

**1st John 4: 17; “Love Perfected Among Us”, Sermon # 18 in the series –
“Behold What Manner of Love”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on July 5th, 2018, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Why does the Apostle John spend so much time talking about love? It is because, as he says in verse 8 of chapter 4, “He who does not love does not know God”. Love is the essential grace which we are to look for, and see if it is in exercise in ourselves. If we are to rightly conclude that we have been saved from our sins, we must know that we have Christian love. If we do not have love, and if we do not exercise that love toward God and the brethren, then we should not fool ourselves in thinking that we are a true Christian. We can also say that we cannot come to have the full assurance that we are a Christian without seeing in ourselves the evidence of love, in our words and our actions towards others. And this is especially true if we do not love our brother in Christ. On the other hand, if we do perceive that we have this true and Christian love, it does not mean that we are perfect in it, but rather that we are learning this new way, which Christ is teaching us. We are learning about His love, and we are learning to love, with that same love. It says in verse 17 that “love has been perfected among us...” This is “love being perfected in us”. Before we partake of the Lord’s Supper, I want to show you first of all, what love being perfected means. And then I want to show you two consequences of the fact that “love that has been perfected among us”; that is – boldness in the Day of Judgment, and the fact that as He is, so also are we in this world.

1st of all – What does John mean when he says that love has been perfected among us?

Christian love is not simply the humanistic creaturely love which many people have, and they say that the world needs more of it. It is not simply being helpful to people. You can have this kind of love in abundance and yet not be a true Christian. Christian love is something that a person must learn from God because He is the only One who can teach it to us. He alone can reveal to us the significance of love in every aspect of our lives. It is not just a concept, it is a grace which is given to you, by the most glorious Person who ever lived. Love is the gift of God’s Son who comes to rule and reign in your life. It is He who personally teaches you how to love people around you in word and in deed. Having Christ in your heart, will lead you into the obedience of right attitudes and actions in connection with all the other moral commandments of God which are found in the Bible. It is not something that you have by nature, without it having been taught to you by God, and shown to you by God.

God has demonstrated His own love to you in His having given you His Son. He savingly reveals His everlasting love to believers when He opens their eyes, and regenerates their hearts, in connection with their receiving the gospel of salvation. God sent His Son to save, because He is love. This was, and it is, God’s love to a sin-cursed world. “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,” it says in verse 9. But when we believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gracious change takes place in your heart which enables you to have Christ’s love in your heart, and then to show that love to people around you. When, by grace, we are really able to see and to believe the love that God has for us in Jesus Christ, then the hardness of our hearts is broken. We are melted down in the depths of our being, that God should show this kind of love to a sinner such as we are. And then to our astonishment, we come to realize that God has given us the means to have this same kind of love at work in our lives, motivating us to keep His commandments from right motives, and then to go about keeping them in the right way.

This is what John means, then, when he speaks in the way that he does, about love being perfected in us. It means that a Christian may not be doing all that He is doing for God and for men, in perfect love. Rather, there may be mixed motives and many imperfect thoughts and some actions of unthoughtful disobedience. A true Christian may yet have many thoughts and motives, and even some actions, which are not completely worthy of the love of Christ which has been shown to them. They may have many motives for their obedience which are partially selfish and self-serving, and perhaps even somewhat self-righteous. And in living this way, the Christian doesn’t quite yet see

clearly what Christ is calling him to be, and to do. The truth of the matter is, that in his motives for what he does, his love needs to be perfected.

