

# Courageous Love

*3 facts about Courageous Love*

By Dustin Folden

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 1 John 4:7-21

**Preached On:** Sunday, October 12, 2014

## **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

We are continuing our study this morning in the book of 1 John. There are only two more weeks of this series so I hope that by reading it you have taken a lot from it. I hope that this morning will be very edifying for you as well. I don't know if you've been noticing as in your own time reading 1 John that John seems to be saying the same thing over and over again just in a little different way. You see, John's writing is more circular than linear. It's a nice way of saying that he doesn't write like Paul. It's a little bit different. He addresses the same issues from slightly different perspectives on multiple occasions and as you study and read, you see the emphasis that he makes, that he discusses over and over again. So I want to introduce us by just talking about those things, those repetitions that we see. John is constantly bringing up the issue of genuine or saving faith. For John, everything rides on this crucial point because as we have heard, there are only two kinds of children: children of God and children of the devil. There are only two kinds of kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil. There is no middle ground. There is no spiritual Switzerland. Then there are doctrinal tests. There are things to help us analyze this. Namely, in chapter 1, how we view sin. Then in chapter 4, how we view Christ. In order to understand or to have a genuine faith, you must understand your sin and your need for Jesus. That's why through this series we have tried to explain the importance of knowing for sure which child you are, which kingdom you serve, because eternity is at stake. This is important. If you don't know that you know that you know, we want you to be able to have the kind of assurance that John talks about.

In addition to that critical point of genuine saving faith, he also emphasized the importance of righteous living and in addition, loving. Righteous living and loving others. Sometimes in the form of loving other believers or loving others in the community. John is equally concerned about the two moral tests for a person who knows Christ, that they would seek to live righteously and they'd walk in the light, pursue purity. But also that they would love their brothers. They would love those God has placed around them, their neighbors. As we do that, we are motivated by the love that God has for us. So John's point is that assurance of salvation is always based on the finished work of Christ. Those who have assurance, they live out that salvation in meaningful ways in terms of the way they behave, the way they live. Walking in the light is something that genuine believers do. They confess their sins and they rely on the strength of the Great

Advocate. They seek to live righteous lives that are personified by the character of God and they would seek to love others in real tangible ways that are visible, recognizable.

Those are John's themes. Those are the points he circular comes back to over and over again and it fits really good into our annual theme of "Loving Our Neighbors." Pastor Viars explained five ways that we need to particularly accomplish this theme in 2014 and I think it's good for us as the 9:30 service to review and think about how that really impacts us. One of our initiatives is having our sole care achieve deeper friendships within our church family. John is all about the family of God being close, being knit together. He expects those who are genuine believers to love those in the Christian community. One of the words we use around here all the time is "connection." We want to get connected. We want to help you get connected. We hope this is a place that is easy to be connected at. We want people to feel connected, to have friends, to have genuine relationships, to be friendly and to receive just the joy of folks being friendly to them. That's why we emphasize Introduction to Faith to get more connected. Men of Faith for men to get connected on the word. To serve together in the Living Nativity so we can get more connected. I would just say that this service, my burden as your pastor, to lead us, to be a place that is very welcoming, easy to get connected. What that means for you I think primarily is get here early. Get here early and be looking for someone to greet and welcome. That's why we stood up, to get in the habit of building this community of one of connection and love. Get to know your neighbor in the blue chair. Invite someone to your ABF. Look for new folks every Sunday. Build deeper friendships within our church family.

We also want to build stronger relationships with those who live around us because loving our neighbors, loving those God has placed around us. We want to develop a parish mentality as a church, corporately thinking about who has God placed in the neighborhood around us and how can we love them. You think about the Living Nativity, Christmas Forever and those initiatives to try to just love our neighbors. One of the things that Pastor Ballard and Pastor C. are reinstating is First Friday for single moms or for parents in our community to have a date night just to serve them. So things of that nature. You think of our Community Development Corporation, just loving people in urban environments with excellence. Then also the Senior Living Community. Have you been behind the community center? There is dirt flying all over the place. There is wood being built on concrete. If you haven't been back back there, check it out because there is lots of construction going on and moving day is going to be happening for a number of seniors before the end of the year.

