

# Jim Albin – I John 4 – Mar 05, 2023

Well, good morning to everyone. We haven't been here as much as we would like since we moved. It is a long drive, especially on a Sunday morning but we have been able to make it whenever we have been able to make it. And today is one of those days, right? Kind of needed to be here for this.

I remember it was 20 years ago I was called into ministry and then about 18 years ago, about two years after that, I knew that it was pastoral ministry. I used to do these devotionals from the pulpit at the church where I grew up. When I came of age and told him I was interested in ministry and I felt like I was called to ministry and all that, then everybody started getting interested. Oh, there's a young guy that wants to do stuff. So they started plugging me in different areas. One of those areas was to get up and share, you know, like evangelism moments, they called it Mission Moments from the Pulpit.

Then one day after I finished, there was one of the ladies that came up. Her name was Rosita Seagraves. In the Southern Baptist Church where I grew up, it was 'preach'. That's what you say, you're called to preach or you're a preacher, that kind of thing. But the pastor would mean the same thing, and that's what they meant by it.

So I came down and she said are you called to preach? And I said, oh, no, no, it's just youth ministry. But it was that moment when I really started to think about it. And that's what I've heard, a lot of times other people might notice a calling in you before you really recognize it fully in yourself.

So I remember I was talking to a friend back in probably 2006 and his name was Kurt. He's a pilot for Delta Airlines now. But when he lived here, we were talking and I said, Kurt, I can't be a pastor. And he said why not? What's the problem? I said I'm not tall enough. Because we were going to Calvary, Fort Worth and Bill Quinn is tall, and Rick Miller is tall, and Billy Graham is tall.

And the pastor that I grew up with out there in my old church was tall and I thought, man, it's just easier for people to look up to somebody like that. And he said, no, man, it's easy. We'll just get a shorter pulpit!

So I've got a laptop with me and I'm glad I've printed out notes on the side because this laptop has this curve on it and it's sliding off of the pulpit. On top of that, if I open it, then it kind of takes away my face. You know, if I were taller, it wouldn't be an issue. But here I am. Glad everybody can see me.

So I am paying attention to the time. I have 31 minutes and I'm going to use every one of them. But please go with me to 1 John, chapter 4, and we're going to go through it together. We're really going to dig into verse 7 until the end, but the first 6 verses are really about dealing with false prophets.

John wrote this roughly around 90 AD, probably somewhere around there. And he died around 100 AD, possibly as late as 110 AD. That's when he wrote the book of Revelation, before that. Now he wrote his gospel long before he wrote his letters, his epistles, but when he was writing it, there was a problem.

He wrote it to multiple churches, and so it was meant to be distributed. But there were a lot of churches dealing with false teachers, and I'm sure a lot of you have heard the Gnostics. That was one of the groups. There were different versions of them. There were break offs and knockoffs and all of that.

And the Gnostics were one of these groups that were the false teaching groups. They were teaching things that were contrary to what the Old Testament was teaching and to what the apostles were teaching. And so what John did is he wrote this letter and in the first 6 verses, he corrects a lot of that. And then in verse 7, here's where he really digs in.

So go to verse 7 with me. We're going to go verse 7 through the end. But first we're going to start here. So he says, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."* Now first it's important to define what love actually is because there are a lot of different ideas of what love is in our world today.

There always has been really and it's not, well, a lot of things that you've seen largely on TV or in the workplace or wherever you've seen it. Love, the basic definition, is meeting the needs of someone else. And sometimes that would also, I would think, include desires. So whenever you think about it like this, and we look at this verse and we say well, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Well, I don't know if that makes sense, does it? I mean, wouldn't that mean that everybody knows God? I mean, the atheists love their kids, don't they? They love siblings. Everybody in the world can love their spouse or can love their friends, whoever. So this can't mean just the love that we're always thinking about.

And it doesn't. Now this is why I call 1 John, chapter 4 the real love chapter. Everybody believes that 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter, right? You've

always heard that. But in this section of scripture, verse 7, all the way to verse 21, he mentions the word love 21 times. Depending on your translation, you might see 20, you might see 22. But it's going to be about 21 times he mentions it, which is the most mentions of this word love in any section of scripture.

