

Sermon Notes

Series on First John
First John 4:7-21
“Provable Love”

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Introduction: A third attack by Jesus’ enemies involved the question about the greatest commandment. A religious scribe, a teacher of the Mosaic Law asked Jesus this question: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” (Mark 12:28; cf. Luke 10:25-28). The rabbis counted 613 commands in the Mosaic Law, 365 positive and 248 negative. They acknowledged that not all of them were equally important and debated as to the so-called ‘heavy’ ones versus the ‘light’ commands. They tried to formulate principles that helped to understand the rest of the Mosaic Law which explains this scribe’s question trying to get Jesus to tell him what command He considered most important. “The scribe desired Jesus to indicate a principle of classification.” [D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark, A Portrait of the Servant, Moody Press, p. 303]. Jesus’ response is to the point: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart....* (v30) and then went beyond what this teacher of the Law had asked and added a second; the scribe had requested one commandment but Jesus gave him two. *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these*” (v.31, NIV). *Love* for a ‘neighbor’ in Leviticus 19:18 grows out of love for God in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and is basically inseparable. Generally speaking, Jews regarded only their fellow Jews as a *neighbor* but Jesus taught that a *neighbor* is anyone with whom a person has dealings (read Luke 10:25-27). *Love* was often discussed by the scribes of Jesus’ day who believed that *love* held a central place in the Mosaic Law even as *love* holds a central place in our thoughts as well, such as in songs, novels, movies and television. Who doesn’t want to hear those all too important word, ‘I love you’ over and over again? The Apostle John uses this word *love* repeatedly in First John chapters 2-4. In fact, this word *love* is used in 1 John 4:7-21, in the New American Version, 27 times in different forms as he seeks to reveal provable *love*; *love* that is perfect, complete and fulfilling. Structurally, 1 John 4:7-5:5 comprises the 3rd major division of John’s epistle. In 2:7-11, John stated that *love* is one of the signs of a believer’s fellowship with God and in 3:13-24 John demonstrated that the conflict between *love* and hate indicates a believer’s living faith. In 4:7-21 John presents a comprehensive treatment of the nature of *love*, perhaps one of the greatest treatise’s on *love* in the New Testament, along with 1 Corinthians 13. Dr. Wiersbe reminds us that ‘this is the third of three expressions in John’s writings that help us understand the nature of God: “God is spirit” (John 4:24); “God is light” (1 John 1:5); and “God is love.” None of these is a *complete* revelation of God, of course, and it is wrong to separate them.” [Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Real; A New Testament Study, 1 John, David C. Cook, p. 138.] Review: In the previous 6 verses (4:1-6), the Apostle John focused on every believer having a mental keenness for right doctrine as well as a sensitive heart to discern false teaching. But God really knows human nature; He really knows us! God is aware that we are sometimes harsh and intolerant of others; sometimes refusing to *love*, even though we have right doctrine and great knowledge about the Bible (read what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8:1). God made us like Himself with the capacity to *love* and the longing to be *loved*. Twice in our text John writes that eternal principle that *God is love* (4:8 & 16). Previously John had taught about *love*; 2:10 & 3:11. In

today's text, the Apostle John reminds us that we must never be allowed an excuse for lack of *love* for our fellow believers as he emphasizes *love's* source, foundation and influence. Note also that the reciprocal phrase, *love one another* is used 3 times in this passage; 7, 11, & 12.

