

I John 4:13-21 ▪ The Perfection of Love

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Love; Judgment; Endurance

God wants us to see the importance of Spirit-produced love.

Intro: A pastor-friend recently asked me what I was preaching through, and I told him 1 John. He said—it's simple but challenging since it's so repetitive. How do you deal with that?

—First, I need the repetition since I'm a slow learner.

For 20 years my wife has been trying to help me by saying, "If you just put your keys in the same place you will never lose them."

Last week I had misplaced my keys on Sunday morning.

I'm still learning spiritually and need constant reminders.

I need to be told from God over and over again—make sure love is a priority. Practice it. Strive to be perfected in love.

—Second, to my friend's question: the most challenging aspect is not how to put together a sermon series...the challenge for us all is in the doing.

- The question then, over and over is: How are we doing in love?

—Is my love where it needs to be?

—Is it the love God is pleased with?

—Is it perfected love?

- There are two ways our text helps us to answer honestly if we are searching our hearts and lives to see if the love is true love? Is it the love that 1 John commends?

Is your love from the *Spirit* that results in *abiding* in Christ? (13-16)

—Two words demand our attention: Spirit and abiding

- Our passage is helpfully divided by two "by this" statements

- The gist is really to test—is there evidence of the Spirit's Work? And what does it look like?

1. The essential indwelling of the Spirit

—The indwelling Spirit is how we experience God’s love.

Romans 5:5 ESV

“and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

—The Spirit also confirms our status as children:

Romans 8:16 ESV

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”

- It’s the Spirit who opens our understanding to accept the witness of the apostles (v14)
- V. 14 is gospel truth from eyewitness testimony.

First, it gives a reason for the faith. If someone asks me why I believe—here is a strong reason: I believe the Bible to be true, written by truthful witnesses (John).

Second, we see the basic gospel truth that every Christian confesses: God sent Jesus to be the *Savior of the world*.

- That phrase matches exactly the testimony of the Samaritans. The woman at the well met Jesus and it turned into a *life-changing experience*.

John 4:42 ESV

“They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”

Apply: This shows us a couple of things. Just like the woman at the well in John 4—a woman who was considered a social outcast and had a polluted past: believing in Jesus changes everything!

And he is the Savior of all kinds of people like her!

If there is a model-story that shows the deep love that Jesus has, coupled with the Spirit’s work, it would be this story from John 4.

It reinforces the truth that “God is love” (v16).

2. The necessity of abiding (15-16)

- The word abide is used multiple times that stresses emphasis.
- The question is: what does the word mean? Also is it the best word?
- Other translations use: live (NIV); remain (CSB); reside (NET)

Depending on the word, a different picture/metaphor is used.

- Jesus stresses the need to abide in him in order to bear fruit in our lives (Jn 15); there, the picture is an agricultural one. If we don't abide in Christ, our lives will be *fruitless*.
- Yet in the overall context of this chapter, the stress is on our relationship with God—a relationship that is marked by *mutual indwelling*. Residing.

Mother's Day--

Across the country today we honor the women who raised us. What makes Mom a mom is not only that she birthed us—or in some beautiful cases adopted us, but Mom is also mom because we resided with her.

Or to paraphrase: she put up with us.

A family is meant to stay together—though sadly it does not always turn that way.

Motherhood is also supposed to be a *lasting relationship*.

It's an abiding relationship.

Apply: It helps to remember once again the context this letter was written. People had said goodbye to the church—and to Jesus (1 Jn 2:19)—it appeared there was no lasting relationship.

Same verb for “abide” —a very literal translation: they would have kept abiding with us (1 Jn 2:19).

Sum/Apply: You can't separate remaining in Christ, his Spirit, and his people.

If you reside/abide in the church—it's evidence and assurance that you continue to abide in the Family.

- › Back to v13—the root: reminds us this is not our doing; it's the Spirit.

I agree with John Stott who said, “Without the Holy Spirit our minds are dark, and our hearts cold”.