It's over and over and over, and much like 1 Corinthians 13, he does mention what it is and how it should be defined, and how, really more importantly, how it should be acted out. This love, I checked every word of it in this chapter, and it is always 'agape'. It is that undying, unmatched, unmerited love of God, because humans don't have that in and of themselves.

It cannot be produced. We can have a human type love for other people but something like this cannot come unless it comes from God himself. And that comes when the Holy Spirit is living inside of a human being and that's when this love comes. So everyone who loves, the agape love of God, is of him and knows God.

So verse 8, *"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."* I want you to pay attention to that. God is love. We were talking about evangelism just a few minutes ago. So if people ever ask you the question, does God really love somebody like me, I've done a lot of bad things in my life, you've probably heard that. Maybe you've thought that yourself, I'm not sure if God can love somebody like me.

He is love. That's who he is. That's what he is. It's in his very nature. It's in his being. That's who he is. It's not proper to use the term makeup because he wasn't made but it's just who he is at the deepest level.

That's who God is. And yeah, there's a balance. God is love and God is also judgment. We know that. But the patience of God because of his love for his people, is unmatched. It is unmatched. And I want you to pay attention to that. God is love because it's going to come back later on in this chapter. So in verse 9, *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him."*

Life cannot come without God's love. And with that would come God's grace and God's mercy. It is the reason that Jesus came, but it's also the reason why he could go through with it. I mean, he sent his son for us. He manifested his love for us. He showed it. He proved it, and that Jesus died for us.

Historians say one of the most recognizable, incredible facts in all of history is the crucifixion of Christ. Now, I would say also the resurrection comes with that

because there is a lot of evidence to believe that he came out of that grave. And a lot of historians don't want to adhere to that part. That's too much.

Because when you adhere to that then you have to submit. And a lot of people have a problem with submitting to someone else besides themselves. So, if someone ever asks, yes, God is love. He doesn't just love you. He is love. He loves you because that's who he is. And he proved it when Jesus came down here and died.

That's something different. It's like a king leaving his throne and coming to live in the slums with all kinds of people of all different backgrounds, dressed and smelly and all. I mean, you name it, that's what Jesus came to in this world because human beings were wretched without him, without his spirit living in us, without his grace, without his mercy.

That's just what we are, lost in dying. Trapped in trespasses and sins on our way to a godless eternity. But he proved his love for us. We know that from Jeremiah and several places in scripture. And it's not that there was something in us. I mean, it would be easy for God to love us if we had something in us that was worth it. But he loved us anyway. Even though Jeremiah says that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

That includes all of our hearts and God still loved us. That's an incredible thing. So then verse 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."*

Propitiation is a fancy word for covering. He covered our sins and because of that, now when God looks at us, he sees us differently, because we are different now. God is not stupid. He knows we sin. He knows we messed up. He knows more about our sin than we do, like minute by minute, the things that we don't even know about.

He knows all of it and he still chose to die for us. He still chose to love us when we didn't deserve it. That's why Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. And then in verse 11, *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

And it reminds you of Matthew 18, where the wicked servant was forgiven of his debt and then he goes out and he doesn't forgive the next guy of his debt. And Jesus really recognizes that as wrong. So he mentions, yeah, if God loved us, we ought to love one another.

But you know, the interesting thing is, is when somebody will receive the love of God, and what he did for them, and the Holy Spirit comes to live in them, then love is a fruit - from Galatians chapter 5.

Love is the fruit of the spirit, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But love is the first and foremost, paramount, and without that really none of the others would come. You can't be joyous in this life unless you have love.

Obviously God's love is what we're talking about. So that's how you love one another, is that the love of God comes into you with the Holy Spirit who comes to live in you, and then it just becomes natural. Fruit grows. If it's nourished properly. It doesn't always grow. Sometimes it doesn't end up well, but fruit will grow if it's nourished and if it is connected, like Jesus tells us to abide in the vine so we can be connected, so that fruit can grow.