#1 LOVE'S SOURCE, 1 John 4:7-12

Verse 7: Notice the opening word John employs to express his own *love* for his readers, namely, *beloved* (cf. the use of *beloved* also in 2:7; 3:21 & 4:11). Stott writes that John practices what he preaches! [Stott, John R. W., The Epistles of John, Tyndale Bible Commentaries, Eerdmans, p. 160]. John's appeal to *love one another* is a mutual *love* grounded in God's *love*. It resumes the believer's obligation to *love* which John wrote about in 3:18 & will restate in 4:11. The Apostle John uses a reciprocal pronoun, *one another*, as Christian *love* must flow in both directions. The Greek present tense of *love* calls for believers to be characterized by *love* while the reciprocal pronoun insists that it be mutual *love*—*love* that flows in both directions. And as we have stated before in our study of First John, the Greek word that John employs throughout this little epistle is $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\epsilon$, *agape*, a unique New Testament word that describes unselfish *love* that seeks the best for others; self-giving *love* that gives without demanding or expecting any repayment. It's the God kind of *love*. This is not romantic *love*; we are called upon by God to choose to *love* others. In 1 John 3:16 we have a defining statement on *agape love*: *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* *Agape love* is the believer's choice to sacrifice himself/herself for another and to give up our rights to benefit another. Van Gorder quotes from another author who explains *agape love* this way: "it involves mind and will, and is seen in the deliberate resolve to do others good regardless of our feelings toward them or theirs toward us." [Van Gorder, Paul R., In The Family, Radio Bible Class, p. 135]. This exhortation to *love one another* is grounded in doctrinal truth which is why John states that *love* is related to the very nature of God. Dr. Hiebert's comment affirms the source of this *love* as he writes: "The use of the definite article with 'love' [η $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$, *e agape*] places 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.) [Hiebert, D. Edmond, "An Exposition of First John," "Bibliotheca Sacra," January-March 1990, p. 71]. But, not only is God the source and origin of all *love*, *God is love* in His very nature, in His very being. He is *love* at the deepest level; not part of who He is—it is who He is. By way of implication, because *love is from God*, *love does not come from anywhere else*. John identifies *love's* starting place as the new birth; our divine birthing precedes our loving. Dr. Orr's comment is excellent: God's *love* "is an activity of the implanted eternal life, and is therefore a proof that the live is present." [Orr, R. O., The Letters of John in A New Testament Commentary, Zondervan, p. 617]. Before we believers can express love, we must have a nature that *loves* and that nature comes at the moment of salvation when we are *born* again; *born of God*. *Love*, like faith, is a product of God's Holy Spirit. John writes that *love* flows from God; the Greek text uses the preposition $\epsilon\kappa$, *ek*, which means "out of" to denote that this kind of *love* flows *from* Him. He is the source and the origin of *love* and all *love*

derives from Him in such a way that the connection with the source remains unbroken. John is asserting this principle that those who are *born of God and know God* act lovingly. John asserts positively; *everyone who loves is born of God and knows God* to identify the true believer. If *love* finds its source in God, then we, who claim to be *born of God* and claim to *know God*, ought to be *loving others*. *Love* defines our character and is the result of the new birth. When the Bible uses this particular Greek word for *know* [γινωσκω, ginosko] that John uses, it means more than an intellectual *knowledge* or understanding. For example, Genesis 4:1 Et. ali, uses it to describe the intimate union of husband and wife. The present tense Greek verb, *know*, points to our daily experience of *knowing* God more intimately. John earlier had written about this matter of *knowing* and perceiving truth (read 1 John 2:3-5). Let me add one more comment that the phrase, *everyone who loves is born of God* does not mean that every *loving* deed can come only from a believer. The unsaved often display acts of *love*.