So those are our areas we want to focus on so I want to encourage you to be thinking about those throughout this message as well as throughout the rest of the year and I hope 1 John helps us move in that direction. So with that in mind, turn to 1 John chapter 4, verses 7 through 21. That is on page 187 of the back section of the Bible in the chair in front of you. Whenever we're reading Scripture, look for repetition. There is going to be a number of them here. 1 John, chapter 4, 7 through 21. John says,

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this 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 also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 19 We love, because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

We'd like to consider courageous love and we'd like to consider three facts about courageous love from 1 John 4:7 to 21. Now did you see any repetition? Did you see anything more than once? I hope you did and I hope what stands out to you is that the Lord commanded us to love one another. Did you notice that? It's there. If there is one thing I want you to take away from this sermon, it's love one another. Love one another. That's what John says over and over again. I think it might be an emphasis in the passage. I think maybe. Maybe. Look at verse 7, "Beloved." Just the way he starts is, "I love you, beloved." That's the focus of love. He says, "let us love one another." That's the introduction. Verse 11, "we also ought to love one another." That's in the middle. Verse 21, the conclusion, "the commandment we have from Him, the one who loves God should also love his brother." I want us to note the words "let us love, we ought to love, we should love." These are words that say that this is something we're supposed to do and I think everybody says, "Yeah, I know I'm supposed to love," but make no mistake about it, the Lord in his word is commanding us to love. He is saying, "Love one another."

Verse 21 makes it clear and the repetition over and over again shows that this is key to how God expects his children to function. The verb "to love" is found 17 times in this passage. Talk about repetition. Have you ever talked to your kids and have you ever repeated yourself? Ever? No, surely not. Surely you tell them once and they are good for the rest of their life, right? You say something like, "Put your shoes away," and it takes just one time, right? No way. It takes repeated training and reminding and you say it and sometimes you say, "Hold on, let me get your attention. I want you to put your shoes

away." And they say, "Oh, dad, you want me to put my shoes away? I thought you said leave your shoes on the floor and go and play with your toys. My bad, Dad. It's a miscommunication." You're just like, "No." We are the little children in this passage and God is saying, "Make no mistake about it, you are to love one another. Love one another." Let's all say it together, shall we? "Love one another." Excellent. I don't want us to miss this.

So if you ask that question, ultimately love one another, that's the focus. You're going down the right path. The question you should be asking next is: what does it look like to love one another? What does it look like? I can say that, great, grand, I've got it. What does it look like? I think if we remember earlier in the year, we've received quite a bit of teaching that should help us answer the question. Let's go back in time for a minute and remember how love is defined. Do you guys remember 1 Corinthians 13:4-7? Do you remember this passage? I know, I know, just allow the conviction to revisit your soul for just a moment. Just remember back the time you thought, "Ah, 1 Corinthians 13." It's okay. It's okay just to remember and to be convicted a little bit. You see, when we focus on loving in specific ways, conviction often follows. When we say, "I need to love," in a generic sense, it's like, "Yeah. Sure. Everybody does." But what does it look like? Well, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 shows love is patient, it is kind, it's not jealous, it doesn't brag, it is not arrogant, it doesn't act unbecomingly, it doesn't seek its own, it is not provoked, it doesn't take into account a wrong suffered, it doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and it endures all things. The command of 1 John to love one another carries the weight of biblical love that we saw in 1 Corinthians 13 and it helps us get specific.

