

The Expression Of Perfect Love

1 John 4:7-21 KJV Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. [8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. [9] In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. [10] Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. [12] No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. [13] Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. [14] And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. [15] Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. [16] And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. [17] Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. [19] We love him, because he first loved us. [20] If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? [21] And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

I. INTRODUCTION -- THE INDEX OF LOVE

In 1st John a key word is “love.” When one begins to look all throughout the contents of 1st John concerning love there are some remarkable discoveries that should encourage the saint of God to seek after the expression of perfect love.

- **Brotherly Love** -- 1 John 3:10-17
- **General Concepts concerning Love** -- 1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-24; 4:7-21
- **The Duty of Love** -- In deed and not in word, 1 John 3:18-19; To love one another, 1 John 4:7-21; To love one’s neighbor, 1 John 2:7-11

- **The Love for God** -- The duty to respond to the love of God, 1 John 3:1-3; How one knows he loves God, 1 John 3:1-3; Proven by our love for one another, 1 John 4:19-21
- **The Importance of Love** -- One of the greatest commandments, 1 John 3:23-24; Proves seven things about the saint, 1 John 4:7-21
- **The Love of God** -- Demonstrated in one supreme act, 1 John 4:9-11; Bestowed on saints, 1 John 3:1-3; The standard for man, 1 John 4:7-21; Versus the love of the world, 1 John 2:15-17
- **Perfect Love** -- By confession, 1 John 4:14-19; By keeping the Word of God, 1 John 2:5
- **Proves** -- One is of God or of Satan, 1 John 3:10; The Spirit of God is within, 1 John 4:12-13; One is a child of God, 1 John 3:10; One really loves God, 1 John 4:8; One really loves God and others, 1 John 5:1-3; Proves six things, 1 John 4:7-21
- **The Results of Love** -- Assures boldness in the day of judgment, 1 John 4:17; Deliverance from fear, 1 John 4:18; In the New Birth, 1 John 4:7-8; 4:14-16; Is the way one knows God, 1 John 4:7-21; Keeps God's commandments, 1 John 5:2-3; Keeps one from stumbling, 1 John 2:7-11; Perfects the saint, 1 John 2:5, 4:12, 4:18; Proves seven things, 1 John 4:7-21; Proves that one knows God, 1 John 2:7-11; Proves whether one is a child of God or of the devil, 1 John 3:10

Man is made to love others because God has ordained it to be so. If we are honest, there is a notable desire in every man to love and to be loved by someone. So John will again look at this process of godly and sanctified love that is present in the lives of every saint.

A. Perfect Love

This passage that we come to now is probably the longest single passage in 1st John that primarily deals with the same subject. The following verses speak directly to the love that is perfect and how that it works in us.

- v. 12 -- The love of God perfected in us.
- v. 17 -- This love is made perfect.
- v. 18 -- This perfect love will cast out all fear.

In understanding this aspect of perfect love, the Greek root word here is **τέλειος** (teleios) which means that it is whole or completely carried out. The

same word is used when Jesus was on the Cross and the last cry of “It is finished!” (John 19:30) poured out of Him. Now John, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, is once again brought back to the majesty of that moment when at Calvary the Lord completely fulfilled all that was required of Him in the aspect of redemption. John is declaring that the love of God has been perfected in us. There is nothing else left to do or to accomplish!

Perfect love is the expression of God in salvation:

Romans 5:5-8 KJV *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. [6] For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. [8] But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

1 John 2:5 KJV *But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*

1 John 5:3 KJV *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

This is not a vague, emotional high/low sort of infatuation. It is a committed love that will never let go. This again boils down to a deep level of commitment on the part of a saint. If the love is really truly perfected there will be a spiritual maturity that is very evident in the way this person lives out their lives. Their prayers will avail much, their understanding of the Word of God will be practical and applicable to their walk of life, and they will have much fellowship with God and with the saints.

Some of the old Holiness (Godbey, Watson, Inskip, Fletcher, etc.) writers coined a term “perfect love” from this passage in 1st John. If one reads their writings, it will become very clear that they believed that God very much empowered the saint of God with a strong stimulus to pursue things that were righteous, holy, and give to godliness. Their description of “perfect love” would be much despised by many modern thinkers because of a lack of appetite for

great godliness. Perfect love in our lives will be marked by some of these following characteristics:

- A pursuit of a clean heart and right spirit—Psalm 51:10
- An increasing hunger for God and the things of His Word—Hebrews 6:1
- A mark of sobriety about the way our lives are lived—1 Thessalonians 5:6-7
- A constant repetition of a continuous and repeated baptism of the Holy Ghost—Titus 3:5-6; Jude 20
- A quest for perseverance and endurance in the walk of the saint—2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 12:7; James 5:11

This passage also identifies several aspects of love. Again it is important to understand that there is almost an escalation of spiritual maturity that takes place with each one of these kinds of love that the Apostle John is mentioning. It is very clear that these types of love will have to be hammered out through the heaving aspects of a life that is well-lived. It will not happen immediately but should be something that is highly pursued and sought after.

