



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 John 4: 13-21

2011

"Perfect Love"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Jim, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in 1 John and we are in chapter 4 and we're going to finish the fourth chapter—so we're getting rather close to the end of our studies in this great epistle. We'll look at verses 13 through 21.

1 John chapter 4, beginning with verse 13,

¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴ We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world.

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

1 John 4: 13-21

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together.

(Message) When we think of the early church in the days of ancient Rome, we often think of martyrdom; of Christians being thrown to lions, or made to be human torches in the emperor's garden. That's what I think of often. They're stories of great courage that are truly inspiring.

But really, we should think of something else when we think of that early church, something really more basic than martyrdom—and that is love. It's the mark of the Christian. In fact, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, "If I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." Love is what profits.

John teaches something very similar to that in chapter 4 of his letter. In fact, this chapter has been compared to chapter 13 verse 3, of 1 Corinthians and it's been called John's 'Hymn in praise of heavenly love'. It's one reason that John is called the apostle of love. In chapter 4 he writes that "God is love".(vs15). And he instructs Christians "to love one another". (vs11).

Two things are true of those who do that. John says that "God abides in them" (vs15), and "His love is perfected in them." (vs17). In the remaining verses of the chapter John explains both of those statements more fully, about 'God dwelling in us', in verses 13 through 16, and then about 'His love being perfected in us' in verses 17 through 21.

Well that first point is truly amazing, that "God dwells in us". That's almost too much to comprehend. Well I would say, really, it is too much to ultimately comprehend but it's what the Lord has promised us. It's what the Word of God explains to us. Jesus told His disciples in John 14, verse 23, that He and the Father would "make Our abode" in them. And John explains here how we can know that they have done just that—that God dwells in us. It's because we have the Holy Spirit, who gives us that confidence through an internal witness.

Then John explains how we can know that we have the Holy Spirit who gives that internal witness. And it's by two external witnesses: It's by our confession of faith in Christ, and it's by our love of the brethren. Now that's how this passage develops.

So, we know that God has made His home in our hearts because, (John writes in verse 13), "He has given us of His Spirit." And the Holy Spirit reassures us that we are believers and that God lives within us.

John wrote of this at the end of chapter 3, (vs24), where he mentions the Holy Spirit for the first time in this book. Every believer has the gift of the Spirit. In fact, we are believers because of that gift of the Spirit. He enabled us to understand the Gospel. He enabled us to believe in Jesus Christ. No one would believe in Christ, no one would love the brethren unless the Spirit opened their eyes to their own sin and their own need of the Savior, and turn their hearts to Him, turn their hearts to Christ. That's the work of the Spirit of God. And He continues His ministry in us by continually confirming to us that we are children of God. Paul taught the same thing. Paul taught that in Romans chapter 8, in verse 16, that "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God."

How do you know you're a child of God? How do you know you're truly born again? Because the heart plays tricks on us very often; it's deceptive, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer 17:9). What keeps you from being frustrated by those doubts? Well, there is an internal witness, the Spirit of God who bears witness with our spirit that, "No!, Your heart is accusing you and it's not true. You are a child of God." Now that witness isn't audible. We don't hear it internally. It's not a mystical or ecstatic experience of some kind. It's simply, (as I would explain it), a subtle conviction that the Spirit instills within a believer that he or she is a child of God; that God does in fact dwell within us.

David Brainerd was a great missionary to the American Indians. He was converted, as a very young man, while walking alone in a forest. He would do that; he'd take these solitary walks—and think. He was struggling at that time with his

theology and his understanding of the Gospel. It was on one of those occasions that things opened up and he understood—that he was converted. And he wrote about that in his diary; he wrote, "Unspeakable glory seemed to open to my view and apprehension of my soul." But he wrote, "I do not mean any external brightness, for I saw no such thing. It was a new, inward apprehension." That's the Spirit's internal witness. It is an inward apprehension, or view, of things. It's a conviction that we come to have—that we know. And it's worked within us, it's given to us by the Spirit of God who literally, objectively, dwells within our hearts.

And it's complemented, that internal witness, by external witnesses. Our confession of the Gospel is one; and that's given in verses 14 and 15. The Holy Spirit reassures our belief that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. That is the substance, that is the content of the Spirit's witness to us. That's what He bears witness to us, that we believe. And we agree within our hearts that we do believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and the Savior of the world. Now that's the Gospel.