Love is not jealous which means, "I can celebrate the success of my brother, my sister, my coworker, my friend, without getting worked up that I didn't get that, that I'm not getting the attention." Love doesn't brag. It's not arrogant. It means, "I don't have to talk about myself all the time. I don't have to listen to your story and one-up you with my better story or kind of tune out as you're talking, just waiting for my opportunity to talk." Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. That's hard, especially when this is the 4,961st time that person has done that. You have the record, not that you're keeping track or anything like that. Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. That's hard when there are a lot of wrongs that could be kept record of. Love believes all things and that is also very hard when a person has done something to erode trust and really hurt you. But that's why it's love. It's very different than bitterness and skepticism and being jaded. Hope. Love hopes all things. Again, it's really hard when there seems to be a track record of very little hope but that's why biblical love focuses our attention on God himself and our dependence.

So when we say love one another, God is talking about thoughts and actions that are really personified in 1 Corinthians 13. And true biblical love is carried out in real tangible ways. You look back at chapter 3, verse 18 and 1 John says, "Love not in word or speech but in deed and truth." Now, we need to make note of a very small tiny snippet that without that snippet, none of which we're talking about, the real tangible ways, would even be possible. We need to remember the source, that love is only possible because God's character is love. Look at verse 7, "Beloved, love is from God." That's so short. It's

so simple. I think you could easily breeze by those four words and say, "Cool. Great. Next. What's next? What else?" I think we just need to slow down and meditate on "love is from God" for just a moment. I mean, you realize the only reason we can love at all in any capacity with any way, shape or form is because love comes from and is sourced in the character of God. Just think about that for a moment. You understand the character of God because he has allowed his creation to function in a way that points back to him. We'll read later that God is love and this reinforces the point. It's not that God's essence is only love, that's the only way he's to be understood but rather, God in his self-existent character, his nature is loving. Love is from God.

So what's the significance for us? Well, the next time you experience an act of love from someone, a kiss from your spouse, a hug from your kids, an act of kindness from your friend, know that's only possible that you could experience that, appreciate that and do anything like that, because God created human beings to do that because that is what he is like. It comes from him and that is what he wants to define his followers by. If love comes from his character and those who know God know that God is love, they will love others as they follow him. Verse 8 says, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." If love comes from God, it's bound up in his character, then it's absolutely imperative that I understand and know that ultimately his grace, his compassion, his mercy is filling me so that I in turn can love others. I think each of us needs to ask ourselves, "Am I willing to love my spouse? My kids? My neighbors? My coworkers? My enemies simply because it shows that love is from God? This is what God is like and when I love, it indicates that I know God, I have experienced his love and his mercy, his compassion, his lovingkindness."

He commands us to love because love is from God but he doesn't just command. The Lord provides necessary motivation in order to love one another. The Lord doesn't simply command us although he has the authority to do so, he is the Lord. He graciously gives us reasons. He tells us why we should love and he tells us what the basis for that command is. And the first motivation to help our hearts love and be motivated is the clear message of the historic Gospel of God sending his Son. God gave us his Son so that we might live. 1 John 4:9-10, it's the next point in the text to follow the command, the Gospel command to love is followed by the Gospel indicative that God loved us. "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." God sent his only begotten Son. The word "begotten" I think is important for us to just slow down again and meditate on. This defines his only, unique, special Son that is unlike anyone else. It's not as though Jesus came from the Father and was created. That's not what begotten indicates but begotten is ultimately that there is no one like Jesus. He is the only, special, unique Son and he was sent so that we might live through him. The terminology forces us to think about the Son. He is the only, special, unique Son. Why should I be thinking about him and what did he do and what did he accomplish that I might love? That's how we begin to understand what love is and seek to love because Christ was sent. And know what John says, "not that we loved God." It's like John just wanted to be super clear of the side of the equation of love that we really started out on. We stood on a love equation negative. We didn't

give any love. We were in desperate need of God's love and God freely gave it. He didn't just emot. He just didn't think mushy thoughts about his creation, he took action and love by sending his Son.