- Brotherly Love
- Unfeigned Love (without hypocrisy)
- Abounding Love
- Serving Love
- Perfect Love

B. The Details of Perfect Love

There are some details of this perfect love that John writes of and it has much to do with fellowship.

- **1 John 2:7-11** -- Love denotes true fellowship. We belong to a community of believers.
- **1 John 3:10-19** -- Love is the evidence of sonship. We belong to the family of God.
- **1 John 4:7-21** -- Love is a manifestation of God actually living in the saint. God dwells in us.

Again note the escalating process of these passages by which the writer presses home the points about perfect love. Doctrine and love have to be linked

hand in hand. The doctrinal tests pertain to our view of sin and Jesus Christ and the moral tests have to do with obedience to the commandments and our love for one another and for God. However, a correct view of doctrine is not sufficient evidence that a man is going to be right with God. He may *know* the doctrine but until the New Birth (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38) have correctly worked in his life, it is of little value to know the doctrinal equation. The conversion of a lost man will manifest itself in his love for another (4:11) and a more specific act of loving his brother (4:21). John is giving this as an encouragement for the saints to whom he was writing both past and present.

II. 1ST JOHN 4:7-21 -- THE REASONS WE ARE TO LOVE

There are some very distinct reasons that we are to be given to love as expressed by John in this segment of Scripture.

A. 1ST John 4:7-8—It Is the Nature of God

1 John 4:7-8 KJV Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. [8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

The Greek word for “beloved” is ἀγαπητός (agapētos) which is the highest form of love that can be expressed. It is the love that comes from the will. It is habitual and committed in such a way that it cannot be swayed or manipulated. This is the love that Jesus expressed to Peter in John 21:15-17. Finally on the third effort, Peter actually allowed the love that Jesus was expressing to him to be matched. Peter was just comfortable with his love of Jesus being that of a general fellowship but Jesus continued to press for a love that exceeded fellowship into discipleship. John is encouraging this same kind of love to be present in the lives of the saints for one another.

The very nature of God is light and life (1:5; 3:1). The light of God is nothing more than manifest truth or truth that is walking about in shoe-leather. “If we walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7) is a truth that connects the forgiveness of sin with an outward expression of devotion. The challenging portion of this segment is the truth that is expressed in 1 John 4:8. The man who does not love literally does not know God.

God expresses His love to man in a number of different ways:

- Through common grace extended to all men regardless of their status before Him—Psalm 145:9; Matt. 5:45
- Through His compassion primarily in that He delays His final judgment against unrepentant sinners—Gen. 15:16; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 3:25; Gen. 18:20-33
- Through the multiple warnings to sinners—Jer. 7:13-15; 7:23-25; 25:4-6; Ezek. 33:7-8; Zeph. 2:1-3; Luke 3:7-9; 1 Cor. 10:6-11; Rev. 3:1-3
- Through the extension of offering the gospel to the world—Matt. 11:28; John 7:27; 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11

God is perfect love and has the ability to love perfectly. He literally loves the saints of God into perfection. This is a characteristic that is often present in those who have years of long service to God. Ephesians 2:4-7 indicates where our identity literally rests:

Ephesians 2:4-7 KJV 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.

The saint is to be given toward love simply because it is the nature of God. This is one of the most challenging conditions of our relationship with God. The difficulty arises because most all who are willing to admit it, serve love on conditions. It is easy to love those who are always agreeable with us and are our closest friends. The dilemma arises when we are placed in a set of circumstances that we must love someone who does not deserve it because of their unacceptable ways and actions.

It is the nature of God to love those who do not deserve it:

- Those who love selfishly.

- Those who hoard everything to themselves (time, talent, etc.).
- Those who discriminate and are motivated by prejudice.
- Those who elevate themselves at the expense of others.
- Those who steal from others.
- Those guilty of abusing others.
- Those who criticize and backbite (to say mean or spiteful things as if the person they are speaking of is not even present).
- Those who gossip and are talebearers (guilty of spreading rumors).
- Those who oppose us and distrust us.
- Those who ignore and reject us.
- Those who do things against us and persecute us.

