

*A young man and woman were very much in love and were planning their wedding. When they met with the pastor, the young woman admitted that she was very nervous about the big occasion. So, after the meeting with the couple, the pastor decided to include a special verse in the ceremony that he thought would be a great encouragement to the young woman. He selected **1 John 4:18** which reads*

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.”

Thinking that the verse would be especially meaningful if one of their friends read it, the pastor asked the best man to be prepared to share the verse in the wedding ceremony; however, the pastor was not aware that the best man did not attend church, did not know the Bible, and was not aware of the difference between the Gospel of John and the letter of 1 John.

*So, at the prescribed moment in the wedding ceremony, the best man faced the bride and groom to read the Bible verse, but instead of reading **1 John 4:18**, he read from **John 4:18** which says,*

“The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.”

Well, I imagine those words made for an awkward moment in the wedding ceremony – maybe just as awkward as when they were first spoken some 2000 years ago. If you remember, Jesus spoke those very words to the Samaritan woman at the well, using those words to expose her distorted view of love, and also using those words to guide the conversation, in a loving way, to reveal Himself to her as the Savior.

This morning, we are continuing with this theme of love shared to us by the Apostle John in his letter to the early church, and in this theme of love, if you recall from last week, I explained that God said something *to* us – He told us in His Word that He loves us. Not only that, God did something *for* us – He proved the full extent of His love on the cross where Jesus died, and then God did something *in* us – He abides in us through the indwelling presence of Holy Spirit so that His love can actually flow *through* us – and when His love flows through us, we reveal the unseen God to others, we experience the empowering and the fruit-bearing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we gain assurance that we are truly born-again children of God.

Now in this next portion of the letter that we are going to look at, it seems that John shifts gears so to speak – explaining that love is not only important in the present, but it’s also important for the future.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 4**, and we will begin with **verse 17** where John says,

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.

According to a Pew Research poll, 62% of Americans believe there is a hell in some form or fashion, and 2% believe that they will be sent there – at least to their version of it for some sort of accounting.

I think most of us realize that at the end of this life, there will be an accounting. Whether Christian or not, there will be a day when all will come before God for judgment, and there are different kinds of judgment – judgment for the saved and judgment for the lost.

I don't know about you, but when it comes to judgment, I want to know exactly where I stand before that day comes. I don't want to guess about it – I don't even want to hope for the best – I want confidence, and John wants us to have confidence as well, and so after he previously explained that *God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him*, John continues with his train of thought and says that by abiding in God – the fruit of love is **perfected with us** – meaning God's love is somehow made complete in us – over time and with nurturing, His love becomes ripened in us, and the result of this ripened love is **confidence in the day of judgment**.

Now that word **confidence** comes from the Greek word "*parrhesia*" which conveys the idea of freedom to speak, and in this context, it paints the picture of one's openness and freedom to step into the presence of our loving God, without anything between us, with nothing to hide, and without any fear of eternal punishment – and so, what John is telling us is the basis for our future confidence is our present loving likeness to Jesus.

As Christians, the love of Christ is to be seen in our lives – expressed not just in words, but also in action. Of course, this does not mean that we love perfectly – only God does that, but as we grow in the direction of love, as the fruit ripens, as we practice love, it reveals we are in a genuine relationship with God through Jesus Christ, it reveals the indwelling Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, and it also reveals the character of Christ to a lost and dying world. On that day – on judgment day, we can be confident **because as He is, so also are we in this world** meaning if we are His – if we are abiding in Him, we will – just like Him, love others.

Now continuing with his train of thought, John tells us this in **verse 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.

In this verse, John includes two new words in his vocabulary: **fear** and **punishment**, and keep in mind that John is writing to Christians here, and it prompts the question: **Is it possible that Christians can actually live in fear – fear of eternal punishment and torment, fear of judgment, even fear of the Rapture?**

Unfortunately, the answer is “yes”, and the reason the answer is “yes” is because they are not growing in the love of God.

God’s love, which is being perfected in us – **casts out fear** and that needs some explaining because fear is not always a bad thing. As a Christian, it’s wise to have a reverent fear for God – to be in awe of Him – that’s a very good thing. It’s good to have a cautious fear of rattlesnakes and black widow spiders – that’s a healthy fear. I won’t skydive or bungee jump – that’s a Bob fear and I can totally live with that, but for Christians to live in fear of eternal punishment and torment – and that’s the context here – John would say that person does not know God’s perfect love.