Love, mentioned as a fruit in Galatians, chapter 5, should grow. When that happens, the more and more you grow into something like that, the more you can start to love other people. It really becomes like a natural thing. An orange tree doesn't have to try its best to grow oranges. It just stays connected to the root and then it grows the oranges naturally.

That's just what comes out. That's what fruit does. You don't have to worry about it. You just worry about staying connected with him and that fruit just starts growing in. Then verse 12, "*No one has seen God at any time.*" That may be a confusing kind of a verse. Obviously they have, right?

Moses did. God said, okay, I'll turn my back and I'll pass by. So Moses sees that. People saw Jesus when he was here, right? But we know that Jesus emptied himself. When it says he came here and he emptied himself, what we're talking about is the fullness in God's heavenly state. His full, glorified, heavenly state we have not seen.

Now another element to that is Paul mentions that God, in 1 Timothy 1:17, is invisible, and then Jesus mentions that he is spirit. So yeah, in that state, you wouldn't be able to see him and that's what we can take away from that, is just to kind of interpret this verse, it can get a little tough for some people.

When you talk about the deity of Christ, people say, well, how can Jesus be God if people have seen him? No one has seen God. And they try to defend their position from that. And from there, there's so much to say, that Jesus emptied himself. There's a lot going into that and that's not for this morning.

Jesus knowingly and willingly drained himself just to come here. That didn't take away his insignia. Like Roman officers who would have the insignia that would tell people that they were officers. Sometimes they could take that off and get on the front lines with their soldiers. It doesn't change that he's an officer.

He just took his insignia off, but he didn't change his position. It's the same thing with Jesus. He didn't change his position to come, but he took the insignia off just for us, to live among us. He got on the front lines, as it were, with us. And so if we love one another, God abides in us and his love has been perfected in us.

Now, don't misinterpret, it doesn't say that if we love one another, that God will reward us by deciding to abide in us. Don't get the cart before the horse. That's what it can kind of sound like. If we love one another, God abides in us. Okay, so we need to love one another first, then God can abide in us.

It's kind of the way it would sound until you let the Bible interpret itself. And if you keep reading, if you stop at that verse, you can easily make that a works-based position. You could build a church on it, an entire denomination if you want. Well, I guess at that point it would be a cult, but you can build an entire theology on it. A works-based mentality.

You love one another, then God can come live in us. He can abide in us. But in verse 13, the Bible is the best interpreter of itself. So you have to keep reading after the comma or after the period. So, the next verse, "*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us.*" So by this we know that we're connected with him.

He abides in us. We abide in him. Here's how we know. How do we know? Because he has given us his spirit. That's where it comes in. So it's the Holy Spirit coming in first that allows anything else to happen, remotely close to what godliness would be. It has to be from the Holy Spirit coming in first.

And so again we look at Galatians 5:22.

The fruit of the spirit is love, because love's not going to be there without the Holy Spirit living inside a person's life. It just won't. We can do things that look like it. But love itself will not be there until he comes inside. So perfected, the Greek word for perfected, translated correctly is perfected, but it's more of a maturity type meaning, which would make a lot of sense because fruit, as we mentioned, grows.

Love is a fruit. It grows. So does maturity, and so that makes a lot of sense to me. So, verse 13, you could easily, like we were saying before, you could easily turn verse 12 into a works-based mentality. But that's not what it was. You just keep reading, and then you see it. We get the perfect interpretation from the very next verse. I love that.

So, in verse 14 “*And we have seen and testify that the father has sent the son as savior of the world.*” And then verse 15, “*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*” This is not the only confession that a person would have to make, but this is what John is dealing with at that time.

Like we said, he wrote to several different churches and that's who they were dealing with. The Gnostics, and other groups like that we're teaching the opposite of verse 14. I mean, they're teaching the opposite of what the apostles are teaching. They're teaching the opposite of what the Old Testament was teaching that the Messiah would actually come in the flesh.

‘Oh, Jesus didn't actually come in the flesh. It was a spiritual thing.’ And we deal with the similar things like that today, but it's not common to hear somebody say Jesus didn't actually come in the flesh or that he wasn't real or something like that. All historians agree. All credible historians agree that Jesus came in the flesh.

