

1 John 4 - Distinguishing Truth From Error; Loving the Brethren; Tests of Fellowship Revisited

VIII. Necessity of distinguishing truth from error (1 John 4:1-6)

- (1) The necessity of testing the spirits (4:1)
- (2) How to distinguish Christ from the Antichrist (4:2-3)
 - (A) Christ (4:2)
 - (B) Antichrist (4:3)
- (3) Every born-again person has already overcome Antichrist (4:4)
- (4) How to distinguish Christ from Antichrist (4:5-6)
 - (A) Antichrist: worldly viewpoint (4:5)
 - (B) Christ: heavenly viewpoint (4:6)

IX. Necessity of loving the brethren reiterated (1 John 4:7-12)

- (1) Love demonstrates belonging to God (4:7-8)
- (2) God's example of love (4:9-10)
- (3) Believers should follow Christ's example of love (4:11-12)

X. Tests of fellowship reiterated (1 John 4:13-21)

- (1) Presence of the Spirit (4:13)
- (2) Acknowledgment that Christ is the Son of God (4:14-15)
- (3) Exhibiting the love of God (4:16)
- (4) No fear of judgment (4:17-18)
- (5) Loving the brethren (4:19-21)

1 John 4

VIII. Necessity of distinguishing truth from error (4:1-6)

- (1) The necessity of testing the spirits (4:1)

1 Beloved, **do not believe every spirit**, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, because many **false prophets** have gone out into the world.

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 Dear friends, stop believing every spirit. Instead, test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

- "...do not believe every spirit" - John warns us to not believe everyone who claims to be spiritual; we should not assume that every spiritual experience or demonstration of spiritual power (miracles) is from God
- We need to realize that the Holy Spirit is not the only spirit manifested in the world. Many Christians naively think that any spiritual experience must be from the Holy Spirit, which leads to easy deception.
- Many people, when first encountering the reality of the spiritual world, are too impressed and amazed to ask whether or not they are of God, which leads to easy deception
- "...test the spirits" - we can detect deceivers by their false teachings: Do they believe in the Jesus Christ of the Bible, the eternal Son of God who came in the flesh as a Man?
- How do you test the spirits? You compare what they are saying with the Word of God (Cf. 1 Thess 5:21)
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 tells us that true prophecy is never of any private interpretation. This means that there will be agreement and confirmation in the body of Christ.
- "...false prophets" - false prophets/teachers were the mouthpieces of the spirits that inspired them; false spirits produce false teaching

(2) How to distinguish Christ from the Antichrist (4:2-3)

(A) Christ (4:2)

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

2 This is how you can recognize God's Spirit: Every spirit who acknowledges that Jesus the Messiah has become human—and remains so—is from God.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

- John's test question to "test the spirits" was, What does the person believe about Jesus Christ?
- If a person denies the incarnation of Christ (that He "has come in the flesh"), which was a heresy the false teachers of John's day promoted to John's original audience, he has the "spirit of antichrist" (v3)
- Today, any teacher or cult that denies that Jesus is eternal God, came to earth in the flesh, and died for our sins and rose on the third day, is the spirit of the antichrist (including Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and all other false religions)

- The flip side is also true: Jesus is God, but Jesus is also a Man. It's just as important to recognize that Jesus is a Man as it is to recognize and affirm that Jesus is God. Both the deity and humanity of Jesus are essential to our salvation.
- The gospel centers around a Person, not a theological truth or a set of ideas
- Notice that John did not say that we can tell false spirits by their *works*; rather, we can decipher false spirits by their *words*. This is how Israel was instructed to identify false prophets as well (Cf. Deut 13:1-5).

(B) Antichrist (4:3)

3 and every spirit that **does not confess** Jesus is not from God; this is the **spirit of the antichrist**, which you have heard is coming, and **now it is already in the world**.

3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit of the antichrist*, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

3 But every spirit who does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist. You have heard that he is coming, and now he is already in the world.

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

- "...does not confess" - a nuance here that must be noted...notice that John did not say every spirit that *denies* Christ; he says every spirit that *does not confess* Christ

— Heretical teaching often takes the tack of simply failing to affirm important truth rather than outright denying it. Rather than proclaiming that Jesus is not the Christ, they fail to affirm that He is the Christ.

