

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST JOHN

LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD!

Read 1 John 4:12-21

Introduction

Anyone who claims to love God must prove it by loving his brother. John's teaching repeatedly emphasizes the fact that a person cannot claim to love God yet hate others. As chapter 3 made clear, hate is always from a demonic source. Those who hate are not "abiding" in Christ. Believers are children of God and brothers and sisters of one another. As family, they are to love one another according to the commandment of God.

God's Love Perfected in Us

"No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us." (v13)

John relates a basic principle about God the Father — that no one, no one, has seen God at any time. Anyone claiming to have seen God the Father is speaking — at best — from their own imagination, because as John plainly states, *no one has seen God at any time*. However, love is the greatest evidence of God's presence and work among us. Since no one has seen God at any time, this provides evidence for the presence of God.

Some people think the greatest evidence of God's presence or work is power. Some people think the greatest evidence of God's presence or work is popularity. Some people think the greatest evidence of God's presence or work is passionate feelings. But the greatest evidence of God's presence and work is love. Where God is present and working, there will be love.

Perfected uses the Greek word *teleioo*, which doesn't mean "perfect" as much as "mature" and "complete." If we love one another, then the love of God is "mature" and "complete" in us. The mature Christian will be marked by love. Again, the true measure of maturity is not the image of power, or popularity, or passionate feelings — but the abiding presence of God's love in our lives, given out to others.

Witness to the Son and Saviour

"By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." (vv13-15)

By beginning with the words **by this**, John connected the thought of this verse directly to the previous verse. We can *know by experience* that we live in God, if *His love has been perfected in us*. And we know that *His love has been perfected in us* if we *love one another*. Plainly, Christians can say, "**We know.**" We don't have to merely "hope" we are saved, and "hope" we will make it to heaven, thus having no assurance of salvation before we pass from this world to the next. We can **know**, and we can **know** now, on *this* side of eternity.

Our abiding in Jesus is not a one-sided affair, with us struggling to abide in Him, and Jesus trying to escape us. Just as true as it is that we should abide in Him, it is true that He does abide in us. Jesus said in John 15:4, *Abide in Me, and I in you*. And in John 15:7, He said, *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you*. One of the ways Jesus abides in us — lives in us — is through His word.

John brings up the work of the Holy Spirit in us at this point for two important connections. First, it is the Spirit of God in us that is the abiding presence of Jesus — the presence of His Spirit is how He abides in us. Secondly, it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us that makes it possible for us to **know that we abide in Him**. As Paul puts it in Roman 8:16: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*. The Holy Spirit gives us this assurance.

We have seen and testify:

The “we” who gave testimony in this verse are those who saw Jesus originally, the eyewitnesses to His presence. They knew the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world.

Speaking as one who has the Spirit of God (He has given us of His Spirit), John declares three essential truths about who God is and how He saves us.

- That the Father has sent the Son.
- That He (Jesus) was sent as Savior of the world.
- Knowing and understanding Jesus is the foundation for abiding in Him (Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God).

Confessing Jesus

It isn't enough to know the facts about who Jesus is; we must confess the truth. The idea behind the word confess is “to be in agreement with.” We must agree with God about who Jesus is, and we find out what God says about Jesus through the Word of God. You may know something without being in agreement with it; God demands our true agreement. Though John has been writing much about love, he does not ignore the issue of truth. John does not think it is “enough” if a person has some kind of love in his life if he does not confess that Jesus is the Son of God. It isn't a matter of deciding between love or truth; we must have both.

God's Love for Us

“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” (v16)

This is the Christian's proper response to who God is, and how He loves us. We are called to take the love and grace God gives, to know it by experience and to believe it. This is what fellowship with God is all about. The Christian must know and believe the love God has for us. We should consider what would it take to make us stop believing God loves us. Paul knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God that was in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:35-39), and each Christian should have the same confidence.

The Christian who has this kind of relationship with God will be virtually “immersed” in God's love; it becomes his environment, his place of abiding.