Without the Spirit, love is merely a project of self. (Marks the difference between the world’s love and the Spirit’s.)

Without the Spirit, love will not be God’s love.

Oh how desperate we are on the Spirit!

We need the Spirit to open our eyes to see the beauty of Jesus and believe.

We need the Spirit to warm our hearts to God’s love.

Is your love growing you in *Christlikeness* and *confidence*? (17-18)

- A theme of judgment is now brought into the mix (v17)

The point: What we do with our lives now counts for eternity.

“Right now counts forever.” —RC Sproul

The Bible, and especially the NT wants to make sure we are well familiar with the fact that we will all one day stand before God and give an account.

- What prepares us for a final day of Judgment? And what proof is there that we will be able to stand?
- V17 b gives the answer.

(NIV) —In this world we are like Jesus.

Q: In what way?

1. Is it in standing?
2. Or in conduct?

Like Jesus in communion or conduct?

A few things:

1. Our relationship to God enables us to become more like Jesus (17)

- If you remember back in 3:2—the text said that we will be like Jesus at his return.

So what about now; what about the interim?

1 John 2:6 ESV

“whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

Here it is expected that our conduct matches Jesus’s now.

2. Our relationship to God is based on love, not fear of judgment (18-19)

- Now there is a lot that can be said about fear.

First, fear of God is a good thing (Prov 1:7)—it’s the beginning of knowledge.

Distinctions of fear have been made since the Reformers.

1) Respect (filial fear)—this is the respect that is due authority, parents; even 1 Pt 3:2 (where the word is translated respectful)

2) Dread (servile fear)—fear of someone on death row, fear of a POW in a torture chamber; it’s the dreadful anxiety. It’s the type of fear that comes through extreme intimidation. It’s alarming and frightening.

The word for punishment here is found only one other time in the NT.

Matthew 25:46 ESV

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Apply: This is clearly the fear of being cast into eternal hell.

But those who have confidence in their relationship with God through Christ don't need to live in that fear.

—Experiencing God's love; loving him, and loving his people drives away a fear of future judgment.

- › When a person is truly loved and forgiven by Christ, *punishment becomes a foreign word.*

Apply: Another way to approach it. Jesus did not go around his eternal life fearing an eternity of judgment. His life was set knowing that he will enjoy God forever, living out Ps 16:11—knowing that eternity means joy and eternal pleasure in his Father's presence.

Jesus lived in the joy of calling God, "*Abba*".

***That's the joy and assurance we have.*

John Calvin gives some good pastoral wisdom:

Romans 8:15 ESV

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

Apply: It's solid gospel-promises that like that, that we need to fill our minds and hearts with, especially when some unbelief starts to attack us.

The key to perfecting love then seems to be directly tied to faith in God's promises—and those promises shaping our identity.

3. Our relationship with God is shown by how we love his children (19-21)

- If there is one thing that John stresses enough (maybe the repetition my friend was talking about)—is that you cannot disconnect a love for God and love for other Christians.
- › A real relationship with God will be displayed in love to others.

Apply: When we truly grasp that God loves us in our unworthiness, it should create in us a humility. Who am I?

Only people who humble themselves can begin to love.

If the love is not there---then it's mere hypocrisy (v20)—a lesser to greater argument that exposes a hypocritical heart.

Conclusion--

With every sermon, we should ask: What does God want me to know, feel, and do.

One of these responses may speak to you more strongly.

— God wants us to *know* and believe the love he has for us (v16)

—God wants us to feel the freedom from fearing future judgment (v18)

—God wants us to live it out. God wants us to prioritize and be perfected in love. But above all, it must be practical.

As we close, David Jackman helps us get practical, and check our hearts.

The Message of John's Letters

We Have Received the Holy Spirit (Verse 13)

Where someone claims to be a Christian, but has no time for fellowship with others, criticizing the church and writing it off, practicing a solitary devotion, do we not have to ask whether that person is deluded and whether God really does live in him? Where the life of God is at work, it sweetens bitterness, melts hardness and multiplies love.