— However, this is not the only test of false doctrine, but it was a significant issue in the church in John's day

— Today, a person might confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, but deny that He is God. This is also false doctrine because it goes against what the Bible clearly teaches about the Messiah.

— The principle of believing in and teaching a *true* Jesus is essential to testing the spirits. No one who presents a false Jesus, or one untrue to the Scriptures, can be regarded as a true prophet.

— The devil doesn't care if you believe in Jesus, love Jesus, or pray to Jesus...as long as it is a false idea of Jesus. A make-believe Jesus is a Jesus who is not there and who has no power to save or transform a person.

- "...*spirit of the antichrist*" - the revealing of the Antichrist is preceded by the "spirit of the Antichrist" in the same way the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:3) is preceded by the "mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:7)

- So the "mystery of lawlessness" and the "spirit of the antichrist" are both currently present in the world, before the Antichrist is revealed. These represent the "stage setting" events that will prepare the world for the actual revelation of the Antichrist and New World Order.
- "...now it is already in the world" - this implies that Satan has had antichrists in place and ready throughout NT history, ready to take on the main role as Antichrist once the Restrainer is removed
- This is because Satan lacks omniscience...he knows that he can't bring the Antichrist forth until the Restrainer is removed, and since he doesn't know when the Restrainer will be removed, he always has someone ready to step into the job.
- This is why so many people/leaders today look like potential antichrists
- This is the third reference to the spirit of "antichrist" (Cf. 1 John 2:18,22)

(3) Every born-again person has already overcome Antichrist (4:4)

4 **You** are from God, little children, and have overcome **them**; because greater is **He who is in you than he who is in the world**.

4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

4 Little children, you belong to God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

- So far at least, John's believing audience had "overcome" these false teachers through the power of the Holy Spirit who indwelt them

— The Holy Spirit is stronger/greater than Satan

— We overcome Satan, his agents, and his influence as we resist his temptations to doubt, deny, disregard, and disobey the Word of God (1 Peter 5:9)

- "You" [2x] - John's believing audience

- "...them" - the unsaved false teachers

- "...He who is in you than he who is in the world" - as Christians, there is no place for fear in our lives. We have many spiritual enemies, but not one of them is greater than the Spirit who lives inside of us.

(4) How to distinguish Christ from Antichrist (4:5-6)

(A) Antichrist: worldly viewpoint (4:5)

5 **They** are from the world, therefore **they speak as from the world**, and the world listens to them.

5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.

5 These people belong to the world. That is why they speak from the world's perspective, and the world listens to them.

5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

- "They" [2x] - the unsaved false teachers

- "...speak as from the world" - the influence of the world is evident in their speech (Cf. Matt 12:34)

— False teaching has an appeal to worldly minds because they come from the world and share the viewpoint of the world

— Many religious movements are composed of unsaved people who find false doctrine appealing

— The fact that some believers are easily persuaded to forsake the truth of the gospel should not be surprising to us

I do not care whether several thousand people come to your church—that is not the important thing. I am interested in the message. Is the Word of God being given out? Is it given out in the power of the Spirit so that the Spirit of God can take it and use it? [J. Vernon McGee]

(B) Christ: heavenly viewpoint (4:6)

6 **We** are from God. The one who knows God listens to **us**; the one who is not from God does not listen to **us**. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

6 We belong to God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever does not belong to God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.

6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

- "We...us...us" - the apostolic eyewitnesses (Cf. 1:1-4) but also includes John's original audience of believers

— John's point here is that the believer who "knows God" intimately will respond positively to the teaching of the apostles ("listens to us"), but the antichrists who are "not from God" do not listen to us (apostolic teaching)

— We can know whether teaching is truth or error by comparing the teaching with what the Scriptures teach

- John is giving us another test of fellowship here...the test is not to distinguish children of God from those who are not children of God (whether someone is saved or not saved), but to distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

- The test is whether or not the teachers of truth are heard and understood by those who believe, but are refused by those who do not believe

God did not give us the Bible to teach us something, but to make us something.

