

Manifesting Perfect Love, Part 2

Scripture: 1 John 4:13-21

Code: 62-35

Well, we come now to the study of the Word of God and to 1 John again, chapter 4, and we're talking about the subject of perfect love...perfect love. Great subject, a great theme, a theme that should be the interest of everyone. I'm not sure that everyone would be interested in the answer to where to find perfect love, but it is the truth that it resides only in Christ.

As we approach this text, just a bit of a big picture, which I usually like to do, realizing there are probably many folks here tonight, as always, who haven't kind of been through the whole series. I was thinking about how we might approach this text in the framework of this tremendous epistle of 1 John we've been going through for months and months now. And I think maybe one way to do it is all of you remember that Jesus taught a parable familiar to all of us called the parable of the wheat and the tares. Remember that? Matthew chapter 13. And Jesus was describing the Kingdom. He was describing Christianity. He was describing this age of the church. And he said that during this age God will sow wheat. That is, God will plant the seed of gospel truth and there will be faith and salvation and fruitfulness. And He's planting wheat in the sense that wheat is true Christianity, there would be real Christians. But the devil will come along, according to that parable, and he will sow tares. One of the ways in ancient times that you hurt your enemy was by sowing tares in his wheat field. In an agricultural society, to destroy someone's crop was the best way to destroy their livelihood and their lives. And so enemies coming along sowing weeds among someone's wheat would not be an unfamiliar concept.

And Jesus said, the enemy, the devil, comes and he sows tares among the wheat. And this particular thing that is sown, known as darnel, grows up and looks so much like wheat that you can't really tell the two apart, except with very close scrutiny. And if you were to go out into your field and try to remove the tares, you would find yourself ripping out the wheat, they're so indistinguishable at certain points in their development. And so Jesus said we're going to have to wait unto the judgment when the Lord sends the reapers, who are the angels, to reap the field and then after the field is reaped, God will sort out the wheat from the tares, the real from the false.

Jesus was saying you can expect within the framework of Christianity, within the life of the church that there are going to be true Christians and false ones living together and sometimes indistinguishable. Now there is no more important matter in all of life than salvation, no important matter than taking

care of eternity and knowing your sins are forgiven and you are promised eternal heaven. And that is the matter that occupies the church. This is our great mandate. This is our commission. This is our mission. This is our objective. This is our purpose. This is what we do. We proclaim the gospel to the lost around the world. That is our task. We exist for this purpose in the world. The reason we teach you the Word of God is to build you up so that you'll be a more effective, more impactful witness to the glory of the gospel. Bringing sinners the wonderful news of reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sin, the hope of eternal life through the person and work of Jesus Christ, that is our message. We are evangelists. We are giving invitations to people all the time, calling people, pleading, begging, as Paul said, that people would be reconciled to God, crying out to them to believe the gospel, to escape from hell, to receive an eternal home in heaven, living in the absolute joy of the presence of God forever and ever.

And really, the church has been engaged in this through all of its history. It is really inconceivable when you think about it, how much time, how much money and how much energy has been committed to this task. I mean, there's no end to it. In our day today there are innumerable institutions and organizations and missions and ministries and strategies that have come into existence. Facilities have been built, programs have been designed, plans have been made, operations are carried out involving millions of people and billions upon billions of dollars to engage this very critical task of evangelism. Countless teachers and preachers and evangelists and pastors and missionaries, books, tracts, radio programs, tapes, CDs, DVDs, television programs and on and on it goes, every kind of creative medium known to man, including now, of course, the Internet, everything is used as a tool in this effort at evangelism. One ministry alone in our own country claims to have a 450 million dollar annual budget devoted to its evangelistic efforts to reach people with the gospel. All this money, all this man power, all this time, all this energy directed ostensibly toward evangelism.

But as you analyze it a little more closely, it seems that the most powerful and the most moneyed and the most influential of these ministries, the most wide-spread, the most dominant function outside the church and are flawed with what can be a deadly flaw. And it is this, often the gospel that they preach falls short of being an adequate presentation. It is a minimal kind of gospel. It is a marginal kind of gospel. It is in many cases even an inadequate gospel to make the truth of salvation known enough so that someone can savingly believe. To me that is just a tragedy of tragedies. All that effort, all that time, all that facility, all that money invested, all of the many, many people who engage in this, all the strategies that are involved in it and at the end when the gun is finally shot, the bullet is a blank..cheap gospel, decisionism, invitationism, insufficient presentation of the essentials lacking in a call for repentance, brokenness, submission, self-denial, cross-bearing and obedience and even lacking in many cases in clarity as to what the gospel actually is.