All of these actions against us will fall into the category of the unlovable. However, as one matures in the Spirit the fruit of the Spirit will begin to be manifest in the life of the saint and their feelings will turn from a sense of aggravation to that of compassion. The compassion grows when we realize that by the grace of God that traits that person exhibits could be our very own. The compassion grows when the reality sets in about the magnitude of the grace of God.

B. 1st John 4:9-11—It Is Shown in the Cross

1 John 4:9-11 KJV In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. **[10]** Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **[11]** Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Another reason a saint is to be given to love is because it is shown in the supreme sacrifice of the Cross of Christ. The love of God became very visible through the incarnation and earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

When one looks at the whole week of the suffering of Jesus it was the greatest expression of the love of God. It was the model of selfless sacrifice.

Romans 3:24-28 KJV Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: [25] Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; [26] To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. [27] Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. [28] Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

This is a reference to the mercy seat where the atonement for sin took place. To propitiate means to turn away the wrath of God through the offering of a sacrifice. The only place this could take place was at the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. But now Jesus Christ serves as the spotless lamb for the work of atonement of sin in the life of the saint of God. The whole message of the trail of the lamb could be understood through the reading of Isaiah 53.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21 KJV To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. [20] Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. [21] For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 3:13 KJV Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

1 Peter 3:18 KJV For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

All of these passages (and many more) give us an insight as to what the sufferings of Christ provided for. This is the kind of love that God is calling us to live in and through. Any kind of love that is motivated by God will have a sacrificial nature. We have a duty to give our lives toward this kind of love through the Cross of Christ.

One of the things often forgotten about the Cross of Christ is that it can bring a powerful commitment to our spiritual life of prayer and worship. Any contact with the example of Jesus Christ through Calvary can mean so much to the saint of God. It is not just the Cross but the whole process of the path that Jesus had to walk leading up to the painful crucifixion.

The crucified life that a saint of God should readily live out further demonstrates the love of God in action. Every saint of God will have to endure Gethsemane moments where the will and hopes of life very well could be crushed to the earth. Never fight with those trials in life that are attempting to bring out the character of Jesus Christ in your nature. If we are not careful, much of life will be spent in a mad effort trying to escape all of the things that God intends to make us great and crown us with a lasting reward. The absolute love of God is shown in the Cross and therefore at whatever cost we may have to pay, we have to invest our lives into this love that was demonstrated at the Cross.

George Watson (1845-1924), which was mentioned earlier in this lesson and identified as one of the old holiness preachers, wrote a little devotion well over 75 years ago that sums up the our reaction to others and the perplexing issues of life:

C. 1st John 4:12—The Testimony of the Saint

1 John 4:12 KJV No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Others May, You Cannot -- George D. Watson

If God has called you to be really like Jesus He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put upon you such demands of obedience, that you will not be able to follow other people, or measure yourself by other Christians, and in many ways He will seem to let other people do things which He will not let you do.

Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful, may push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it, and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.

Others may boast of themselves, of their work, of their successes, of their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works.

Others may be allowed to succeed in making money, or may have a legacy left to them, but it is likely God will keep you poor, because He wants you to have something far better than gold, namely, a helpless dependence upon Him, that He may have the privilege of supplying your needs day by day out of an unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward, and keep you hidden in obscurity, because He wants to produce some choice fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others be great, but keep you small. He may let others do a work for Him and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing; and then to make your work still more precious He may let others get credit for the work which you have done, and thus make **YOUR REWARD TEN TIMES GREATER WHEN JESUS COMES.**

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch over you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words and feelings or for wasting your time, which other Christians never feel distressed over. So make up your mind that God is an Infinitely Sovereign Being, and has a right to do as He pleases with His own. He may not explain to you a thousand things which puzzle your reason in His dealings with you, but if you absolutely sell yourself to be His love slave, He will wrap you up in Jealous Love, and bestow upon you many blessings which come only to those who are in the inner circle.

Settle it forever, then that you are to **DEAL DIRECTLY WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**, and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that He does not seem to use with others. Now, when you are so possessed with the living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this **PECULIAR, PERSONAL, PRIVATE, JEALOUS GUARDIANSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OVER YOUR LIFE**, then you will have found the vestibule of

No one can see God but He can be seen in the lives of the saints. An unseen God literally becomes seen by the world when love is expressed in action.

John 13:34-35 KJV 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.

It is a responsibility for us to love in fact it is one of the core values of the apostolic church. A crucial evaluation for every saint of God would be to evaluate how much love that is expressed through their actions.

