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**A0447 -- Nov. 21, 2004 – 1 John 4:15-17 – Hearing God**

Let's review 1 John 4:11-14. In the prior section, John has told us that **God is love**, and in v. 10 John gives us a demonstration of what it means to say **God is love**. Love is not some humanistic emotion that finds its source in humans and is, therefore, a social convention, having any form of expression. In its essence, **love** is demonstrated in **that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins**. He sent His one-of-a-kind Son into a sin filled world to **be the propitiation for our sins**. He died for you and me. He died for every person on the planet. We could not satisfy God, so He provided His own Son as a satisfaction for us. He is the initiator. This is love. Love is not so much a response as an initiation that should result in a response from us. That is v. 11. Since **God so loved us, we also ought to love one another**. If God's love extended to everyone, then we cannot limit our love to just those believers that are lovable, can we?

Verse 12 demonstrates that **no one has seen God at any time**. John means that no one has ever seen God directly. God has only been seen through filters (i.e., fire, cloud, flesh, visions, etc.). During this unique Church dispensation, **if we love one another**, this invisible **God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us** so that we become filters through which God can be seen by those who know what it means that **God is love**. Since our love for one another finds its source in God, then it makes sense that God is manifested among us when we love one another.

Verse 13 shows that when there is reciprocal abiding, us in Him and He in us, the Spirit He has given us is the enabler of this love for one another. Verse 14 is the key verse to understanding this epistle. It comes down to the two words **seen and testify**. How can we both **seen and testify** that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (*kosmos*). Jesus is no longer here to **see**. Sure, we can testify, but we can't enjoy the benefit of **seeing** Him as the apostles did! But, actually we can, because His seed of eternal life abides in us when we love one another so that eternal life, which Christ is, is manifested

through us. We become filters of God's love in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is how we can fellowship in what was **seen** (cf. 1 John 1:3-4).

We will see today in v. 15 that we can also **testify (bear witness)** of Christ by making a common confession, namely, that confession found in v. 15 (READ). The key to these two both **seeing and testifying (bearing witness)** is the abiding. When we are abiding in Him, then we can both **see and testify** that the **Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world**. This is the number one way to be a witness for Christ in the world. F. F. Bruce says, "The love of God displayed in His people is the strongest apologetic that God has in the world."<sup>i</sup>

When we know the character of a parent and we see their child doing things that the parent does, then it can be said that we are seeing a manifestation of the parent through the child. In the same way, when we know the character of God and we see a child of God doing the things that God does then it can be said that we are seeing a manifestation of God through the child of God.

Today, I want to recall to your attention the body of this letter. The introduction of the letter is discussed in 1 John 1-2:27, but the body, and John's main theme of loving one another, is introduced in 2:28 and extends to 4:17. We know this because of a comparison of 2:28 with 4:17. Both verses have common words and concepts.<sup>ii</sup> Both speak of having **boldness** or **confidence** (*parresia*). 2:28 speaks of having **boldness** at Christ's **coming** (*parousia*) and 4:17 speaks of having **boldness** at the coming **judgment** (*krisis*). **Judgment** and Christ's **coming** are very closely related because it is when Christ comes for His church that there will be a **judgment** for believers immediately following. So, these two thoughts form bookends to the main body of the letter (2:28 might be called **Bookend A** and 4:17 **Bookend B**; this is called an *inclusio* in the Greek). John did this purposefully. The major theme between the bookends (2:28 and 4:17) is "loving one another." If we love one another, then that increases our **boldness** if Christ were to come for us and begin the **judgment** for believers. There would be no reason to shy away as long as we love one another with a pure conscience.