We know he was a person from history, but what we get into with Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups like that is that when he rose from the dead, it was just a spiritual resurrection. It wasn't a physical resurrection, just spiritual. And this is something else that reminds me of that.

And Jesus did say, after he rose from the dead, come touch me because spirits don't have the flesh and blood that I have. So let's continue with verse 16. “*And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love.*” You remember that from verse 8? “*God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*”

So what people would do back in that day, you couldn't just get on a laptop and click bold or italics or underline or something, or put it in all caps. It was a little different back then. So what a lot of people would do, especially in first century, with the first century Jews, is they would write something twice or three times or four times.

If it was important to them, they would write it multiple times. If you see how much love is in here, 21 times in 14 or 15 verses, that's a lot for that amount. I mean, it's important. And especially the phrase God is love. It was so important he didn't forget about it. He came back to it again in verse 16. And that's something I've always remembered.

Because if you're wanting to memorize scripture, some ways to do it, there are chapters and verses, right? So 1 John 4:8, and 4:16, they're multiples of 4. So chapter 4, verse 8, and then chapter 4, verse 16 has always been easy for me to remember for some reason, just because it's multiples of four. So sometimes if it helps, you can think of it like that.

And so verse 17, as we get more and more into this, "*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.*" Again, the Greek term for perfected comes up and it seems to be more emphatic.

I heard one commentator say that he says it twice in the original Greek text. So I went and looked and it's only in there once. So I'm wondering what that meant. But I think really what the bottom line is, is that it's emphatic. It's like he wrote it twice. It's such an emphatic term. It's such an important, nail it to the wall, kind of a term, that you really can't escape it. So that's something to remember from that.

If you look again at verse 17, it's not surviving, it's boldness in the day of judgement, like we can go boldly to the throne of grace, from Hebrews 4:16, boldly to the throne of grace. Not because of anything that we've accomplished or anything that we've done.

It's because of what he has accomplished and what he has done. It's important that he calls it the throne of grace instead of the throne of judgment. Because it is a throne of judgment, but for us it's a throne of grace. That's why we can go boldly to it.

My kids can come boldly to me as their father. They don't have anything to worry about, even though they mess up constantly, right? Because they're kids. But your love for them is what enables them to come over and over again in the middle of the night, in the middle of a meeting. It doesn't matter, when you love your kids. My kids could come to me anytime because of my love for them. It's much like God says, come to me any time. Just stay here. That's what God really wants.



Stay connected. Stay here and you will be okay. Then verse 18, *“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.”* So there's no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear. Okay. It brings up an analogy in my mind.

I have a fear of snakes and scorpions. If you ever heard me talk about how I grew up, I've been stung multiple times, eyelid, you know, leg, things like that multiple times. So I've got a fear of scorpions and snakes even though I've never been bitten by a snake. But I can imagine, right? But if one of my kids fell into a snake pit, do you think I'd just stand there and go, oh no, that's just too bad? You're diving in after them!

There's a girl coworker that I used to have and she was going to be married. She had this fiancé. And it was a tragic situation that the guy fell off of a cliff into some water and he couldn't swim. Well, his father happened to be there and his dad couldn't swim either. And knowing that, he still jumped in after his son. He probably had a fear of water, but because of the love for his son he didn't really think about his fear of water anymore, or his fear of heights, or my fear of snakes or whatever it might be.

Jesus came here to die for us because his love casts out fear. You know where it says he did it for the joy set before him? But remember what we were talking about in Galatians chapter 5, the fruit of the spirit is love. And then what comes right after that? Joy. The joy comes set before him because he loved us first and that perfect love cast out the fear.

It's what could propel him into the worst death that someone could experience. A lot of historians agree that the first century Roman crucifixion was the worst kind of death a person could ever experience. And I don't think it's an accident that Jesus came right during that time when the Romans had perfected death.

They had perfected suffering for their criminals, and so Jesus said, I'm going to come right at that time and I'm going to prove it even more. It reminds me of John 15:13. *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”*

You can say you love somebody. You can help them move. You can help them, you know, do whatever. They threw their back out. They need your help. Or you name it. Help them with the cell phone if they can't figure it out.