And really, that statement is just an expansion on verse 8, that, "God is love", and the statement that John will repeat as well. This is how we know God's love, what it is. We can have a sense of it, we can have a feeling of it. And so oftentimes that's really what we think of when we think of love as a kind of feeling, an emotion. I don't deny that that's part of love. But what John is speaking of here, in terms of love, is objective and it's something we can understand.

We know what it is, what it looks like by looking at the cross. The love of God is seen in the fact that God sent His Son to be our Savior. In fact, the wide scope of God's love is shown in the breadth of the salvation that He has given. Here it's described in this statement that Jesus is "the Savior of the world." (vs14). He's a great Savior. He's not only the Savior of the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. That's the meaning of this statement, "Savior of the *world*". It doesn't mean that He saves all men. We know that all men are not going to be saved. He didn't fail in His work. That wasn't the design of His work. He saves all kinds of men, not all without exception, but all without distinction.

Now, I think that's the clear meaning of this statement. At least it's a statement that's made clear from the only other place where that description of the Lord is used. That's in John chapter 4, in verse 42 where the Samaritans confessed that Jesus is "the Savior of the world." They meant that He saves them as well as Jews. That's what they marveled over. He saves the people the Jews hated as a mixed and inferior race. John is saying, in addition to Jews and Samaritans, Christ saves Gentiles, as well. —All kinds of people.

He "sent Him to be the propitiation for our sins.", John wrote back in verse 10: to take our sins upon Himself and absorb God's punishment for them in our place. And what John is saying is, "that's love". You want to know what love looks like...Look at the cross.

Now all of this, what John is saying here, everything that he's writing here, the whole force and direction of this book is about assurance of salvation. He's writing to saved people and encouraging them that they might have the assurance that they truly are born again. The Holy Spirit gives that assurance. Through His inner witness we know and are convinced that we are saved, and that Christ is our Savior. We know that Christ is God's Son. We know He is God's eternal Son, that He sent Him from heaven, sent Him out of the endless ages of eternity into time and space, into this world. We know this in our hearts. We know this in our minds, in our souls. That's the Christian message. That's the Gospel. And that is what the Spirit convinces us of, confirms within our hearts and our minds. And this is what we confess publicly. This is our profession of faith.

So John writes, in verse 15, that "God abides" in those who give the confession that Jesus is the Son of God. And, of course, John means that those who confess that are those who believe that. We believe that very confession. Is that your confession? Do you know that Jesus Christ is God, God the Son, that He's the second person of the Trinity, and that He entered into time and space by becoming a human person? Do you believe that He was sent for the purpose of saving sinners by dying in their place, as the atonement for them, as propitiation for their sins, as the one who satisfies the pure

justice of God and turns away His wrath through the sacrifice that He made for us? Is that your profession of faith? Is that what you believe?

Well, if that is your confession, if that is what you believe, John is saying that that is evidence that you are born again, that you are a child of God. So if you're troubled about these things, if you're not certain about your salvation, that's an evidence of it, that you have eternal life. And so it's the firm ground of assurance that we actually do possess the Spirit.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:3, that "...no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit." So that confession, that belief, is the sovereign work of the Spirit of God. It's the evidence that you're born again. It's the evidence that the Father and the Son dwell within you. It's the evidence that the Spirit of God is in your heart and you can believe the testimony that He gives.

But so is love. Love is also the evidence that the Spirit of God dwells within us. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 5, in verse 5, "...that the love of God has been poured out within our hearts." The love of God is given to us. It has been poured into us by the Holy Spirit. It's a gift.

So when John writes in verse 16 that "God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.", that again is a sure sign that we have the Holy Spirit within us and we can believe that testimony that we have. The Spirit of God produces it.

Now John is not teaching that love is a condition that we must meet in order for God to dwell in us. All of this, again, is about assurance—how we can know that God is in us; how we can know that we are a child of God. Confessing the truth of the Gospel, that Jesus is God's Son, that He's the Savior, confessing that truth and loving the brethren, those are the evidence that we have the Holy Spirit. And we can trust His witness within us, that God is in us, and we are in Him, that we're saved.

So, first what we do with first evidence, is that we confess the truth, we confess the Gospel. We believe it. We confess it to be true—and then love, we love the brother. So is that true? Is that true of you? Is there love in your life, in our lives, love for God and love for His people? Is your love for the Lord demonstrated by your love for others, for one another? That's what naturally occurs as a result of God abiding or dwelling in us. "God is love", John says. So His love, like His life is given to us. It is imparted to us. And we then impart that to Him, love Him, and love one another.

