

An Expository Study of 1 John
Part 8 (of 10 parts):

An Exposition of 1 John 4:7-21

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In 1 John 4:7-5:5, the third major division of the epistle, John presented an elaborate development of the nature and results of Christian love. In 2:7-11 he already noted that love is one of the signs of the believer's fellowship with God; in 3:13-24 he also portrayed the conflict between love and hatred as an assuring sign of a vital Christian faith. Now John noted that love is related to the very nature of God Himself. He spelled out the precise nature and the results of the love demanded of all true believers.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 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. 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And 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. By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 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. We love, because He first loved us. 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. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also (1 John 4:7-21).

In 1 John 4:7-16a John presented a comprehensive treatment of the nature of true love, while in 4:16b—5:5 he set forth the results of this love in the life of the believer. The presence and operation of this God-inspired love is a further ground of Christian assurance.

The Nature of Redeeming Love

John noted that the presence of love is basic for Christian assurance (vv. 7-8). He portrayed the manifestation of true love in Christ (vv. 9-10), stressed the need to practice mutual love (vv. 11-12), and elaborated on the confirmation of redeeming love in Christian experience (vv. 13-16a).

THE ASSURANCE FROM THE PRACTICE OF LOVE (vv. 7-8)

John called for the practice of mutual love because of the source of true love (v. 7a) and declared, both positively and negatively, the significance of such love (vv. 7b-8).

John prefaced his discussion of Christian love with the direct address "Beloved" (Ἀγαπητοί), expressive of his own love for his readers. Stott remarks, "The author practices what he preaches. In urging them to love each other, he first assures them of his own love for them."¹ Four of the six occurrences of this term of address in this epistle occur in passages where love is the theme (2:7; 3:21; 4:7, 11). its use in 3:2 and 4:1 reflects John's pastoral concern for his readers.

Mutual love grounded in God's love (v. 7a). The appeal, "let us love one another" (ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους), is a call for mutual love in which John included himself. In form the verb may be either indicative, "we love,"² or hortatory subjunctive, "let us love." English Bible versions and commentators generally accept the latter view, taking the verb as a call for mutual love within the Christian brotherhood. It resumes the obligation to love expressed in 3:18 and restated in 4:11. The present tense calls for love as a characteristic practice, while the reciprocal pronoun "one another" insists that it must be mutual: the love must flow in both directions! It is a call to

¹ J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 160.

² Donald W. Burdick supports the indicative: "The main point being expressed in verses 7-16 is not an exhortation to love but a declaration that Christians do love because they have been born of God, who is love" (*The Letters of John the Apostle* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1985], p. 317).

seek unselfishly the true welfare of the one loved. Such love should characterize the mutual relations of believers. Plummer notes, "The love of Christians to unbelievers is not expressly excluded, but it is not definitely before the Apostle's mind."³ This love will prompt the believer to reach out to the unsaved around him, but this God-inspired love cannot find full mutual realization with unbelievers.

The exhortation is grounded in doctrinal reality: "for love is from God" (ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν). The use of the definite article with "love" (ἡ ἀγάπη) centers attention on the kind of love John was urging, "the love" that has its source in God. It is not the natural love of the world for its own (John 15:19), nor the love of publicans for fellow-publicans (Matt. 5:46), but a self-sacrificing love motivated by good will and implemented in action, as portrayed in 1 John 4:9-10. The preposition "from" ἐκ, "out of") denotes that this love "flows from Him, as the one spring, and in such a way that the connection with the source remains unbroken."⁴

Love as the revelation of character (vv. 7h-8). The call to love is undergirded by the fact that its practice is a sure revelation of character. Verse 7b states the positive revelation while verse 8 states the negative fact.

The positive assertion, "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God," identifies the true believer. "Everyone who loves" (πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν) includes every individual actively practicing the kind of love of which John was speaking. No object of love is expressed; it is his practice of this love that is the crucial test. The significance of such love is indicated in the double assertion concerning him: he "is born of God and knows God" (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν, which Rotherham renders, "Of God hath been born, And is getting to understand God"⁵). The original order draws the two verbs together, framed by the two references to God. The perfect passive verb in the first expression denotes the definite experience of the new birth as wrought by God, with the result that he is now a member of God's family. The divine begetting preceded his loving; for his love "is an activity of the implanted eternal life, and is therefore a proof that the life is present."⁶ The second assertion, "and knows God," re-

³ A. Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 146.

⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St John* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 147.

⁵ Joseph Bryant Rotherham, *The Emphasized New Testament* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1959), p. 247.

⁶ R. O. Orr, "The Letters of John," in *A New Testament Commentary*, ed. G. C. D. Howley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 617.

cords the sure result of the new birth. The present tense verb "knows" points to his daily experience of getting to know and understand God better.

