

As we have been traveling through John's first letter, we have been repeatedly reminded of the reality and necessity of Christian experience—the need to personally and experimentally know the truths of the gospel—thus no fewer than 32 times, we find the term “know” which refers to a knowledge that entails experience—an experimental knowledge...

But because experience can be misinterpreted or misunderstood, John repeatedly drives us back to the objective facts of the gospel—it's as if John was saying—while experience is necessary it must be grounded upon and governed by Scripture—thus he steers us clear from two extremes—[1] mysticism, which emphasizes experience at the expense of Scripture, and [2] intellectualism, which all but denies or neglects experience all together—these two are equally dangerous and have been the cause of multitudes ship-wrecking their souls to an eternal destruction...

For let me ask you—which of these two would you do without—would you want a religion void of some objective standard by which all that we believe, do, and feel is judged—or would you want a religion void of any experience but merely presented in abstract intellectual concepts—either of these would be but half a religion and would address but half the man...

Accordingly, as we look back upon vv7-16 [a section we completed last week], we see how the apostle, as a wise navigator steers us between these two extremes, laying stress both upon objective truth and personal experience—vv7-8 we find experience [or the need to love others], in vv9-10 we have objective truth—“God sent His only begotten Son into the world...to be the propitiation for our sins...”, vv12-13 experience [or the need to be assured by the testimony of the Spirit], in vv14 we have the objective truth that God sent His Son as Savior of the world, and then in vv15-16 we have the experience of personal confession and inward knowledge of God's love...

In coming to vv17-21 we come to the final paragraph of chapter 4 and in many ways a continuation of the thought began in v16—in fact we will see this morning that the latter half of v16 serves as a bridge into v17—having come to know the love of God in Christ (v16a), and as we consciously abide or remain within that love (v16b), we now have a gospel confidence able to stand the contemplation of that final and sober day—the knowledge and belief of that love has produced within us a present, but here especially a future, result —“boldness in the day of judgment...”

Now in coming to these two verses I want to suggest that a dominant theme is—The perfection of love—and so my three main points will relate to this single theme...

- I. Its Meaning
- II. Its Benefit
- III. Its Grounds
- IV. Lessons

#### I. Its Meaning

1. The word translated “perfected” means—“to bring to a completion or an intended purpose...”—it refers to the completion or accomplishment of an intended purpose...”
2. It's very akin to the idea of maturity—the bringing to fruition, completion, or a purposed end—the inner knowledge, belief, and abiding in God's love has achieved a certain goal...
3. Now here I am forced to deal with a translational issue—the old King James has rendered the phrase —“Herein is our love made perfect...”
4. By which they have suggested that John is referring to our love and not to God's love for us—but let me suggest several reasons I believe this is inaccurate...

5. Notice [1] the testimony of the Greek text—literally it reads—“In this has love been perfected with or in us...”—what they’ve done is taken the Greek word for “us” moved it to the middle of the verse and rendered it “our”...
6. Grammatically this is possible but totally unnecessary—it makes perfect sense leaving it at the end of the verse along with the preposition “with” or “among”—“in this has love been perfected with or among us...”
7. Notice [2] the testimony of v18—notice the phrase—“perfect love casts out fear...”—here we find the same love found in v17...
8. Perfect love, that is love that has produced its intended goal—“casts out fear...”—here the love referred to is obviously God’s love for us, for the imagery is that it enters the heart driving out all carnal or slavish fear...
9. As the love of God is believed and known—as we abide or remain within it—it casts out—or literally throws out fear...
10. Notice [3] the testimony of John himself—twice John previously used this word, both times referring to God’s love for us...
11. For example, 2:5—“but whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him...”—here we find that keeping His word is evidence that His love has had its intended goal within us...
12. We find it again in 4:12—“no one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us...”
13. Our love for the brethren is evidence that His love has been brought to maturity or completion within us —“His love has been perfected in us...”
14. Thus we find that our keeping His word and our loving the brethren are evidences or results of His love being perfected in us...
15. We find the same truth but stated differently in those words of the apostle in 2Cor.5:14—“for the love of Christ compels us...”
16. That is, the knowledge and belief of God’s love for us drives or compels us to respond with obedience and love—and to the degree that His love is perfected within us so is the degree of our obedience and love...
17. But here in v17 we learn a third result of having God’s love perfected within us—“boldness in the day of judgment...”
18. And so it’s to the degree that love has been perfected within us [that is that we know, believe, and abide in love] that we’ll have confidence or boldness toward the day of judgment...