A Christian *abides* in love.(vs16). And that means we understand love. We believe it and we imitate it. We practice it towards God by obedience and affection for Him, and by acting for the good of others, by acting for the good of His people, for other Christians. That's the natural product, or the natural fruit, of our relationship with Him. All who do that have the Spirit of God within them. They're saved—the people of God, love.

And in the remaining verses John analyzes this love, which he calls 'perfect love.' "By this", he says in verse 17, (or really ,more literally, (and I think this is how the New International Version translates it), but more literally it is "In this". That is, in this mutual relationship with God that he's been describing, that he described in verse 16). "In this" (*this relationship*), he says, "...love is perfected with us." And he will say that it is perfected in two ways. It is perfected in 'our confidence with God in the day of judgment', and it's perfected in 'our love of the brethren.' These are the two characteristics of the love that John highlights here in these remaining verses.

Now when he speaks of love being *perfected*, (or love being perfect), John doesn't mean that love is perfect in the sense of flawless, but that our love is complete; the idea, 'complete love'. And John shows what that love looks like. First he says, 'love for God is 'complete', (or perfected), when it has confidence.' When we are dwelling or abiding in God's love we "have confidence in the day of judgment." God is love; John is emphasizing that. God is love.

But God is also a judge and some day He will judge this world through His Son. That's the teaching of the Word of God. It's the teaching of all of the apostles. It's what Peter preached, it's what Paul preached. In Athens Paul told the philosophers on Mars' Hill that God has "fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man, whom He has appointed." (Acts 17:31). And that is when Paul's sermon suddenly ended. The philosophers thought the idea of a man being raised from the dead to judge them was foolishness—and they began to mock it.

Peter mentions the skeptics who mocked the Lord's coming. People then, in the days of the apostles, as well as people today think it's nonsense, this idea of judgment. But I can't help but believe that, buried down deep in men's souls, is a fear of that day; that they know it is coming; they know that justice requires that—and they deal with it by denying it. And isn't that really what John says?, "Men love the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil." (Jn 8:12). They hide in the darkness of ignorance and denial in order to avoid that truth. They don't want to think about it.

John says in Revelation 6, that when that day of judgment begins, when the sealed judgments are broken and the sixth seal is broken, that 'men will hide in caves and pray to the rocks for them to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.' (vs15f). There's a great deal of irrationality in that praying to the rocks, when they know the Lord God exists, and He's pouring out judgment upon them. But they don't want to repent. They don't want to come. They want to hide. That's the heart of man.

Well that day is coming. The apostles teach it; and it will be a terrifying day. But the believer in Jesus Christ is not afraid. He or she is confident because John adds, "as He is", (that is as Christ is), "so also are we in this world." (vs17). We will escape judgment because our substitute suffered all of that judgment for us, in our place, so that at the moment of faith our debts are paid up. We are considered innocent before God; we are declared righteous by Him. We're clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We are justified. We are righteous with the righteousness of Christ. That is grace.

That's the love of God. And we'll never understand God's love, we'll never understand love fully until we see it in the cross—the great example of love. It gained everything for us, at no cost to us, but at great cost, at infinite cost to Him. And that is the ground of our confidence; the death of Christ which cleanses us of our sins and frees us of our guilt.

When John Bunyan learned that it gave him great peace. He wrote about it in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding*. In his early Christian experience, he had a lot of uncertainty about his salvation; had a lot of fear in his life. But his fear was replaced with confidence when he heard the words of Romans chapter 3, in verse 24 that we are “justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” And he said ‘It was as though a voice spoke to him out of heaven.’ I don't think he meant an audible voice, but it was clear in his mind.

And he explained that verse. He said that this voice that spoke to him said, "Sinner, you think that because of your sins and infirmities, I cannot save your soul. But behold, my Son is beside Me and upon Him I look, and not on you, and will deal with you according as I am pleased with Him."

Now how pleased is the Father with the Son? Well, you remember at His baptism in the Jordan River, the Father spoke out of heaven and He said that He is “well pleased” with Him. (Mat 3:17). And when the Father sees us, He's *well pleased* with us because we're in His Son. He sees us in Christ. He sees us in the Son and therefore He's well pleased with us. John said, “as He is”, (as Christ is), “so also are we in this world.” (vs17).

So, the day of judgment shouldn't terrify us. And as we grow in our relationship with the Lord and our love increases and matures, our confidence will grow, and judgment won't cause us fear. Love prevents that. The two don't mix. John writes in verse 18 that there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. Fear involves punishment, he says. But there's no punishment for those who are joined to Christ.

