

THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN TO THE CHURCH:

17. “Being Made to Be Like Jesus!”

I John 4:16 – 21

Introduction:

We are studying the letter John wrote to the churches he was Overseer for, people he dearly loved. When this letter was written between AD 100 and 102, John was nearing the end of his life on earth and he was struggling with his legacy, because the false teachers who opposed his leadership had taken nearly half the church members with them and started new churches based on heresies and falsehoods! He is wondering if his work will last at all!

He wrote to leave behind him a clear well thought out word about what is really important to believe about Walking with Jesus and Living the Christian life. This letter is actually one passionate plea John wrote because his heart was deeply troubled and he was moved by love to clearly explain who Jesus is and what He came into the world to do for us all!

John wrote this letter with a heart of a sincere pastor who was moved with intense love and passion to **Protect the remaining Flock from the heresies.** John’s first concern is not to refute the false teachers. His first concern is pastoral! He is writing from the heart of a pastor, overseer who loved his people deeply!

Listen to his words as he writes to his dearly loved little children in the family of God that was still together after the ugly split! **Joy, Holiness, and Assurance** are what every pastor who has any character and truth about him or her deeply desires for the people who are part of their local fellowship of believers! **This letter is a masterpiece in the art of edification of believers!**

I John 1:4 “**We are writing these things so that** our joy will be complete.”

I John 2:1 “**My dear children, I am writing this to you so that** you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely.”

I John 5:13 “**I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that** you may know that you have eternal life.”

In the text of this letter, we see John write to his followers and we see him call out some of the false teachings the people were hearing from these teachers who had “special revelation of God,” and who saw themselves as superior to John. John has witnessed what these false teachers were able to do in turning people away from the faith and getting people to believe lies!

John tells them exactly what he thought of these heretical leaders: I John 4:1 “*Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.*”

For teachers who seek to enable their followers to know the truth as it is in Jesus, there are two clear things John points his readers to in this paragraph, that are just as true and just as sound for us today as they were in the first century when the heretics were seeking to lead people astray!

The first thing is John appeals to the indwelling Witness of the Holy Spirit who makes the truth alive for all of the believers, whose heart and mind living in us witnesses to the truth we hear from genuine teachers, who speak to us in love! John wants them to remember it was the work of the Holy Spirit who came to live in them and gave them new birth.

The second thing is the Holy Scriptures are the standard of truth, how we see and discern truth from falsehood, is by knowing the genuine truth of God: “That which you have heard from the beginning, from me and the other apostles.” The truth is not fluid and changing at the whim of human teachers like Cerinthus. It is sure and firm, rooted in Jesus’ life and teachings!

John has witnessed what these false teachers were able to do in turning people away from the faith and getting people to believe lies! So, John writes to refute the teaching of the Gnostics and to establish the truth of who Jesus is and what Jesus came into the world to do, the Divine Human Jesus Christ the Son of God. John writes to give those he loved ground to stand on!

I. Assurance of Salvation #4 – God’s Gift of Agape Love for the Believers:

I John 3:10 – 11 *“So now we can tell who are the children of God and who are the children of the Devil. Anyone who does not obey God’s commands and does not love other Christians does not belong to God. This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.”*

I John 3:14 and 16 *“If we love other Christians, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who doesn’t love them is still dead. ... We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for our us. And we ought also to give up our lives for our Christian friends.”*

As we look at this context and the particular word Jesus used in the Greek language, He used the word agape. In doing so it is clear that this is not a human or philanthropic love for people that we are to have, nor is this a natural love or affection Christians are to display in their lives – friendship love or familial affection type of love. **Jesus says we are to love one another with Holy and Divine love that we do not naturally possess!**

Human, natural love that we have for one another, is subject to the moods and dispositions of the hearer, to coldness, suspicion of others, and to being withheld from others through hurt or envy. What Jesus says here is “agapate one another” – love one another with a divine, holy, self-giving, self-emptying, other-oriented love, and keep on doing it constantly!

Well, if it’s not human love that I’m to display but the love of God that He alone is the source of, how do I go about getting it and displaying it to my brothers and sisters? Good question! Paul writes about this love as a gift from God in Romans 5:5 *“and this hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.”*

This holy love comes to us and lives in us solely **by the Gift of His Grace**. Only when we are born into the family of God by saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ do we receive this agape love into our hearts. Only when our sins have been dealt with and our guilt cleansed and pardoned do we receive this holy love.