What **coming** and what **judgment** is John referring to? Is it the First Coming, the Second Coming, or the Rapture? Is it the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Sheep/Goat's Judgment, or the Great White Throne Judgment? Well, since this letter was written *after* the First Coming, it can't be the First Coming. Yet, we also know that this is not the Second Coming. Turn back to 2:28. Here John speaks of both an **appearance** and a **coming** and he uses those words interchangeably. Look down in 3:2; again, he says that Christ is going to make

an **appearance** (*phaneroo*). This is a visible and transforming appearance, but it's only visible for Christians! The context here is directed toward Christians and notice that the timing of this appearance is not revealed. If this were the Second Coming, then "every eye would see Him" (Matt. 24:30). But here only believers see Him. Notice also that there are no timing indicators here so that we could date when this event will take place. Therefore, this appearance is certain to occur according to John but uncertain when it will occur. This is what we call imminence; something that is certain to occur but uncertain when it will occur. Therefore, because this is an **appearance** and because it is only an **appearance** to believers (not every eye will see Him), and because there is no time element given so that we could date this **appearance**, and because no mention is made of Him coming to earth, we can safely conclude that John has in mind here the Rapture. We believe also, because of the elements here and elsewhere, that the Rapture is pre-Millennial (before Christ's return to set up the 1,000-year Kingdom on earth) and pre-Tribulational (before the 7-year Tribulation). The Rapture can happen at any moment. Because the Rapture can happen at any moment, John keeps stressing the importance of abiding in God, abiding in His love, and abiding in His commandments. When we do, we have **confidence** and look forward to the Rapture and judgment.

What judgment is this? As I said earlier, it is a judgment only for believers. It is not a judgment to determine if you are a believer or not, it is a judgment of believers' works. The Bible calls this the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment is going to be an evaluation of your works. Turn briefly to **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**.

"Now if any man builds on the foundation [Jesus Christ as per v. 11] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, [what do you notice about this list of items? Do you see that they fall into two categories?] <sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it [the foundation] remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire [no loss of salvation; all and only believers make it to this judgment].

Notice that our works fit into one of two categories: eternal quality (gold, silver, precious stones) or temporal quality (wood, hay, straw). When they are tested by fire, they either burn up or remain. Your reward is based on what remains after your works are put through the fire. You can go for years pumping out human good and evil and you will find that it is just a waste of time. You will actually suffer loss when you do human good because God gave you an opportunity to produce good works by the means of the Holy Spirit and you

chose to do good works by means of your flesh. Fleshly works do not count with God, so you just wasted an opportunity. A waste of an opportunity is to suffer loss because you didn't capitalize on that opportunity. It is very important that Paul adds at the end of v. 15 that even if your work is burned up you don't lose your salvation, nor does it mean you never were saved. Instead, it simply means you won't receive any rewards. God, by His grace, will save you, but it is kind of like barely making it. It is like taking a math class and scoring 69.5, and by the grace of your teacher, he rounds that up to a 70 so that you pass his class. The ironic thing is that the moment you believed you got the 69.5 points you needed to pass. So, your entire post-salvation life may amount to a waste of time and learning nothing. You just got in, but you received no rewards.

So, it's very important for you to learn to abide in Him, abide in His commandments, abide in His love. These are all very similar things; abiding in His love is abiding in Him, abiding in His commandments is abiding in His love. These things are all interrelated but they all boil down to a closeness in relationship with God, His commandments and His love. These are interconnected so closely you cannot tear them apart. We are commanded to love Him; and when we love Him, we are obeying His commandment. It is all interrelated but you can only do this by the means of the Holy Spirit. When you do abide, you produce fruit by the means of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faith, self-control, etc.); and abiding produces **confidence** to pray with an expectation to receive (1 John 3:21; 5:14); and confidence before God so that if He were to appear and the judgment begin there would be nothing to be ashamed about (1 John 2:28; 4:17), nothing to hide from or try to hide from. You can't hide from God (Gen. 3:9). You can try to hide like Adam and Eve tried to cover up, but it is just an exercise in futility (Gen. 3:10). You are just damaging your mind when you do that.

So, the point is today that we are coming to the end of the body of the letter which began in 2:28 and ends here in 4:17 (the two Bookends A and B). Let's look now at 4:15 which paves the way to the close of the main body. Here John gives us another way to detect if God abides in us and us in God.

*Greek Text 4:15 hos an homologese hoti Iesous estin ho huios tou theou ho theos en auto menei kai autos en to theo*

**Translation 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

Remember, in v. 14 we participated in a common "sight" and "testimony." We see **eternal life** manifested through the filter of Christians so that we are seeing the same eternal life

that the apostles saw. Granted, the apostles saw more than us, they saw God in the flesh, but they also saw eternal life that was with the Father manifested in that flesh. We, too, can see eternal life manifested because we received eternal life the moment we believed. So, we can actually see the same **eternal life** that the apostles saw. This is necessary if we are to have fellowship in what was seen and heard according to 1 John 1:3! If we cannot see **eternal life** through Christians today, then we cannot fellowship with the apostles and with God in this way!