Verse 8, in typical Johannine fashion, presents the opposite picture: "The one who does not love does not know God." The negative with the present tense participle ($\delta\ \mu\eta\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\omega\nu$) pictures one who is unloving in attitude and practice. The absence of love in his life proves that he "does not know God" ($\sigma\upsilon\kappa\ \xi\gamma\nu\omega\ \tau\omicron\nu\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu$), that he has never come to know personally what God is like. The aorist tense apparently looks back to the time of his professed conversion. Not knowing love shows that he is still a stranger to God. McDowell remarks, "Ignorance of God and, we may deduce, misinterpretations and misrepresentations of God, are traceable to the absence of love in men's hearts. . . . The reason for this is that God is love."⁷

The assertion, "God is love" ($\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu$), is another of the great biblical statements concerning the nature of God. It stands parallel to two other statements from the pen of John: "God is spirit" (John 4:24) and "God is light" (1 John 1:5). They set forth different aspects of the essential nature of God. In the words of Marshall, "'God is spirit' describes his metaphysical nature, while 'God is light' and 'God is love' deal with his character, especially as he has revealed himself to men."⁸ Since love is a personal activity, the statement assumes that God is a Person. The two nouns in the statement "God is love" are not interchangeable, since the definite article occurs with "God" ($\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$) but not with "love."⁹ To make them reversible would offer a basis for pantheism. While John has just said that "love is from God" (v. 7), one cannot say that "love is God," just as one cannot say "light is God." Without the article, "love" is qualitative and depicts the nature of His being. The fact that God as a Person is completely loving does not invalidate the fact that He is also holy and righteous. All aspects of His nature belong together and unite in determining His action. His actions are totally self-consistent. "Because He is love, God works against whatever works against love."¹⁰

⁷ Edward A. McDowell, "1-2-3 John," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 12:216.

⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 212.

⁹ "The article with one and not with the other means that the articular noun is the subject. Thus $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu$ can only mean God is love, not love is God. . . . If the article occurs with both predicate and subject they are interchangeable" (A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931], p. 279).

¹⁰ Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Epistles of John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers,

THE MANIFESTATION OF REDEEMING LOVE (vv. 9-10)

Fallen humanity would never have known this love apart from the fact that God took the initiative in revealing His love to mankind. That love was manifested in the Incarnation (v. 9) and in the Atonement (v. 10).

God's love manifested in the Incarnation (v. 9). In verse 9 John sets forth the manifestation of redemptive love in the Incarnation: "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." "By this" (ἐν τούτῳ) looks forward to and is interpreted by the following "that" clause. The rendering "by this" interprets the preposition (ἐν) as instrumental, namely, that God's love was revealed by means of the sending of His Son. It may also be understood as locative, meaning that God's love was embodied in the sending of the Son. Plummer suggests that "for the sake of uniformity with vv. 10, 13, 17" it would be preferable to render "herein" each time."¹¹ The verb "was manifested" (ἐφανερώθη), a favorite term with John,¹² means "to make visible, make clear, come out into the open," and implies that before the first coming of Christ, "the love of God" (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ), that is, God's love for mankind, had not been displayed in such a personal, dynamic manner. In Him God's message of love reached its climax (Heb. 1:1-2).

John's statement that this love was manifested "in us" (ἐν ἡμῖν) is differently understood. Some, like Smith, understand it subjectively, "'in our souls'—an inward experience."¹³ But since John was referring to a historical event, such a subjective meaning seems unlikely. As relating to an objective event, the meaning may be "to us" or "among us" as the sphere in which this manifestation took place. Since those who beheld were not merely interested spectators, John apparently meant that "the manifestation was 'in connection with us,' it involved us as the recipients of God's love."¹⁴

This manifestation consisted in the fact "that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world" (ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μενογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον, literally, "that His Son, the

1983), p. 109.

¹¹ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 148.

¹² The verb φανερώω occurs nine times in 1 John, nine times in the Fourth Gospel, and twice in Revelation. In Paul's epistles it appears 22 times, but only seven times in the rest of the New Testament.

¹³ David Smith, "The Epistles of John," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), 5:191.

¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (1945; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 500.

only begotten, God has sent into the world"). John's order places the object, "His only begotten Son," emphatically forward. The manifestation was personal, none other than the only Son of God. The repeated article makes both τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ and τὸν μονογενῆ prominent and distinct. The former marks His deity, the latter His uniqueness. "His Son" calls attention to the intimate Father-Son relationship; in eternity past He was in an intimate face-to-face relationship with God (John 1:1).