Verse 8: Here the Apostle then makes a powerful deduction; *The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love*. He begins with the other side of the coin, the negative. The *loveless* Christian who claims to have been *born of God* and *know God* is actually denying their spiritual parentage. *Love* has its source in God and when there is failure to *love* there's indication that that person is not connected to the source of *love* or else the connection has perhaps come unplugged! The absence of *love* in a believer's life is proof positive that he/she does not *know* God. My home was built in 1988 and we're in the process of replacing the electrical receptacles because sometimes when we plug something into a wall socket, it immediately falls out! It becomes unplugged! It's no longer connected to the source. John is saying that a *loveless* Christian is not connected to the One who is the source of all *love*. *Loving* behavior is as much a sign of the new birth as is righteousness (read 1 John 2:29). Sometimes what a believer *knows* in his/her head has unfortunately never gotten into the heart! John makes a great theological affirmation, that *God is love*; it's part of His nature. John had made two other statements concerning the nature of God; that *God is light* (1 John 1:5) and that God is spirit (John 4:24) teaching two different aspects of God's nature. In the first chapter of the Bible we read *let there be light and there was light* (Genesis 1:3). But I want us to notice that in our passage, God doesn't say here 'let there be *love* and there was *love*.' Nowhere in the Bible! Why? *Love* can only be communicated; it cannot be created. To say that *God is love* does not mean that '*love* is God;' the two nouns are not interchangeable. Greek grammar makes that impossible since the definite Greek article occurs with God [ὁ θεός, o theos]. Someone has wisely written that '*love* does not define God but God defines *love*.' And the supreme sacrifice of *love* was shown at the cross of Calvary; that the sinless Son of God, God in the flesh, would choose to die for us, for the sins of the world (John 16:9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 & 1 John 1:29). As my DTS classmate writes, "If in His character God is a 'God of love' (II Cor. 13:11), then we would expect one of His cardinal characteristics to be 'the love of God' (II Cor. 13:14). We can say 'God is love' (1 Jn. 4:8), but we cannot reverse the phrase as if it were an equivalent identification and say 'love is God.' The ocean *is* blue, but not all blue is ocean. As a color, blue may characterize the ocean in its entirety, but more things are blue than just the ocean. Even so, love characterizes God through out His being, but believers may also have love—and they are not the same as God." [Townsend, James A., The Epistles of John & Jude, David C. Cook, p. 48].

Verse 9: We can understand the words, *by this*, as ‘in our case.’ John writes about God’s provable *love* which He demonstrated at Calvary (read also John 1:14-18; 3:16 & Titus 3:3-8). *The love of God was manifested*; in the Greek [εφανερωθη, ephanerothe], a favorite term of John’s, which means “to come out in the open, to be made public” (cf. 1 John 1:2). It’s the opposite of hidden! When Jesus Christ came to earth, God’s message of *love* reached its zenith. John is here revealing what *love* is and what it means. *Love* is not only defined by the sacrifice of Jesus; it is also defined by the giving of our heavenly Father as it was a sacrifice for Him to *send* the Second Person of the trinity. This is God’s redemptive *love* shown in the incarnation; Jesus’ birth in the manger. John states two ways that God’s *love* is proven: **(1)** the first way that God proved His love was by *sending His only begotten Son*. This was not God’s response to our *love* for God, because He took the initiative in our salvation as Paul expresses in Romans 5:8. The language in which the Apostle John wrote, Greek, has what is called a perfect tense which he uses here—*God has sent His only begotten Son*. This tense points to the continuing impact of that *sending* as we continue to enjoy the benefits of this *sending*, underscoring the fact that the results of *God sending His Son* are permanent. God’s offer and promise of salvation will not be withdrawn—amazing grace! Why did the God of the universe willingly *send His only Son* to die for us? **(a)** God suffered the death of His Son because we were alone, separated from Him, and He wanted to remove our aloneness; **(b)** God’s heart is rich with *love* and compassion which is why He went to incomprehensible lengths to restore the fellowship that was interrupted by sin; **(c)** Christ willingly took a robe of flesh; **(d)** suffered the pain of humiliation and rejection; **(e)** died a criminal’s death; **(f)** and in becoming sin for us, experienced the aching void of separation from His Father; **(g)** not only to remove the penalty for our sin but also to restore the relationship and remove our aloneness. Response: Are we moved with awe and gratefulness for such a loving and compassionate God? We often sing the praise song; “**I’m alive** and well Your Spirit lives within me, because You died and rose again. Amazing love; how can it be? That You my King should die for me! Amazing love, I know it’s true; it’s my joy to honor You, in all I do; I honor You.” There’s much more about John’s use of this unique phrase, *His only begotten Son*: In the Greek Bible, the order of words is different than the English; it is literally, ‘that His Son, the only begotten, God has sent into the world.’ This places the object, *His only begotten Son* in the emphatic position. Also, this is the only place in John’s epistle where Jesus is called *God’s only begotten Son* although this title is used in John 1:14, 18 & 3:16, 18. Luke uses it often of an only child, Luke 7:12; 8:42 & 9:38 and the writer to the Hebrews uses it in 11:17 of Isaac’s unique relationship with Abraham. This special term means Jesus has a Sonship that is unique/*only*; and *begotten* means that Jesus and the Father are of the same substance, the same essential being. Dr. Wiersbe writes; “It means ‘unique, the only one of its kind.’ The fact that God *sent* His Son into the world is one evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. Babies are not *sent* into the world from some other place; they are *born* into the world. As the perfect man, Jesus was born into the world, but as the eternal Son, He was *sent* into the world. [Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Real; A New Testament Study, 1 John, David C. Cook, p. 142]. One more thought on verse 9; the last phrase, *so that we might live through Him*—that’s eternal life today and for all eternity. The Greek aorist subjunctive verb, *might live*, indicates the gift of *life* as the intended result of Christ’s coming to earth; God’s purpose

