

# Love Perfected

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Text: I John 2:3 – 6; 4:11 – 21

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his 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. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

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. 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.

## Introduction:

We are reaching the end of this letter. John is drawing his arguments to a conclusion. He has been describing what true life in Christ is like; what it means to be in fellowship with the Father and the Son; what it means to walk in the light;

what it means to walk as God's child. We have almost completed the second cycle of conditions which is but a repetition of the first: (1) We must renounce sin, (2) We must walk in obedience, (3) We must renounce the world, (4) We must walk in love, and (5) We must keep the faith. These ideas have resurfaced again and again throughout our study. We are now concluding what is perhaps most central to John's teaching: The perfection or completion of God's love in our lives.

This is the reason we reread the passage from chapter 2. While studying chapter two we touched on this idea only lightly, then we touched on it again when we looked 4: 7-12. Now that we have seen all of the passages where it appears, I want to try to summarize what it means for us. What does John mean when he speaks of God's love being perfected in us? What are the signs or the evidence that it has been?

## **I. The Perfection of God's Love**

Four times over I John speaks of God's love being perfected in us. We have read all of the passages where the words "love" and "perfected" are associated. Now let us try to understand what John is trying to communicate by the association of these two words. The first obstacle that we need to get over is the way we understand the word "perfect". For English speakers perfect is an absolute state; it is something that cannot be improved upon. This being the case, and humans being the imperfect beings that we are, it is hard for us to imagine anything in this life as having reached a state of perfection. This is the reason we need to look at the word that is translated "perfected" and think about some alternative translations. The basic meaning of the word is to reach an intended goal. In this sense, for example, the adult is the "perfection" of the child, or harvest is the "perfection" of the planting. We do not expect children, or even adolescents to be fully mature persons. We understand that human development takes time. There is a whole process of physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth that must take place before a child reaches his full human potential. It is this goal of reaching that potential that encourages us to nurture and educate our children.

No farmer or gardener hopes to eat the fruit of his labor the day after he plants his crop. The seed must first germinate, then the plant must grow to maturity before it can bear a harvest, but it is planted with this goal in mind. In this sense the harvest is the planting perfected. The goal has been reached.

This is what John means when he says God's love has been perfected in us. He means that God, who is love, has shown his love to us in Jesus Christ, whom he sent to be the Savior of the world. He has done this with a purpose in mind. Just as the farmer has a goal in mind when he sows his crop, so God has a goal, a purpose in view when he extends his love to us in Jesus Christ. His goal is that we might be forgiven of our sins and come to new life, a life like that of Christ that is governed by love; a life lived in relationship or fellowship with him. When this happens then we can say: "God's love has achieved its goal; it has done its work." John makes it clear that God not only has a goal for the world as a whole, but a goal for each of us as individuals. "God so loved the world that whosoever", that is, whoever responds to that love in faith might come into a saving relationship with him, and have his life transformed.

Once we understand what God is trying to achieve in us, life makes more sense. In fact, until we do we are at cross purposes with him. Instead of receiving his grace and responding to his love and being transformed by it, we are trying to achieve our own goals and wondering why when we do we still have the impression that we have not really achieved the goal of our life. We will never have that satisfaction until God, who created us, loves us, and redeemed us by the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ achieves his goal in us, and that goal as we have already stated is that we might be transformed by his love.

Having understood the meaning of "perfected" love, we can now once again look at the passages where John speaks of it and the specific signs that he gives of its existence. When we do, we will find that there are three clear indicators that God's love has achieved its goal in us. First, it produces a quiet and loving obedience to the Lord, Jesus Christ. Secondly, it makes us loving towards others, and finally, it takes away our fear of death and judgment.

## II. Signs of Perfection

“Whoever keeps his word”, John writes, can have the assurance that God’s love has been perfected, has achieved its goal in him. Jesus said: “If you love me keep my commandments.” The kind of obedience of which he is speaking is an obedience born of loving trust. It is not the begrudging obedience given by fear to a tyrant. It is rather, that quiet and easy obedience that comes from knowing that the one asking for it desires our best; that his commandments are not grievous, but gracious. It is an obedience born of intimate relationship. “We love him”, the text says, “because he first loved us.” Having received that love; having come to know the one who loves us, our one overwhelming desire is to please him. His ways are best. All that he asks of us, he asks for our good. So the first sign that God’s love has found a place in us; that it has achieved its goal in us, is a quiet contentment in pleasing the one who loved us with an everlasting love.

The second sign that God’s love has done its work in us is that we love one another. We have spoken often of this in traversing this Epistle, because John speaks often of it. We can summarize what he has to say with the last two verses of the text we read at the beginning: “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” (I John 4: 20-21).

It is impossible that we should know the love of God in Jesus Christ and not show that love in the way we treat others. When God’s love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, when we come to know God’s grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ we are forever changed. We cannot be hateful, selfish, and unforgiving towards others when God has been gracious, loving and forgiving towards us. God’s love has nothing to do with our worthiness as objects of his love. He loved us when we were yet sinner, still his enemies. So our love has nothing to do with the worthiness of others. We do not distribute our love selectively to those who merit it, but like the Good Samaritan, we give freely to those who need our help without consideration of who they are. This kind of love is a gift. It is not

something we create or develop, but rather God's love perfected in us. This is the kind of person God wants us to be. It is the goal that he set out to achieve in us when he sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

The final sign of the completion of love is the banishment of fear; not the banishment of all fear, but specifically, the banishment of the fear of death and judgment. This is our greatest fear, and it is specifically this fear that Christ came into the world to deliver us from. This is what we read in Hebrews 2:14 – 15:

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

By this, we are told, we may know that God's love has reached its goal in our lives; by the fact that facing judgment we have boldness. We have boldness as we come to face God as judge, not because of any confidence in ourselves, but because God's love has reached its goal. God's love has so assured our hearts that he is for us; that he has sent Christ to be our Savior; that we know we have nothing to fear. If we listened to our own heart, our own conscience, it would condemn us, but God is greater than our heart. Once we have come to know his love in Jesus Christ, we know that nothing can ever separate us from it.