There was a purpose to sending a Son, that we would live. In order for that, the only, special, unique, begotten Son had to die. He must be the big word, propitiation for our sins. He had to die. To propitiate something means you remove the wrath from, you take the punishment away from, you propitiate it. Some translations say "atoning sacrifice" but the point here is that the wrath that we deserve is removed and placed on his Son because he propitiated the wrath. You and I cannot propitiate God's wrath. We can't do that. We don't have the ability to do that. His only, unique, special Son had to do that so that we can live. Only sending the unique, special Son to die in our place could do that and our sin required a punishment because God is holy but a loving God was willing to pay the price to satisfy, to propitiate his own wrath by sending his unique, special, only, begotten Son to take that wrath in our place. That's love. That's the picture of love. It's to warm our hearts, to change our selfish minds and to rescue us from the domain of darkness and place us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. That's love, not that we loved God but that he loved us in sending his only, unique, special Son.

It's very important that we consistently recognize that he chose to love us first. He did it first, not us. 1 John 4:11, "Beloved, if God so loved us," if he did this, if he loved us, "we also ought to love one another." 1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us." Why is this so important? Well, John stresses it numerous times that God took the initiative not us. If God commands us to love one another, the motivation for that love can't be from the love that we expect from other human beings. We can't expect them to initiate love to us first because our love comes from God initiating love first. My mother told me this story when she was in college and I'll never forget it. I'm not really sure why it stuck in my mind so much but she told me this story of how her roommate wanted to borrow some of her clothes and she knew that she was never going to get the clothes back. She knew it and I was like, "Why would you give her the clothes then?" But she knew that she was never going to get the clothes back but she gave them and she was fully expecting never to see them and she taught me that when you give and serve others, don't expect to get things in return. Don't expect things from other people. You don't love expecting things from them either first or even later. Now, don't ask to borrow my car and then never give it back. That's not what I'm talking about. Just because my mom did that, but think about it. How many times do we love and expect a really thoughtful thankful something in return? Or to be bragged on to somebody else or two kind of tell somebody else, "Look, the great loving thing that I did." Or do you wait for the love to be reciprocated in some manner?

Or maybe, I think, what the text most directly guides us to and is best applicable here in the 9:30 service, how many times do we wait to build relationships because we want to see if the person really cares about us first before we put ourselves out there to love them? Oftentimes we love only if somebody else takes the first step. Think about that even in a more personal way when you get in an argument with your spouse. Are you willing to take the first step of love and humility by confessing your sin first? "Honey, I

love you. Let's resolve this and let's start with my sin." We need to take the first step in conflict and we need to take the first step in getting to know new people. I think this has huge implications. If you are in your ABF, if you're here before the service, do you just kind of wait for somebody else to, "Who's going to talk to me? Who's going to take the first step?" Or are you looking, "Who am I going to walk towards?" I mean, don't stomp towards people, that's kind of intimidating. But are you thinking, "I need to take the steps towards somebody," or are you just waiting as though you're a magnet and people are going to be drawn to you? I don't know where that came from. My point is that are we loving first? What does it look like? Greeting people who sit around you. Going to ABF with the purpose of making someone else feel welcome. Looking for somebody new each Sunday and train your kids, train your kids, train your kids to initiate love first. Who did you invite to play with? Those will serve them well, loving others for the rest of their life and you need that level of accountability of training your kids.

What about your neighbors? God loved you first. Are you seeking to love your neighbor first? What does it look like? Well, it's very simple. Simple. Simple. Simple. It means you wave first, okay? It means you drive down your subdivision and instead of being like, "I have to change the radio at this exact time you're driving by," you wave first. I don't know, I grew up in North Dakota and you waved to everybody. Just everybody, as many times as you can. I think there is something important there in just saying, "Do you know what? Whether they see me or not, I want to initiate contact with this other image bearer of God because of God's love for me." And then that might lead to initiating a conversation with your neighbors. Invite them over for a meal. Getting to know them so that you can help them or even ask for help. Yes, I said ask for help. That's actually loving, did you know that? Asking someone else for help is loving. I'm not saying that God needs our help. What I am saying though is that it's one way to show love to your neighbor. Asking for someone else's help recognizes their gifts, their abilities, you recognize the intrinsic value of God in creating them and it humbles you and stops you from talking about yourself all the time and learning about what they are good at and it makes it easier for them to accept your help because you've asked them for help. The last thing you want to do is try to be the savior of your neighborhood because you're so awesome. Ask people for help. That's more relational and hence, it's more loving. Initiate love first. Don't be afraid to build that relationship in love by asking for help.