The proof of what I am saying to you is found in 1st Corinthians 8: 1-13. "Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge." "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." "And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know." "But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him." "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one." "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live." "However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?" "And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" "But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

Now, you can see here that there is a principle which is stated here which is very important for every Christian to take notice of, and to live by; and that is, that knowledge puffs up. That is, knowledge is good and it is strengthening to the soul, the mind, and the heart, but it can make a Christian proud if it is not checked by a right understanding of how they will use that knowledge that they have. But if that same person has love, it edifies; it builds up Christians around them; it encourages, and helps other Christians to see the truth rightly, and to live in a way that is glorifying to God. What love will lead us to, then, is humility. That is, that we will realize that if we think that we know anything, we do not yet know it as we ought to know it, Paul says here. If we love God, we are known by God; that is, He knows whether ours is a complete obedience, or whether there are things which we still need to learn to truly show love to the brethren and edify them and not wound their conscience, if their conscience is weak.

One of those things, in that day, was meat offered to idols. To those who had a strong conscience, they could partake of such meat, and it would not hurt their conscience at all. They ate that meat in the faith that all foods were clean, and that an idol was really nothing, and so, therefore for them, there was no problem. However, Paul says, not every Christian has that knowledge, and so, if any person (Christian or non-Christian) does not have that knowledge working in that same way, and they see that first person with the strong conscience, eating in an idol's temple, they may draw a wrong conclusion that it is perfectly alright, not only to eat meat offered in an idol's temple, but also to worship more gods than the one true and living God, and thus they would perish in their sins by being defiled by the practice of the worship of many gods.

The reason that Paul mentions that the weaker person that we are considering is the one for whom Christ died, is to bring to the stronger Christian's remembrance the fact that they may cause others, even other believers around them, to stumble in such a way, that they may be mightily affected in a negative way, spiritually. They may look at the stronger believer eating food sacrificed to idols, and it may take them many years in trying to work through that issue of whether they have a conscience that can freely partake of such food. They may conclude that they cannot, and they should not. The real issue for the stronger Christian brother or sister is that of whether they are willing to see that their love needs to be perfected. A true Christian ought never to cause other believers to stumble. Perhaps because of a lack of Christian love being shown by the stronger brother, they have been stumbled, and they would indeed perish, were it not that Christ who has died for them, will preserve them and keep them, and will prevent them from perishing everlastingly.

However, this passage teaches us that many persons who profess to be true Christians, seeing that same first brother exercising his supposed religious liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols, in an idol's temple, this could really and truly bring about, by their carelessness, the thought in the one watching, that this is perfectly acceptable in the sight of God; to worship many gods besides God, and to thus defile themselves repeatedly, unto death. Therefore, in partaking of the Lord's Supper here today, will you not see, my dear brethren, how important it is that you claim, not only the liberty to eat such meat, or drink alcoholic beverages to the glory of God, that you also learn to love the weaker brothers and sisters around you, by not partaking of such things while they are looking to you as an example, or boasting in your liberty when they are looking on? It says here – "For, when you sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. You therefore, ought to conclude with Paul, that if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again do it, lest I make my brother stumble. Resolve in the sight of God, while you partake of this Supper, that your love will be perfected in this holy regard, in relation to the weaker consciences of other brothers and sisters around you.

2nd – If love is being perfected in us, we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment.
(verse 17)

In the King James Version it is worded this way, "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." I like that better than the NKJV because the meaning in the Greek is – "the love that is within us, is made perfect". This love of God and men was altogether perfect in an absolute way in the person of Jesus Christ when He walked upon this earth. We, as believers in Christ, are being taught to love by the power of Christ's Holy Spirit. The more that we engage in Biblically defined love, the more reasonable the conclusion is, that we will have confidence in the day of Judgment. We will have boldness to approach to the Lord Jesus on that day and not be ashamed of the way that we have lived. It is guilt that brings shame, and leads us to consider hiding from God as Adam did in the garden when he sinned. The person who loves God and loves men, does not have any reason to be ashamed. This is why we are told to "abide in love".

