

**MADE PERFECT IN LOVE**

1 John 4:17-21

**Intro:** Each evening before we go to bed, Lucille and I have been reading the story of certain hymns before we read something from the Word. A few nights ago we came to a hymn which we used to sing quite frequently, but it has been a long time since we had sung it, and it was a blessing to read the verses over again, and to learn a little about its background. I am speaking of the hymn, or Gospel song, entitled, The Love of God. Frederick Lehman wrote both the words and music to it. It was back in 1917 when he was facing some financial needs, and he had been meditating on the love of God. He wrote two of the stanzas over a brief time, and then added the third verse later from a sermon he had heard on the love of God. Both Lucille and I were blessed to read the verses again, and I want to begin by reading the words of the last stanza because it fits so well into my subject this morning.

This is the third stanza:

Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,  
 Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,  
 To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry;  
 Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.

Anyone who is called upon to speak of the love of God would feel a sense of helplessness when faced with such a task. The writers of Scripture could only do it under the careful guidance of the Spirit of God. But that task fell in a great measure to the Apostle John. He sometimes has been referred to as the Apostle of Love. And 1 John is his masterpiece of writing in which he was led word by word to discuss this greatest of all subjects, the love of God. The love of God runs like a golden thread through all of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Often it is mentioned specifically. Many times it is illustrated in Scripture. Behind all of the blessings that God has ever poured out on this world of are, is the love of God. But no one has the privilege of knowing it like those of us do who have experienced the amazing love of God in our salvation. And day after day, all of our lives, we have continued to be the recipients of the love of God. Even Jeremiah in Old Testament times was not only revelling in the love of God, but that it was everlasting and was the cause of his salvation. You will find his words in Jeremiah 31:3:

3 The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness

have I drawn thee.

If it is “everlasting love” (and it is), then there never has been a moment of time in the past when God did not love him, nor was there any period in Jeremiah’s life when the Lord did not love him, and the same truth extends into eternity. And the wonder of it all is that you and I can say the same thing. There was a time in all of our lives when we first love the Lord, but there has never been a moment in which the Lord has not loved us. His love extends from eternity to eternity.

As I have told some of you many times, the first words of Scripture that I memorized were the words of the Lord Jesus found in John 3:16.

The Apostle Paul has told us some wonderful things about the love of God. One of those statements is found in Ephesians 2. After reminding us of what we were before we were saved, then he followed those dark words with these found in Ephesians 2:4-7:

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

I could spend the rest of my time this morning reading passage after passage from the Bible which tell us about the love of God. We would have no salvation if it were not for the love of God. The Cross of Christ is the supreme evidence of God’s love for unworthy, hopeless and helpless sinners.

The Apostle John in this first epistle tells us two main things about God. One is that “God is light, and in Him is not darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). This means that He is holy. He is righteous, perfectly righteous. You will never find even a trace of sin in God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. But then as we get into chapter 4 twice John tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). God’s righteousness was satisfied by our Savior at the Cross when He died as our Substitute, and it was at the Cross that by grace, and grace alone, God’s love was satisfied.

But in our text this morning there is an expression, which is also found earlier in this epistle, that I want to focus our attention on. And you will

find it in both 1 John 4:17 and 18. It has to do with our being made perfect in God's love. (Read verses 17 and 18.)

Now if you will turn back to chapter 2, and verse 5, you will find these words: "But whoso keepeth his word (God's word), in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him."

And then you will find it again in chapter 4, verse 17. (Read.) But you can tell by the first word of verse 17, "herein," that John was referring to what he had just said in verse 16. (Read verses 16 and 17 together.)

Now the word "perfect" needs a little explanation. I hope we all know that some day we are going to be perfect when it will no longer be possible for us to sin or to displease God in any way. That will be only after we see the Lord, and are made like Him – a process which began when we were first saved, and which continues as we grow in the Lord until we see the Lord and are finally made like Him.

However, the word "perfect" in the Bible also conveys another idea that we all need to understand.

There are four aspects of the love of God that we need to be aware of as Christians.

The first is our understanding of the doctrine of the love of God. It is one of the major truths of Scripture. And the Apostle John hits it hard here in 1 John 4 when he tells us in 1 John 4:8 and again in verse 6 that "God is love." Now that is doctrine. That is one glorious fact that we need to understand about God. He is "light" also. That is He is a holy God Who is never pleased with our sin. He is a God Who judges sin in the lives of His people in particular. But basically we need to get this truth firmly fixed in our hearts that "God is love." This is foundational teaching about God. He is love, the personification of love.

Now a second point which John makes, and it is supported by all of Scripture, and that is that God loves us. This is what was such a comfort to Jeremiah.

But a third point about the love of God is that we are to love God. This is the first, the greatest, the most important commandment of all. We are to love the Lord with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our

strength, and with all of our mind. The Lord first stated this in Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

5 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And then our Lord stated it again in answer to a Jewish lawyer who was trying to get the Lord to say the wrong thing. The Lord's words are found in Matthew 22:36-40:

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.

Now if we were to state in one statement what it means to love God, what would that statement be? The Apostle John has given it to us in 1 John 2:5:

5 But whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.

This is our love for Him. Going to the Upper Room again, remember that our Lord said to His disciples, "If ye love Me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

And then there is a fourth point about the love of God. And this fourth point is that we are to love each other in the family of God. The first statement of this truth was that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And that still stands. But not many of us are really faithful in doing this. But the Lord gave another commandment to the Apostles when He was with them in the Upper Room just the night before He was crucified. Many of you will remember what He told the apostles that they were to do. His words to which I am referring are found in John 13: 34-35:

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.

See on this the last verse of our chapter: 1 John 4:21. And we have had it over and over again in this epistle from chapter 2 on.

So when you find the Bible speaking of the love of God, I think that you will find that they all fall into one of these four categories:

- 1) The doctrine that God is love.
- 2) God's love for us.
- 3) Our love for God.
- 4) Our love for each other in the family of God.

When you think of the word “perfect” as the Apostle John uses it here, don't think in terms of perfection, but think in terms of *completeness*. *This is a divine prescription for a life of fellowship with God. It is God's way of showing us how we are to live.* As is the case with the other writers of Scripture the Apostle John would lay a glorious and powerful foundation for the Christian life in the knowledge of God, but then by releasing that power in living in the enjoyment of God's love for us, and our love for Him, and our love for each other. God is in us, and we are in God.

Now I have given you four points which I believe reflect the teaching of the Apostle John, but I do not think that he meant that we move from one to the other leaving one behind as we go to another. This is the order in which we take them up, but we continue growing in our knowledge of God's love, living in the peace that we get from His love for us, growing in our love for Him, and overflowing with the love of God into the lives of our fellow believers. So to be perfect, to be complete, is to be living in the enjoyment of all four of these aspects of the love of God.

Now if these four points were all we have, it would be more than enough. But the Apostle John gives us a very practical benefit by which we can judge what kind of progress we are making. *And it has to do with something which we all are well acquainted; FEAR!* Look at 1 John 4:18. (Read.)

What are some of the fears we have? Health? The future? Money? Death?

You see (and I am saying this to myself as well as to you because I need all of this teaching too), verse 19 tells us that there would be no love in this world if it were not for God.

Verse 20 is for the person who says that he loves God, but not the people of God – or at least, not all of them.

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Verse 20 brings us back to the last point he has been making which shows that if you can't love your brothers and sisters, it is because there is something (or many somethings) missing in what leads up to the last point.

Let me close by giving you two helps toward your completeness:

- 1) From the OT – Isaiah 26:3-4, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace ...”
- 2) From the NT – 1 Peter 5:6-7, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.