I said from this pulpit some years ago that I was being interviewed on a Christian radio station by a Christian radio talk show host who did a four-hour afternoon program answering people's spiritual questions. This person was the spiritual counselor. And it became apparent to me in the interview that this person lacked basic knowledge of what I understood as sort of minimal Bible understanding. And so, in the break off the air, I said, "May I ask you a question? How did you become a Christian?" To which the person replied, "Well one day I got Jesus' phone number and we've been connected ever since." And I must have had a stunned look on my face and I didn't quite know what to say and I said, "Well, could you say that again?"

"Yeah, one day I got Jesus' phone number and we've been connected ever since."

And I said, "Well what do you mean by that?"

She said, "What do you mean what do I mean by that?" She said, "If someone asked you how you became a Christian, what would you say?"

And so I launched into an explanation of the gospel. To which this woman host said, "Oh come on, you don't have to go through all of that, do you?" This is not just the man or woman on the street, this is someone responsible to give spiritual counsel in one of the major cities in America on Christian radio. It can be very frightening how much is invested in an inadequate presentation of the gospel.

The results of this are very often half-converted people who are not converted at all but live with some kind of an illusion about their condition, their deluded. They belong in that category of those who say, "Lord, Lord," and the Lord says, "I never knew you." They are deceived about the true spiritual relationship they have to the Lord, or really don't have. They think they're wheat, but it's likely they are tares. And frankly, in the contemporary Christian style of evangelism, very little interest, very little effort, very little emphasis is spent to confront people who profess Christ and call them to examine themselves to see if that profession is genuine. It's almost viewed as an affront to someone who professes Christ, to question the validity of that claim. If somebody claims to be a Christian, that satisfies most. Some minimal claim affirming Christ is certainly enough because there are even people in evangelicalism today who say you don't even need to affirm Christ, and God will accept whatever it is you affirm as enough.

Today if a person is a Roman Catholic or they're a member of a liberal denomination, or some kind of cult or sect or self-styled Charismatic group, and they say they're a Christian and they profess to know Christ, it's really not permissible to question the validity of that profession. And, you know, it's really a head-in-the-sand approach. How can you commit this much energy, this much time, this much manpower, this many dollars, this much effort to an enterprise and never really honestly assess the validity of the results? I actually had an evangelist say to me, one time, if I believed your theology, I'd have to go back and undo all of the converts and the evangelistic messages that I did.

Well, brother, then you better go back and undo them because what do they mean if it was an inadequate presentation? The heads you're counting really can't be counted. I remember when I was in Ecuador and they had an evangelism in depth conference and 3,000 people were saved. And a year later they found two of them in the churches of the city of Keto(?). Where were the other 2,998? This kind of superficial evangelism, this kind of reluctance to confront the confessing, professing believer, to see the validity of that person's profession is critical to our evangelism. We must examine, we must question because Satan is always sowing tares among the wheat and sometimes the tares don't even know they are tares. They think they're wheat.

The importance of this matter cannot be overstated. False Christians are in danger of the same hell as rejecters of Christ. False Christians are in danger of the same hell as rejecters of Christ. False Christians need to be rescued from the hell they're headed toward. This has been a major emphasis, as you know, in my life and ministry, trying to get the gospel straight, trying to call people to self-examination. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith."

Our Lord Himself was concerned about this issue and that's why He gave the parable about the wheat and the tares. That's why He taught what some have come to call the hard sayings of Jesus. "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." "If you're not willing, literally, to hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brother, your family, if you're not willing to reject all that the world offers, if you're not willing literally to give up everything you have, even your life, you're not worthy to be My disciple." Jesus eliminated the superficial. He eliminated the half-committed by the hard truth of gospel commitment. He called for true repentance. He called for self-denial. That's just not common today in the cool communication of contemporary evangelicalism.

Faithful biblical teaching of the gospel divides the truth from the false, and rightly it should. One of the things that a faithful pastor has to do is make sure that he confronts profession and he confronts public confession with a call to self-examination. Jesus did that. Jesus did it with His own disciples. And sometimes He tightened the noose so...so tight around their necks with regard to the true commitment required for salvation, that they abandoned Him permanently.