in *sending His only begotten Son* was to give us *life*. It is something of a paradox that Christ had to die in order for us to *live*—Jesus died for us (read Galatians 2:20). All believers were once spiritually dead, as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:4-6. Jesus died *we might live through Him* (v.9); *for Him* (2 Corinthians 5:15); & *with Him* (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

Verse 10 reminds us again that God took the initiative in *loving*. The Greek literally states, ‘that He Himself loved us.’ Bennett adds, His *love* “was original and spontaneous, the source of all other love.” [Bennett, W. H., The General Epistles, James, Peter, John and Jude, p. 312]. Did you catch John’s negative—we didn’t *love* Him first! Mankind all around the world isn’t in *love* with Jesus! Fallen human beings just don’t naturally decide to *love* God. Instead, God took the initiative in *loving* us and revealing His *love*. Again, the Apostle John is affirming the source of *love*—God! The Greek aorist tense of the verb *loved*, looks back to Christ’s first coming. Here John reveals the (2) second way that God proved His *love* for us was by atoning for *our sins*. God proved His *love* for us by being the *propitiation for our sins*, the 2nd time in John’s first epistle that he used this term; read 1 John 2:2. Hiebert writes, “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.” [Hiebert, D. Edmond, “An Exposition of First John,” “Bibliotheca Sacra,” January-March 1990, p. 76]. *Propitiation* comes from a Latin word meaning ‘that which renders one favorably disposed toward another;’ ‘to appease or satisfy a god.’ *Propitiation* is something God does to make it possible for us to be forgiven and have a righteous standing before God. We’re sinners condemned to hell! But Jesus, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21 became sin for us. God the Father *sent* His Son on a mission. He didn’t send an angel but *His only begotten Son* to be our Savior; to deal with *our sins*. No! Not to merely deal with our sin, but He sent His Son to **die** for *our sins* revealing God’s great *love* for us. Again! “Amazing love; how can it be? That You my King would die for me!” He pardoned me; forgave me; cleansed me; restored me to a right relationship with Him. “Amazing love; how can it be?” Here’s a quote from James Montgomery Boice that expresses so well all that God has done for us: “If God had merely sent Jesus to teach us about Himself, that would have been wonderful enough. It would have been far more than we deserved. If God had sent Jesus simply to be our example, that would have been good too and would have had some value....But the wonderful thing is that God did not stop with these but rather sent His son, not merely to teach or to be our example, but to die the death of a felon, that He might save us from sin.”