The Perfecting of Love

“Love has been perfected 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 no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” (vv17-18)

For perfected, John doesn't just use the Greek word *teleioo* (which has the idea of “maturity” and “completeness”); he writes *teleioo teleioo* — speaking of love that is “perfectly perfected” or “completely complete.” In the day of judgment is when the completeness of love's work in us will be demonstrated.

As much as we can know the completeness of God's love now, we will know it all the more in the day of judgment.

- You may know you are a sinner now; you will really know it in the day of judgment.
- You may know now you are not a better person than those who are going to hell; you will really know it on the day of judgment.
- You may know the greatness of Jesus' salvation now; you will really know it in the day of judgment.

Boldness in the day of judgment shows the greatness of God's work in us. We might be satisfied to merely survive the day of judgment, but God wants to so fill our lives with His love and His truth that we have boldness in the day of judgment. Some think they will go there and judge God ("When I see God, there's a few questions I have for Him!"), but that is nonsense. The only way to have boldness in the day of judgment is to receive, and walk in, the transforming love of God today.

How can anyone have such boldness?

We can imagine Jesus being bold before the throne of God, but us? Yet, if we abide in Him, and He in us (1 John 4:13), then our identity is bound up in Jesus: as He is, so are we in the world. How is Jesus now? He is glorified, justified, forever righteous and bold, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Spiritually, we can have that same standing now, while we are in the world, because as He is, so are we in the world.

Certainly, this glory is in us now just in "seed" form; it has not yet fully developed into what it will be. But it is there, and its presence is demonstrated by our love for one another and our agreement with God's truth — and that all serves to give us boldness.

There is no fear in love:

The completeness of love means we do not cower in fear before God, dreading His judgment, either now or in the day of judgment. We know all the judgment we ever deserved — past, present, and future — was poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross.

What about the many passages of Scripture, Old and New Testament (such as Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 1 Peter 2:17), which tell us we should fear God? The fear John writes of here is not the appropriate reverence we should all have of God, but the kind of fear which involves torment — that agonizing kind of fear which robs our soul of all joy and confidence before God. It is fear that is the opposite of boldness in the day of judgment. If our relationship with God is marked by this tormenting fear, it shows that we have not been made perfect — that is, complete, and mature — in His love.

He First Loved Us

"We love Him because He first loved us." (v19)

Our love for God is based on two elements: (1) gratitude for forgiveness and (2) following the example set before us by God, who *"so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..."* (John 3:16).

This verse not only declares our love for Jesus, but it also tells us when He loved us. Some people imagine that Jesus loved us because He knew we would love Him and come to faith in Him. But He loved us before that, and even before the worlds were created, when our only existence was in the mind and heart of God, Jesus loved us. This verse also tells us where our love for Jesus comes from. It comes from Him. Our love for God is always in response to His love for us; He initiates, and we respond. We never have to draw God to us; instead, He draws us to Himself.

The Commandment to Love

“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” (vv20-21)

It is often easier for someone to proclaim his love for God because that regards a private relationship with an invisible God. But John rightly insists that our claim of loving God is false if we do not also love our brother, and that this love must be seen. If someone says, *“I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar*: By this crucial measure, Jesus said the world could measure our status as disciples by the measure of our love for one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another (John 13:35).

We have a commandment to love. Though love springs forth from our abiding relationship with God and comes from our being born of Him, there is also an essential aspect of our will be involved. We are therefore commanded to love our brother in Christ. Being born of God and abiding with Him give us the ability to love; but it is a choice of our will to draw upon that resource and give it out to others. Therefore, we are given a command to love, that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Because of this, the excuse “I just can’t love that person” (or other such excuses) is invalid. If we are born of Him and are abiding in Him, then the resources for love are there. It is up to us to respond to His command with our will and whole being.

He who loves God must love his brother also! We can also learn how to love God by loving people. One might say, “I want to love God more; I want to grow in my love for Him. But how can I love a God who is invisible?” God would say to us, “Learn to love Me, Whom you cannot see, by loving My children, whom you can see.”

Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* God is more pleased when you get it right with your brother, than if you bring Him a sacrifice of praise or resources.