Now here's what I'm saying summed up. What good is shallow evangelism followed by an unexamined life? What good is it? What good is shallow evangelism followed by an unexamined life? I was criticized by leading evangelicals when I wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus* because it was divisive. I wrote it to be divisive. I wrote it to divide between who's a real Christian and who's not and make that crystal clear so that no one would be deceived. Is that something evil? It seems to me that that's something for which I'm responsible before God. What good is shallow evangelism

followed by the unexamined life? Worst than wasteful, it is deadly spiritually and, of course, spiritually.

Now all that brings us to 1 John. First John was written to call us to the examination. First John was written to give us the criteria by which we could do the test of our faith. And I've told you before, and I tell you again, chapter 5 verse 13 is the key to this epistle. It's the thesis of the epistle, all the rest is wrapped around this thesis. "These things...1 John 5:13...I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

The implication there is believing is not necessarily enough. You all say you believe. You believe in Jesus Christ. You believe in the Son of God. I'm writing this epistle so that you can know whether that is saving faith that brings eternal life. Many believe on the name of the Son of God. Many have their view of Christ, but aren't truly saved.

John lays out the tests of true salvation. There are some doctrinal tests. You must have the right view of man in his sin. You must have the right view of Jesus Christ, who He really is and that He came to be the propitiation for our sins and not ours only but the sins of the whole world. There are some doctrinal tests. The right view of man in his sin, the right view of Christ in His salvation. And then there are some moral tests, or some behavioral tests. And really, they break down to two...obedience to the Word of God, and love for the Lord and His people. You can by these tests the validity of your claim.

Go back with me to chapter 1, for a minute, just sort of regripping these truths. Verse 6, "If we say we have fellowship with Him," you say you have fellowship with God, you say you are Christ's and you believe in Christ, "But you walk in the darkness," that is to say you continue in a pattern of sinfulness, "we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son is cleansing us from all sin." So you don't just look at what someone claims, you look at how they walk and that's just a metaphor for how they live their life. You can't deny sin, as we noted, verses 8 to 10, that's the doctrinal test, you have to affirm your sinfulness and you have to affirm Jesus Christ as the righteous advocate, chapter 2 verse 1, the propitiation not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. So you affirm the right anthropology, the right theology about man and the right Christology, the theology about Christ.

But the behavioral then comes back into play. Verse 3 of chapter 2, "By this we know we have come to know Him." How do we know it? Because we profess it, because we confess it? No, if we keep His commandments. Verse 4, "The one who says I've come to know Him and doesn't keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." I mean, it's just that basic. The moral or behavioral tests are critical.

And then down in verse 9, moving from obedience to love, "The one who says he's in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now." Light being salvation, darkness being outside. Verse 10, "The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there's no cause for stumbling in him." So very early in the epistle you're introduced to the fact that pattern of life in obedience in love is the test of the validity of one's claim to know Christ. It's just that basic.

If you look...well, we could go through virtually the whole of this epistle, we won't do that, but chapter 2 verse 15 is a good one. "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So the things of the world are the things of Satan, the *kosmos*, the society. If that's what you love, if that's what you desire and long for and hanker for, then the love of the Father is not in you. If all you know is what's in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, that's not from the Father, that's from the world and the world is passing away along with its lust. You belong to a corrupt and dying to be destroyed culture. So it's a test then again of whether your claim is genuine.

How do we test it? Do you obey the Word of God? Do you love the Lord and do you love His people? And do you hate the world, even though tempted by it and sometimes unfaithful? It grieves your heart because it's not really what you love. In fact, if you were to go into the third chapter...well, verse 29 of the second chapter, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who's practicing righteousness is born of Him." Again, come back to the test of practicing righteousness, obeying the Word, loving the brother, not loving the world. And we've been through all of these.

Just in to chapter 3 verse 6 and 7, "No one who abides in Him sins, no one who sins...that has a habitual unbroken pattern of sin...has seen Him or known Him." Verse 7, "Little children, let no one deceive you, the one who practices righteousness is righteous." Verse 8, "The one who practices sin is of the devil." Verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin," that means in an unbroken and continual pattern, "because His seed abides in him," that is the seed of new life, God's seed, God's life, "and he can't sin because he's born of God." Verse 10 sums it up, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who doesn't love his brother." Verse 28, "Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." And I love verse 19, "We shall know by this that we are of the truth and shall assure our heart before Him." You want to have confidence in your salvation? You're going to have see obedience to the Word, righteousness and love of the Lord and the brethren, the people of God.