The second designation, "only begotten," is climactic. As applied to Christ, the term is unique to John (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and here). Elsewhere in the Gospels it is used of an only child (Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38) and in Hebrews 11:17 it is used of Isaac to indicate his unique relationship to Abraham as the only son of promise. Derived from μόνος ("only, single") and γένος ("kind"), μονογενῆς denotes uniqueness ("one of a kind"¹⁵) rather than origin. The term denotes that "as the 'only' Son of God, He has no equal and is able fully to reveal the Father."¹⁶ Marshall notes that in the Septuagint the Hebrew word for "singly, only" is sometimes rendered in Greek as ἀγαπητός ("beloved") and sometimes by μονογενῆς, and concludes that "μονογενῆς may contain the nuance 'beloved,' especially since an only child is particularly loved by his parents."¹⁷ But Cremer notes that John's usage of μονογενῆς does not quite correspond to ἀγαπητός in the Synoptics but rather to Paul's "His own son" (τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ) in Romans 8:32.¹⁸ The familiar English rendering "only begotten Son" was based on Jerome's usage of *unigenitus* in the Vulgate for the Old Latin translation *unicus*.

John's term indicates the sacrificial nature of the Father's love in sending His only Son. The perfect tense verb "has sent" (ἀπέσταλκεν) points to the abiding impact of that crucial sending. Believers now enjoy its abiding blessings. This compound verb embodies the thought of someone being sent forth as the representative of another. The cognate noun (ἀπόστολος), commonly translated "apostle," denotes one sent forth on a mission as the representative of another. In Hebrews 3:1 this noun is used of Jesus Himself as the commissioned representative of the Father, who sent Him "into the

¹⁵ James Moulton and George Milligan note that the term "is literally one of a kind,' 'only,' 'unique' (*unicus*), not 'only-begotten,' which would be *monogennetos* (*unigenitus*)" (*The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930], pp. 416-17).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

¹⁷ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 214, n. 8.

¹⁸ Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, trans. William Urwick (1895; reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1954), p. 150.

world" (εἰς τὸν κόσμον), the earthly scene where the people to whom He was sent live.

The purpose of this divine sending of the Son was "so that we might live through Him" (ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ). The aorist subjunctive verb "might live" indicates the actual bestowal of life as the intended result of His mission. This statement of purpose implies that those to whom the Son was sent were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), but He came to give them life. The added words "through Him" declare that the Son Himself was the mediating agent in this bestowal of life, imparting to them eternal life while they are still living in this world. Eternal life is not merely future; through Christ it is received here and now and will continue into the eternal future. God's love manifested in the Atonement (v. 10). The love that sent the Son "that we might live through Him" is now related to His propitiatory work. The renewed statement, "In this is love" (ἐν τούτῳ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη, literally, "the love" as just depicted), points to a deeper aspect of that love. The words again look forward to the concluding "that" (ὅτι) clause where John used a double statement to portray this love.

The parenthetical negative, "not that we loved God" (οὐχ ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήκαμεν τὸν θεόν), contradicts the misconception that God, though altogether worthy of the believer's love, is loved directly by the natural man. Fallen human beings are not naturally in love with the God whom the Son came to reveal.¹⁹ The emphatic "we" (ἡμεῖς) stresses that as human beings believers did not originate the love John was writing about.

Two facts concerning God's love are stressed. First, "that He loved us" (ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, literally, "that He Himself loved us"). He took the initiative in revealing His love. His love "was original and spontaneous, the source of all other love."²⁰ The aorist tense "loved" refers to the historical coming of Christ; regarded as a distinctive landmark.

The redemptive purpose of His love is made clear in the additional fact that He "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." This is a summary of the redemptive mission of Christ in His First Advent. The connecting "and" (καὶ) links the fact of God's love with

¹⁹ There is a textual problem with the tense of the verb we loved." Only Codex B and ψ and a few minuscules have the perfect ἠγαπήκαμεν; the majority of the manuscripts have the aorist ἠγαπήσαμεν. The aorist may be an attempt to conform the unusual perfect to the other aorists in this verse. For the evidence see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979).

²⁰ W. H. Bennett, *The General Epistles, James, Peter, John and Jude*, The Century Bible (London: Blackwood, Le Bas & Co., n.d.), p. 312.

His loving act. The aorist "sent" (ἀπέστειλεν) views the First Advent as a mission that culminated in making "His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν). Since no verb is used, the expression may be rendered "His Son to be the propitiation" or "His Son as a propitiation." John insisted that the Son "Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (2:2). He was not sent merely to be "the propitiator for our sins," like the high priest under the Mosaic Law, but Himself became "the propitiation for our sins" by shedding His own blood for the remission of sins. Christ's self-sacrifice for sins made full atonement for all sins, thus enabling God to pardon at His own cost the sins against Himself of those who believe and to restore them to acceptance and fellowship with Himself. In the words of Pentecost, "The death of Jesus Christ did not change the heart of God, as if One who hated us now loves us; rather it opened the floodgate so that the love of God for sinners could be poured out to them through Jesus Christ."²¹ The words "our sins" bear witness to the consciousness of John and his readers concerning their own need of such a propitiatory sacrifice.

THE PRACTICE OF BROTHER LOVE (vv. 11-12)

Having set forth the nature of redeeming love (vv. 9-10), John then presented the resultant obligation of believers to love each other (v. 11) and noted the significance of its practice (v. 12).