Actually, my neighbor, his landscaping is awesome and I'm like looking at my lawn and his lawn and I'm like, "Man, big difference." I just said, "What do you do?" His eyes got big and he's like, "Let me tell you what you do. You do this. You do this." And he was just a treasure trove of information that quite frankly overwhelmed me. But later on when a lady got stuck at the end of our subdivision, he came over and knocked on my door and said, "Can you help me get this lady unstuck?" And this lady then thought he was my dad and we now have this joking relationship like, I say, "Hey Dad," and he's like, "Hey son." But my point is that those relationships have to start somewhere. Are the children of God going to start those kinds of relationships? Are we just going to fall into them like a puddle? We're not. We need to initiate it because God initiated love toward us. Are you willing to take the first step in love here at 9:30 or maybe 9:20 in the foyer? In your ABF's and in your neighborhood?

God loved first and that's one motivation to take us to another one. God gave us his Spirit. He gave us his Spirit. Look at 1 John 4:13, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." John says we know we abide in him and he in us. That's the beginning part of this passage so we see here the assurance of believers regarding the relationship with God is that, "God knows me and I know him. He abides in me and we are in him. He will abide or remain or stay with me and I will abide or remain and stay with him." In other words, we are secure in our relationship with God. But why? Why are we secure? The grounds of that assurance is that he has given us the Spirit. He has given us something that we can look to and think about that ultimately assures us before him. If you look earlier in chapter 3, verses 23 and 24 he says it again, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." Biblical assurance is grounded in the work of God, in what he has done. It is Christ's work on the cross that through his propitiation grants us salvation and it is here that the Spirit is at work that enables us to believe in the Gospel. The indwelling Holy Spirit is how we know that we abide in him and he abides in us and it is his work that gives us confidence and assurance. Do you see the tests of righteousness and love are sufficient to ask the question, am I saved? Am I saved? Are there any evidences of salvation? Am I saved? But it's only the work of God by sending his Son, the work of the Son by propitiation, by taking my wrath and the indwelling Holy Spirit that seals me for the day of redemption. That is what gives me assurance, what he did. The tests allow me to ask the questions but it's only the work of God that really gives me assurance of my salvation and allows me to love others with the assurance because once I'm assured, once I'm secure in my relationship, I'm motivated to love others, not to worry about the uncertainty between me and God. I'm free to do what he commands of me. The security the Spirit provides motivates me to love others. Don't forget the overall point is love one another.

That point I think is just sufficient in and of itself but there is more. The Lord produces amazing results when we love one another. The security that he provided is wonderful and we are reinforced by that but now God adds like a whole other layer. It's like, this is what happens, this is what the Lord does when we love one another. These are the amazing results. Now, I want to make sure this is phrased very carefully on purpose: it's not simply that loving others produces results like an equation  $1 + 1 = 2$ . The Lord produces results. The Lord uses our love for others to accomplish some very significant results. And in this passage there are four amazing results that the Lord uses when we love people. At the very minimum of what we should take away from this is that all of our boasting is to be done in the Lord, not in ourselves because he is the one producing these amazing results when we actually love one another.

Well, here's the first amazing result: loving one another demonstrates that you have a relationship with God. It shows something. Notice how often this subject comes up in these three verses and I'll talk about them. 1 John 4:7-8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.



The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Then he says in 1 John 4:12, "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." No one has seen God at any time. 1 John 4:15-16, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

So there are three aspects of our relationship with God in these verses that are displayed and I want to talk about them here. This is what God uses and produces when we love one another. The first is born terminology. Everyone who loves is born of God the Bible says and we are all initially born into the wrong kingdom, the kingdom of Satan. The question is: have you been reborn? Born from above? John emphasizes that new birth, the birth born from God is when I trade in my child of the devil card for my child of God card. When we love one another, it demonstrates that God has done that. He has transferred you. Loving one another demonstrates that, "I have had this new birth. There is something different. My love was not characterized by love because I didn't understand the love of God. I wasn't born again and now once I repented of my sin and placed my faith and trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross, the propitiation for the wrath due me, I've now been reborn. I'm in a different kingdom. I now am a child of God and before I was not."