Verse 24, ending chapter 3, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him and we know by this that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He's given to us." It's all about that. The whole epistle is about evidence, it's about proof. And we find that even orthodox doctrine, even a

good anthropology about sin, even a good Christology concerning Christ while essential to salvation by themselves do not give sufficient proof of salvation. The proof is in the conduct. The proof is in the fruit. The proof is in the behavior. The soul searching proof...obedience to the Word of God, that is to love the Word and long to obey it, even though imperfectly. As little Johnny said, "It's not the perfection of your life, but it is the direction of your life." And to love, not the world, but the Lord and His people.

And so, we come to chapter 4 and we come to verses 7 to 21. And here for the third time in this epistle, the moral test of love is explained to us. The first time, chapter 2 verses 7 to 11, the second time, chapter 3 verses 10 to 23, and now the third time, chapter 4 verses 7 to 21, John has a way of cycling back through the same themes and every time he comes back the circle gets wider and he covers more ground. He enriches it.

Now his theme here is that true believers are commanded to love because they have the capacity to love and this is the evidence that their salvation is real. And the kind of love he's talking about he calls perfect love, verse 12, "God abides in us and His love is perfected in us." Verse 17, "By this love is perfected in us." Verse 18, "Perfect love casts out fear." And then at the end of the verse, "The one who fears is not perfected in love." So four times he refers to this love as perfected love, that is love to the ultimate sense, love to the fullest sense, the maturest sense, the complete sense. We're talking here about a divine kind of love, talking about something that's not simply human affection. We're talking about a perfect kind of love, a mature, full, whole, complete love, *teleioo*, love to the end, love to the max. And so here we are given a definition of this kind of love.

For the first time his discussions of love broaden to embrace the concept of this perfect kind of love. And he starts out with a command in verse 7. "Beloved, let us love one another." Let us love one another. We are commanded to do that and we should be commanded to do that. Verse 11 is a second command. "If God so loved us we also ought to love one another." There's another injunction." Verse 21, "This commandment we have from Him that the one who loves God should love his brother also." Here's the command for the third time, you're to love one another, you're to love your brother, you're to love your brother. Habitual, self-sacrificing, serving love, you're to love this way with this maximum kind of love, this divine love which God has shed abroad in your heart. And this is the great test of your salvation. If you possess this love, if you can love this way, then it's evident that God is in you because this is not human love. It is not love that only loves because the object attracts it, it is love that loves because it wills to love. That *agape* love.

Now he gives six motives for this love, or six reasons we should love this way. We covered three, we'll cover the final three tonight.

Reason number one, John lays out the motives for this perfect love, he says you ought to love one another, we all ought to love one another, reason number one, "Because love is the essence of God." Love is the essence of God. Verses 7 and 8, he says, "Love is from God," verse 8 he ends, "God is love." And since we share His life, we share His life, that's a tremendous truth. You've been begotten again by an incorruptible seed, and that seed, that life seed, that spiritual life seed is the very life of God planted in you, you are right now the possessor of the life of God in your soul, you are the possessor of eternal life right now. You will never die. You possess eternal life. In fact, the greatest change that will ever happen to you has already happened. Your death and your moving into heaven will be less of a transformation than your salvation was. In your salvation you passed from darkness to light, in your death you pass from one dimension of light to the fullest dimension of light. All that death is for the believer is not really transformation. When we die it's simply losing the flesh which inhabits and restrains our new nature. You're already a new creation. Unfortunately incarcerated in the old unredeemed flesh. The biggest change has already happened, the life of God is in you. If the life of God is in you, if God is in you, if the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, if the Spirit of God dwells in you, the Holy Spirit dwells in you, and you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and God resides in you, this incredible reality is so, then for you to love each other is a very reasonable command because love comes from God, God is love, and God lives in you. It's that simple. You share His life.