The obligation of mutual love (v. 11). For the sixth and last time John addressed his readers as "Beloved" (ἀγαπητοί), thus reverting to the admonition with which he began this discussion of love (see v. 7). No further direct address occurs until the very last verse of the epistle (5:21).

John's appeal is, "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." The first class conditional statement, "if God so loved us" (εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς), states gently the motivating reality and implies no doubt. The adverb "so" recalls the sacrificial love portrayed in verse 10, while the repeated use of "God" (ὁ θεὸς) stresses the majesty of the love shown by the God they have come to know. The verse echoes John 3:16, but the use of the pronoun "us" makes it more personal in its direct application to John and his readers. God loved us "not because of our merit but because of our need."²²

In view of God's love "we also ought to love one another." The verb "we ought" (ὀφείλομεν) denotes not external compulsion but the

²¹ J Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Fellowship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 109.

²² Hobbs, *The Epistles of John*, p. 111.

inner constraint of conscious obligation. The present tense marks this as a continuing obligation, while "we also" stresses that believers must sense this constraint because they have been brought into a relationship of love. God's children "ought" to be displaying their Father's love. His love is the example as well as the stimulus. It is in the practice of love for "one another" that the reality of love for God will be tested, strengthened, and purified. In keeping with Jesus' teaching (Matt. 22:37-40), John insisted that love for God and love for believing brothers cannot be separated.

The significance of mutual love (v. 12). John's assertion, "No one has beheld God at any time" is unexpected. Houlden feels that it "has the air of being misplaced," and suggests that it should stand before verse 20, but he admits that his conjecture has no textual support.²³ Marshall insists that its place here is deliberate and that John was refuting those who claimed to know and love God because of their mystical experiences.²⁴ John insisted that God is not truly known through such professed mystical visions of God but that He can be known because He has revealed Himself through Christ and the experience of His love in Christian relations. For those who disparage the obligation to love the brethren, no vaunted mystical visions of God will ever enable them to attain to a vital relationship with God. John had already informed his readers that such a direct vision of God awaits the time of the Rapture (3:2).

The word order of John's assertion is literally, "God no one at any time has beheld" (θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται). The direct object, "God," stands first and, used without the article, denotes His essential essence, His deity. The negative "no one" allows for no personal exceptions, while the adverb "at any time" denies any past exceptions to this categorical assertion. The verb used here is not that used in John 1:18 (ἑώρακεν), which simply denotes the fact of having seen; the verb here (τεθέαται) implies a careful observation or close scrutiny (the word "theater" is derived from it). The perfect tense denotes an intimate gazing on the face of God by one who has entered into close fellowship with God. Since God is spirit (John 4:24) and invisible (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16), the natural human eye cannot behold Him in His true essence. What Moses saw on Sinai (Exod. 33:22-23), or Isaiah in the temple (Isa. 6:1), were theophanies, revelations by which God made Himself visible to the eye.

John continued by pointing out that a believer's love for the

²³ J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 114.

²⁴ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 216.

brethren is closely related to his experience of God's love: "if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12). The third class conditional sentence, "if we love one another" (ἐὰν ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους), leaves open the actual fulfillment of the condition. John knew well that the condition was not true in the lives of some professed Christians. But he anticipated that the readers would practice mutual love. Such mutual Christian love is evidence that "the unseen God, who was once revealed in His Son, is now revealed in His people if and when they love one another."²⁵

The fact that "God abides in us" (ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει) is now discerned through their continuing exercise of the mutual love that God Himself implants through the Holy Spirit (v. 13; Rom. 5:5). As believers experience His love in them, it will be expressed through them. John pointed to the practice of brother-love as evidence that God "abides" (μένει) in the believer as a continuing reality.

Their practice of mutual love further signifies that "His love is perfected in us" (ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν). In 1 John 2:5 John pointed to the believer's obedience to God's commands as revealing that "in him the love of God has truly been perfected." Here the evidence is the practice of mutual love. The genitive rendered "His love" (ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ) may be understood (a) as an objective genitive ("our love for God"), (b) as a subjective genitive ("God's love for us"), or (c) as a qualitative genitive to describe its Godlike quality. Some take the genitive as objective,²⁶ but this seems unlikely since the context speaks about God's love for believers (4:10-11). The discussion suggests the genitive is subjective: "God's love for us, now dwelling in us."²⁷ But it is quite possible that the second and third view combine in John's thought, since the operation of God's love in the hearts of believers inspires and develops a love in them like His own. In this paragraph John has been describing the nature of God's love, but he has also called for believers to respond to the divine love in loving the brethren. The words rendered "His love is perfected in us" do not denote an internal perfecting of God's love through the elimination of inadequacies; they mean that God's love

²⁵ Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 164.

²⁶ Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (reprint, Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), pp. 1741-42; Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 150; Harvey J. S. Blaney, "The First Epistle of John," in *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), 10:391-92.

