

Perfect Love

1 John 4:13–21

Would you notice the phrase found in verse 17—”love perfected”; and in verse 18—”perfect love”; and again in verse 18—”perfected in love”? What exactly is perfect love?

A group of professional people posed a similar question to a group of four- to eight-year-olds. The answers they received were broader and deeper than anyone could have imagined. See what you think:

“Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss.” Emily – age 8

“Love is what makes you smile when you’re tired.” Terri – age 4

“Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.” Danny – age 7

“Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.” Bobby – age 7 (Wow!)

“Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.” Noelle – age 7

“Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.” Mary Ann – age 4

“When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.” Karen – age 7 (What an image!)

“You really shouldn’t say ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.” Jessica – age 8

“When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That’s love.” Rebecca – age 8¹

¹ Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, & 3 John* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2014), 100–101.

These children give piercing descriptions of what love looks like. However, the most piercing description of love comes the One who created love, the One who *is* love—God Himself. God is most qualified to define, describe, and identify what love truly is.

John has a way of circling back around to the same theme and enlarging the circle each time. John has dealt with love before, but in this text John is relaying to us God’s discourse on perfect love.

Transition:² John writes clearly in three distinct movements. Each movement brings clarity and clearness to perfect love. Here is the first:

1. God sent His Son in love (verses 13–16).

“The Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (verse 14)—that is the supreme act of love.

God is completely self-sufficient. He has always existed. He has no origin. He does not answer to us. He is self-existent and self-dependent. He did not need us, so why would He create us?

- He did not create us because He was lonely. He enjoyed the fellowship of the Trinity. (Genesis 1:26; John 1:1)
- He did not create us because He was lacking in any quality or worth. He possesses those in unending measure.
- He did not create us because of any unmet need.
- According to Revelation 4:11, He created us for His pleasure. You will fulfill your purpose in life if you are living for God’s pleasure.

God created us as dependent, fragile people. Adam and Eve were persuaded to believe a lie, and it had devastating consequences on the human race. They desired to live independently of God and to be self-sufficient. Sin, like a virus, entered the world and our hearts. Sin crept into every crevice of your soul. Despite this willful sin, God sent Jesus. Why? There is only one reason—perfect love.

² Alternate outline:

1. How God showed perfect love to us 13–16
2. How perfect love affects our view of death 17–18
3. How perfect love affects our treatment of others 19–21

You were bankrupt in your sin. He sent the only remedy, the only cure, the only sacrifice possible to bring back His creation back to His original purpose of bringing Him pleasure. We actually have a Trinitarian picture of love in these verses. God the Father sent God the Son to bring salvation to the fallen race (verse 14). Someone knows assurance of that salvation by God the Spirit testifying to it in his or her inner person (verse 13). For all of eternity there will be a mutual indwelling of us and the Spirit.³

How do you know God loves you? He sent His perfect son to die for your imperfect soul. Someone rightly, but stunningly put it this way: “God killed His own son, so He would not have to kill you.” You may be thinking, “But I thought the Roman soldiers killed Jesus (Matthew 27:27–37).” Yes, they did. “I thought the Jewish leaders killed Jesus (Matthew 27:22–26).” Yes, they did too. “I thought our sin killed Jesus (Romans 5:8).” Yes, our sin had a hand in it, just like the Romans and the Jewish leaders; but we must never forget Isaiah 53:10—“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief.” The English word *crush* is from a Hebrew word *daka* which means “to break, to bruise, to destroy.” This same word is also translated in another portion of Scripture as *beating* someone to *pieces* (Isaiah 3:15). That is the strong redemptive pulse running through these verses.

Have you accepted God’s perfect love in the Person of Jesus Christ? Have you been transformed by this one person who stepped into human history?

I am not asking . . .

- if you believe Jesus is real
- if you believe He was a good person
- if you believe He died

I am asking if you have ever invited the risen Jesus Christ into your life to take over! Do you recognize Him as the Son of God (verse 15), and do you believe He is God?

Transition: Here is the picture of perfect love: God sent His Son in love. He also gives us confidence in love.

2. God gives confidence in love (verses 17–18).

John is shifting gears here and changing directions. We move from the truest picture of

³ Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 113

love—Jesus Christ—to the truest results of love—the absence of fear.

We heard earlier what a child believes about love. You could call that young love. Here we have perfect love. The word *perfected* refers to maturity and completeness. It is mature love. God's love is maturing in us and it is yielding results. God's love matures in us so that we do not fear.

I John 4:17–18 says, “By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for 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. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”

People fear lots of things. John introduces two new words to us in this section: *fear* and *judgment*. People have all types of fears—so many fears, in fact, that we have had to separate and organize them.

- If you fear spiders, it is called arachnophobia.
- If you fear heights, it is called acrophobia.
- If you fear dogs (like I do), it is called cynophobia.
- If you fear thunder and lightning (like many children), it is called astraphobia.
- If you have an irrational and extreme fear of death (to the point of refusing to talk about it), it is called thanatophobia.

Warren Wiersbe, the gifted Bible commentator, said, “If people are afraid it is because of something in the past that haunts them, or something in the present that upsets them, or something in the future that they feel threatens them. Or maybe a combination of all three.”⁴

Here, God beautifully releases the Christian from the fear of God and the fear of His judgment. Now, there should always be reverential fear of God for a Christian, but never a tormenting fear.

God gives his children a new confidence facing eternity.

- The Christians does not fear God's wrath because he or she will not face it.
- The Christian does not fear judgment because someone faced it for us.

