

**PERFECT LOVE**

1 John 4:17-21

**Intro:** I have mentioned more than once that when the Apostle John wrote the books of the Bible that are attributed to Him, as far as we know, he was the sole survivor of the apostles. He was surely in his eighties, and possibly in his early nineties. His mind was crystal clear, and we should all recognize that, while he was directed by the Holy Spirit in what he wrote, he also was writing about truth, the truth of God, that had become very precious to him throughout the years of his life. And in his works we see subjects which were a great source of strength to him in his old age.

We would have to say that high on the list of truths that were precious to him, was the truth of the love of God. Twice in this fourth chapter of 1 John he tells us that “God is love” (4:8, 16). In chapter 1 he began by telling us that “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” We know that this means that God is holy, God is righteous, and you will never find a trace of unrighteousness or sin in Him regardless of how long and how hard you look. And that is what makes it so amazing that God loves us because we are not light. We are darkness. By nature we are everything that is displeasing to God. The fact that God loves any human being is the greatest wonder in the world. We need to dwell on the holiness of God and the love of God until we marvel that He would ever want to have anything to do with any of us. But He does! And He does because of His great love for us. In fact, He told His people in OT times through the prophet Jeremiah,

Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee (Jer. 31:3).

This means that there never has been a time that God has not loved His people. And it was because of His love for us that He has drawn us to Himself in salvation.

When Moses wrote to the children of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy about God’s love for them, he had this to say:

6 For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

7 The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

(Quotation continued on next page)

8 But because the Lord loved you . . . (Deut. 7:6-8a).

Moses could not come up with a single reason as to why God loved them. And why was that the case? Because there was no reason in any of them as to why God would love them. He loved them because He loved them. Why would the Lord send His Son to die for me, or for you? There is absolutely no reason in any one of us why He should have loved us, and especially to love us as much as He did, and still does! *The reason why God loves any of us, is locked up in the heart of God.* As with the children of Israel, *He loves us because He loves us.*

And, as I have told you many times before, His love for us never fluctuates. Our love for Him goes up and down. His is always the same. It is eternal and unchanging. **Illus:** God's response to Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1.

In the passage we considered together last Sunday, 1 John 4:11-16, we saw that there was an emphasis in those verses that this God of love has come to abide in us. And it is because of His abiding in us, that we are capable of loving Him. This is John's way of saying what the Apostle Paul said in the words, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given unto us." (Rom. 5:5). And it is by God dwelling in us, this God Who is love, that we are capable of loving Him, and capable of loving one another. The Apostle John expressed it in verse 12 of this chapter. (Read.)

That verse (12) suggests the subject of my message this morning – the perfection of His love in us. And I say that because of what the Apostle John wrote in verses 17 and 18 in particular. (Read.)

Now I am sure that you would agree with me when I say that the only perfect love that there is in heaven or upon earth is the love of God. Like everything else about God, it cannot be improved upon. God is infinite in all of His attributes. He has perfect wisdom and knowledge. So it is impossible for God to learn anything that He does not already know. His love is also perfect. It cannot be improved upon.

But we would also agree that it is our love for God that needs to be perfected. But why is that when our love for God is made possible by His love for us, "shed abroad in our hearts"?

Let me say that our love for God will never be perfect in this life. It will

never be all that God's love is in itself. What did the Apostle John mean, then, then he said, "Herein is our love made perfect." The word that John used did not mean exactly like God's love, but he meant that as we walk with the Lord in obedience to His commandments (because that is the way we show our love for Him) there is going to be a more complete, a more mature, manifestation of the love of God which is in us.

If we could have met the Apostle John and could have asked him if his love for God was perfect (as we usually use that word), I am sure that he would say, "No, I am still learning more and more about God's love and how to show it to God, to His people, and to the world in general." But we would not be with him very long before we would see that he was showing far more of the love of God in his life than we are in our lives. The One Who perfectly, completely, manifested His love for God and for His people, was our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been saved to be made like Christ, and so the Apostle John was speaking here in these verses about our becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus.

But we need to realize that the manifestation of this love which will have such a transforming effect is, first of all, to be directed toward God Himself. We will never love the God's people more than we love God, so loving Him needs to be what we are primarily concerned about.