²⁷ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and Jude*, p. 505; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 68; Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 164; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of James and the Epistles of John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 335.

has been brought to its intended goal in believers' lives through their consistent practice of loving one another.

THE CONFIRMATION OF GOD'S LOVE (vv. 13-16a)

In verses 13-16a John presented three grounds for assurance that believers have come personally to know God's love. He mentioned the gift of the Spirit (v. 13), the apostolic testimony concerning God's saving work in Christ (v. 14), and the experience of fellowship with God (vv. 15-16a).

Confirmation through the gift of the Spirit (v. 13). The ringing words "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us" express the basic assurance of the Christian life. The words "By this" (ἐν τούτῳ) here, as usually in 1 John look forward to the gift of the Spirit as expressed by the "because" clause.²⁸ The present tense verb "we know" (γινώσκουμεν) indicates "the process of obtaining knowledge by experience, by observation, or by instruction."²⁹ The content of this ongoing knowledge is "that we abide in Him and He in us." The verb "abide" portrays the continuing reality of this reciprocal abiding as a close and intimate relationship—God dwelling in believers and they in Him. John first mentioned the reality of this mutual interrelationship in 3:24. There the mutual indwelling was presented as the experience of the individual believer, but here the use of the plural pronoun, "we . . . us," underlines this relationship as the experience of the Christian community. Only in this verse does John assert the communitywide scope of this interrelationship between God and His people.

The ground for this knowledge is "because He has given us of His Spirit" (ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν). This knowledge is not grounded in esoteric insight into the nature of God but rather in God's own gift to believers. The perfect tense "has given" denotes the resultant indwelling of the Spirit imparted at regeneration. In 3:24 use of the aorist tense asserted the historical fact that the Spirit was given; here His resultant presence is asserted.

The statement that God has given believers "of His Spirit" (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ) has been understood in two ways. Lenski holds that the preposition (ac with the ablative) means that God has given us "from His Spirit," namely, "when the Holy Spirit is given to us, he does not enter our hearts without gifts for us."³⁰ Thus

²⁸ Others hold that the reference is to the preceding context in which John stated that if Christians love one another God lives in them.

²⁹ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 327.

³⁰ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, p. 507.

Marshall suggests that John may have had in mind the charismatic gifts which were the proof of the Spirit's indwelling.³¹ But since John made no mention of such gifts, it is better with Burdick to hold that "the statement refers simply to the presence of the Spirit."³² The expression seems best understood as having a partative sense, that "Christians receive from God a share (only) in the Spirit who fills the whole Church."³³ Only of the incarnate Son could it be said in the fullest sense that He received "the Spirit without measure" (John 3:34). Given as the gift of the Father's love, the indwelling Holy Spirit implants and molds the love of the believer.

Confirmation through the apostolic testimony (v. 14). With a connective "and" (καὶ) John pointed to a further confirmation of God's love, grounded in the apostolic testimony: "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." The "we" (ἡμεῖς) is emphatic and points to the apostolic experience and testimony. In saying "we have beheld and bear witness" (τεθεάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν) John affirmed that their apostolic message was grounded in their own personal experience; it was not speculative philosophy. The verb "have beheld" denotes a close and careful observation, and the perfect tense indicates the abiding impact of what they had observed. In their association with the incarnate Son they saw with their own eyes the outworking of His redemptive mission. What they beheld produced in them an abiding conviction concerning His true identity, and that conviction prompted there to continue to "bear witness" concerning Him. The Christian life rests on the acknowledged reality of God's revelation of Himself in His Son and a personal acceptance by faith, of the Son's unique Person and ministry.

The heart of the apostolic witness is "that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." The acceptance of this message is the test of doctrinal orthodoxy. The perfect tense "has sent" denotes the abiding significance of the sending of the Son "to be the Savior of the world." The term, "the Savior" (σωτήρα), used without a verbal form, is the predicate accusative, "as Savior"; it describes what He is, not merely what He was sent to do. The salvation He wrought is inseparably connected with His Person as the unique Son of God. "The world," steeped in sin and corruption, needs such a Savior. He is the Savior, not of Jews only, but of the entire

³¹ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 219.

³² Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 328.

³³ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1984), p. 250.

world. "There is no limit but the willingness of men to accept salvation by believing on the Saviour."³⁴

In the New Testament the designation "the Savior of the world" occurs only here and on the lips of the Samaritan believers in John 4:42. In classical Greek the term "savior" was applied both to the gods and to men. In the Roman imperial cultus it was employed as one of the titles of the emperors, many of whom were the most immoral of men. In the New Testament the term is applied both to God the Father and to the Son.³⁵ The term is applied to the Father as the originator of the plan of salvation, who sent the Son into the world "so that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9); the Son is the Savior as the one who wrought salvation through His death and resurrection. The term is not directly applied to the Holy Spirit, but the Father sent the Spirit to bring about salvation for those who believe (Gal. 4:4-6; Rom. 8:9-11). In verses 13-14 John accordingly mentioned all three Persons of the Trinity in his portrayal of redeeming love.