The second reason we saw last week, while we are to love one another is because love is manifest by Jesus Christ. Love is manifest by Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Cursed people don't love Christ. Saved people love Christ. We sing songs about loving Christ all the time, don't we? All the time. "I love You, Lord, and lift up My voice," little choruses like that. "More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee," and we literally are carried away in the sentiments of those songs because those are the cries of our hearts. We want to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And when you look at Jesus Christ, you see that He was the perfect manifestation of love, the perfect model, the perfect example. Verses 9, 10 and 11, we saw last week, "By this the love of God was manifest in us that God sent...has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we love God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." If God loved His Son enough to send Him for us, if the Son loved us enough to go and redeem us, then we certainly ought to love as God calls us to love. God's free, spontaneous, sovereign love revealed in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross demonstrates His love for us and there on the cross Jesus Himself gives the supreme example of love in the most magnificent and glorious terms possible. He loved the Father so much He gave His life because the Father asked Him. His love for God was so great and His love for us so great that He gave His life.

And if you say you abide in Him, 1 John 2:6, then you ought to walk the way He walked. And how did He walk? In self-sacrificing love to His Father and that's how we are to walk, following His example.

So, we're called to love one another because love is the very essence of God and we possess the life of God, because love is manifest by Jesus Christ, God sends Christ, Christ dies on the cross, manifesting His love to the Father and His love to us and establishes such an incredible example, how can we not love when God the Father and God the Son have gone to such extremity to make it possible for us to love?

And thirdly, reviewing again, we are to love one another because love is our testimony, verse 12, "No one has beheld God at any time." Nobody has seen God. We have the dilemma then in evangelism in our ministry of declaring God to people and they can't see Him. No one has ever seen God, so we're trying to convince people that an invisible God really exists.

How are they going to see an invisible God? John says if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. I mean, the very simple truth here is this, that the world can see God in the love of the church. That's why Jesus said to the disciples in the upper room in John 13:34 and 35, "By this shall all men know that you're My disciples if you have love for one another." We put God on display by loving each other. There's no human explanation for the level of this affection and love. Love is our testimony. The unseen God is seen in our love for each other. It's evidence that our lives have been transformed, that we love in a way that's not human.

So love is commanded because it's made possible. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts as Romans 5:2 puts it. We are to love then because it is the essence of God who lives in us, because love is manifest by Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us, because love is the key to our testimony and declaring the very reality of our God. In loving each other in a perfect, mature, whole way, as verse 12 puts it, we put God on display.

Let me give you three more, as we work our way through these. And we don't need to go into a lot of detail because much of this we covered in chapters 2 and 3. But fourthly, in my little list, we are to love one another because love is the assurance of our salvation. Love is the assurance of our salvation. And as I said, John's theme in this section is really John's theme in the whole epistle. But he builds a little case here from verses 13 through 16 and he really gives us a sort of sequence here to know we're saved. Here comes the nitty-gritty of this section.

"By this we know that we abide in Him." All right, now we're getting right to the crux of this whole thing. Here's how we know we're saved. Here's how we know we abide in Him and He in us, again

emphasizing He is in us. How do we know we're in Him and He's in us? One, because He's given us His Spirit. He's given us His Spirit.

You say, "I can't see the Holy Spirit. I can't feel the Holy Spirit. I don't know that I can say for sure I've received the Holy Spirit. How do I...how can I say that I'm sure I'm saved because He's given us the Spirit? I don't know how to..I don't have any criteria, I don't have any physical means to recognize the Spirit. In fact, John 3 Jesus said the Spirit is like the wind, it blows here and it blows there, you don't know where it's coming from, you don't know where it's going, you just...you kind of see the effect of it. How do I know that?"

Well keep reading. He's given us His Spirit, and verse 14, "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God." How do you know you've been given the Holy Spirit? How do you know you've received the Holy Spirit? Not because you have some mechanism that causes you to feel His impulses, not because you hear voices, not because you feel promptings. Here is how you know that you've been given the Spirit. "Because you believe the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world and you confess Jesus is the Son of God." In other words, it is your belief in the gospel that is evidence of the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit, right? Because you couldn't know that apart from the Spirit, is that not so? Sinners are dead in trespasses and sin, as we've been noting on Sunday mornings, they are blind, you have no capacity, it's not of him who wills or him who runs, it's not according to the will of man or the will of the flesh, you can't know God, God is not known by human wisdom. He's not known by human intelligence. "Natural man understands not the things of God, they are foolishness to him. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the ruler? Where is the intelligentsia? They're all fools, unable to discern the truth of God."

