

Sermon: Demonstrations of God's Love

Text: [1 John 4:7-21 ESV](#)

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Introduction: John, the Apostle, has been sounding like a broken record. All right with all the love talk already. This kind of love is not to be confused with some of the lyrics in an old Beatle's song - *All You Need Is Love*, or a show tune from *My Fair Lady* like "Show Me."

There are important implications to being in a Christian fellowship or family. We understand that family cannot be forced against one's will. This is not like a shotgun wedding where mistakes were made and sometimes other decisions just compound the problem. You can have a man and a woman biologically forced to be married with a child(ren) who follow, but that is not a real family like John wants us to experience. Real love and commitment ideally comes before wedding vows are made public, or we make a public confession of our faith in Jesus.

Within the family:

I. We Have an Obligation to Love (4:7-11).

With God our promise of loving Him and others sometimes is not easy. Duty and obligation are heavy words that are a result of what God has done for us as an example and a definition of how we should live. [1 John 4:7-11 ESV](#) 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have 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.

Illus. There was an amazing story that came out of the Korean War. A young Communist officer ordered the execution of a Christian civilian. When he learned that his prisoner was in charge of an orphanage and was doing much good in caring for small children, he decided to spare his life, but kill his son instead. The 19-year-old boy was shot in the presence of his father.

Later, when the tide of events changed, this same officer was captured, tried, and condemned to death for war crimes. But before the sentence could be carried out, the Christian father pleaded for the life of this Communist who had killed his son. He admitted that if justice were followed, this man should be executed. But since he was so young and blindly idealistic, he probably thought that his actions were right. "Give him to me," he said, "and I'll teach him about the Savior."

They granted the request. That father took the murderer of his son into his own home. As a result of his self-sacrificing love, that Communist became a Christian pastor (“Our Daily Bread,” April, 1980).

We must love to be able to be believed that we are indeed God’s children. There is a big difference between knowing God and knowing about Him and having a saving relationship with Him. It is the difference between a fan and a follower. You may know all about soap stars or various athletes or even the President, but have you had dinner with them, been to their houses or spoken a word to them.

If we are God’s children we will live our lives in Christ and with the power of the Holy Spirit. Every person has an existence, but only those who put their faith in Jesus have eternal life.

While we live our lives in this material world that is heavily influenced by Satan, how involved should we be? It seems we have an obligation to protect God’s name and our own (child of God) remembering to whom we belong. And until we act like God and love like God, all our relationships will be less than what they could be.

Until we accept Jesus, God’s one and only Son, as our Savior our future is bleak, and Hell is our future.

Here, Dr. Ralph Wilson is helpful: “This designation (one and only Son) sets Jesus’relationship to the Father apart from anyone else’s. Jesus is in a class by himself. John speaks of us as "children of God" (*teknon*, [3:1-2](#); [5:2](#)) and as "born of God" (*gennao*, [John 1:13](#); [3:3-7](#); [1 John 2:29](#); [3:9](#); [4:7](#); [5:1, 4, 18](#)). But he speaks with a different vocabulary and in an entirely different sense of Jesus’relationship as Son (*huios*) to the Father. In particular, Jesus is the "only begotten Son" or "one and only Son." In the face of third century heresies that denied the full divinity of Jesus, the Nicene Creed was developed:

"We believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."

So here is our obligation and our reciprocal reaction to God’s love: ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Our commitment to love others ought to be to show them Jesus by the way we love and ask them to join us in this holy endeavor so they too might be saved.

Our salvation is sure and:

II. We Have Assurance through the Holy Spirit (4:12-16a).

I John 4:12-13 ESV ¹² No one has ever seen God; 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.

Illus. Going to Mexico on a mission trip - Even though I did not know the people, they were brothers and sisters. Because of what Jesus did for us, His Spirit in us provides assurance of our salvation and the firm belief we are doing the very work of the Master. His Spirit gives us the very words combined with God's Holy Word to share with others - the saved and the unsaved.

Illus. A writer named Caecilius (ca. A.D. 210) said of the Christians, "They know one another by secret marks and signs, and they love one another almost before they know one another." The Greek writer, Lucian (ca. A.D. 120-200) said of the early church, "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator [Jesus] has put it into their heads that they are all brethren." The church father, Tertullian, said, "It is our care for the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Look,' they say, 'How they love one another! Look how they are prepared to die for one another!'" **I wonder how often outsiders would describe modern Christians like that?**

People have seen Jesus, but no one has seen God in all his glory and lived. It is too much for us to take in. The R.V. renders v. 12 "No man hath beheld God." "The verb used here implies something of gazing and contemplation: our word 'theatre' comes from it." - Plummer, p. 149 -- **τεθεαται**

and God's love is made complete (NIV) or *perfected* in us. This is the idea of bringing to a goal, in this case us - what we were created for to show others Jesus (God)!

If we know we are being obedient there is an assurance in our relationship with God. **I John 2:5 ESV** ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

I John 4:14-16a ESV ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his 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.

So here again, both confession and witness provide a way to have God dwell in us.

16a So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

This realization is something in our past (conversion) and continues to today. We are the best possible proof of God's existence when we love like God loves.

III. We No Longer Fear God (4:16b - 18) in the sense of punishment).

I John 4:16b-18 ESV ^{16b} God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for 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. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

God is equal to the Holy Spirit here. "The Spirit is the inner witness, who as C.H. Dodd puts it, gives us the immediate, spontaneous, unanalysable awareness of a divine presence in our lives."

And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,

i.e. convicts us, challenging us to do better, and reassuring us we are still loved...