Confirmation through mutual fellowship between God and man (vv. 15-16a). God's love is further confirmed in the experience of believers. Verse 15 indicates how men enter into fellowship with God, and verse 16a states the believer's assurance concerning God's love. The conditional statement, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God," indicates how God's redemptive purpose in sending Christ becomes operative in human lives. The scope of the third class conditional statement, "Whoever confesses" (ὅς ἐάν ὁμολογήσῃ, literally, "he who if he may confess"), is restricted only by the individual's willingness to make the indicated confession. The aorist verb "confesses" denotes a specific and apparently public confession born of an inner persuasion. The verb, which basically means "to say the same thing," denotes a personal acceptance of the reality being confessed.

The confession that "Jesus is the Son of God" (Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ) is an explicit acknowledgement of the abiding reality of the Incarnation, that the man Jesus is indeed the Son of God incarnate. It is a confession that the false prophets whom John confronted refused to make. Because of their Gnostic philosophical presupposition that spirit and matter are in opposition to each other, they regarded such a confession as impossible. But John insisted that

³⁴ Plummer, *The Epistles of John*, p. 150.

³⁵ Of the 24 occurrences of the word "Savior," apparently eight refer to God the Father (cf. Luke 1:47; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 25) and 16 to the Son (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph. 5:23; Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14).

the confession is crucial, that it is precisely those who accept and confess the reality of the Incarnation who have fellowship with God. Stott well observes, "The theology which robs Christ of His Godhead, robs God of the glory of His love, and robs man of the one belief that generates a perfect love within him."³⁶

The truth thus expressed as a confession of personal faith assures the believer that "God abides in him and he in God." It portrays a vital twofold relationship that is both intimate and progressive. The present tense verb (μένει) stresses the present reality, "God lives in him and he in God" (NIV).³⁷ As Westcott notes,

The two clauses mark two aspects of the Christian's life. The believer has a new and invincible power for the fulfilment of his work on earth: "God is in him." And again he realizes that his life is not on earth, that he belongs essentially to another order: "he is in God." The divine fellowship is complete and effective in each direction.³⁸

The amazing relationship with God which John held before those willing to make the confession just indicated (v. 15) is now expressed as a living reality in the experience of true believers: "And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us" (v. 16a). The opening "we" (ἡμεῖς) is emphatic and denotes John and the believing community. God's love evoked a response: "we have come to know and have believed" that love. The two verbs "have come to know" and "have believed," both in the perfect tense, indicate the resultant experience flowing from initial faith and confession. Burdick notes that the order of the two verbs indicates that "a knowledge of basic facts must precede belief, for it is necessary to know what is to be believed. Faith must be intelligent or it is sheer gullibility."³⁹ In John 6:69 these two verbs are used in reverse order, thus indicating that in spiritual matters "the growth of knowledge and the growth of faith act and react on each other."⁴⁰

One's growth in knowledge and faith relates to "the love which God has for us." The words "for us" (ἐν ἡμῖν, literally, "in us") have been understood in two ways. The rendering "for us" suggests that the love God revealed in His incarnate Son was witnessed by those

³⁶ Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 165.

³⁷ See also *The New Testament of the Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition*, ed. Alexander Jones (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1969); *The New Testament in Today's English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1966).

³⁸ Westcott, *The Epistles of St John*, p. 155.

³⁹ Burdick, *The Epistles of John*, pp. 330-31.

⁴⁰ A. E. Brooke, *The Johannine Epistles*, *The International Critical Commentary*, (reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1964), p. 122.

around Christ and intended to bring salvation. While the preposition ἐν can have this remoter meaning (cf. John 13:35), its more natural meaning is "in us." Accepting the love manifested in Christ has enabled that love to become operative in believers' lives. God's love, poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), is now at work manifesting its presence in them. Since God's love is no longer visible in the presence of the incarnate Christ here on earth, God is manifesting His love as it is now displayed in His people.

The Results of Redeeming Love

Having explored the nature of redeeming love, John next dealt with the results of that love in believers' lives (1 John 4:16b-18), in their relationship with others (vv. 19-21), and in their relationship with God (5:1-5).

THE RESULTS IN BELIEVERS' LIVES (vv. 16b-18)

God's love abiding within promotes the consciousness of reciprocal love (v. 16b), produces confidence in view of the future (v. 17), and casts out the feeling of fear (v. 18).

The experience of reciprocal love (p. 16b). The work of love in believers' lives is connected with the fact that "God is love." This is the only New Testament statement declaring the essence of God's nature that occurs twice (see 4:8). While the restatement well summarizes the discussion in 4:7-16a, the use of "and" (καὶ) connects it with what follows: "and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." The present articular participle, "the one who abides in love" (ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ, "the one abiding in the love"), describes the individual by his practice as continually dwelling in the sphere of love whose very essence is God. He who lives in this sphere must necessarily be permeated with love, resulting in a mutual interrelationship with God. The triple occurrence of the verb "abide" (μένω) strengthens the fact of the continuity. It is in this mutual relationship that the believer's life finds its true fulfillment.