Verse 11: For the 6th and final time, John addressed his readers as *beloved*; the endearing term *little children* is employed in the very last verse of this epistle, 5:21. Again, God chose us (John 15:16). Having set forth in writing the nature of redeeming *love*, John concludes this section with an obligation for us; for once we have experienced God’s amazing grace so undeserved because of *our sins*, how could we ever go back to a life of *lovelessness* and selfishness. In the Greek text this is a first class conditional Greek sentence; *if God so loved us...and He does; He really does!* And because *God so loved us*, then...we have an obligation. A mandate *to love one another!* ‘The verb *we ought* [Greek is *οφειλομεν*,

opheilomen] denotes not external compulsion but the 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*.' [Hiebert, D. Edmond, "An Exposition of First John," "Bibliotheca Sacra," January-March 1990, pp. 76-77.] Van Gorder adds these practical thoughts; "Yet His love operates *through* us to our fellowmen. Malachi Taylor said, 'God's love is a large treasure house to draw from. Every brother ought to feel safe with another brother because he is of God, knowing that this large love will be exercised through him.'" [Van Gorder, Paul R., *In The Family*, Radio Bible Class, p. 139]. What about those who don't *love* us? Am I to *love* him/her? Out of obligation and appreciation for all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, I am to *love* that person who isn't deserving of my *love* no matter what he/she has done. If we *love* only attractive people and only people who *love* us, we haven't learned! The experience of *loving* unlovely people reminds us of who we once were and are. If we've been to the cross and seen God's immeasurable and unmerited *love* that He displayed there for me, we must not be selfish, *loveless*, and insensitive to others.

Verse 12: John's announcement in the first phrase, *no one has seen God at any time*, (this same expression occurs in John 1:18 but with a different Greek verb) is somewhat unexpected yet seems to be an essential part of John's argument against the false teachers, especially the Gnostics who placed emphasis on their so-called 'mystical experiences' or 'visions.' Anyone then or today claiming to have *seen God* the Father is speaking from their own imagination (read 1 Timothy 1:17 & John 4:24). Perhaps John states these words, *no one has seen God at any time*, because, while we cannot *see God* physically, John wants us to know that there is a way that believers can have a *knowledge* of Him (cf. vv.7, 8, & 16). The verb that translates *has seen God*, is τεθεαται, tetheatai, (do you see our English word theater?) in the Greek and emphasizes in the perfect tense used here, an intimate gazing on the very face of God by the one who has intimate fellowship with Him. What Moses saw on Mount Sinai in Exodus 33:22-23 and also the Prophet Isaiah in his temple vision of Isaiah 6:1-7 were revelations through which God made Himself visible to their eyes (technically referred to as theophanies). Only a real nut would claim to *have seen God* but as John adds, by *loving* others, believers show to the world that God lives in us. *His love* and the invisible God become visible to others when *we love one another* (3rd time this reciprocal phrase is used in John). We were made for *love* and we have no higher calling than to *love one another*. Wow! We make God visible! The invisible God becomes visible in our *love*. This aim enables the unsaved to see our calling! Even the meanest, hate filled and hardest-hearted person can be changed when believers show this kind of *love*. **Illustration:** A Chinese pastor related the story how Christianity had finally taken hold in his area of China. Numerous western missionaries had spent many years in his territory with little success in getting converts. However, when one of the Chinese villagers was diagnosed with a very severe skin cancer that required a skin transplant, things began to change. The only person willing to donate the needed skin was the white missionary. As that person's entire family, friends and other neighbors saw that very visible large "white" patch of skin on that Oriental person; God was made visible, trumpeting the *love of God*, resulting in many converts to Christ. That's what the Apostle John means when he writes; *His love is perfected in us. Loving one another*