IX. Necessity of loving the brethren reiterated (1 John 4:7-12)

John now leaves the warning about "the spirit of error" that his readers might mistake as the Holy Spirit, and he returns to one of his central themes: love for the brethren. Just as 1 Cor 13 is Paul's great statement on God's love, so v7-16 is John's great statement on love. This section defines the nature of the love that is expected/demanded by every believer.

(1) Love demonstrates belonging to God (4:7-8)

7 Beloved, let's love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and **knows** God.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

7 Dear friends, let us continuously love one another, because love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born from God and knows God.

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

- "Beloved, let's love" - *agapetoi agapomen*, literally "those who are loved [by God], let us [therefore] love"

— The reason we as believers are to love others is because we are loved by God

— When we put our faith in Christ, a love is imparted into their life that they did not have before. John urges us to take that love imparted to us and distribute it and demonstrate it to other believers.

- Just as in detecting false doctrine (v1-6), love is also the product of the Holy Spirit

- "...knows"- *ginōskō*, an intimate fellowship that comes through experience (Cf. Gen 4:1)

— When a believer really experiences God it will show by their love for one another

— A believer cannot grow in their experience with God without also growing in love for one another

— If a believer is not growing in love for God's people, they are not experiencing (in close fellowship with) God. Our love for other believers is a "test" of our fellowship with the Lord.

8 The one who does not love does not know God, because **God is love**.

8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

8 The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

- A believer who is not demonstrating or growing in love for other believers is not in close fellowship with God because if he was, he would demonstrate God's love because that is the essence of God's character
- "...God is love" - a glorious truth! Love is the character and heart of God. He is so rich in His compassion, mercy, and grace that the amalgam of the three can be used to describe His very being.
 - Unbelievers can demonstrate acts of love, but that doesn't prove that they are "of God"
 - Human love, however noble and highly motivated, falls short of the *agapē* love of God because it refuses to include God as the supreme object of its affection
 - "God is love" does not encompass every aspect of God's being or His character. God is also holy, righteous, just, etc. Instead, every aspect or trait of God's character expresses His love: the holiness of God is loving, the righteousness of God is loving, and the justice of God is loving. It means that everything that God is and does, in one way or another, expresses His love.
- Many people today do not understand the *agapē* love of God as expressed here. When they think of non-romantic love, they think of kindness, compassion, or simply being "nice." But *agapē* love is so much more than that...it actively and aggressively seeks and does what is really best for the other person.
- Note that "God is love" is very different than "love is God." Love is not simply a quality that God possesses, it is part of His very nature
- Because "God is love" the love that He shows to all comes from within Himself and not from any outside cause

(2) God's example of love (4:9-10)

- 9 By this the love of God **was revealed in us**, that God has sent His **only** Son into the world **so that we may live through Him**.
- 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only **begotten** Son into the world so that we might live through Him.
- 9 This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent his unique Son into the world so that we might live through him.
- 9 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.
- The proof of God's love for us is that He sent His only Son to die for us
- The love of God is not only defined by the sacrifice of Christ, but also defined by the giving of His Son by the Father
- It was a sacrifice for the Father to send the Son to die, and a sacrifice to pour out His judgment and wrath that we deserve on His Son

- "...was revealed in us" - *ephanerothe en hemin*, better translated "was revealed *among* us"
- "...only [begotten]" - *monogenēs*, "only begotten" [NASB95]; *mono* = one; *genēs* = species, kind. Jesus was "one of a kind" (Cf. John 1:14; 3:16,18) because He is the only person who ever lived who is 100% God and 100% man in the same being.
- *Monogenēs* is a very misunderstood and misinterpreted word: cults (especially Mormonism) use *monogenēs* to argue that Jesus was "fathered" by God the Father, that He was a created being and came into existence at the Incarnation.
- The problem is, that's not what *monogenēs* means. If that was what John was saying here, he would've used the Greek word *gennaō*, as in the genealogies (Cf. Matt 1:2). The Greek word *monogenēs* has no connection to *gennaō*.
- If you don't understand the difference between *monogenēs* and *gennaō*, it's an easy trap to fall into. In Heb 11:17, Isaac is called Abraham's *monogenēs*, but Isaac was not Abraham's only son. Abraham fathered Ishmael, plus other children through Keturah (Gen 25:1-2). So "only begotten" (*monogenēs*) does not mean "only son" but rather "special, unique, one-of-a-kind" son.
- Jesus was not created/begat, He was one of a kind because God added humanity to eternally-existent deity, veiling the glory of God, allowing man to look at God and not die
- "begotten" means that Jesus and the Father are of the same substance, the same essential Being
- We use the term "create" to describe something that may come from someone, but isn't of the same essential nature or being as the person who created it. For example, a man can "create" a statue that looks just like him, but it will never be human.
- However, we use the term "beget" or "begotten" to describe something that is *exactly* the same as the Creator in essential nature and being
- We are *adopted* sons and daughters of God, but we are not of the same essential nature and being as God—we are human beings. But Jesus is the *only begotten Son*, meaning His Sonship is different than ours; He was and is of the same essential nature and being as God the Father.
- We are human beings; He is a "God-being" – who added humanity to His deity.
- "...so that we may live through Him" - includes both the abundant life promised to us now (Cf. John 10:10) as well as eternal life forever