The confidence of perfected love (v. 17). A life of love provides a foundation for Christian hope: "By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment." The opening "By this" (ἐν τούτῳ, literally, "in this") may look back to what precedes or forward to the "that" (ἵνα) clause. Lenski, connecting the phrase with what follows, gives this translation: "In this has this love been brought to its goal with us, that we have boldness in con-

nection with the day of the judging."⁴¹ Perfected love now gives believers confidence as they anticipate the coming judgment. Others take John's expression (ἵνα with the subjunctive to express purpose) to mean that Christians' present experience of perfected love now assures that they will have confidence in that future day of judgment. Some like Westcott⁴² and Burdick⁴³ hold that "By this" looks back to the double communion in verse 16b and that this brings love to its goal, with the result that they will have confidence in that future day of judgment. Under either view John insisted that one's experience of perfected love has a bearing on the future.

John's statement that love is perfected "with us" (μεθ' ἡμῶν) is unusual. It can mean "in us" or "in our case," but the preposition with the genitive basically means "with us" and suggests that love not only works in believers but also with them as God's people. Love attains its goal when a believer also communicates His love. God's love has as its intended goal "that we may have confidence in the day of judgment" (ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως). In 2:28 John spoke of this confidence before Christ at His coming as gained through continual abiding in Christ; here its basis is the experience of abiding mutual love. In that majestic day God's children will come before the Judge not with terror but with full assurance of having been accepted in Christ. Apparently the reference is to the judgment seat of Christ when believers will appear before Him not to determine their salvation (John 5:24) but for the evaluation of their lives for reward (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15). He who has lived under the inspiration and power of perfect love will experience "confidence," liberty to approach and commune with Christ, in that day.

The clause, "because as He is, so also are we in this world" (ὅτι καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ), indicates that confidence in that future day is grounded in present likeness to Christ. The demonstrative pronoun (ἐκεῖνός, "that one"), here rendered "He" as elsewhere in the epistle denotes Christ. The comparative "as" (καθὼς, "even as") marks close resemblance giving assurance that confidence is not presumption. The use of "is," rather than "was," makes clear that John is not thinking merely of the man Jesus while He was here on earth. The present tense denotes His unchanging character, "as he is eternally—past, present, and future."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, p. 510.

⁴² Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, p. 157.

⁴³ Burdick, *The Epistles of John*, p. 333.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

The comparison, "as He is, so also are we," marks a likeness in character which is true of believers already "in this world." Varied views have been expressed as to the nature of this likeness.⁴⁵ The context suggests that it is a likeness in love. Love is the theme in this section (4:7-5:5), and in the next verse John explicitly singled out love as the antidote to "fear" in believers' lives. Clearly John believed in a God-given love that works redemptively in its recipients in this world and prepares them for the future.

The operations of perfect love (v. 18). The mention of love-produced "confidence" led John to deal with the fact of "fear": "There is no fear in love" (φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ). Fear and love are mutually exclusive in their nature. The word "fear" is used with two meanings: it may mean "alarm, dread, fright," the self-regarding fear of the criminal or slave because of a sense of guilt; or it can signify "reverence" or "respect." The latter meaning is not in view here. God-inspired love is perfectly consistent with that reverential awe before God which keeps Christians from doing what displeases and grieves Him. The feeling of fear here is general, though fear of the future judgment may be involved.

The adversative "but" (ἀλλ'; "on the contrary") introduces the fact that fear and love are antithetical in action: "but perfect love casts out fear" (ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον). "Perfect love," the love that has attained its goal of bringing believers into abiding fellowship with God, by its very nature repeatedly "casts out" (present tense) fear whenever it arises. "No believer's love has ever been so perfect as to banish fear entirely; but every believer experiences that as his love increases his fear diminishes."⁴⁶ This is "because fear involves punishment" (ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, more literally, "because fear has punishment"). The noun "punishment" occurs only here and in Matthew 25:46 in the New Testament. Its root significance is that of "pruning," and so it came to denote the process of correcting or punishing. The sense of fear springs from the consciousness that punishment is deserved. But John's precise wording "fear has punishment" implies that the punishment is not merely future, but that fear involves present suffering because "fear anticipates and makes real the future punishment it contemplates."⁴⁷ Such fear is destructive of inner peace and mars the consciousness of the love of God.

The words "and the one who fears is not perfected in love"

⁴⁵ For a summary of five views see *ibid.*, p. 335.

⁴⁶ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 152.