Love constantly casts out fear – it’s a process. As love is being perfected in us, as it ripens, as it accomplishes its purpose – it casts out fear. If we understand that God really and truly loves us no matter what – even at our worst, we can have confidence that whatever comes our way – good or bad, ultimately, God is for us and not against us. God loves us, and in His love, we need not fear – the *past*, the *present*, or the *future*.

We do not have to fear the *past*, because from the very beginning God loved us. The Apostle Paul explains it this way in **Romans 5:10**,

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

If God loved us when we were enemies – rejecting Him and living in total rebellion against Him, how much more does He love us now that we are His own children.

We do not need to fear the *past* and we do not need to fear the *present* because as we grow in the love of God, we begin to trust Him and we cease to be fearful of what He will do, and lastly, we don’t have to fear the *future* because our sins have

already been judged and paid for “in full” on an old rugged cross where Jesus died for us. In **Romans 8:1**, the Apostle Paul says,

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You see, to the Christian, the Judge is now our heavenly Father, and if we are living in fear of judgment and eternal punishment, then we are not understanding nor are we experiencing God’s love for us, and therefore, we are not sharing it with others as we ought.

When the fruit of God’s love has ripened and reached its intended goal, when it has accomplished its perfect work in us – fear is cast out and the dread of punishment is removed. This is one of the joys and blessings of knowing God as our Father, but to those who continue to live in fear – something is wrong and the love of God is not being perfected.

Now, in **verse 19**, John then shares one of the most straightforward verses in the Bible. He says,

We love, because He first loved us.

That’s a pretty simple statement, **isn’t it?** We love God – we love others – we love period, because God first loved us. The fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit is love, and our motivation to share that love is His love for us.

Our love is motivated by His first love. God started this. Love began in His heart, He’s the source, He initiated it – even though we were still yet sinners and enemies of God – He loved us first – it’s not the other way around, and in turn, we are to respond to His love.

That’s it – our motivation to love is merely a response to His love for us, produced and enabled by His Spirit, and modeled for us by Jesus.

Over the years, I have toyed with this little verse in my mind – it clearly has a cause-and-effect nature to it, and I think there were a couple of ways to apply it.

I think all of us want to love God more, and since our love is a response to His love for us, I concluded that if I desire to love God more, I need to learn how much more He loves me. Yes, I know that God’s love is too deep, too high, and too wide to completely understand, and yet, as with any relationship, it can grow deeper and fuller over time.

Now, I know that for some of you, God seems *impersonal* and His love for you is only seen as being *universal* in nature – meaning, God loves the world so He has to love me kind of love, but God calls you His very own child – let that sink in. He adopted you. He intentionally chose you, and He sacrificed His Son for you. Jesus said that God has numbered the hairs on your head. Isaiah says that God has engraved your name in the palm of His hand – **how personal and intimate is that?**

Turn to **John 17**, beginning with **verse 22** because I want to show you something. In this chapter, Jesus is praying to the Father on behalf of His disciples, and on behalf of the disciples to come, and in this portion of His prayer, Jesus says this,

²² The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

In His prayer, Jesus describes the unity that He desires to see produced in the hearts of His disciples – a unity of love patterned by the loving relationship between Jesus and His Father. In this demonstration of unity, it is intended that the world may know that Jesus was sent by the Father, but there was something else we can't miss. Jesus prays that the Father would love His disciples just like He loves the Son. "*Father, love them just like You love Me,*" and God does, and so we have the confidence, we have the freedom to step into the presence of God the same way Jesus does.

So, I challenge you to learn how much more God loves you so that you will draw nearer to Him.

Now, a close second to what I just said is this: If you are struggling to love someone else, especially someone who has wronged you, you need to remember the love that God showed you when you had wronged Him. You did not deserve His love and He did not owe it to you, in fact, you only deserved His judgment and wrath, and yet in spite of you, God loved you anyway and now He wants you to share His love to others who – are just like you.