For the non-Christian, judgment is future and you should fear it. God will pour out His

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Real: Turning from Hypocrisy to Truth* (Colorado Spring: David C. Cook, 1972), 155.

wrath on you because you are not covered by Jesus' sinless perfection. For the Christian, however, judgment is not future. It is past. It is not coming to us in the future because it came to Christ in the past.

Christian, we should not torment ourselves about the future. We rejoice about what Jesus Christ did on the cross in the past.

Jesus spoke about judgment more than anyone else did. Jesus also spoke about hell more than anybody else did. He does not describe hell as annihilation where you cease to exist. The word for hell (*gehenna*) is used twelve times in the New Testament. All but one came from the mouth of Jesus. Judgment Day is coming. Jesus came to help you be ready for that day.

John MacArthur, a 21st century theologian, college founder and president, summarized perfectly how God gives Christians confidence through His perfect love:

This stunning statement means the Father treats the saints the same way He does His Son Jesus Christ. God clothes believers with the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:21- 22; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), and grants the Son's perfect love (Matt. 9:36; John 10:11. 14-16; 13:1; 14:21) and obedience (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; 18:37). Someday believers will stand before God's throne as confidently as their Lord and Savior does. When they reach that final accounting, they will see the fulfillment of 1 John 3:2b, "We [believers] know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."⁵

Transition: This is what perfect love looks like. God sent His Son in love, God gives confidence in love, and, finally . . .

3. God issues commands in love (verses 19–21).

I John 4:19–21 says, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he 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: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

God issues this command in love: "Christian, you must love people who are difficult to love." You must love them . . .

- Even if they do not see things your way.
- Even if they continually do spiteful things towards you.
- Even if they are indifferent toward you.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1–3 John* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 171.

- Even if they are on the opposite end of the political spectrum.
- Even if they are blinded by their own ambitions.
- Even if they are making decisions that are going to have devastating consequences.

We put God on display when we love one another. There is no human explanation for this love. If love is real, you will be able to see it work. It is not abstract. Specific actions will accompany this love.

- You could spend time daily praying for the person you are having difficulty loving.
- You could do a good deed on purpose towards someone you are having difficulty loving.
- You could write an encouraging note or give them a compliment.

I know for the rest of your life you will be surrounded by people who are difficult to love. You must be active in actual, bone fide ways to show your love for them.

How can you love someone who is so unlovable? Here are a few steps:

- Tell God you are willing to love them. You have to get to this point first: “Lord, I know I do not love them, but I am willing for you to change my heart where I will love them.”
- Pray scripture for them. This will help you to have God’s heart toward that person. Your heart toward them right now is indifferent or even malicious.
- Act on ways to demonstrate God’s love toward them.

Steven Davey comments on this idea:

The fact that our love is maturing and being perfected doesn’t mean *we’re* perfect—at least not yet—it means that God’s love is perfected in and through us—that is, God’s love is completed—it is accomplished in and through us.

One author put it this way; God’s love is made real, tangible, concrete in and through the Christian fellowship when the children of God practice love toward one another.⁶

The ultimate picture of someone loving someone else who’s very unlovable is found in verse 19, “We love because he first loved us.” Here are a few amazing truths from this verse: First, God took the initiative in love, not us. You should do the same with those in your life. What initiatives could you take this week toward someone in love? Second, our love for God finds its origin in God. His prior love explains how we use our freewill to express our love in return to God.

⁶ Stephen Davey, “God is Agape,” Colonial Baptist Church, accessed May 28, 2016, <http://www.wisdomonline.org/files/1934/Heart%20to%20Heart%20Part%207.pdf>.

In verse 20, John's logic is precise. He is using a lesser to greater argument. He used a lesser to greater argument already in 1 John 3:17–18. This style of argumentation says one side of the coin cannot be true and the other false. The lesser argument denotes the impossibility of the greater.

If you cannot love someone you see (lesser) how can you love God whom you cannot see (greater)? That means you do not say, "I love God" with your lips; you say it by loving those difficult people God has placed in your life.

Do not forget you are that difficult person in someone else's life. "Oh me?" Yes, you. You are not as nearly as loveable as you think you are. How can you tell if you are the difficult person everyone else is having a hard time getting along with? I have known many difficult people in life. Most of them would be surprised that others find them difficult.

- When you join a group of people, does the mood often shift?
- Do you think it is important to express your views or your feelings even if it makes other people angry?
- Have you noticed that telemarketers hang up on you? Okay, that one was not serious.
- Do you find that even when you're trying to be helpful by explaining something or providing information, people don't seem to want to listen?
- Do you think it's useful to point out people's mistakes, areas of incompetence, or previous track records of failure?

If you answered "yes" to any of these, it is a red flag that you're a source of unhappiness for others.⁷

The last verse is a summary verse for John's argument: "And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:21). John is reaching back into Matthew 22:36–40 where someone asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." These two commands form bookends of all the commandments. In other

⁷ Gretchen Rubin, "Quiz: Are You the Person Whom Everyone Else Finds Difficult?" *Huffington Post*, last modified November 17, 2011, accessed May 28, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gretchen-rubin/quiz-are-you-the-person-w_b_149635.html.

words, if you love Jesus as you ought, you will not have a problem loving difficult people. If you are having difficulty doing that, the problem is not found with someone else; it is found in your weak love for God.

Conclusion

God sent His Son in love. Will you receive Him? Will you adore Him? Will you worship Him?

God gives confidence in love. Do you have any fear about the “after life”? You do not have to fear; run to Jesus.

God issues commands in love. Are you obeying His commands? Is the love of God being reflected in how you treat the difficult people in your life?

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