But notice what v. 15 adds to this. We not only participate in what the apostles **saw** (eternal life), but we can also participate in what the apostles **heard**. What they heard was the common Christian confession that **Jesus is the Son of God**. Again, John is looking back at 1 John 1:3. John is a wonderful writer and he is deliberately trying to tie the letter together, bind it up by a common **sight** (seeing eternal life) and a common **confession** (that Jesus is the Son of God). These are necessary if we are to fulfill John's major purpose of the book, which is "fellowship" in what was **seen** and **heard** (1:3). True fellowship can only be attained if all Christians can share in what was **seen** (eternal life) and what was **heard** (this confession that Jesus is the Son of God). Apart from possessing eternal life and expressing it through Christian love so that it can be seen, and apart from the confession that Jesus is the Son of God, "fellowship" with the apostles and with God and His Son Jesus Christ is impossible.

Let's look now at the important confession that **Jesus is the Son of God**. John says this should be a common confession among local churches. We ought to make this confession all the time. If and when we do, God is among us. He abides in us. A loving Christian community will always be making the confession that **Jesus is the Son of God**. If you go into a church and you don't hear this confession then God is simply not among them. He is not abiding in them. And if He is not abiding in them, then they can't be producing fruit (storing up rewards). Instead, they are just storing up a lot of wood, hay and straw.

Let's look at this title **Jesus is the Son of God**. John is doing something interesting with this title. In John's writings, the title Jesus is the Son of God has a very definite meaning. When John was a younger man, before Jesus started His ministry, we think that John was a disciple of John the Baptist. And we all know that John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah who would prepare the way for the Messiah Jesus (Isa. 40:3). And John was most likely one of John the Baptist's disciples (John 1:35-40). What we find that is so interesting is that if he were with John the Baptist, then this confession that Jesus is the Son of God came directly from John the Baptist's mouth. Turn to John 1:34. Notice he uses both **seen and testify** as well as **this is the Son of God** just like John does here in his

epistle (v. 14-15)! Therefore, the testimony of our Church ought not to be limited to the visible manifestation of eternal life in the form of loving one another, but it should also be a verbal confession that we all share that **Jesus is the Son of God**. We can make this confession in prayer, in singing, in preaching, and in our teaching. So, there ought to be two things going on in Fredericksburg Bible Church: (1) the visible manifestation of God through Christian love, and (2) the verbal confession that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the kind of fellowship John has in mind for our congregation. Both our life and our lip reflect God, both our works and our words reflect the Almighty. Eternal life should be regularly seen through love and this confession should be regularly heard throughout our congregation.

Whenever we make this confession, John says at the end of v. 15, **God abides in him and he in God**. This means the mutual abiding fellowship exists for the one who makes this confession in the context of Christian love. Therefore, whenever we make this confession it is God Himself who is making the confession through us by means of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who can be recognized by this confession (4:2). Any other confession does not find its source in God but in evil spirits.

There are several heretical groups who will not make the confession that **Jesus is the Son of God**. Or they make it without having John's meaning in mind, so it is a false confession, a dishonest confession. They might mean Jesus was created by God or became a Son at the moment of His birth through Mary. But this is not what John meant. What exactly was John's concept of **Jesus as the Son of God**?

First turn to John 20:30-31. This is the theme verse for John's gospel. *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."* In John's thinking, the fact that Jesus is the Christ is equivalent to saying that Jesus is the Son of God. Christ = Son of God and Jesus was both. Christ means He was the promised Messiah of Israel from the Old Testament and Son of God means heir of God, like a first-born child. The first-born child is the heir of the father's inheritance and Jesus is the heir of the Father's possessions. It does not mean He is less than God in any sense. In fact, it means He is equal to God, that He is God. So, this was John's concept of Jesus as the Son of God.