That is why the Lord answered as He did when He was asked what was the greatest commandment in the Law. You remember His answer. Let me read about that incident in the life of our Lord. It is found in Matthew 22:34-40:

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The Lord was pointing to the most basic truth in Scripture, but he didn't understand what the Lord was talking about. God loves us that we might

love Him. In our text we have to go back to verse 16 to get the point of what the Apostle John was saying in verse 17. This God of love dwells in us, and we in Him, that we might love Him and might continually love Him more and more. What God commands, He enables us to do.

So we show our love for Him by keeping His commandments. We do His will, not because we are afraid of Him, but because we love Him.

And, looking further into verse 17, there is no better way to prepare for the day of judgment. We look forward to that time which even unbelievers know is coming. But with do it with “boldness.” Here is another word that we need some help with. “Boldness” often means to people today, self-confidence, or pride. But the word “boldness” actually means here *confidence*, or *assurance*. Paul tells us at the end of Romans 1 that people who sin to their heart’s content, do so, know that there is a day of judgment coming. People often glibly say, “Oh, I will take my chances when that day comes,” but down in their hearts there is a fear of what that day will mean to them. The instructed and obedience child of God, on the other hand, can look forward to that day knowing that if he, or she, has spent life showing love for the Lord, that they can be confident that they will receive a “well done” from the Lord.

Note the other places where the Apostle John used this word which is translated “boldness” here in 4:17: in 2:28; 3:21-22; 5:14-15. This same word is used in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace . . .” Also concerning prayer, Hebrews 10:35-36:

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

The reason that an obedient believer does not fear the judgment is because we are seeking by His grace to be like He is, and He is not going to pass judgment upon Himself. It is difficult for us to understand the intimate relationship we as God’s people have with Him.

Following along with this truth of our union with God and the other Members of the Godhead, we do not “fear” God in the sense of dreading the time that we will see Him, or even in our reaction to the circumstances of our lives. Seeking to please God does not mean a trouble-free life. We have our trials just like anyone else. But Isaiah’s word should come to

our minds here: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength” (Isa. 26:3-4). When fear is a problem for us, it shows our immaturity.

Verse 19 reminds us that we do not love the Lord because we initiated the relationship. We only love Him because He first loved us, and shed His love in our hearts by which love we love Him in return. It is to our shame, and to the shame of the whole human race, that none of us would have loved God if He had not loved us first, choosing us in eternity past, seeking us in time, calling us to Himself, and drawing us to Himself. Our salvation is the fruit of the sovereign love and grace of God for worthless sinners.

God’s love found expression when God through Christ met our deepest need. His love in us causes us to seek the welfare of our fellow believers. We need to keep this in mind as we talk with each other before or after our services. We should seek to leave our brothers and sisters in Christ with the blessing of God even in ordinary conversation. It is, according to verse 20, impossible to love God if we don’t love the people of God. This means that the person who regularly stays away from the meetings of the church, is raising all kinds of questions about his own relationship with God.

Do you remember how many times the Apostle John used the word “liar”? Cf. 1 John 1:6,10; 2:4, 21, 22, 27; 4:20; 5:10.

And so in verse 21 the Apostle John reminds us again that loving the people of God is not an option for those who claim to be Christians. We are not being obedient to the will of God if we don’t love each other in the Lord.

**Concl:** But what do we need to do for the perfection of the love of God which is in all true believers?

First, read your Bible to learn all that you can about God. Especially learn all that you can about God’s love for you, what He has done to express His love for you, and what should be the results in your life that you should look for. You will find basically that the Lord wants you to love Him, and if you love Him your are going to trust Him.

Second, note the commandments of Scripture that apply to your life. Remember that the Christian life is a supernatural life. God does not expect you to obey Him on your own, with your own strength. Faith does not mean that we leave everything to the Lord. We respond, but looking to Him for the strength and wisdom to live like He wants us to live.

Third, in all of this we need to pray. Prayer is the way we acknowledge how dependent we are upon the Lord. But remember that there are different kinds of prayer. There is confession. There is worship. There is thanksgiving. There is intercession. There are personal petitions. These are not necessarily exercised independently of each other, but often they are blended together. In prayer ask the Lord to make you sensitive to the needs of others, and then to provide you with opportunities to show your love for them and your interest in them. It will be a great blessing to you as well as a blessing to those to whom we minister.

May the Lord make all of us diligent in seeking perfect the love, His love, that He has placed in all of our hearts. This was the burden upon the heart of the Apostle John as he wrote because he had found such blessing for himself in seeking to love the Lord and enjoying the fruit of his efforts.