A saint who loves others will have a spiritual maturity in his life that will be foundational to his ability to love others. Virtues such as humility, contentment, thankfulness, and joy are elements of that deals with our relationship with God. If these areas are strong they will overflow into two other crucial areas. Spiritual maturity will move one toward holiness, self-control, and faithfulness of which all of these areas will require for a saint to deal very sternly with himself in his walk of life. The virtues of the saint and the spiritual direction of a saint will then lead to peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness, and love which are all aspects that will enable us to deal graciously and tenderly with others. The saint of God who has the love of God in his life will then find that there is a very pointed variation in how he deals with himself—sternly—and with others—tenderly. Everything that a true saint of God does is a testimony to the power of the love of God in his life.

What many do not understand is that the world takes note of the invisible God through those saints who love each other. Literally the unseen God is seen in our love for one another.

John 13:34-35 KJV 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.

This can only happen when the New Birth takes place and we have received the Holy Ghost.

Romans 5:5 KJV And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

D. 1st John 4:13-16—The Witness of the Spirit

1 John 4:13-16 KJV Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. **[14]** And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. **[15]** Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. **[16]** And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

The fourth reason that a saint is to be given to love is because it is a witness of the Spirit. This passage gives to us a picture of a saint who is Spirit-filled. Once the New Birth takes place there will be divine revelation that immediately starts to encourage maturity in the saint of God. The Spirit will open up the avenues of understanding concerning doctrine. Literally in a nutshell, John has compiled some of the key components of apostolic doctrine in this passage.

- vv.13—The New Birth (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38).
- vv.14—The Incarnation (1 Tim. 3:16).
- vv. 15—The Work of Confession/Belief (Acts 19:1-6).
- vv. 16—The Indwelling Spirit (John 15).

The indwelling Spirit provides the strength and source for an understanding of doctrine, a desire for spiritual things and the ability to love like God does. These things are the characteristics of someone who has been filled with the Spirit.

John concludes in vv. 16 by informing us that God is love. This statement in itself determines an application to evaluate where we are in our relationship with God.

- Are we drawn toward the Church or the world?
- Are we interested in having fellowship with those in the Church or those in the world?

- Are we drawn toward wanting to build up the work of God or pursue the enticements of the world?

The answer to these questions will have much to say about one's relationship with God and whether or not his life is acceptable to God.

E. 1st John 4:17-18—Love Creates Confidence

1 John 4:17-18 KJV Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. **[18]** There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

When the Spirit has completed its work, a saint will look forward to the place of judgment. For a saint of God to have confidence in the day of his accounting will only be possible by a work of what John determined to be perfect love.

The Greek word for boldness is **παρρησία** (parrhēsia) which means a freedom and unreserved attitude in speaking. It is marked by free, fearless confidence and cheerful courage. It implies a full certainty, frankness, and a bluntness that is very confident in what the work of God's love has accomplished in the saint. When one cross-references this with 3:21 further light is added on the passage.

1 John 3:21 KJV Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

This indwelling Spirit of love which comes from the Holy Ghost is almost as if one is about to take a written test that he is very familiar with the material and an excellent grade is assured. This is how that God intends for us to face His judgment. We have the seed of God within and have been covered with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:2-3 KJV Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him;

for we shall see him as he is. [3] And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

The love of God that is indwelling, leads to hope and the hope lends the saint toward purifying himself from the spots of this world. Therefore when John writes in v. 18 that there is no fear in love and that perfect love casts out all fear, the ultimate place that he is speaking of is in the judgment. Fear is present with those who are in expectation of judgment. God intends for us to have perfect confidence in His plan for redemption (which includes judgment).

F. 1st John 4:19-21—Because It is Reasonable

1 John 4:19-21 KJV We love him, because he first loved us. [20] If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? [21] And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

In summary, the reasons that we are to love are as follow:

- It is the nature of God—vv.7-8.
- It is shown in the Cross—vv. 9-11
- It is the testimony of the Saint—v. 12
- It is the witness of the Spirit—vv. 13-16
- Because it creates confidence at judgment—vv. 17-18

The last reason that we are to love is because it is the reasonable thing that we should do. This is the summation of the whole passage (4:7-21): if a saint loves in this way, it is because He first loved us!

NOTE: As previously mentioned, 1st John has a cyclical, spiraling approach where he will write on a thought and then leave it but return to it later with a tighter bit of detail. Lesson 8 in this series may be helpful to look back at concerning the love of God and the love of the brethren.