is evidence that *God abides in us*, or He ‘dwells’ in us. I like what Dr. Wiersbe has done in his commentary as he traces God’s *abiding* or ‘dwelling’ places in the Bible. Here is just a summary: ‘In the beginning, God had fellowship with man in a personal way (Gen. 3:8), but sin broke that fellowship....One of the key words in the Book of Genesis is *walked*. God walked with men, and men walked with God. Enoch (Gen. 5:22), Noah (6:9), and Abraham walked with God (17:1; 24:40). By the time of the events in Exodus, a change had taken place: God did not simply *walk* with men, He *lived*, or dwelt, with them. God’s commandment to Israel was, “And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” Ex. 25:8). The first of those sanctuaries was the Tabernacle. When Moses dedicated it, the glory of God came down and moved into the tent (40:33-35)....Unfortunately, the nation sinned and God’s glory departed (1 Sam. 4:21). But God used Samuel and David to restore the nation; and Solomon built God a magnificent temple...and God’s glory returned (1 Kings 8:1-11). Again, Israel sinned and God’s glory departed (Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 11:22, 23). But God’s glory/presence returned in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Today, God dwells/*abides* in believer’s bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19). [Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Real; A New Testament Study, 1 John, David C. Cook, Pp.146-147]. Also, God is made visible when we show the *love of God*, which is what the Apostle John means when he writes; *His love is perfected in us*, or is carried out to completion or fully developed. The Greek word is τετελειωμενη, *teteleiomene*, which John used earlier in 2:5 to write about the believer’s obedience to God’s commands. This is not teaching that believer’s achieve sinless perfection by showing *love*. Hiebert’s comments makes it clear that we don’t become *perfect* in the sense of sinless: “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 has been brought to its intended goal in believers’ lives through consistent practice of loving one another.” [Hiebert, D. Edmond, “An Exposition of First John,” “Bibliotheca Sacra,” January-March 1990, Pp.78-79].

#2 LOVE’S FOUNDATION, 1 John 4:13-15

This section is like a doctrinal confession; it contains words that a believer would verbalize about Jesus. John’s emphasis is not on some emotional high or feeling but on the words that a Christian makes about Christ. In verses 13-15 the Apostle John presents three foundations of this *love* in action; about God living in us: (1) Giving the Holy Spirit (v.13); (2) testifying (v.14) & (3) confessing v.15).

Verse 13: By beginning with the words *by this*, John connects the thought of this verse with the previous. Here’s proof positive—we *know*. This is the 2nd time John mentions *God abiding* (vv. 12, 13 & will again mention in vv.15 & 16); here reciprocal as well as in vv. 15 & 16. John states that our *abiding* is not one sided; *we abide in Him and He in us*. Some Christians only hope that they are saved but here the Apostle John writes that a believer can say with utmost confidence, I *know* that I’m saved and will go to heaven. And the assurance that we are saved and will go to heaven is founded in what God has *given* every believer; (1) *He has given us of His Spirit*. This is the Holy Spirit who lives within every Christian confirming our relationship with the invisible God (read Romans 8:16). Three observations: (a) The presence of His Spirit is how He *abides* in us; (b) It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us that makes it possible to *know that we abide in Him*; (c) It is only by the

work of the Holy Spirit that we come both to believe in Jesus Christ and *love* others. God's Holy Spirit is the source of our *love* just as He is the source of our obedience (read 1 John 3:23-24).

Verse 14: John uses the same word *seen* as in verse 12, but here refers to those disciples and followers of Christ who were eyewitnesses to His life and ministry (John spoke about being eyewitnesses in 1:3). This verse is the gospel in a nutshell; the very essence of the gospel truth. John affirms that the message about Jesus Christ and His *love* is grounded in their own personal *testimonies* because they had actually *seen* and been with Jesus. They saw Him accomplish His purpose in coming; *to be the Savior*. And what they saw produced within them a conviction, a burning zeal to tell the story of Jesus' and His love. (Song: "I Love to Tell the Story.") The story of *the Savior* is the story that the whole *world* needs to hear; our friends and neighbors; Muslims, Jews, atheists—that's one reason for our 18th Annual Mission's Conference last weekend. And we too can *testify*, that is, give a witness to the truth that Jesus has saved us. Believers ought not to forget that Jesus was *sent* to save *the world* (read John 3:16—the *love* of God for *the world*). The Greek perfect tense ἀπεσταλκεν, *apestalken*, places the emphasis more on the purpose and result of His being *sent* than on simply the historical event. (2) The 2nd foundational principle John states is *testifying* which gives further confirmation of God's *love* which is grounded in the *testimony* of the apostles. One more note specifically on the phrase *the Savior of the world*, a phrase that occurs only here and in John 4:42.

