

## 1John 4:7-21

### Perfecting the Love of God

*...and His love is perfected in us – v. 12; Herein is our love made perfect – v. 17*

Perfection is the Christian's standard and perfection is his goal. This must be the case because we serve a perfect Savior and we are predestinated to be conformed to His image. We studied the text in Hebrews last week that tells us of Christ *that being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;*

Christ said of the "thorny ground" hearers in the parable of the sower in Lk. 8:14 that they *bring no fruit to perfection*. While that's a tragic statement that ought to convict us when the cares of this world dominate us, what I want you to note from the statement is the implication that the "good ground" hearers do bring fruit to perfection. What this means, then, is that love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance – as fruits of the Spirit these things should be brought to perfection in the Christian's life.

Paul states this perfection as the goal of his ministry when he writes of the duration of his ministry in Eph 4:13 that it will be *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*: Isn't that a good description of perfection? – perfection being the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. That's how we'll know we've arrived – that's how we can gauge ourselves. When we've attained the stature of the fulness of Christ then our goal of perfection will be attained.

In other verses in the New Testament we see particular things mentioned pertaining to perfection. *Perfecting holiness in the fear of God – 2Cor. 7:1; for my strength is made perfect in weakness* – the Lord says to Paul in 2Cor. 12:9; You are able to perceive, I'm sure, that John focuses on one of the fruits of the Spirit – the first, and arguably the primary one which is love. *His love is perfected in us* he writes in v. 12. *Herein is our love made perfect* – v. 17.

There's a connection between these verses. As His love is perfected in us then certainly our love toward Him and our love toward others will move forward toward perfection. One of the benefits to this time around the Lord's table is that in our remembrance of Christ His love becomes ours in fuller measure. The broken body and shed blood of Christ should remind us of His love. And as we partake of these elements we should be basking in His love and pledging our faith in His love. His body, after all was broken for you and His blood was shed for you. *Greater love hath no man than this*, Christ says in Jn. 15:13 *that a man lay down his life for his friends*.

And so I'd like to draw your attention to this theme this morning. The theme of:

## Knowing The Love of God Perfected in Us

How can we know in our experience this love perfected so that our love to God and to Christ might be perfected? Consider with me first of all that we may know the love of God perfected in us:

### I. By Seeing the Close Connection Between God and Love

Would you notice from v. 7 that God is the source of love. 1Jn. 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* God is the source from which love flows. Apart from God love is unknown. The connection becomes even closer in the words of v. 8 and v. 16:

- 1Jn. 4:8 *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*
- 1Jn. 4:16 *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.*

So when you note from v. 7 that God is the source of love and add to the weight of the argument vv. 8,16 that both tell us *God is love* then you cannot help but notice the very close connection between God and love. I don't know of any other attribute of God that actually contributes to a definition of God. We know, of course, from our catechism that God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. But John doesn't draw from these attributes to tell us what God is. He draws from the attribute of God's love to describe or define God to us.

Verse 7 tells us that *every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.* It would not be right to draw the application from this statement that born again Christians are the only ones that know anything about love. You can still find families made up of unsaved people where husband and wife love each other and are faithful to each other. You can find unsaved families where kids know to love and respect their parents. Unfortunately such a phenomenon is becoming increasingly rare.

And I think the reason for it becoming increasingly rare is because God is lifting the hand of His common grace and giving the inhabitants of this nation more and more to their sin. And when the inhabitants of a nation are given to sin then Christ's prophetic statement comes to pass recorded in Mt 24:12 where He says *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

Don't we see this happening in our day and age? Doesn't this statement by Christ go a long way in explaining our culture to us? This is why crime rises and families dissolve. This is why trust evaporates and suspicions arise. It's the absence of the common grace of love. I caught a headline on the internet this past week which told of yet another Hollywood Actress declaring that she was gay. Her plunge into sodomy followed 3 failed marriages and so I suppose she decided she might find the love that was lacking in her marriages by turning to more abominable sin. She certainly has deceived herself.

