so are we in this world.” This is so wonderful that it should be hard for us to believe, and it will be if we really understand what the Apostle John was saying. Let me try to explain it to you as I understand it. “As He is” means as God is now. Bishop Westcott said, “at present and eternally” (p. 158). The Apostle John was not speaking in absolute terms. We have a long way to go before we are all that God wants us to be. But he did mean that as we walk in fellowship with the Lord, more and more the attributes of God which He communicates to us, will become more and more apparent “in this world.” “So are we in this world”! What? “As He is.” This is the goal of our salvation, isn’t it? The transformation started the moment we were saved. It has continued up to this present moment. It makes steady progress as we obey God and enjoy fellowship with Him and with His Son. And it will be completed finally when we see the Lord.

But here is another benefit: “There is no fear in love.” Apparently the first emotion that Adam experienced after he sinned was *fear*! He hid himself from God. And man has been a bundle of fears ever since. And have you noticed that the more we depart from God as a nation, the greater and more numerous our fears have become. Fear is what tortures us, not the commandments of the Lord. And the person who fears, even if he or she might be a child of God, has not been made perfect in love.

So, you see, the remedy for fear is obedience to the Lord and fellowship with the Father and the Son. We can’t control what may happen to us, or to our loved ones. But the safest and happiest place for any of us to be is to be walking in daily fellowship with the Lord, seeking always to do His will as we see it in the Word of God.

As we leave today, let us be praying that the Lord will enable us to persevere in seeking His commandments, and then to do them, that we might enjoy fellowship with the Lord, personal fellowship with Him, so that we may become more like Him and reap the fruits of assurance and peace which He bestows on those who walk with Him and who love the people He sent His Son to save.