⁴⁷ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, pp. 260-61.

restate the impersonal principle, "There is no fear in love," in personal terms. The conjunction "and" (δέ) implies that something further needs to be said about the believer whose life is harassed by fear. The present participle, "the one who fears" (ὁ φοβούμενος) pictures an individual whose life is habitually beset with fear. In him love "is not perfect" (οὐ τέλειται), has not yet been enabled to attain its intended goal in his life. The perfect passive verb indicates that the believer is himself the sphere in which God's love is at work to remove all fear by bringing him into abiding fellowship with God.

THE RESULT OF REDEEMING LOVE IN BELIEVERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS (vv. 19-21)

In verse 19 John declared the origin of Christian love and then insisted that this love involves the obligation of loving the brethren (vv. 20-21).

The divine initiative in Christian love (v. 19). The amazing love of God in Christ is the basis of inspiration of all the love that stirs believers' hearts. The form of the words "We love" (ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν) may be understood as hortatory, "Let us be loving," but the absence of any connecting particle and the use of the emphatic "We" (ἡμεῖς) supports the indicative rendering.⁴⁸ A number of manuscripts have "God" (τὸν θεόν) or "Him" (αὐτόν) as the expressed object of the verb.⁴⁹ Modern textual editors generally hold that the reading without an object has good support and best explains the other readings. It is more probable that the object would be added than left out, because the scribes felt the need for an accusative after the verb, especially if it was regarded as a hortatory subjunctive. The asserted love is unrestricted in its scope. The words "because He first loved us" (ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμῶς) explain the operation of love in Christians. The subject "He" (αὐτὸς) is emphatic; "He" (and not "we") is the true source of love. The adverb "first" stresses His initiative; He revealed His love for mankind to awaken love in them. With his use of "He" John again made no distinction between the Father and the Son. The aorist "He loved" (ἠγάπησεν) looks back to the historical manifestation of His love in the life and death of Christ (vv. 9-10).

The consequent duty of brother-love (vv. 20-21). John then asserted that God-induced love involves love of the brethren. The

⁴⁸ The Latin and the Peshitta Syriac versions, as well as some Greek manuscripts, accepted a hortatory rendering and added a connective particle, οὖν, "therefore, then" (see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed.).

⁴⁹ For textual evidence see United Bible Societies, *The Greek New Testament*, 3d ed.

scene in verse 20 is hypothetical: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother" (ἐάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι Ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεόν, καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῇ). There is a contradiction between the individual's explicit claim to love God while he continues to hate his brother. The Greek places "God" and "his brother" side by side, suggesting that the two cannot be the objects of opposite feelings within. "Inward condition is easily measured by outward behaviour."⁵⁰ The clear verdict is, "he is a liar" (ψεύστης ἐστίν, "a liar he is"). "He is either blind or a conscious hypocrite."⁵¹ It is not merely a matter of making a false assertion; the noun insists on the falseness of his character.

The supposed personal scene is now undergirded with a general statement: "for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." As Stott observes, "It is obviously easier to love and serve a visible man than an invisible God, and if we fail in the easier task, it is absurd to claim success in the harder."⁵² It is a contrast not merely between the seen and the unseen, but also between man and God, whose nature is very different from man's.

His failure to love on the lower and visible level proves that a person "cannot love God whom he has not seen." The negative "cannot" (οὐ δύναται, "is not able") does not assert man's abiding inability to love an invisible God, but does declare that it is impossible for one who continues to hate his brother. Instead of the negative (οὐ) some manuscripts use the interrogative "how" (πῶς), thus rhetorically questioning the claim made. Manuscript evidence favors the view that the blunt denial was apparently the original reading.⁵³

In verse 21 John's "And" links his blunt rejection of the claim made with the explicit command of God. His reference to the "command we have from Him" apparently refers to the summary of the Mosaic Law quoted by Jesus, "You shall love the Lord your God . . . and . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31). But the substitution of "brother" for "neighbor" may suggest that John also had in mind the "new commandment" given by Jesus (John 13:34; 15:12).

⁵⁰ John Miller, *Notes on James, 1 and 11 Peter, 1, 11 and Ill John, Jude, Revelation* (Bradford, Eng.: Needed Truth Publishing Office, n.d.), p. 90.

⁵¹ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 153.

⁵² Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 171.

⁵³ For the textual evidence see United Bible Societies, *The Greek New Testament*, 3d ed. Using a scale of A to D, the editors rate the reading οὐ as B.

The command as formulated, "that the one who loves God should love his brother also," asserts that the Godward and manward aspect of true love cannot be separated. The command clearly refutes the heretical claim that some love God while they are hating their brother. The present tenses indicate that this is a continuing obligation. The opening "that" (ὅτι) is generally taken as simply indicating the contents of the command. But Westcott says that aim is also involved: "The final particle gives more than the simple contents of the commandment. It marks the injunction as directed to an aim; and implies that the effort to obtain it can never be relaxed."⁵⁴ So understood John suggested that those who claim to love God while they hate their brother stand condemned for their practice as well as their intentional failure to seek such love.

⁵⁴ Westcott, *The Epistles of St John*, p. 162.

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