10 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.

10 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.

10 This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

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.

- God's love for us was not in response to man's love for God. God took the initiative in reaching out to us first.

- "...this is love" - *agapē* love is not defined by our love for God but His love for us

— Our love for God doesn't say much about us. It is the only common sense response to knowing and receiving the love of God.

- "...He loved us and sent His Son" - it's easy to see how Jesus' substitutionary atonement and propitiation demonstrates His love for us, but John wants us to recognize that it also shows the love of the Father for us, that He gave/sent His Son for this purpose

— This demonstrates the Father's love because *agapē* love only gives/sends its best

— There was nothing better that God the Father could've given lost humanity than the gift of the Son of God Himself

2 Cor 9:15: Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

- "...to be the propitiation" - *hilasmos*, a means of appeasing; it has the idea of a sacrifice that turns away or appeases the wrath of God

— Jesus was our propitiation means that on the cross God the Father poured out His anger and wrath at every sin we have ever committed. Jesus took the punishment for our sins that we deserved. He took the punishment for our crimes.

If there was to be reconciliation between God and man, man ought to have sent to God; the offender ought to be the first to apply for forgiveness; the weaker should apply to the greater for help; the poor man should ask of him who distributes alms; but 'Herein is love' that God 'sent.' He was first to send an embassy of peace. [Charles Spurgeon]

(3) Believers should follow Christ's example of love (4:11-12)

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

11 Dear friends, if this is the way God loved us, we must also love one another.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

- God's demonstration of love toward us (v10) should be both our motivation and our model for showing love to others

— This pattern of receiving from God then dispensing to others is found throughout the Bible:

- Gen 12:2-3: And I will make you into a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And **you shall be a blessing**; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And **in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**
 - God blessed Abraham not just for his sake, but so that he would become a vehicle of blessing to the entire world.
- Lev 23:22: 'When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to **leave them for the needy and the stranger**. I am the LORD your God.'"
 - After God provided for Israel in the wilderness, He instituted laws of generosity in the land, expecting them to share what God had given them in the harvest.
- Matt 10:8: **Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, cast out demons.**
Freely you received, freely give.
 - Jesus gave His disciples authority to heal the sick and cast out demons, but He reminded them that the power and blessings they received were not for personal gain, but so they could bless others.
- John 13:14: **So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.**
 - When Jesus washed the disciples feet in the Upper Room, showing great love and servanthood to them, He didn't expect them to then wash His feet in return. Instead, He told them to go out and do the same to others.
- 1 Cor 12:7: But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.**
 - Spiritual gifts are given by God to individuals, but their purpose is to bless and serve others within the body of Christ.
- 2 Cor 1:4: who comforts us in all our affliction **so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**
 - God gives us comfort in our trials, not just for our benefit, but so we can become a source of comfort to others.
- Eph 4:32: Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, **just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**
 - God's forgiveness of our sin is so great that we're expected to use it as a model and mandate to forgive others

12 **No one has ever seen God; if** we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is perfected in us.

