

What God's Love Does to Believers

1 John 4:17-21

God's love transforms the believer. The miraculous change made in a person's life when they accept Jesus Christ can only be attributed to a love that is superior to any love found on earth; this love is heavenly. Over the nearly 100 years (which was an EXTREMELY long life in that day) of John's existence, he had observed many lives that were completely turned around because of the love of God that is found only in Christ. Now as he begins to present, again, this love of God, he is basing it a maturity that produces a confidence in that love. John's first observation is found in his own life. John is different than he was when he began this journey over 60 years ago. He has outlived all of the other apostles. He has lived to see the Romans expand their empire into the furthest portions of Europe and London was founded. In 66 AD John knows that Israel has declared war on Rome and the Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed according to the words of Christ (Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6). The city is burned to the ground by the Roman army when Titus marched on Jerusalem in 70 AD; Israel no longer exists. The "Colosseum" in Rome is constructed and the martyrdom of Christians and the battles of gladiators to the death become the main source of entertainment to Roman citizens. All of this has happened and yet John writes of loving people because God loves them. This hardly sounds like the man who at one time wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the people of Samaria (Luke 9:54). What changed John so drastically? It is the love of God that is found in Jesus Christ.

I. GOD'S CONFIDENCE Vss. 17-21

(a) **Love Perfected**: Like I said in the introduction, love perfected in Christ brings about a maturity in the believer that is undeniable. It is summarized in this marvelous thought, "...as *He is*, so are we *IN this world*." Vs. 17

1. "*Herein is our love made perfect...*" John has been doing his best to explain to the churches in Asia Minor that a carnal mind void of love is no ally of God; it is His enemy. The presence of love signifies the Presence of Truth in that person; Truth in Jesus Christ.

John 8:32 *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, {*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*}

1. There is an ultimate purpose for our mature love that has been made perfect in Christ; boldness. Sometimes I believe that believers forget that they will one day stand before the Lord.

Romans 13:10-14; 14:1-12

Did you hear about the boy who failed all his college work? He wired his mother: "Failed everything; Prepare Papa." His mother wired back, "Papa prepared; Prepare yourself." This is the message a lot of us need in view of the coming judgment. God is prepared. We need to prepare ourselves!

(b) **Love Unafraid**: Can there be a "fearless" love? Doesn't love have the capacity to bring pain too? I know that boldness is integral for courage, but how does boldness harmonize with love? Vss. 18-19

Hebrews 13:5-6 *[Let your] conversation [be] without covetousness; [and be] content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord [is] my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

1. Paul's reminder to the Hebrew Christians that have been scattered due to persecution was that God's love was never failing no matter what the circumstances may be. Perfect love is NOT validated by perfect circumstances! Vs. 18

a. Hebrews 13:6 is in reference to Psalm 56:4 when David was 'captured' by the Philistines and taken to Gath. David knew that going to Gath was risky and potentially a lethal mistake, but David would trust God in the midst of imperfect circumstances because the Lord loved him with a Perfect love. Perfect love casts out fear!

b. Remember Psalm 23? David had NO FEAR in the...

- PHYSICAL; I shall not want, lie down in green pastures, drink from still waters
- SPIRITUAL; restores the soul, leads us down paths of righteousness for His name's sake
- UNKNOWN; valley of shadow of death
- DISOBEDIENCE; the rod and the staff
- BATTLE; table prepared in the presence of the enemy
- MOUNTAIN TOP; anointed with oil, cup overflows, surely goodness and mercy

2. If God's love is all of these things, then why are we afraid to love him? Calvary certainly proves that He is not afraid to love us!
Vs. 19

No powers can separate us from God's love in Christ. Unmasked, revealed in their true nature, they have lost their mighty grip on men. The cross has disarmed them: wherever it is preached, the unmasking and disarming of the Powers takes place.

Hendrik Berkhof

(c) **Love that's Honest**: Regardless, there are still those who have a hard time with the truth. In that respect, if a person has a problem with the truth then they will also have a problem with the Truth; Jesus Christ.
Vss. 20-21

1. Potential Problem #1; "If a man say..." Love is an emotion shown and it is not supported by love expressed alone. Jesus' half-brother James has addressed this in his letter to the Hebrews scattered across the world.

James 2:18 *Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

a. Paul also addressed the Church at Thessalonica about the way that he, Silas and Timothy lived their lives amongst them.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 *For our gospel **came not unto you in word only**, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

2. Potential Problem #2; “...*he is a liar... (with his tongue; TDC)*” If someone tells you how much they love Jesus but they do not love His people, you’re lying. THIS is a lie that we rarely stand against personally even today. People tell us all of the time how much they love Jesus but hate church. WE do not respond properly against it but instead we feed into it. Let me explain.

a. You see someone at Wal-Mart that hasn’t been to church in weeks or months or years. You strike up a conversation and tell them that you have missed seeing them at church; you speak the truth. But then they say, “*Well we just stopped going to church altogether. We were out of Sunday School for six weeks and no one called. The pastor didn’t call to check on us and our deacon didn’t reach out. No one from the choir called us to see why we haven’t been there. We stayed at home just to see who would call us and no one did. We love the Lord but we don’t love church anymore.*” Have you ever heard this?

1) Here are my questions. If you’ve been out of church for 6 weeks, why is that not your responsibility? We don’t have to call and make sure that you ate today or went to work or brushed your teeth or combed your hair so why do we have to make sure you keep your word to follow Christ? Next, how can you love the Groom (Jesus, the Lord) and not love His Bride? If you abandon my wife then you are abandoning me! **Lastly, how do you justify that poor inspiration with the cross?** Have you never read where Paul told the Hebrews “*How much worse punishment do you think is deserved by the person who walks all over God’s Son, who acts as if the blood of the covenant that made us holy is just ordinary blood, and who insults the Spirit of grace?*” (Common English Bible) Remember what I said about 15 minutes ago; professing believers forget that they will stand before the Lord one day in judgment!

3. That brings us to Potential Problem #3; unrealistic reflections. Jesus said it best when He said, “*It’s hard to get a splinter out of your brother’s eye when you have a railroad tie in your own.*” It reflects back to what was just said; how do you love God but don’t love His people. That makes no sense. It’s just unrealistic!

a. Again, James said, “...*he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*”
(James 1:23-24)

b. The Godhead requires a love from us that is honest and pure and real. Therefore, if you have ‘seen’ what the cross means and what Jesus did there for you and how much that cost the Father and the price that was paid, then you must have an honest reflection of yourself about how you feel and do to your brothers and sisters in Christ. That love then reflects in positive consequences that glorifies the Father, Son, Spirit AND His Bride the Church.

Give me such love for God and men as will blot out all hatred and bitterness.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)