## II. Its Benefit

1. We find the benefit of this perfected love [1] simply stated in v17b—“that we may have boldness in the day of judgment...” and then [2] expanded upon in v18...
2. Notice [1] simply stated, v17b—“that we may have boldness in the day of judgment...”—the word translated “boldness” literally refers to a liberty of speech...
3. John used the same term earlier in 2:28 where its translated “confidence”—“and now, little children, abide in Him, that when he appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming...”
4. Thus the term refers to the absence of fear or shame and here describes a confidence that results from knowing and believing God’s love...
5. Notice [2] expanded up in v18—“there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment [or punishment]...”
6. In other words—the knowledge and belief of God’s love for us, drives out or casts out, a terror of punishment in the day of judgment...
7. Thus the fear referred to in v18 is a slavish or carnal fear that entails a terror of eternal punishment—this of course is in contrast to a gospel fear or a sober reverence for God’s paternal chastisements...
8. Christians are everywhere commanded to fear God, but they are never expected to dread His eternal judgment...
9. We find both kinds of fear illustrated in Newton’s famous hymn—“twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved...”
10. In other words it was grace that achieved both—it taught him to fear God rightly and it relieved him of a carnal, slavish fear...

11. Thus the fear that love casts out is an unhealthy or carnal fear that's akin to being afraid of God—of being scared of God...
12. This is not the fear that the Scriptures commend, nor is it the fear that the Spirit produces—but the fear here condemned is divorced from love and trust...
13. Rom.8:15—“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father...”
14. Notice two things—[1] the spirit of bondage—“for you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear...”
15. By—“the spirit of bondage”—is meant that spirit or disposition of bondage that results from an attempt to find peace with God by our own efforts...
16. Here it may have direct reference to a misuse of the old covenant—an attempt to make peace with God through the works of the law...
17. Thus a “spirit of bondage” necessarily entails the presence of carnal and slavish fear—a dread of coming punishment...
18. Notice [2] the Spirit of adoption—“but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father...”
19. By this second “Spirit” is meant the Spirit of God, who enables us to possess a sense of peace and assurance...
20. In the terminology of 1John chapter 4, He has been give to us that we might know and believe the love that God has for us...
21. Or in the language of Rom.5:5—“the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us...”
22. Thus I suggest that Rom.8:15 teaches us the same truth as 1Jn.4:17-18 only in varying terminology—the Spirit is pouring out God's love within us casting out all that's in opposition to it...
23. Heb.2:14-15—“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage...”

### III. Its Grounds

1. We here come to the most difficult and yet most important phrase in our passage, and in fact, as I hope to show you, one of the most glorious statements found in the entire Bible...
2. Why do we have boldness in the Day of Judgment—what possibly can bring such confidence that the terror of punishment has been removed...
3. Before I suggest to you the two main options that have been suggested as to what John meant by this phrase, I want to point out that the phrase is “causal” in nature...
4. What I mean by “causal” is that the word “because” indicates that what is to follow serves as the cause of what was previously stated...
5. In other words—John is now providing us with the cause behind our boldness, or a reason for boldness in the day of judgment...
6. We find a similar construction in v19—“we love Him, because He first loved us...”—God's love us is the cause behind our love for Him...
7. Notice [1] some say that this phrase means we are presently like Christ—that is, because we bear a similar image to Christ we can be assured we are in Christ...
8. This is without doubt the majority view, who understands John to refer to our practical righteousness or character...
9. Because we love the brethren as did Christ, we can have confidence that God has changed us and thus saved us...
10. Right now Christ presently possess a heart of love—and so to the degree that we exemplify this love it can be said of us—“as He is, so are we in this world...”
11. But a [2] possibility and I believe a greater probability is that John meant we are presently in Christ—that is we are in union with Him...
12. This view places the focus upon our present and personal union with Christ—although He is in heaven, we are with and in Him by way of our position...