Second turn back to John 11:25-26 and Jesus' exchange with Martha. *"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'" <sup>27</sup> She said to*

Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." Once again, the clear confession is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This confession is necessary for eternal life. One must believe that Jesus is the Christ which is equivalent to believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Which means that you believe that Jesus is GOD! If you do not believe that Jesus is GOD, you cannot be a Christian!

Third, turn to Matt. 16:15 and Jesus' exchange with Peter. This is another important reference to Jesus as the Son of God. "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."<sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." No one can make this confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God unless the Father reveals it to them.

Thus, a genuine confession that **Jesus is the Son of God** guarantees that a person has eternal life. But he must mean by this that Jesus is very God of very God, very light of light. He is not like God, He is not similar to God, He is God. But the only way someone can make this confession is if the Father reveals it to him and if the Holy Spirit enables him to make it (1 Cor. 12:3). John's concept amounts to an affirmation that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. He must be the Messiah promised of Israel, a descendant of David, a true human and He must be God at the same time. Many heretical groups do not make this affirmation (e.g., Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Islam, etc.). No other religion can make this confession. This is why it is so critical that one believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Apart from believing this, you cannot be saved! John says here in v. 15 that when one makes this confession, it can be said that **God abides in him and he in God**. This is the mutual abiding, the intimate communion between a child of God and His heavenly Father.

*Greek Text 4:16 kai emeis egnokamen kai pepisteukamen ten agapen hen echei ho theos en hemin ho theos agape estin kai ho menon en te agape en to theo menei kai ho theos en auto menei.*

**Translation 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.**

We here must refer to all Christians (it is the inclusive use of **we**) because that is the way John has been using it since 4:7. First of all, let's look at the truth that **we have known...the love that God has for us** then we will look at what it means to **believe the love that God has for us**.

**We have known** is used in the same sense as John uses it elsewhere. It means to come to advanced knowledge of something. Here it means these Christians have come to advanced knowledge about **the love that God has for us**. This is not only by the testimony that the apostles gave, but by directly seeing it displayed. We can come to recognize the love that God has for us when we come to grasp in an advanced way that God is love! Then we are able to recognize God's love for us all when we experience loving one another. This is because when we love one another, what we are enjoying is really God Himself loving us through one another.

Secondly, let's look at what it means that **we have...believed the love that God has for us**. Of course, we have believed the gospel and of course, when we believed the gospel there was a belief that God loved us. Love is tied up in what God did for us in sending His one-of-a-kind Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sins. He provides life, breath, and all things including physical and spiritual things. But it means a little something different here. Since we can observe the love of God for His children when we love one another in the present, then seeing this causes a fresh surge of confidence in our faith in the reality that God is love. When you believed in Christ, you exercised saving faith. But hopefully your faith has grown since then. Hopefully you have at least been reading the word of God and maybe even studying on your own some in depth. This is very important. Personal Bible reading is not the same as Bible study. Both are important. Both increase our ability to trust the Word of God. There are two ways to read the Bible: (1) read quickly to see big themes in the Bible, or (2) read slowly to see details in the Bible.

Bible study is another issue. This is slowing down substantially, studying a single book of the Bible, learning the argument and structure of the letter, and of course the themes and details. All of these increase our faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). You cannot just work up faith apart from Scripture, it just doesn't work. Now, what can also happen and what John is talking about here about **believing the love that God has for us** is our faith can be renewed or refreshed, spurred on when we see God's word in action in peoples' lives, particularly when we see love among one another. Do you catch what John is saying? When we here as a local church love one another and when we make this confession that Jesus is the Son of God, very God of God, then there is camaraderie, a stimulus to press on in our faith. Our faith is strengthened and renewed through what we share here. This is one reason it is so important to love one another and to grow into a close-knit group; a group that is dependent on the word of God and applies it, putting it into action among one another. When we do it bolsters our belief in God and His love for us. We can flourish as a local church as we grow in His word and love for one another.



