

Two Wonderful Effects of Perfected Love

(1 John 4:17-21)

What is True & What to Do:

Loving others, confessing the Son, possessing the Spirit, abiding in God (and His love) brings God's love to its mature expression in the believer, therefore, if you are a Christian, you should have both love for the brethren and total confidence before God in view of His coming judgment and Christ's return.

Background:

Our study of John's letter now brings us to the perfection of love, where God's love is brought to its full and intended goal in the believer (v.17–21). Apparently, given John's words in this chapter, believers in the first century shuddered at the thought of future judgment. Even today, the idea is sobering—even scary: standing before the Lord on His throne to give an account for one's life on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). Yet John explains clearly how we can banish such fear from our lives.¹ "Two wonderful purposes of that goal are 1) love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and 2) confidence when the believer stands before God on judgment day and the complete absence of fear at that time (v. 17–18). How is this possible?

The answer is that when you stand before God on that day, He will see you as He sees His Son. The love of God will have done its perfect work as it is applied to that day when we stand before God."² It is important to understand that the emphasis by John in these verses is not so much upon that love God has in Himself (He is perfect already) or God's love in us, but rather upon our expression of love both for God and one another. Thus, in close union with God (a mutual relationship with Him), Christian love is perfected so that no fear exists on the day of judgment. Likewise, God makes it clear in this passage that the expression of perfect love makes it impossible for a man to love God if he genuinely fails to love his brother. Love for God and hatred for a brother cannot coexist in the same heart.³

1.) NO FEAR! We should have confidence for the future (v. 17–18)

- "Made complete" does not mean flawless in a moral or any other sense. It means "mature," and it refers to that state of mind and activity in which the Christian is to find himself when the love of God within him, expresses itself in the believer's own love and has accomplished that which God fully intends it to complete.⁴

- The day of judgment is as fixed in God's eternal timetable as any other day in world history. John says perfect love casts out fear and terror. He doesn't mean that your love for God is grounds for acceptance. Rather, those fears are calmed by love for God. He is the one who loved us and favored us in Christ!
- Because believers are becoming like God (v.17), they do not need to live in terror of Him. Fear is not the "righteous awe" that people should have because it is built on "guilt" and the worry of punishment. *Perfect love* involves confidence!
- Paul wrote to the Romans in 8:15, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"

2.) NO HYPOCRISY! To say you love God but hate a brother or sister is to live a lie (19–21)

- Our love has its origin in God's love. We love because He first loved us. His love is the source and the cause of our love of others. If you are not loving others as you ought, you do not know God's love as you should!
- If you do not have the ability to love the brother or sister you can see, it is impossible for you to love the God you have not seen. How can you love the creator if you do not love others as a part of His creation? If you cannot love His children, you cannot love their Father.
- "John was likely countering the spiritual elitists who boasted of their relationship with God. This boast—I love God—can be tested by their love for the community of God. If these people show hate [for] their brothers or sisters in Christ—by rejecting them or refusing to fellowship with them—their love for God should be questioned. Such was the case with Diotrephes, who refused to have fellowship with John and his coworkers (see 3 John 9–10). In fact, John says that such people are liars. Believers know that God loves them and that they need no longer fear Him, but they still are responsible for loving Him and other believers. It is easy to claim to love God when that love doesn't cost anything more than weekly attendance at religious services. But the real test of a person's love for God is how that person treats other Christians and others. People cannot truly love God while neglecting to love those who are created in His image."⁵ See also, Matthew 22:37–40; Mark 12:30–31; John 13:34.

1 Bruce. Barton and Grant Osborne, 1, 2 & 3 John, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton,: Tyndale House, 1998), 101.

2 Daniel L. Akin, Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 1 Jn 4:17-18.

3 Akin, Daniel L. 1, 2, 3 John. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

4 James Montgomery Boice, The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 119.

5 Bruce. Barton and Grant Osborne, 1, 2 & 3 John, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1998), 101–102.