In other words, do not change your mind about it, as though love is not the way to glorify God or to address your problems with other people. Some people will be loving for a time, when they think that it will further their own interests, but when they see that they cannot obtain what they want by love, they resort to other methods. They may get what they want in this life; but they will not have confidence in the day of judgment. This is because love is the way of the disciple of Jesus Christ. This is the way that He teaches you, and if it is not followed by you, then it shows one of two things. It shows that you are a disobedient Christian who is acting like a child, one who needs to be disciplined. Or it shows that you have not yet come to know God and Christ at all. This is where righteousness and truth meet with love. They meet in the disciple, in their willingness and desire to love others, even when they are not getting their own way in things. The true disciple is more interested in doing God's will than he is in doing his own will. And so, because he loves God, he realizes the greatness of what God has done for him in loving him and forgiving him in Jesus Christ, and so he is fully persuaded that he needs to learn the Christ-like way of loving others. This is abiding in Christ, and in His love. 1st John 2: 28 says, "And now little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." So let us come down front now, and I will have a few more words to say to you about this verse 17.

3rd – If love is being perfected in us then we will be like Christ in this world.

"Love has been perfected in among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." There is a good example of this in John chapter 13 if you will turn over there with me. To truly love, you must learn to serve others, and so Jesus showed his disciples how to do this. Verse 1 says, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." Jesus' love was a love that loved at all times, even when things were going against him. Even when He Himself was coming to the place where he would suffer

and die because of His love for sinners like us. Look at verse 2. “And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.” “After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” It seems that Peter thought that this was a lesson that he did not need to learn. He thought that it was beneath our Lord’s dignity to humble Himself and serve in this way. Verse 6 – “Then Jesus came to Simon Peter, and Peter said to Him, ‘Lord are You washing my feet?’” “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.’” “Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’”

Now this is very interesting is it not? Peter is probably the most outspoken and zealous of all the disciples, and yet he does not want Jesus to show him the way of loving service. “Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’” Jesus is saying to him that it is absolutely essential that He do a work of daily cleansing in Peter’s life in order that he might truly learn the way of love. And, even though Peter did not understand it at that point, it would be absolutely essential that Peter would come to understand Jesus’ example to him, in terms of his ability to love. Verse 12 says, “So when he had washed their feet, taken His garments and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’” “You call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.” “If I then, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

I wonder about Judas at this point; don’t you? Judas was there, but he was not clean. Jesus had not washed or cleansed His heart. Jesus says in verse 10, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” “For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not clean.’” You see, you have to be cleansed of your sin if you are to love with a Christian love. And Judas had not believed in Jesus in order to be cleansed from his sin. And so, even though he had walked with Christ for those 3 years, he had not yet learned the way of love. Jesus says in verse 16, “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.” He is as much as saying – “As He is, so also are we, in this world.” Here Jesus says in verse 17, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Judas was not willing to love, and even worse, he was willing to betray perfect love. Let this thought lead us to remember Christ’s perfect love at this hour. Let us remember that Jesus merited everything related to our salvation, even our ability to change to become more like Him in exhibiting and demonstrating love to people around us. It is because of His love being perfected in us, that we can have real boldness in the day of judgment, because we know that He died for our sins. But we also need to remember that as Jesus was, in this world, so are we. Because of our identification with Jesus, and because we are commanded to love one another even as He has loved us, we must accept the fact that in order to become like Jesus in love, that there will be people who will persecute us, there may be betrayal, and we may be hurt or even die for the sake of love to our Lord. But most certainly we shall not be separated from the love of Christ.

In John 15: 12 Jesus says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” Let us ask ourselves if we are laying down our life for the brethren, who are our best of friends? If we love them, and are laying down our life for them, it just may be that the people of the world will come to hate us. But Jesus has the answer to this as well. John 15: 18 says, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” “If you were of the world, the world would love its own.” “Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” This tends to put fear in our hearts when we think of suffering for loving the brethren. But let us see that having the perfect love of Jesus in our hearts, His Spirit and grace within us will help us to cast out all fear. Therefore, let us partake of this Supper with joy, knowing that Christ has accomplished all things necessary for our salvation, and for our growth to become mature servants to Him.