How do I know that the Spirit of God has taken up residence in me? Because I believe what can only be believed if it is revealed by God. We have beheld. And John could say that from his own life experience. He was there, he saw. He bore witness that the Father had sent the Son to be the Savior of the world, but he would not have believed that had not the Father in His good pleasure chosen John, had not the Son in His own will revealed John and had not the Holy Spirit opened his eyes.

So how do you know that you have the Spirit? Because you believe the gospel. That's so important, isn't it? Do you believe the gospel? I mean, do you believe the gospel from front to back? You believe all these elements of the gospel, that the Father sent the Son? That is to say you believe in the Trinity and He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, and you believe that salvation is by faith not works because it's confessing Jesus as Son of God. God then takes up residence, abiding in us

and we in Him. That's the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

And that's not all, now he comes to really the point in verse 16. "And we have come to know and believed the love which God has for us." This is just really the culmination of this flow here. How do I know I'm a Christian? Because God gave me His Spirit. And He only gives His Spirit to those that are His. He only takes up residency in those that are His. How do I know He gave me His Spirit? Because I believe the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. And I confess that Jesus is the Son of God. In other words, I believe the gospel which I can't believe apart from the work of the Spirit.

Furthermore, not only do I believe the gospel, but I have come to know and believe that all of this is because of the love which God has for us. I have come to understand the eternal love of God for us. God is love. That's why He, the Father, sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. It all was out of His love. For His great love wherewith He loved us, Ephesians 2. And so verse 16, "God is love and the one who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.

That's a great section, isn't it? And I had some notes on that but I didn't pay any attention to them because I didn't want to interrupt the flow. The flow here is so magnificent. To chop it up with a sort of smallish look at the details would interrupt the greatness of this incredibly rich passage. There is inserted here a doctrinal test. You have to understand God the Father to be who He is, God the Son to be who He is. You have to understand that He is the Savior of the world and therefore men need to be saved from sin. You have to confess that Jesus is not man, but rather the Son of God, that God abides in Him and He in God. That is He is inseparable from God. And believe that God authored this whole thing out of His love and that it's matter of faith and not works. I mean, all of that is there. All the doctrinal components and elements are there. But in the end, verse 16, the culmination is, you're going to know that you abide in God and God abides in you because you abide in love. You love God. You love Christ. And you do not love the world system. You do love the brothers and sisters in Christ. It's this incredible love. And it even spills over so that we like God love even our enemies, right? If you love your enemies, Jesus said, then you're the children of God because God loves His enemies, too. After all, He loved all of us when we were enemies, right?

So when you look at your own life and you ask the question, am I a Christian? The answer will come, you are if you have the Holy Spirit. Well how do I know if I have the Holy Spirit? Do you understand and believe the gospel in its fullness? That God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world? You understand and believe that? Then you know the Holy Spirit is in you. And if you understand and believe that, you also understand that God did this out of love because God is love and therefore if you are God's, you are characterized by love. And you will love the way God loves. You will love God as God loves God within the Trinity, you will love the Son of God as the Father loves the Son.

And you will love those who belong to Him and you will even love enemies the way God does. And so in verse 16 those words, "We have come to know and believe the love which God has for us, for God is love and the one who abides in love, abides in God." This is the behavioral test, this is what so many have called the moral test.

You look at your life, is that what you see? If it is, if you love Christ even though you're not always faithful as you should be, if you love God the Father, and you love to worship Him, and you love to honor Him, and you cherish His glory, and if you find yourself drawn to the brethren and the fellowship, sacrificially serving one another, and even compassionately, lovingly caring for those outside the gospel so that you give them the saving truth of Jesus Christ, this is evidence that God is in you, the God of love because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, we're to love one another with this kind of perfect love because God is love, because Christ is manifest love, because love is our testimony and because love is the assurance of our salvation. Number five, we are commanded to love because love is our confidence in judgment. We are commanded to love because love is our confidence in judgment.