This divine and holy love is brought to us by the person of God's Holy Spirit who lives within us and imparts this new nature of God into us when we invite Him to come in. **Only God loves with agape love, so it follows that if we're to love with agape, God must Live In Us**. That is exactly what Scripture teaches us and what happens to us when we invite Jesus Christ to cleanse and save us and His Spirit comes to live in us. Agape is the fruit of the Spirit's presence in our lives; we need Him to produce it! Galatians 5:23 *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, agape."*

Jesus taught us the truth that **everyone will be able to tell whether or not we are His followers when they see in you and me His holy love that flows from the heart of God**, poured out in the midst of us and fleshed out in our relationships with one another. His love is self-emptying, sacrificial, lifting, and focused on the needs of others! Here John echoes that teaching when he writes these incredible words: I John 3:14 *"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers."*

Jesus chooses the love test as the Proof of our Discipleship to Him. It's not our doing, it is His doing. He says we will be known by the habitation of God's love in us, and the demonstration of God's love through us. Love, agape in us, proves we are His people. It is proof to us and to others. John uses the Greek word metababekamen – meaning, "to cross over from one place to another, to change where and how we are living, to relocate to another place!" The presence of Jesus' love in my life is the proof of my citizenship in His kingdom.

II. It All Centers in Jesus Christ our Lord:

I John 4:14 – 16 *"Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us and we have put our trust in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God and God in him."*

This assurance of our salvation being inhabited by the love of God is growing in the text! We see the Lord Jesus' relation to God; he is Son to the Father as no one else is, and so as to be the One True God with the Father. We see the Lord Jesus in His role as our Savior and Redeemer, *"the Savior of the world."* We see the truth that Jesus was sent from Heaven on mission from the Father. *"The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."*

I John 4:15 *"All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God."* This confession of the truth includes faith in the heart as its foundation, confessing it with our mouth to the glory of Christ, and is expressed in our actions we do in opposition to the will and ways of the world system we live in. John says the one who confesses Christ, and that He is the Son of God, is inhabited by the Spirit of God.

Christian revelation is the revelation of the divine love; the truths of our faith are truths relating to the divine love; all his transactions in and with his Son reveal His love to us, and means to

advance us to the love of God: “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.*” II Corinthians 5:19

I John 4:16b “*God is love, and all who live in love live in God and God in him.*” This has been one of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses in the entire New Testament. The secular mind reads that and takes it at face value: God is love, so what I feel for a member of the opposite gender, what I feel for my sons, daughters, and grandchildren is actually the expression of God flowing through me to those people! That is not what John writes in this text!

What John writes is God is agape love and agape love has its origins in the very heart, the nature, and the character of God the Father, Son, and Spirit! God is in His essential nature holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love. That statement radically changes what John is writing here.

It explains the Creation. God is holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love is why God created the world and put human beings in it. If God is this kind of holy love, it cannot exist alone, or in isolation. This kind of love must have someone to love and someone to love it and His actions in creation give Him a place and a people to release His holy love into!

It explains Free-Will. Unless agape love is free responding to it is not love it is coercion. When God created human beings, He had to make it possible for them to experience His love and that meant they had to be able to accept or reject it! So, love is a free response of our heart to receive and give to God our love.

It explains Redemption. If God had been only law and justice and not holy love, He would have left us in our sins and guilt and shame with no hope of extricating ourselves from what we had done to ourselves through sinning! His law states the soul who sins shall die. But in Jesus we see the love of God motivating Him to come and die for us, to give us His gift of loving life!

It explains the Life Beyond this Life. If God was merely a Creator we would have been born and died and would have been little better than the flowers of the field. We live, we die, and our place remembers us no more. But the fact of God’s love for us in Jesus says this human life is not all there is and we have an opportunity to know God, love God, and live forever with God!

It explains the Demonstration of His Holy Love in Jesus. When we look at the agape love of God revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord, **we see a love that Holds Nothing Back!** It reaches to us over and over. We also see a love that is **Completely Undeserved!**

III. Perfected in His Holy Love of Heaven:

I John 4:17 – 21 “*By this is love perfected in 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 our fear. For fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 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.*”

One of the reasons why I like the ESV so much is right here in this text we are studying this morning. When John writes about the love of God growing in us and through us to one another, the truths he is expounding are expanding the parameters of our understanding of the power of agape love. One of clearest translation issues is found in the words John uses to describe how His holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love matures or comes to completion as we love each other deeply!

The Greek word John used is the word translated accurately “perfected” four times by the ESV, in verses 12, 17, 18a, and 18b: The Greek word is *teliotai*, from the word *telios*, and it carries the connotation of having been made “complete, whole, and in the human senses of the word “perfected.” It is the same word as what Jesus used in Matthew 5:48, when He said, “*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”

That word “perfect love,” does not mean God-like flawless love for each other. It means complete love, mature love, love that is self-starting, and moves to love the other regardless of their performance! It is a verb that is in the perfect indicative passive, and it means to have been perfected and that perfection is presently standing. And remember this is in reference to the holy love of God poured out in you and me by His Spirit.