Now it's possible for a genuine Christian to fear judgment. A lack of sound doctrine results in a fear from uncertainty about one's spiritual condition. A person's theology can affect or further fear. We all have theology. Everyone has theology. It may

be good, it may be bad, but they all have theology. And sometimes people have very bad theology, and it furthers fear. Arminianism certainly does that with a belief in a conditional relationship with God that depends on man's faithfulness, and entertains the real possibility in their mind of losing one's salvation. That produces uncertainty in the heart.

The Scripture is clear from beginning to end that God deals with His chosen people by grace. His relationship is based on Himself: On His love, on His faithfulness—not on our weakness, not on anything in us. He always takes the initiative. He seeks and saves the lost. He makes promises to us, and He never fails to keep them. He “cannot lie”, we're told. (Tit 1:2). He cannot fail in His promises. He holds us in His mighty hand, and He cannot let us slip away. “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phl 1:6). ‘We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption.’ (Eph 4:30). We're secure in Him; every believer in Jesus Christ is. That's the love of God. It is inflexible. It is unconditional and sacrificial, again, as demonstrated in the cross.

So Paul could write in Romans chapter 8, in verse 32 that, ‘since God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, He won't deny us anything, not anything that's for our good.’ “He will freely give us all things”, Paul says. He bought heaven for us, and we will have it. We're safe from judgment. He bought faith for us and that faith will hold firm in the child of God. So again, we're safe from the judgment to come.

Now that's the future. And that's what John is speaking about here, the future judgment. But there's a principle here that also applies to the present. There's no reason to fear life now because we are safe in God's hands, absolutely! He's sovereign; He guides us at every moment in our life. We are safe in the hand of God.

But Christian people are often afraid. And in all fairness, life is scary. If we're going to be realistic about it, life is full of, from our perspective, lots of uncertainties and

lots of trials. Our health can fail. Christians get pink slips at work, and they get bad reports from the doctor. Job did.

But often people are afraid of the unknown. They're afraid of what might happen. And our imaginations can anticipate all kinds of things that are terrible things that could happen. People fear those things. They fear *'chimeras'*.

Are you familiar with what a chimera is? Well, it's a monster; it's a monster of mythology. And it's a hideous creature, a fire breathing monster that's terrifying. But it isn't real. Doesn't exist, and so that word has been used to describe imaginary monsters. And we all have them. We imagine things and fear things that aren't real and aren't going to happen.

But listen, whether imagined or real, the dangers of life are not greater than our God who is sovereign, and who promises to work everything for our good and for His glory, and He cannot fail. That's His love for us, and we understand it. At least as we grow in our knowledge of Him; and as we grow in our love for Him, we will understand that. And that love, as it increases will increasingly cast out fear and give us strength and stability to live a life that's courageous, a life that's steady, firm.

Fear in us of the future judgment or present distress is really an evidence, not of anything lacking in the Lord God, but what's lacking in us; that our love for Him is not perfect; it needs to grow. And that's true of all of us. Every one of us have flaws, imperfections in our love. We need to grow. Our love needs to become increasingly more complete. But as it does, as we mature in our knowledge of Him and our love for Him, that happens; our love casts out fear. And that maturity causes our love to be increasingly perfect.

Well that's the great characteristic of the Christian—love. We love. That's what John says next, in verse 19. Now he doesn't say who we love, just that "We love....". 'Love is our nature' is what he's saying. But love always has an object. We love God. As His children we will love Him. And we will love Him by loving the Lord's children. All of that's included in this short statement, "We love."

Why do we love? Why do we have love for one another? Why do we have love for the Lord God, whom we can't see? Well John tells us: It's because God first loved us. Once again, we see the divine initiative in our relationship with Him. He loved us before we loved Him. He loved us from the "foundation of the world". (Eph 2:20). He loved us from all eternity and had a plan of salvation from all eternity that included us in it. And so, as a result of His love for us, personally and individually, and His love for you as an individual from all eternity, we love Him as a result of that—and we love others.

That is sovereign grace, once again. We find it all through this letter, we find it all through the Bible. Our love is only a response to God's love. It comes from Him. It's not in us naturally; not this love. Our ability to love God is God given. All love is, our love for Him, our love for one another. —It's God given. He gets all the glory for it. He's the source of all love. We can be glad of that, too, because He's faithful to supply it. But He's the one who gets the glory.