And speaks of heaven.
And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone

cited in Barclay, p. 120

Q. How is it we can be confident "on the day of judgment?"

A. Because we have a Savior who loves us, and we love Him by being obedient and also loving others.

I really appreciate what Steven Cole shares with us here. "All of us, at one point in life, should have experienced the fear of God's judgment. But as you grow in grace and godliness, that fear is replaced by God's love. The 18th century commentator, Bengel, gives the proper course of growth in the spiritual life: "neither love nor fear, fear without love, both fear and love, love without fear" (cited by Westcott in Latin, p. 160; translated in James Boice, The Epistles of John [Zondervan], p. 148).

Most unbelievers have neither the fear of God or the love of God in their lives. Often such lack of fear stems from ignorance. Children are often unafraid of danger because they are not aware of the severity of the danger. Concerning people in their natural state, Paul states (**Rom. 3:18**, citing **Ps. 36:1**), "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Unbelievers are a heartbeat away from eternity in the lake of fire, but they don't know or fear God!

Then, as the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and judgment, they become terrified of God's wrath and their guilt before Him. At this point, it is "fear without love." God often uses this to drive them to the cross, where, still trembling, they experience both fear and love. Then, as they grow assured of His grace and see His love working itself out in their lives, they cast out fear and grow into love without fear. John Newton aptly put it, "'Twas grace that caused my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved" ("Amazing Grace," stanza 2). So John's point is that as God's love grows in your life, it casts out the fear of judgment that existed before. God's love flowing through you is evidence that you are born of God and that evidence removes the fear of God's judgment.

Plummer, p. 152 - "love moves toward others in the spirit of self-sacrifice; fear shrinks from others in the spirit of self-preservation."

I think a good way of looking at the word "perfect" or "perfected" might be thinking about maturity, and "grown-up love." This is the kind of love one might find in a good marriage where the cost of the relationship has been weighed and both parties are all in. Bonhoeffer understood this relationship God offers in this way: "When the Lord calls a man/woman to follow, he asks him 'to come and die.'"

We only need to be fearful in a negative way with God when we deliberately and knowingly sin. The writer of Hebrews makes this distinction clear: [Hebrews 10:26-27, 30-31 ESV](#)
26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But when you know you are loved by God or anyone, it frees you to fail while trying your best without any fear of reprisal or punishment. Those of us who are "in Christ" have been adopted and chosen by God. Yet this election can never be an excuse for deliberately sinning, leaning into privilege and our position with Christ.

IV. We Have a Reason to Love (4:19-21)

[1 John 4:19-21 ESV](#) 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot[a] love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Footnotes: [a] 1 John 4:20 Some manuscripts *how can he*

As John Stott points out (p. 170), the apostle uses the word liar with reference to each of the three tests. With regard to the moral test, he said (2:4), “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” With regard to the doctrinal test, he said (2:22), “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” Here, he applies it to the social test of love. Stott concludes, “However loudly we may affirm ourselves to be Christian, our habitual sin, denial of Christ and selfish hatred expose us as the liars we are.”

The word “Liar” is *pseustes*, liar, cheat,” occurs five times in I John. Jesus called Satan “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Each time John uses the word “liar” in this epistle, he was challenging the claims of the false teachers:

In 1:10 These false teachers claimed not to have sinned.

In 2:14 They claim keeping Jesus’ commands is unimportant.

In 2:22 These false teachers lie again by claiming Jesus was not the divine Christ.

In our text here at 4:20 they say you can love God while hating a brother or sister.

Later, in 5:10 these false teachers will lie again claiming that belief in Jesus is not necessary.

Q. So how can you tell who are liars and false teachers?

A. **Matthew 7:15-16a ESV** ¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ^{16a} You will recognize them by their fruits.

John insists this fruit is God’s love. It’s not what a person says, but how one lives a life of love. Loving one’s brothers and sisters, says John, is the chief thing, and shows that God indwells that person.

When you step back, this lesson on **I John 4** is pretty straightforward: 1.. Satan, God’s enemy, is in the world, but the Spirit of Christ abiding in Christians is greater than all other enemies. 2. God is love, and seeks to mature His love in those who follow Him (family members). In fact, He insists on it. We must love, because God loves.

Conclusion: With all of the decline in personal safety, with crime increasing and people in the world caring less and less about their relationship with God, maybe we could demonstrate to a skeptical world what real love is!

I recall a song: **You're the Only Jesus**

David Will

Verse 2: And if not you
I wonder who will show them love
And love alone can make things new
If not from you
How will they learn
There's One Who trades their hopelessness
For joy in return

Chorus: 'Cause you're the only Jesus some will ever see
And you're the only words of life some will ever read
So let them see in you the One in Whom is all they'll ever need
'Cause you're the only Jesus some will ever see
So let Him shine, let Him show
Let them see Him in you
You've got to let them know

'Cause you're the only Jesus some will ever see
And you're the only words of life some will ever read
So let them see in you the One in Whom is all they'll ever need
'Cause you're the only Jesus
You're the only Jesus some will ever see
Songwriter: Gordon Jensen.

Illus. “Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones.

But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts, Mead said. This is like *The Good Samaritan*.

We are at our best when we serve others.” **Love is like that.**

From when we were children we have been taught “God is love.” As we grow and mature in understanding we must also understand that love and punishment work together. Listen to John as he writes some of his last words to the church: [Revelation 20:15 ESV](#) ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

There is a penalty for refusing God’s offer of love. There is a time to act on this offer, and it is now. Do not mistime your acceptance. There is a time when it will be too late. Don’t be found sleeping when Jesus comes and be eternally shut out of heaven and consigned to hell.