There are **Four Major Truths** we need to see in this amazing paragraph **about the holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love of God, poured out into us and being brought to perfection in us as we love one another, by His Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence and power:**

Truth #1 – The Love of God Being Perfected in Each of Us for Each other, gives us confidence and holy boldness to stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ at the end of our lives! The Love of God shed abroad in our hearts means that cringing and cowering in fear of anything in life is driven out of us by confidence we feel from His gift of Holy Love! Perfected in the agape of Heaven poured out into my life, brings me to also feel keenly the confident assurance that I am beloved of God, welcomed into His heart and His forever family!

Confidence when we come to Jesus each day to hear His Word as we read Scripture, and confidence when we come to Jesus in prayer and pour out the contents of our hearts and souls to Him in prayer right now as we walk in this world, breeds incredible confidence in us preparing us to stand before Him on Judgment Day when He is seated on His throne judging the world.

Please hear amazing truth from the very depths of your soul. The Lord Jesus Christ who loved you so much that He bore your sins in His body on the Cross long before you ever cared ... The Lord Jesus Christ who came and found you, wooed you, convicted you of your sin, and drew you to deep repentance ... The Lord Jesus who wrapped you in His holy love and saved you from you sins, washed you in His precious blood shed for you on the Cross ... That same Jesus is the one whom you will face when He looks at you from the Great White Throne of Judgment. The love in His eyes will reveal to you the love and grace and mercy He has poured out in your heart!

Truth #2 – The Love of God Being Perfected in Each of Us for Each other, drives our Fear, removes from us our Fear of Torment or Terror in our interpersonal relationships with each other! If we are living in bondage to fears and tormented by fears, we are not being made perfect in His Holy Love! The Greek word for “fearing torment” is the word, *kolasis*, and

it means “to coerce with fear of retribution or chastisement, to bring to another painful torment, the actions of powerful deeds of terrorizing.”

We live in a world system that is tearing apart human relationships everywhere we turn by introducing things that cause us to fear the future, fear one another, and fear those who are across the political aisle from us! The world system is trying to do everything it can to sow fear in our lives, fomenting negative feelings to create fear over COVID vaccines or those who do not vaccinate, those who wear masks or those who choose not to wear masks, and sowing hatred of those who do not see things the way we see them.

The holy, self-emptying love of God poured out into each of our hearts and then released to each other in the body of Christ at Cedar Grove is the antidote to the injection of fears into our hearts. The truth is when we are living in fear, motivated by fear, and separated by those we fear we are already living in the torment fear drives us toward!

What you and I are called to fear is absolutely nothing in the human arena. We are called to fear absolutely nothing that is of this world system of things. We are called to fear the Lord our God with holy reverential fear that motivates us to love God and therefore, love the things and the people God loves. When we revere God with reverential awe and wonder, the only fear that remains promotes healthy relational love with God the Father, the Son, the Spirit!

Truth #3 – The Love of God Being Perfected in Each of Us for Each other, demonstrates that we are Being Made to Be Like Jesus for as He is so are We in this World! As Jesus was loving and deeply gracious and compassionate in this world so are we in this world. As Jesus was gladly, confidently, and deeply engaged in an ongoing communication with the Father, moving into and out of His divine presence freely, so are we in this world, able to engage with the Father God about everything.

The love of God that is in Christ Jesus shed abroad into you and me as His sons and daughters in Christ, teaches us the deep truth that Jesus is the **Restorer** of **Broken Hearts** and **Broken Relationships**. His holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love lived out in the human realm is the only hope for humankind to be redeemed and relationships to be restored!

Truth #4 – The Love of God Being Perfected in Each of Us for Each other, means that we are being prepared to meet the Lord Jesus Christ on His Throne for we have chosen to Love our Brothers and Sisters we can see, enabling us to Better Love God whom we cannot see! Brother John asks and answers a question that demands only one answer: How can we say we love God whom we cannot see when we have said we do not love a brother or sister whom we can see? If we can't or won't do the easier action of love, how can we do the harder actions?

The final truth the Lord has laid on my heart for us this morning is to speak to this amazing confident assurance we have been given by the Lord Spirit to prepare us for the day when we stand before God's Throne. **There is a theological side to our confidence:** That basis of my confidence is **the Faithful Love of God** throughout the ages. **There is a psychological side to our confidence:** **You and I received His love when We Were at Our Worst.** Once I know for certain I am loved even when I am empty-handed, when I was my weakest and most vulnerable,

I am free to have confidence that sets me free from self-doubt and self-condemnation that I somehow don't measure up! I am loved and accepted in the very Presence of God the Almighty, the Most High!

THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN TO THE CHURCH:

17. "Being Made to Be Like Jesus"

I John 4:16-21

Introduction:

We are in a study of the letter of I John to the churches of Asia Minor, written about AD 100 as John neared the end of his life on earth. He wanted to leave behind a detailed message about what it means to **W** _____ with Jesus and **L** _____ the Christian life!

He wrote this letter to **P** _____ the remaining **F** _____ from the teachings of the heretics, Cerinthus and the Gnostics. John is writing with the heart of a pastor who loved his people deeply!

John writes about three themes every Jesus-loving pastor longs to see in the lives of the people they love: **J** _____, **H** _____, and **A** _____!

John writes about these false teachers and false prophets who were turning people away from the faith. He clearly states who and what they are, telling his readers what he thinks of their falsehoods! I John 4:1

John teaches the readers two truths when enabling us to see false teachers and teachings, that are just as true today as they were then:

First, John appeals to the **I** _____ **W** _____ of the Holy Spirit

Second, John appeals to the Scriptures as the **S** _____ of **T** _____

I. Assurance of Salvation #4 – Agape Love for the Believers in Jesus:

I John 3:10, 11, 14, and 16

In the text the word love is agape in the Greek, as John restates what Jesus lived and taught. We are called to love one another with **H** _____, **D** _____ love that is not of human origin. Romans 5:5

This holy love comes to us and lives in us solely by the **G** _____ of God's **G** _____. It is brought into our lives by the Holy Spirit who comes to live in us, creating in us the **F** _____ of His **L** _____, Galatians 5:23

John echoes Jesus' words about agape love being the proof of our discipleship. We will be known as His by His love flowing through us to **O** _____ **A** _____.

I John 3:14, we know we have "crossed over from death to life," the Greek word is metababekamen, meaning, "to change where and how we are living from one place to another place." The world will see we belong to Jesus when they see His love in us but that doesn't mean they will like it or us!

II. It All Centers in Jesus Christ our Lord: I John 4:14 – 16

John testifies to the things that are absolutely essential to you and me knowing we have eternal life in Jesus Christ. I John 4:15

The confession of this truth includes our faith as foundational to what we confess as truth. Christian revelation is the revelation of the love of God to us: II Cor. 5:19.

I John 4:16b is one of the most misunderstood and often misquoted texts in the entire New Testament, "God is love." John doesn't have a human definition in his mind as he writes. His term is God is agape and that changes everything:

It explains **C** _____ ... It explains **F** _____ **-W** _____ ... It explains **R** _____ ... It explains the **L** _____ after this **L** _____ ... It explains the **D** _____ of His love in Jesus

III. Perfected in His Holy Love of Heaven: I John 4:17 – 21

The ESV is the only version that accurately translates the word teliotai, from telios accurately all four times it is used here: Verses 12, 17, 18a, 18b

The term **P** _____ **L** _____ does not mean we are required to love with flawless and God-like love. It means “complete, whole, perfect.”

There are four major truths about holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love poured out in you and me and brought to perfection as we love each other:

Truth #1 – The Love of God perfected in us for each other gives us C _____, B _____
before the judgment seat of Christ

Truth #2 – The Love of God perfected in us for each other D _____ O _____ fear, removes T _____
from our interpersonal relationships

Truth #3 – The Love of God perfected in us for each other demonstrates we are being M _____ to
B L _____ Jesus, for as He is so are we in this world

Truth #4 – The Love of God perfected in us for each other means we are better prepared to stand before
God in love for Him we can't see, because we L _____ P _____ we can see

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. John wrote about three themes in this letter, things that are important to all of us. What are they and why are they important to us today?
2. What is the inner witness of the Spirit and why is it so important that we have it?
3. What is the agape of God and how do we as believers come to have it in our lives? What makes agape so different from other loves? Why is agape a proof that we are saved?
4. There are five things that are explained when we grasp the nature of God when He fills us with His holy love of Heaven. Which one or ones of the five things touched you deeply? Why?
5. The truth is the agape love dwelling in our hearts is the assurance of divine habitation in our lives. John says it is “perfected” in us when we love each other. Why is that so important?
6. What do the words “God is love” really mean? How would you explain to someone who is not yet born of God what the love of Heaven dwelling in the human heart is and does?
7. We ended the message with four major truths about the holy love of God being perfected in our lives. Which of the four really ministered to your heart at your point of need? Why?
8. Read together aloud Romans 12:9 – 21 and I Corinthians 13:4 – 13 and discuss insights you have about the Spirit’s work in pouring the love of God into our hearts. What are the character traits the love of God dwelling in us creates?
9. Do you know for certain, with confident assurance that you have been invaded by the love of God? How do you know His love has flowed into your life? What is the evidence you see?