Verse 15: The (3) 3rd foundational principle that John states is *confessing* from the heart doctrinal truth. It isn't a matter of deciding between *love* or doctrinal truth; believers must have both. *Confessing* the doctrinal truth that *Jesus is the Son of God* is not the only condition for *abiding in Him*, but is one evidence. That word *confess* means to be in agreement with God about who Jesus is; God in the flesh. Mormons don't believe the doctrinal truth that Jesus is God in the flesh, nor do Muslims, nor atheists and many other false teachings. I hope you are more sure than ever of your personal *confession* and that God living within desires that you live a life of *love* toward others. *Confessing that Jesus is the Son of God* is just one evidence that *God is abiding in us*. This commentator writes this about the scope of the Greek 3rd class conditional sentence—*whoever confesses...* 'literally, "he who if he confesses" 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...denoting a personal acceptance of the reality being *confessed*.' [Hiebert, D. Edmond, "An Exposition of First John," "Bibliotheca Sacra," January-March 1990, p.81]. "Martin Luther said, 'if you had knocked at the door of my heart anytime before my conversion and had asked: 'Who dwells here?' I would have answered that no one dwells here but Martin Luther! And if I had opened the door, and you had come in, you would have seen a raw-headed monk with a shaven crown and a hair shirt, with two tables of stone under his pillow and a knotted scourge hanging beside his bed. But if you were to knock at the door of my heart tonight, I would answer that Martin Luther no longer lives here: Jesus Christ...lives here.'" [Quoted by Townsend, James A., *The Epistles of John & Jude*, David C. Cook, p. 53.]

#3 LOVE'S FRUITS, 1 John 4:16-21

Verse 16: In this final section, John writes about our response to God and His *love* and it is true that people respond to *the love of God* differently. John reminds us that it is one thing to *know* (intimate *knowledge*) and *believe the love which God has for us* but it's another to learn to *love* others and to *abide/remain* (intimate fellowship) in that *love* ourselves. The dual themes of loving and *believing* are intertwined in this section. What would it take to make you stop *believing* that *God loves you*? In Romans 8:35-39 Paul asserts that nothing could stop him. John writes that God (1) *loved us* and (2) *God is love*. Notice that John again repeats that phrase, *God is love* (1 John 4:8 & 16); the only restatement in the New Testament declaring the essence of God's nature. Smalley writes, "The stages of John's thought at this point have now emerged clearly. Faith (acknowledging Jesus as God's Son, v 15; and trusting in the love which God has for us, v 16a) leads to mutual indwelling between God and the believer. Such a personal relationship is consequently expressed in and perpetuated by 'living in love' (v 16b). The believer's love, for God and for other people (or for God in other people, cf. v 12), is to be active and sustained." [Smalley, Stephen S., 1, 2, 3 John, Word Biblical Commentary, p. 256]. When we have this intimate relationship of *abiding in God and God abiding in us*, we will be immersed in God's *love* and as a result *God's love* will permeate every place we go and with everyone we meet. I like how Dr. Wiersbe illustrates this intensity and intimacy of *love*. "A man standing in the greeting card section of a store was having trouble picking out a card. The clerk asked if she could help, and he said:" "Well, it's our 40th wedding anniversary, but I can't find a card that says what I want to say. You know, 40 years ago it wouldn't have been any problem picking out a card, because back then I thought I knew what love was. But we love each other so much more today; I just can't find a card that says it!" [Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Real; A New Testament Study, 1 John, David C. Cook, p. 151].