The second aspect of the relationship is knowing terminology. I know God. Everyone who loves God knows God because God is love. The point being made is that those who really know God, what they do is they love others. Knowledge about God or about the Bible does not in and of itself necessarily result in love for one another. You can know a lot about the Bible and not love people. Satan knows Scripture really well. You can have a Ph.D. and memorize a whole New Testament in Greek and not love one another. Knowing a lot of information does not mean that you love people. But loving one another on the other hand, demonstrates that we not only know about God but we have a personal relationship with him. We understand that God is love.

The third aspect displayed by love is abiding terminology. We abide. If we love one another, God's love abides in us and the one who abides in love abides in God. There is this ongoing connection to God who is love. "Love is from God and I'm connected, I'm abiding in him and he in me and I am loving others." There is a connection. Abiding terminology is very popular through John the apostle. In his Gospel, John says that we must abide in Christ for apart from him we can do nothing. It demonstrates that one of the most wonderful aspects of a New Testament Christian relationship to God, to our Lord, is that one of abiding or ongoing indwelling or connection.

When you love one another, one of the results is that God's love abides in you and you also then have confidence that you are born of God, that you know God and that you abide in him. You have confidence. As amazing as that sounds, there is more than just confidence. Loving one another makes the unseen God clear. This is amazing, that we have this honor. 1 John 4:12 says, "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." 1 John 4:20 says, "If someone

says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar," here it is, "for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." This play with being seen when you can and cannot see and no one has seen God at any time and what is being seen is played out here and John says, "No one has seen God at any time." Now we know that God's handiwork is visible. In Romans, God's work is visible in creation. We see it. It's clearly evident. As people look at the amazing creation of God, it points to the Creator behind it. In 1 John, God's handiwork is seen as we love other people.

We live in a world that is broken but also beautiful. We see the common grace that extends to believer and unbeliever alike but what's different is the saving grace that makes God more clear, that what God is like, his character, shouted and resonant. That's what community-based ministry is all about. That's why we want to love our neighbors so that people would say, "Why are you loving us? Why is it so clear that you as a church want to just obviously love people in the community?" Because it shows God's handiwork. You know, you could spend a lot of your time doing many, many things. You could know all the latest TV episodes, never miss anything and know the character arc of everybody in every show on prime time. You can watch every game. I'm convinced that Friday is going to have a football game eventually. You can watch football from Thursday through Monday and consume your life in that way. Or you can find ways to love one another so that the unseen God becomes more evident to those he has placed around you. That's why we do the CDC, the Living Nativity, the Christmas For Everyone, the musical and why we're trying to be a good neighbor and just love those around us.

John adds one little fact at the end, he says, you can easily see your neighbor or your brother. It's easy to love what you can see. How can you expect to love God who you can't see? It's harder to love who you can't see if you can't even love the one that you can see. If you're not loving your neighbor, how can you say that you love God, the one you don't see? The point is clear that loving others is one of the ways that God is seen among his people and in any group, in any community, Christians ought to be known as the most loving and most caring group of all because it makes the unseen God seen.

Loving one another produces confidence for the day of judgment. This warms our heart and encourages us. Love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is so also are we in this world. When you think about the parables of the talents, you know, the parable of the talents is a wealthy landowner gave a bunch of resources to his servants and left and came back expecting a return on their investment and the phrase at the very end is, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What's challenging about that parable is that not everybody heard those positive words. One said, "I was afraid. I went and I hid your talent." And the master said, "You wicked, lazy slave. I'm taking away the talent from this person and giving it to the person who has ten." You think about that and you just ask the question: where am I going to be in terms of faithfulness when God sees me? When I read that passage, I oftentimes think, "Lord, am I going to be a faithful servant? What is the Lord going to say to me? How do I know that I'm not going to be the wicked, lazy slave? How do you know that? How do you

know Matthew 7:21, God is not going to say, "Depart from me, you who I never knew who practice lawlessness." John answered the question emphatically. How would you know? How would you know? By loving one another. I can know and have confidence and be assured that I will be in the group that hears, "Well done, though good and faithful servant," if you love one another.