Now for part b of verse 16. Once again, John asserts **God is love**. One of God's attributes is **love**. This love was demonstrated back in v. 8-9 in the fact that God loves us, we didn't love Him. God always makes the first move and here the move was God sending His only Son into the world that we might have spiritual life through His death. We are supposed to love each other following this model, responding to the spiritual and physical needs of others in the body. When we do this, when we **abide in love**, we **abide in God and God in us**. Hopefully, you can see the high level of attainment this Christian enjoys. The quality of life and perspective on reality have become Christ-centered and grounded in the very essence of God. An in-depth study of the divine essence will give you a magnificent appreciation for who and what God is and will build into you humility, compassion and love for one another. It has to. It can do no other. Realizing the immensity of God and what He did in saving a wretch like you; the brilliance of God in the plan of salvation. The intricacy, the detail, the care with which He created all things, His providential controls of history and the redemptive wisdom demonstrated by His salvific plan as it unfolds before the angelic realm. This shouts out to all men the wisdom and love of God. The height of the Christian life is enjoyed when this mutual abiding takes place: **us in Him and He in us**. The grandest expression of this is when it is happening in a large group of people in a local body. It can't be missed when it is taking place. And, of course, that is what we want to develop here at this church: an understanding of the essence of God so that we can recognize the divine essence and re-manifest aspects of it among one another.

The magnificent results are found in v. 17.

*Greek Text 4:17 en touto teteleiotai he agape meth hemon hina parresian echomen en te hemera tes kriseos hoti kathos ekeinos estin kai hemeis esmen en to kosmo touto.*

**Translation 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.**

I have already told you in today's introduction that this verse is Book-end (A) of the body of the letter which is 2:28. The other Book-end (B) is here in 4:17. We know this because the same themes are in both verses. This was a common way of writing in the Greek called an *inclusio*. So, we see once again the theme of **boldness** (*parresia*) and **judgment** (*krisis*) which is connected with His **appearing** (*phaneroo* and *parousia*) at the pre-Trib Rapture. John is also bringing up the idea of being **perfected** which he mentioned in 2:5 and 4:12. In each context, it "suggests that God's love reaches its fullness and maturity in us only as we learn to pass it on to our brothers and sisters in Christ."<sup>iii</sup> If God's **love has been perfected among us** as a local group of believers that we as a group and as individuals

**may have boldness in the day of judgment.** When we are loving one another as God loved us, there is no doubt, worry, or anxiety. Instead, we increase confidence and boldness **in the day of judgment.** The **day of judgment** here refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ which takes place in heaven after the pre-Trib Rapture. It is a judgment for believers only. It is not a judgment that separates believers and unbelievers (like the sheep/goat judgment of Matt. 25). It is a judgment of our works, whether in the flesh or in the Spirit. As we are abiding in the love of God and He abides in us, the Holy Spirit is producing fruit through us. We are building up rewards. We are taking “every thought captive” to Christ, we are not letting an opportunity go by without capitalizing, without responding positively to God’s Word and the Spirit’s guidance.

The interesting thing about the Christians **day of judgment** is the word **judgment.** It is the Greek word *krisis*, pronounced “crisis” in the English language. It is a “crisis” moment. 2 Cor. 5:10 describes it as **terror** (Gk. *phobos*), a word that means “fear.” We should not think that the judgment seat of Christ is just going to be a great day of celebration. All Christians will have to face the Lord and all will have to give an accounting for their deeds done in the body, whether fleshly or spiritual. “Fire” surrounds this judgment and some will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. So, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not just a day of reward but it is also a day of loss. We ought to keep both in mind as Christians still in the body. Hodges writes,

In light of these Scriptures, the Judgment Seat of Christ must be viewed as utterly solemn and potentially productive of fear. Even a transformed believer, who knows he is in no danger of hell, will be capable of feeling the fear which the presence of God always produces in those with holy sensibilities. We forget the awesomeness and majesty of Jesus Christ our Lord if we think otherwise.<sup>iv</sup>

If we abide in love, we can expect **boldness** at the Judgment Seat of Christ **because as He is, so are we in this world.** **As He is** refers back to the statement that **God is love.** In other words, **as He is LOVE, so are we LOVE in this world.** Whatever other faults we may have while in the body (we are never without them 1:8; 2:1), when we love one another and have faith in God, there is a divine manifestation of eternal life through us. We are representing a true likeness of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles of John.* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1970; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 109.

<sup>ii</sup> This is called an *inclusio* in the Greek.

<sup>iii</sup> Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 198.

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<sup>iv</sup> Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 200.

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