12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

- "No one has ever seen God" - John states a basic principle about God the Father: that no one has seen God the Father in His pure essence, without some kind of filter

John 1:18: **No one has seen God at any time**; God the only Son, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

John 4:24: **God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**

1 Tim 1:17: Now to the King eternal, immortal, **invisible**, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Instances where the biblical writers said someone saw God were theophanies, a manifestation of God in human form (Cf. Gen 18:1-22; Ex 33:18-23)
- The incarnation of Christ was also a manifestation of God veiled in human flesh (Cf. John 1:18)
- "...if" - third class condition; if at any time this condition ("we love one another") is met, then the result ("God remains in us") will follow
- Whenever Christians love one another, we make it possible for God to abide in close fellowship with us
- The more/longer God is in close fellowship with us because of our love for others, God's love reaches a fullness and depth ("is perfected") in us
- **God's love is perfected [matured, complete] in us only when it is reproduced in us. And when God's love is reproduced in us, we make the invisible God visible to the world.**

X. Tests of fellowship reiterated (1 John 4:13-21)

(1) Presence of the Spirit (4:13)

13 **By this** we know that we remain in Him and He in us, because **He has given to us of His Spirit.**

13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

13 This is how we know that we abide in him and he in us: he has given us his Spirit.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

- "By this" - John connects the thought of this verse to the previous verse

- We can "know" (by experience) that we are in fellowship with God and He with us if God's love is "perfected" (matured, complete) in us
- And we know that His love is "perfected" in us if we love one another. This becomes evident by the demonstration of love that comes from "His Spirit."
- "...He has given to us of His Spirit" - John brings up the work of the Holy Spirit in us for two important connections:
 - (1) It is the Holy Spirit in us that is the abiding presence of Jesus—the presence of His Spirit is *how* He abides in us
 - (2) It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us that makes it possible for us to know that we abide in Him (Cf. Rom 8:16)
- The Holy Spirit is the source of the abiding believer's love, just as He is the source of the abiding believer's obedience (Cf. 3:23-24)

(2) Acknowledgment that Christ is the Son of God (4:14-15)

14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world.

14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world.

14 We have seen for ourselves and can testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

- "We" - those who saw Jesus, the eyewitnesses to His presence

— They saw and testified that the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world

- "...seen and testify" - because "He has given us His Spirit" (v13), John gives us three essential truths about who God is and how He saves us:

1. The Father sent the Son
2. Jesus was sent as Savior of the world
3. Knowing and understanding Jesus is the foundation for abiding in Him (v15)

— We have not seen Jesus Christ in the flesh as the apostles did, but we can see God, both in the manifestation of His love and in God's life behind that love, as we observe Christians loving one another

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he in God.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

15 God abides in the one who acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, and he abides in God.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

- "...confesses" - *homologeō*, "to say the same thing"
- Confessing ("saying the same thing") as God the Father about who Jesus is (the Son of God) is necessary in order to have intimate fellowship with Him
- It's possible to know something but not be in agreement with it; God demands our agreement as the foundation for our fellowship with Him
- Confessing Christ is never a condition for salvation (contrary to the popular interpretation of Rom 10:9-10), but rather is a step on the path to intimacy with God, the step of bearing witness (Cf. "testify," v14)

(3) Exhibiting the love of God (4:16)

16 **We have come to know** and have believed the love which God has **for us**. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

16 We have come to know and rely on the love that God has for us. God is love, and the person who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

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.

- "We" - probably includes the apostles along with John's readers collectively
- "...have come to know" - *ginōskō*, know through experience
- "...for us" - better translated "among us" (Cf. v9)
- Another condition for intimate fellowship with God is remaining "in love"
- John's point in this passage now emerges clearly: faith (acknowledging Jesus as God's Son, v15) and trusting in the love that God has for us (v16a) leads to mutual indwelling between God and the believer
- This intimate fellowship between God and us is expressed and perpetuated by "living in love"
- A believer's love, for both God and for others, is to be active and sustained

To feel God's love is very precious, but to believe it when you do not feel it, is the noblest.
 [Charles Spurgeon]

(4) No fear of judgment (4:17-18)

17 **By this, love is perfected with us**, so that we may have **confidence in the day of judgment**; because as He is, we also are in this world.

17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

17 This is how love has been perfected among us: we will have confidence on the day of judgment because, during our time in this world, we are just like him.

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.