This cultural phenomenon certainly underscores the truth that where the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ's love is absent then the love of many does indeed wax cold. But what about our text that tells us that *every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God*? The term for *love* throughout this chapter is that term that speaks of the unique nature of Christian love. It's the term *agape*.

This is the kind of love that springs from a renewed nature and is spiritual. This is the love that Paul describes in 1Cor. 13 as that which suffereth long, and is kind; that envieth not and vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up. This is that love that Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. This is the love, then that will never fail.

And this love is characteristic of a true Christian. Indeed, apart from this love Paul says in 1Cor. 13 that it doesn't matter what kind of talents we possess or what kind of deeds we perform, without this agape love we are as nothing – nothing beyond sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

This is the kind of love that we must examine ourselves to see if we know anything about it for apart from this love we don't know God and apart from this love we have not been born of God and we are not dwelling in God. This is the love that we must pursue to perfection. How then, do we pursue the perfection of this kind of love? How can we know this love perfected within us?

Knowing the close connection between God and love puts on the right course. We obviously have to go to God and seek Him for the perfection of this love in our lives. But we can narrow the scope of our seeking by considering next that we may know this love perfected in us:

## II. By Beholding the Manifestation of God's Love

We find a particular manifestation of God's love mentioned twice in vv. 9,10. Note what it says *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. And then in v. 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.*

Do you see the double reference to God sending His Son? In v. 9 this sending of the Son is called by John a manifestation of the love of God toward us. In v. 10 it follows the phrase *Herein is love*. This certainly shows us the love of God from two vantage points – the love of the Father in sending His Son and the love of the Son in His willingness to come. I think it's important to note the unity of love between the Father and the Son.

The mistaken, if not heretical notion, has been held by some in the course of church history that love springs from Christ but wrath springs from God the Father. Or another way to put it is the God of the Old Testament is a wrathful and vengeful God while Christ in the New Testament demonstrates love. And thus our need has been for a mediator to

twist the reluctant arm, as it were, of a God who is bent on our destruction. Nothing could be further from the truth. Note again the words of v. 9 *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world.*

So we find this double reference to God sending His Son recorded in v. 9 and repeated again in v. 10. And would you notice the two-fold aim that was to be accomplished in God sending His Son. The first part of the aim is given to us in v. 9. *God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*

I take the word *through* to be an expression of means. And so we could interpret the statement – *God sent his only Son into the world, that we might live by means of him* – i.e. that we might live by means of His love and by means of His grace and by means of His power. His power, of course, is what brought spiritual life to our souls. We were raised from spiritual death to spiritual life by means of His power.

And His love becomes the motivational force to our living. *We love him, because he first loved us* we're told in v. 19. His love toward us has gained our love toward Him. His love toward us deserves our love toward Him. In your bulletin this morning you'll notice the remark by Thomas Manton on this verse. *Love is like an echo, it returneth what it receiveth.*

So the first part of this two-fold aim in God sending His Son is that we might live through Him. And don't we know that apart from Him we can do nothing but with Him we can do all things. The second part of this two-fold aim in God sending His Son is given to us in v. 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.*

Not only did God send His Son that we might live through Him but He sent Him to be the propitiation for our sins. Apart from Christ being our propitiation there would be no way we could live through Him. Even if He imparted His power to us so that we might live by supernatural power the issue of our sin would not be met and the issue of God's justice would not be met.

Justice had to be satisfied for salvation to be wrought. The very term *propitiation* presupposes the righteous anger of God toward sinners. And God's character could not be compromised – not even for the salvation of sinners. So there must be one to bear the wrath of God for us – that's the meaning of propitiation. The term points us to Christ not only dying in our place but bearing the righteous anger of God for us – the anger of God against our sins.

John mentions propitiation twice in this epistle. Look at 2:1,2 *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Would you note the statement pertaining to Christ's righteousness. He is called *Jesus Christ the righteous*. And the fact that such a designation can be assigned to Christ

certainly indicates to us that Christ will not fail to do that which is right at all times. And yet this righteous One can be our advocate with the Father. And the reason He can be our advocate is because He is the propitiation for our sins.