He not only shows us how to love, He gives us the desire to do that, to follow His example, to love fellow Christians. And that's what we will do. John makes that very clear in the next verse, in verse 20, we'll love one another. We cannot separate loving God from loving God's people. We can say that we love God, (whom we don't see), and not love others—but that's not a true statement, John is telling us. He makes the point here that we cannot say we love God and then not love the one whom we see. We don't see God. We say we love Him. Well, how can you love Him whom you don't see, when you don't love the person that you do see? That's the point that John makes here, in verse 20. He says that if anyone makes such a statement, that he loves God while not loving his brother, (and he uses very strong language here), "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar."

Now, we all know it's not always easy to love people. It's not always easy to love Christians. It's, in fact, hard to do that. We're sinners, and some Christians are not very pleasant people. That's why we need 1 John to remind us of who we should be and who

we can be. And we're to love one another because we're not always the kind of people that are easy to love. Those closest to us can certainly make testimony to that.

And so, at times, all of us are not easy people to love. And John understood that. Nevertheless, he is saying that loving those whom we see in visible ways, measurable ways, is the evidence that we love Him whom we don't see. In other words, "God is love" translates into our lives in real, tangible acts. It's not a theoretical, abstract concept. The Christian doesn't seclude himself in a monastery somewhere and contemplate God. So that's really a mature person, a person who's truly devoted to God, who really loves God. He's the one, or she's the one that gets away, privately, and spends their life in quiet contemplation. No! That's not love.

That can be very selfish. That can be, in fact, an escape from life. There can be lots of talk about love and devotion to Christ while people are ignored and attitudes are very unchristian. The person who truly loves God, acts like God. He or she gets involved in the lives of people. That's what the Lord God did in sending His Son into this world. He's involved in our lives in every moment of our lives. And so those who love God demonstrate their love for Him by loving others and doing that by getting involved in the lives of people and helping them.

That is what Jesus Christ instructed us to do. That's how John ends the chapter, his "Hymn in praise of heavenly love", he refers to the Lord's instruction. Verse 21, "And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

Now John is referring here to the instruction that Jesus gave in John 13, in verse 35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." That is the mark of the Christian. I'm sure that those Christians who gave up their lives for the Gospel, that those early Christian martyrs who were thrown to the lions, loved the Lord. They were motivated to sacrifice their lives out of love for Him. I'm sure that a person who gives a fortune to the church, gives all his possessions, does so out of love. I wouldn't question that. Those are great acts, and yet that's not what the Lord asks of us,

at least not usually. He will ask that of people sometimes, but generally what the Lord asks of us is something much simpler than that, something much more basic, and it's that we have love for one another.

It's putting the good of others first before our own interests. It's inconveniencing ourselves to help those in need. It is humbling ourselves to forgive others who have wronged us. It is being gracious and showing people respect. Maybe in as simple a way as simply listening to them, giving them an ear, giving them some time.

That is theology in practice. That brings the invisible God into focus. It's being Christ to one another. It is reenacting the cross for one another. It's sacrificing for others. And it happens in the small things of life, the very basic things of life.

I came across a story that William Gladstone told in Parliament, when the daughter of Queen Victoria, Princess Alice, died. When her little boy came down with diphtheria, she nursed him personally. Now the doctors cautioned her against contact with him, "It's a highly contagious disease, don't have physical contact with him." But when he was in delirium from fever and asked her in a very weak whisper to kiss him, her mother love was stronger than the doctor's warnings. She bent down, kissed her child—and soon after died.

Now that might seem careless and foolish, but mothers often ignore danger. That's what love does. It forgets self, forgets caution, and sacrifices for others. It's what Christ did for us. He took our sickness, the poison of our sin to Himself, and He died. A sacrifice in our place so that we might be healed and we might live forever. "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11). May God give us that kind of love for one another. It's His love. It's unique love. It's *agape* love.

How do we know that the Father and the Son abide in us? The Spirit tells us. How do we know that we have the Spirit? We love each other. We love the Lord Jesus Christ. We confess Him.

If you're here without Christ, you don't know Him, you don't know Him as your shepherd. But you can by believing in Him, by recognizing your need of the Savior, acknowledging your sin, and turning to Him. May God help you to do that. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for sinners. The moment that you do that, you are forgiven, you are forgiven forever, you're made a child of God, you're given eternal life. Come to Christ, and then reflect that love that you have for Him to one another. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Your love for us, unconditional, undeserved. We thank You for the gift of Your Son who paid our ransom, who bought us for Himself. Help us to rejoice in that love and to express it to one another.

Bless us now as we leave. Bless our time together in fellowship. Bless the food that we will enjoy. Bless it to our nourishment and our health. Bless us spiritually. Enrich us in Your Son and by the Spirit of God. We pray these things in the name of our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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