- "By this" - John connects this verse with v16

— Our mutual abiding/fellowship (Him in us and us in Him) leads to love being "perfected" in us, which in turn will give us confidence (no fear) when our works are judged by Christ

— "...perfected" - *agapē* love becomes complete ("perfected") by our mutual abiding/fellowship

— When this happens, we can have confidence as our works are evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ

— "...with us" - *meth hamon*, in 4:12 is says His love reaches perfection "in us" (*enhamin*)

— When His love reaches perfection "in us," a proper relationship to other people exists (no hate). When it reaches perfection "with us," a proper relationship to God exists (no fear).

— "...confidence" - *parrēsia*, to speak freely, openly; fearless, or boldness in the face of trials or judgment

— Just as Christ had perfect fellowship with the Father and consequently had confidence/boldness in the face of trials and death, we too can abide in Christ and have confidence in spite of present trials

— Abiding in the Father gave Jesus confidence, and it gives us confidence as well

— "...the day of judgment" - the Bema Seat judgment of Christ (Cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10-12)

— Christians do not need to fear this judgment if we have demonstrated *agapē* love to others

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because **fear involves punishment**, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

18 There is no fear where love exists. Rather, perfect love banishes fear, for fear involves punishment, and the person who lives in fear has not been perfected in love.

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.

- When we love others we have no reason to fear our future judgment (Cf. Rom 8:15; Heb 2:15). "Perfect love" equals "no fear."

— The person who loves is the person over whom God is exercising His controlling influence (an abiding believer)

- "...fear involves punishment" - a believer who does not love others, because they have not allowed God to be their controlling influence, dreads meeting his Judge
- The "punishment" is that the unloving believer's guilty conscience continually "punishes" him through fear
- Christ's sacrificial death frees us from condemnation at the Great White Throne judgment (Rom 8:1), but our abiding life frees us from the fear of shame at the judgment seat of Christ (Cf. 2:28).

(5) Loving the brethren (4:19-21)

- 19 We love, because He first loved us.
- 19 We love, because He first loved us.
- 19 We love because God first loved us.
- 19 We love him, because he first loved us.
- Our ability to love and our practice of love toward others both come from God's love for us
- Another reason we do not need to fear standing before our Judge is because we love Him and He loves us
- The ultimate grounds for a believer's confidence and assurance at the *Bema Seat* judgment of Christ is not found in our loving, however "perfected" it may be, but in God's prior love for us

Confidence is one of the great consequences of having intimate fellowship with God. We can have confidence to meet Jesus Christ when He returns for us or when we die (2:28). We can have confidence in prayer (3:21-22) on earth, and confidence when we stand before His judgment seat to give account of our stewardship (4:17-19).

- 20 If someone says, "I love God," and yet he hates his brother *or sister*, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother *and sister* whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.
- 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.
- 20 Whoever says, "I love God," but hates his brother is a liar. The one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love the God whom he has not seen.
- 20** If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?
- Genuine love for the invisible God will find expression in love that is visible for fellow believers
- It is easier to love someone we can see than it is Someone we can't see

— Jesus told His disciples that the world could measure our discipleship by the measure of our love for one another

John 13:35: **By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."**

— In John 13, Jesus is speaking with 11 saved people. He is instructing them how to move from simply being a believer to being a disciple

— Loving others is not how we *become* a disciple, it is the evidence that we *are* a disciple (see notes on John 13:35)

21 And this **commandment** we have from Him, that the one who loves God must also love his brother *and sister*.

21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

21 And this is the commandment that we have from him: the person who loves God must also love his brother."

21 And this commandment have we have from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

- "...commandment" - *entolē*, an order or injunction; not a suggestion or recommendation, but an imperative

— Although *agapē* love is sourced from our abiding relationship with God, there is also an essential aspect of our will. Thus, John commands us to love fellow believers.

— The resources of love are present within us from the indwelling Holy Spirit, but it is a choice of our will to draw upon that resource and demonstrate it to others

- God has commanded us to love both Him and our brothers and sisters in Christ (2:3; 3:11,23-24; 5:3; Lev 19:18; Matt 5:43-44; 22:37-40; John 13:34)

— It is easy to have love for God that does not recognize the obligation to love one another

— Such love for God falls short of being real love for Him since it fails to obey His commandment