Paul is the only other New Testament author to mention propitiation and he mentions it once in Rom. 3:25 *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*; You see from Paul's statement the connection between propitiation and faith in Christ's blood. It was the shedding of His blood, you see, that appeased the righteous anger of God. And it is the value of His blood that makes His atoning sacrifice sufficient not only for all your sins and all my sins but for the sins of the whole world.

Is it any wonder, then, that John prefaces his statement about Christ being our propitiation by saying *Herein is love*. Herein is love indeed – One bearing shame and scoffing rude that we might be spared from our just desert from God – One giving His body to be broken and His blood to be shed so that it might be written by Paul that there is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus.

His love becomes perfected in us and our love toward Him advances toward perfection when we remember that He came and we remember why He came. He came that we might live – and not merely live but live through Him. And the reason we can live through Him is because He became the propitiation for our sins. May His love be perfected in us, then, through our remembrance of all that He bore on our behalf in order to save our guilty souls from hell.

So His love becomes perfected in us when we see the close connection between God and love. And His love becomes perfected in us when we behold the manifestation of His love. Would you consider finally that we may know His love perfected in us:

### III. By Overcoming the Hindrances to His Love

A very common hindrance to God's love is fear. Notice the statement in v. 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.*

Such a verse certainly strikes at the root of false religions and corrupted Christianity. Where ever religion is governed by guilt it's governed by fear and where ever religion is driven by guilt it cannot, therefore, be driven by love. *He that feareth is not made perfect in love. Fear hath torment* – and how many religions thrive on torment?

God has no interest in His children being tormented or being driven by this kind of fear. This is brought out at least on two occasions by Paul. In Ro 8:15 *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* And again in 2Ti 1:7 *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

The fear in our text could be applied to many areas in our lives but there is one area in particular that I think John has in mind. Note again the phrase to our love being made

perfect in v. 17 and take note especially of what follows the statement of our love being perfect. 1Jo 4:17 *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.* We have boldness in the day of judgment. And the term for *boldness* is a term that means *confidence*. We are able to have confidence in the day of judgment. And the basis for that confidence is not found in anything we've done or could do – it's found, rather, in the glorious truth that Christ is the propitiation for our sins.

Fear, then, is an obstacle to basking in God's love. And note from v. 18 that *perfect love casteth out fear*. This is one of the benefits to meeting around the Lord's table. It is here upon our reflection of Christ's broken body and shed blood that our faith becomes strengthened in the reality of Christ's love and as our faith in His love is strengthened then fear is cast out.

The text can be practically applied in a number of ways in matters that lead us to fear. Don't we find ourselves fighting fears within when we think of the direction of this world and what appears to be the increase of sin and ungodliness? Don't we find ourselves having to fight fear when the plots of the rulers of this world against Christ come to light and sin is sanctioned and virtue is criminalized? And don't we find ourselves having to fight fear when we think of the dim prospects for our economy?

God would not have us tormented by these fears. He would have us, instead, governed by His love. This is another reason why this time around the Lord's table is essential. Perfect love casteth out fear and in the remembrance of our Savior's broken body and shed blood we find His love perfected within us. While we remember, therefore, His broken body and shed blood let's not forget what He has earned through the accomplishment of His death.

All power and authority has been given to Him. He has taken His seat at the right hand of God the Father, having purged our sins and as Psalm 2 indicates to us, the things that might cause us to fear give our Savior occasion to laugh. Ps 2:4 *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.*

The fear factor is only one of the hindrances to God's love being perfected in us. I'll only take time to mention another hindrance that's mentioned earlier in John's first epistle and that's the hindrance of competing affections. When we set our affections on the things of this world we hinder God's love from being perfected in us. And so we're exhorted in 1Jn. 2:15-17 to *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth way, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*

May we not be found, then, hindering the perfection of God's love within us by allowing our affections to be placed where they should not be. May we instead find God's love filling and thrilling our souls and becoming the driving force in our lives. May our remembrance of Christ this day lead us forward in the perfection of God's love.