So, **we love, because He first loved us.** It's a simple and straightforward statement, but beginning with **verse 20**, the rubber really hits the road so to speak. John says,

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.**

If someone says – this is the seventh time that John has used that phrase in his letter and it's typically used when someone pretends to be something they are not. If someone says, **"I love God"**, and yet habitually hates his brother or sister, they are a **liar**. That's a blunt statement, **isn't it?** – and just for clarification – just so we are being honest with one another, it's not that we *cannot* love – it's that we *will not* love.

If we know the love of God – then we *can* love. Again, we love because He first loved us, but if we *will not* love, then we are kidding ourselves. Now, John knows that none of us are perfect when it comes to love – he knows that – only God is perfect, but it would seem that John is sticking his nose into our business, he's meddling – and he's saying in so many words,

"You know, it seems very inconsistent when you folks come to church and sing 'Amazing Love' or you sing 'Oh, How I Love Jesus' while at the same time, your hearts are filled with this habitual bitterness and hatred towards one another." That's what he is saying.

If we *will not* love, if we live in *willful* habitual hatred towards another, then John says we are lying when we say we love God. If we love God, then there are really no excuses – we *can* love our brothers and sisters – and then to drive his point home, John says, **"How can you say you love God – whom you can't see at all, and not love your brother or sister who are standing right in front of you? You can see their needs. You can see their problems. You can see what your love could do in their life."**

Saying it with a positive spin, God might say to us, *"Learn to love Me – whom you cannot see, by loving My children whom you can see."* Loving God and loving others are a package deal – we can't have one without the other. We can't love vertically without loving horizontally.

When we love one another, when love is seen, we reveal the **unseen God** who first loved us. So, each of us needs to ask, **"Do others see the love of God in me?"** **"Would others, especially those who live with me – my spouse and my kids, say that they see the love of God practiced in my life?"** It's something to think about, and if we are honest, probably something to act upon.

The third largest rodent in the world, with an average adult weight of 20-25 pounds is the porcupine. This rodent gets its name from the Latin word for “pig” and the French word for “thorn” – rightly named “prickly pigs” because they have about 30,000 barbed quills.

When threatened, these rodents first try to escape and if that doesn’t work – it tucks its little head, turn its back and “Whamo!” When touched, the quills dislodge into an attacker’s flesh and the barbs on the quills flare out working against the muscle to embed itself deeper and deeper. These quills are not poisonous, but they can kill. Animals with quills in the mouth can die of starvation or from an infection.

*Now, porcupines are loners, and go figure. They typically don’t hang out in groups or in packs like other animals do, in fact, within a few months of birth, they separate from their mother and become these self-sufficient, loner, walking mass of missiles. One would think they should be extinct by now, but they survive and actually thrive. **How so?***

Well, once a year, between late summer and early fall, porcupines get close enough to each other to produce offspring. In the courting practice, they nuzzle their noses and place their front paws on each other’s shoulders and do their version of a country waltz. Some call it a “love dance” and while all of this is occurring, each porcupine relaxes and flattens their quills so to not hurt the other. They make it work, and in the wintertime a small group may even cluster together for warmth in what is termed a “prickle.”

So, there you have it, even with porcupines – mating and fellowship can and does occur.

We could all learn a lesson from these rodents. We can all be porcupines at times, with sharp damaging quills, but God places us in churches and He commands us to love one another. To do this, we need to ask God to help us “relax our quills,” even when other people are prickly. It’s the way we show the world that we love God who first loved us.

*Some people can be difficult to love
And so we do not even try to care,
But God says, “Love them just as I’ve loved you—
You’ll bring Me glory as My love you share.”*

As Christians, our love towards others is not going to be perfect, but if a porcupine – a rodent – a walking missile launcher can do a love dance, **then what does that say about us?** God loves you and He loves me – and therefore, our only reasonable response is to love one another so others can see the unseen love being perfected in us.

Source Material:

David Walls and Max Anders, I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude, vol. 14, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2018).

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament vol. II, Ephesians-Revelation (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck

Thomas L. Marberry, Shaw Craig, "Commentary on the Books of 1, 2, 3 John," in 1, 2, 3 John & Revelation, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, First Edition., The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2010).

John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

Curtis Vaughan, 1, 2, 3 John, Founders Study Guide Commentary (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2011).

Enduring Word – David Guzik

Jon Courson, Jon Courson's Application Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

Facing the Judgment with Confidence – Steven Cole

Daniel L. Akin, Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).