Verse 17: John concludes that it is this kind of mutual *love* relationship with Christ that will give us confidence and hope when we stand before God at the judgment seat of Christ, the Bema Seat. We don't have to fear that day if we've shown *love to one another*; but look out if we've been selfish, bitter, hate filled, harsh and hard-hearted toward others. John doesn't use the Greek word that can also be translated *perfected* yet emphasizes maturity but uses the Greek word *τελειωται*, *teleiotai*, with the idea that *love* is rendered complete—*love* becomes what God intends for it to be. It also will prepare us for that *day of judgment*. It is at *the day of judgment* when the works of believers will be evaluated (read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10 & Romans 14:10-12). Unbelievers will not be there; only believers. When *God's love* reaches *perfection with us*, we will have no *fear*, indicating that our relationship to God is correct and we'll come before the Judge of all the universe not with terror but full assurance of having this intimate relationship with Christ. Note that in 4:12 John writes that *God's love* reaches *perfection in us*; indicating a correct relationship with others so that we don't act selfishly or with hate. Also, the comparative phrase, *because as He is, so also are we*, marks a likeness in our character with God even though we remain in *the world*. Perhaps the Apostle John was comparing God's *love* with our *love*.

Verse 18: John introduces the strong word *fear*. *Love* is the antidote to *fear*; *love* and *fear* are mutually exclusive in their nature. The Greek word for *fear* is *φοβος*, *phobos* (*phobia*) and basically means fright; that which involves torment and not the reverential *fear* for God. It is

fear that is the opposite of *confidence* on the day of judgment. John adds that *perfect love casts out fear* because *fear* and *punishment* go together. The *loveless* Christian feels guilty and fears standing before God at the Judgment Seat perhaps subconsciously if not consciously. His/her guilty conscience *punishes* him/her. We can illustrate this principle in the marriage relationship for one that is free of *fear* is the kind of relationship that has a mutual trust and total acceptance of the mate. *Love* declares open season on *fear*. *Fear* and *love* fight! Either *fear* wins or *love* wins. John demands that we kick *fear* out of our life—*cast out fear* whenever it arises. The Greek noun *punishment* occurs only here and in Matthew 25:46 in the New Testament with the root meaning of “pruning” which came to mean the process of *punishing*. The phrase, *the one who fears* is unusual and pictures a person who is habitually *fearful* and as a result, *God’s love is not perfected*.

Verse 19: The Apostle John has written about the future in verses 16-18 and now here he writes about our present experiences. Simply stated! Our everyday experience of relating to others mirrors Christ's *perfect love*—our *love* comes from Him. Does it really matter whether we *love others*? Yes, and so in the closing two verses, John addresses the potential excuses for not *loving one another*. Spurgeon wrote: “Every man that ever was saved had to come to God not as a lover of God, but as a sinner, and then believe in God’s love to him as a sinner.” Spurgeon also wrote: “I have sometimes noticed that, in addressing Sunday school children, it is not uncommon to tell them that the way to be saved is to love Jesus, which is not true. The way to be saved for man, woman, or child is to trust Jesus for the pardon of sin, and then, trusting Jesus, love comes as a fruit. Love is by no means the root. Faith alone occupies that place.”

Verse 20: This *perfect love that casts out fear* also *casts out hatred* of others. God induced *love* produces *love for one another*. John is citing a hypothetical case because no one who *loves God* in John’s congregation or among believers today is going to stand up and tell the whole world something like this; ‘I hate so and so!’ Hiebert adds, “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 measure by outward feelings.’ [Hiebert, D. Edmond, “An Exposition of First John,” “Bibliotheca Sacra,” January-March 1990, p. 87].

Verse 21: John is setting forth how the world can measure the validity of our faith for it is measured by our *love for one another* which is what Jesus taught in John 13:34-35 & Mark 12:30-31. Some commentators believe that John's substitution of the word *brother* for neighbor indicates that John was thinking of Jesus’ teaching in John 13:34 & 15:12.

Conclusion: Note: It is my prayer that these printed notes will encourage serious Bible students to do further study on this passage. If you find any typos, errors or have any questions, please contact me. Since these notes are now available on our website, www.gcc-am.org, your assistance in making corrections is truly appreciated. Thank you. Pastor John A. Eastman