Notice verses 17 and 18 where this is given to us. "By this love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment." When the Spirit has done its work and the eyes of your understanding have been opened and you've been enlightened and your dead heart has been awakened and your blind eyes have been made to see and you've come out of the darkness into the light and the Holy Spirit has caused you to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ and God comes and takes up residence in your life and your life is flooded with love, going in all the directions that the very love of God goes through you, when that kind of perfected love is in you, you will have confidence looking ahead to the day of judgment. I look ahead at judgment and I would...I might say to myself, "Well I don't have any fear of judgment, after all, I believe in Jesus." Some people would say that. You hear people say that all the time. "Oh, I'm not worried about death, I'm a good guy and I believe in Jesus, God certainly will let me into His heaven."

It's not just the theology that is the issue. Confidence in the anticipation of the day of judgment comes from perfect love being your experience. The day of judgment simply looks at the final reckoning, the final in the broadest sense. In chapter 2 verse 28 it says, "Now, little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." It just looks at the end and says you can live your life with no fear, never fearing the coming of Jesus Christ, never fearing standing before the throne of God, before the judgment. In fact, it says here in verse 17, "You may have confidence," *parrhesia*, a boldness it actually means, boldness.

Go back to chapter 3 verse 21, "If our heart does not condemn us, we have...same word...boldness before God," the kind of boldness that whatever we ask we receive from Him. If you know you're

God's, if your heart assures you by this love and obedience that characterizes your life, you can go into the presence of God with boldness and confidence and ask what you will and receive it. That's chapter 3. Here in chapter 4 you can look ahead at judgment without fear...without fear. How wonderful is that? You can live without fear.

You say why? Well this is the end of verse 17, amazing statement, "Because as He, Christ is, so also are we in this world." What does that mean? What does it mean? It means the Father treats us the way He treats His Son, as He is, Jesus Christ, in the eyes of the Father so also are we who live in this world. We, believers. Well what do you mean by that? Well, do you think Jesus could face the final judgment of God with confidence? You think He can? With boldness? With fearlessness? Of course. Because love is absolutely perfected in Him, obedience is absolutely perfected in Him, righteousness is absolutely perfected in Him. And how incredible is it that we can actually go to the judgment and stand there as confident as Christ, because in reality we've been covered with His righteousness. Jesus is God's beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. And so are we...so are we. We can share His confidence because when we get to that final accounting, in that final day, 1 John chapter 3, you remember this, verse 2? "Beloved, now are we children of God." He's the Son of God, and we're children of God. "It has not appeared yet what we shall be," you can't tell right now what we are, "we know that when He appears we shall be...what?...like Him." We can be confident in looking ahead at the judgment because when we get to that place, we're going to be made like Jesus Christ. Wow. And so, we can live this life with that absolute confidence.

And verse 18 explains it further. "So there is no...what?...fear in love." If you love like this, if you love in this perfect love, this mature, this whole love, there's no fear. You don't fear judgment. You don't fear the return of Christ, you long for it. You say with John, "Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly." We have no fear of judgment. We have no fear of standing before the throne of God, the tribunal. We can go there with the same confidence Jesus has there in the presence of God because we are covered with His righteousness. And when we get there, we're going to be received as the children of God, as literally brothers of Jesus Christ who is not ashamed to call us brothers, the Bible says. And we're going to be made into His image and there's no fear because we experience that love and that love becomes our confidence. So perfect love does...what?...casts out fear, it dispels fear, it dismisses fear because fear involves punishment. If you're looking forward to the judgment and all you can do is fear punishment, you've got a problem because the one who fears, verse 18, is not perfected in love...is not perfected in love. Fear connects with punishment. And if you're afraid of that day, and you're afraid of the coming of Christ, and you're afraid of the Rapture, then you are not perfected in love because where this love is shed abroad in your heart, this love exists, there's no fear...there's no fear.

The saint who fears Christ's return may not be a saint at all. It may be that you're just not even a Christian because if...if the Spirit has come, taken up residence, enlightened you to the gospel, you've embraced it, you've believed it, He's flooded your life with love for Christ, love for the Father, Paul says, "Then you're going to love His appearing." You're going to love His appearing. God wants all His children to live in confidence. He doesn't want to make your life miserable here. He doesn't want you to live in terror and fear of the judgment. He wants you to live in love, confidence and hope. He wants you to know that nothing will ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Oh I know a disobedient Christian, a Christian who is sinful and fallen into some kind of pattern of sin, even though it goes against the grain of his nature, even though it's contrary to what he longs for and desires in his truest and purest self, it's a sort of Romans 7 battle and he's losing it, that Christian can lose that confidence. But God intends for His children to have the confidence of the perfect love which He has given us by His Holy Spirit in Christ. If you fear Christ's coming, if you do not look at the final judgment, at the throne of God, at the coming of Christ fearlessly, hopefully, joyfully, confidently, boldly, then either you're not saved, or whatever reasons for the time you are failing to express that love. You are fighting against your spiritual nature. And that's created doubts and it will create doubts.