But dying for somebody else is just completely different. It's a whole other animal. And so then we love him in verse 19, because he loved us. We couldn't

love him first. He had to love us first. He first loved us because we couldn't do it first. We were depraved. Debased and depraved. And without God's love we would have nothing.

We couldn't love him. You can't love him. You wouldn't even want to if it weren't for God's love, for human beings in the first place. Then verse 20, *“If someone says ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he's a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”*

So he is making a valid point. If you can't love somebody that's right there in front of you, how could you love God that you can't see? That's a good point. So someone says, I love God, but they hate other people. I remember before I was saved I had a friend and we were just mean teenagers.

And I remember one thing he always used to say to me. He used to always say, you know me, I hate people. And I would just go, yeah. I mean, it didn't mean anything to me at the time, because I agreed. Then after I was saved, it didn't take long where that kind of a comment started to bother me. So finally one day I just had to bring it up.

I knew he didn't actually hate other people. I mean, that's a strong word, but you know, it bothered me. I remember bringing that up to him and he just said, yeah, I agree, you're right. He didn't argue anymore.

We're not actually talking about siblings, right? We know that if he hates his brother ... what if you don't have a brother, this verse doesn't apply to you, right? But we're talking about other people. It's like when he says to love your neighbor, what if you live out in the country? You don't really have any neighbors.

We're talking about other people that you know. To just love people. I love God but I hate people, does not mix. Because again, when the Holy Spirit lives inside of somebody, his fruit begins to grow. Hatred doesn't grow, racism doesn't grow, theft doesn't grow, whatever it is, his fruit will continue to grow if we're abiding in the vine.

And so in verse 21, *“And this commandment we have from him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”* And it should remind us of Matthew 22:37-39, when they asked Jesus, what are the important commandments? And he said, well, the first one is to love God and the second one is like it, to love other people.

He didn't get the cart before the horse either. It's love God first and then it's love other people. A lot of people teach that we have to love ourselves first but it's really not about that. You start loving God and then everything else can fall into place and just allow God's grace to take care of the rest.

It will. That's what it's for. So as we close up today, if you're not sure about God's love and you need to be sure, please come talk to someone. If you need prayer, then talk to somebody. That's why we're here so we can hold each other up. This whole thing is for the equipping and the edification of God's people. This has been a great time of equipping and I hope it has also edified you to do some work in the ministry. And it doesn't mean professional ministry.

It could just mean going out and just being like Jesus and loving people the way we are supposed to on the street or wherever.

Like you're at the grocery store and their bag drops and all the groceries fall out. Instead of ... I'm going to act like I didn't see that and just walk on by, it was behind me anyway, so I can probably get away with just keep on walking ... turn around, help them out, just being Jesus to somebody else.

Let's go ahead and pray. Lord, we thank you that we know that when two or three are gathered in your name, that you will be there also, and in a different way, in a more powerful way, in a way that really is hard for humans to comprehend.

But if we just let go, people use the term, let go and let God. It's something that we need to take seriously. Just to stop trying to love the way that we think we are supposed to and just let you work through us first and work in us first. This is written to us because you loved us first. You didn't leave us here without any kind of a guide.

You gave us your word, and on top of that, you didn't just leave it, you gave us your Spirit as well. Then you gave us each other. But Lord, without your love coming to live in us with your Spirit, through your Spirit, we would have nothing. We thank you for your love. We thank you for the real love chapter, Lord, for the Book of Love.

The whole thing is about your love for us. It's about you. It's about how we relate to you, how you relate to us and how you have come here to die for us. We know that when Jesus left and ascended back into heaven, that wasn't the end of it. Your Spirit came and you have been here ever since. You don't come and go.

We come and go, but you don't. You are constant. You are consistent. And Lord, we know that we fail you and we want to say we're sorry for that. But we just want to ask you to live through us as we get out there into the mission field of the world and do your work. We thank you for bringing us together this morning. We thank you for teaching all of us and for equipping all of us and for your encouragement.

In Jesus' name. Amen.