You can have confidence not only in your death that you are a genuine Christian but you can also receive a positive review of your Master if you love one another. That is consistent to what Jesus taught in the sermon. He didn't know them because they were practicing lawlessness which is not loving other people at all. I find that incredibly encouraging and helpful. The Lord doesn't just give us a warning and leave us to our own devices, he tells us, "You can be sure. You can hear the message, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' if you are loving one another." And ultimately that results in another amazing result that is you can live a fearless life. Verse 18 says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." You know, many of us have learned that when you try to minister to people, it involves risk. When you take a step toward somebody, you don't know what's going to happen, if they are going to chide you or run away from you or just not respond and you try to love people and they spurn your love or say that what you're doing is not loving anyways. It's very possible to become a cynic and then no longer desire to love because we are dissatisfied with how people respond to our love.

Here are two things that I think will help us through that. We've already seen that loving people produces amazing results and the Lord does that. It shows I'm born of God. It shows that I know God and that I abide in God. It makes the unseen God clear to others in my life and it gives me confidence in the day of judgment. If I have all that, I don't have to worry about how they respond. If I have all that amazing result and that encouragement that I know God, that I have confidence in the day of judgment, I don't have to worry about what you think of me as I try to love you.

The second response we see in our text is that perfect love casts out fear. It says, "I'm going to love and fear is going to have no part in that." If fear remains, it might indicate that we're not exercising the perfect love of God and I think all of us would say, "Right and I need to go down on my knees and say, Lord, help me. My love is faulty. It is weak. It is insufficient. I need you, Lord, to help me love in the way that you love so that I can cast out fear and love in the way that personifies your character because all the things that you've done to assure me, I don't have to be afraid of what people think of me. My kids. My spouse. My coworkers. My neighbors. I can't love you if I'm afraid of what you think of me." Perfect love casts out fear. That's an amazing thing that the Lord produces, taking fear away as we don't focus on punishment, we just focus on loving.

Now, this passage is full and potent and we're commanded to love and I hope that you don't walk out of here just thinking, "Well, that was good," I hope you walk out of here saying, "I need to grow in actively loving others." Don't miss the point of the text: we are commanded to love. We need to respond to the commandment to love one another but don't forget that we're not commanded with no reason. God provided three reasons: we

should love each other because God gave us his Son that we might have life; we are to love because God first loved us; and we're to love because God gave us his Spirit that assures us. If John just stopped there, that would be fine but he doesn't. He tells us all the amazing results that God uses for when we love. It confirms our relationship with Jesus. It makes the unseen God clear. It gives us confidence when we die that we will one day hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," because we loved one another and that helps us to live a life without fear. Let me close with 1 John 4:11 and then pray. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Let's pray.

*Lord, we read your passage and we see that you very, very clearly want your children to personify your character by the way that we love one another. Lord, you gave us some amazing, beautiful, wonderful motivations to do so. Ultimately the love comes from you, that we can be confident in the day of judgment because of your great love for us that he has propitiated the wrath and we don't have to be afraid of your punishment. We don't have to be afraid of your wrath. If that has been taking care of, Lord, we don't have to be afraid of anybody's wrath and we are free because of your love for us to initiate love towards others and look and trust you to produce amazing results as we love one another. Lord, help us to do that starting in our church family by initiating conversations of love with one another. Lord, help us do that in our ABF's. Help us to do that in our neighborhoods. With our families. With our spouses. With our kids. With our coworkers. Lord, help us love because you first loved us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*