So, you see, we're to love one another with this perfected kind of love, this sacrificial, selfless love that we talked about last week, and we're to love one another because love is of God and God lives in us, because love is manifested by Jesus Christ and in Christ and He set the example for sacrificial serving love. And if we love Him and He is ours, we ought to walk the way He walked. We are to love like this because love is our testimony. People are going to see God when they see His work of love in us. We're to love like this because love is the assurance of our salvation, it proves that the Spirit came and awakened us and opened us to the gospel. And we are to love because love is our confidence, our boldness when we look to the future. And true Christians have no fear of the coming of the Lord, but rather it is our great joy and hope.

Finally, and this is just kind of a summation, we are to love because love is only reasonable...love is only reasonable. This is really a review. If someone says...well, let's go back to verse 19, "We love because He first loved us." That's just the review of the basic principle. We love...we love as Christians because He first loved us. "If someone says I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar for the one who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen can't love God whom he's not seen." It comes down to the same thing. If you love this way, with this perfect love, it's because God first loved you, we love. Some translations say, "We love Him," but that's not in the best original manuscripts. We love because it is characteristic of Christians to love because God has shed His love abroad in our hearts. We love because He first loved us. That's the key word, eternal, sovereign love was granted to us.

And then in verse 20, for the seventh time in 1 John, "If someone says..." Seven times John deals with claims and every time he gives a warning. "If someone says," in this case, "I love God, I'm a Christian, I'm a believer, but is characterized by hate toward his brother, he's a liar. He doesn't love his brother whom he's seen, he can't love God whom he's not seen." You can't claim to love the invisible God and not love the God that's in His people. You can't claim to love the invisible Christ and not love Christ in His people. It's absurd. So it's only reasonable then to say true believers are characterized by loving the way God loves, sacrificial, selfless love.

And then John closes this section with a command, just as he began it, "This commandment we have from Him," John is saying it's not mine, it's His, "that the one who loves God should love his brother also." With an unrequited love, you might say, wanting nothing in return, an unconditional love that accepts and forgives, a vicarious love that bears the pain of others, a self-giving love that practices sacrifice and a righteous love that tolerates no sin.

Listen then, love is not an emotion, it's not a feeling to which we give expression whenever we feel like it. There is that kind of love and it's a wonderful thing. It belongs in human life. But we're not talking about that here. There is the wonderful love that a husband and a wife share, that a family shares, that children share with parents, friend with friend. We're not talking about any of those human loves which are enhanced and enriched by the love of Christ in the heart of believers. We're talking about this kind of love that extends toward anybody that has a need, particularly those in the family of God. It is a perfect kind of love, a different love than the world's kind of love. It is a whole, complete love and it is the essence of God manifest in Christ. It is our testimony, it is the assurance of our salvation. It is our confidence in judgment and it is only reasonable because you could never truly have the love of God in you and not love others with that love. Perfect love is the mark of the true believer.

Lord, thank You for this again, a rich text. The truth of it not unknown to us but often lost in the flow of life. Help us to remember what we're talking about here is not a feeling toward someone, but care, compassion, sacrifice, service, selflessness. Really what we're saying here is humility because only the humble can love. You humbled Yourself to love us who were unworthy and we should be humbled by that, to humble ourselves to show love to those around us, sacrificial, selfless, generous love. This...this devotion, this charity, this compassion, this mercy, this grace that we feel toward other believers, this great love toward You and toward Christ and toward the Holy Spirit, this is the evidence that You are in us for love is from You, You are love. Any claim to love You not backed up by this kind of loving devotion to You and to Your people is a lie and an empty claim. So again tonight we examine our own hearts to see if we're in the faith knowing that these things are written that we might know that we have eternal life, so that we may enjoy its anticipation and even now its

presence. Grant us the fullness of this perfected love that we might thoroughly enjoy Your love flowing through us and our love directed again toward You who first loved us. We thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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