13. Because Christ is our Head and we are His body—there is a true sense in which wherever the Head is so is the body...
14. Let me suggest several reasons why I believe this to be the mind of Christ upon this phrase—notice [a] John has made repeated reference to our union with God throughout the immediate context...
15. V12—“God abides in us...” v15—“God abides in him, and he is God...” v16—“he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him...”
16. Thus I suggest that this mutual union is referred to in the latter part of v17—“as he is, so are we in this world...”—that is there exists a present union between us and Christ...
17. Although Christ is presently physically in heaven, we are in Him by faith, and He is us by His Spirit—although we are physically separated we are one with Him...
18. Notice [b] the phrase—“as He is, so are we in this world...”—isn’t strictly true according to the first view—are Christians on earth just as Christ is in heaven...
19. Christ is presently in a glorious place with a glorified body—Christians are in the midst of a wicked world with a decaying body...
20. Notice [c] this view harmonizes with the rest of Scripture—let me briefly suggest two or three other passages that say a similar thing...
21. 1Jn.2:1-2—“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world...”
22. Col.3:1-4—“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory...”
23. I suggest the phrase in v3—“you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...” is very akin with the words of our text—“as he is, so are we in this world...”
24. Eph.2:4-6—“but God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus...”
25. Notice the phrase—“made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”
26. While we are yet presently in this world, we are also, byway of our union with Christ, seated in heaven with Christ...
27. In other words—there is a sense in which—“as He is [sitting on a throne in the heavenly places], so are we in this world...”
28. And so byway of summery—we have three things within these two verses—[1] a perfected love, [2] a result—“that we might have boldness in the day of judgment...” and [3] a cause or grounds—“because as He is, so are we in this world...”

### III. Lessons

#### A. We learn the reality of a future judgment

1. I think it goes without saying, that we live in a day when the reality of a future judgment has all but disappeared from the average pulpit...
2. We’ve breed a generation that no longer has any fear or dread of such judgment—a generation of mockers who laugh and scoff at the idea...
3. Such a concept smacks of old-school fundamentalism—or perhaps even Puritanism—no body believes such a thing any more...
4. And even if we did believe it, you can’t preach about it because it might upset your hearers—and besides, few people ever built a big church by stressing or maintaining such truths...
5. But my friends if the Bible teaches anything it teaches the reality of a literal judgment—let me briefly suggest three descriptions of judgment as found within this passage...
6. Notice [1] it will be a future judgment, Acts 17:31—“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world...”

7. There are some who portray death as the only judgment man must face—as if death were the greatest thing man must face...
8. But our text speaks about something far worse than death—something that is planned and purposed, and something that is yet future...
9. Notice [2] it will be a single judgment—notice the terminology—“the day of judgment...”—there is not five judgments, as some teach, but one...
10. Notice [3] it will be a fearful judgment—if a knowledge of God’s love casts out fear, what will become of those who’ve never known or believed God’s love for them...

#### B. We learn the nature of gospel confidence

1. Here I want to come back to the phrase—“as He is, so are we in this world...”—for within it we find the only sure ground for gospel confidence...
2. What an amazing thought—a thought that if rightly and really believed could and should relieve every doubt...
3. Notice [1] as Christ is slain, so am I—by this I mean as Christ presently bears the marks of crucifixion, so does every person for whom He died...
4. That is—as we died with and in Christ, because Christ now stands before the Father as one who satisfied the justice of God—we too stand with Him before God justified...
5. Fully and totally acquitted from all of our sins—God now finds no displeasure in us—“as He is, so are we in this world...”
6. Rev.5:6—“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures [angelic beings], and in the midst of the elders [representative of elect], stood a Lamb as though it had been slain...”
7. Notice that Christ presently stands in the midst of the throne [that is He sits upon a throne] as a—“Lamb as though it had been slain...”
8. This is to say that Christ presently sits on the right hand of His Father, as One who had fully satisfied the wrath of God...
9. As Christ now stands in heaven as—“a Lamb as though it had been slain...”—we too—“are in this world...”—that is, we are presently represented in heaven by Christ as a slain Lamb...
10. Notice [2] as Christ is righteous, so am I—here we learn that Christ not only stands before His Father as a Lamb that had been slain, but also as a Lamb without spot or blemish...
11. We are presently looked upon, in Christ, as if we loved God and our neighbor to the very degree that He loved God and His neighbor...
12. Notice [3] as Christ is beloved, so am I, Matt.3:17—“And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased...”
13. While this statement was made of our Savior while on earth, the sediments made are obviously true of Him now—Christ presently stands before the Father as beloved and accepted...
14. But I want you to notice the phrase—“in whom I am well pleased...”—notice not—“with whom I am well pleased...” but—“in whom I am well pleased...”
15. The point being—God the Father is well pleased with every person who is in Him—because Christ represented them the Father is as pleased with them as He is with Christ...
16. My friends a Christian person, who is yet within this wicked world, is as beloved and accepted as Christ as Christ is Himself...
17. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century a man by the name of John Bunyan had been struggling with his remaining sins and beginning to question his acceptance with God...
18. He writes—“at the apprehension of these things my sickness was doubled upon me, for now was I sick in my inward man, my soul was clogged with guilt...”
19. As he began to walk up and down the house—“as a man in a most woeful state” he says—“that word of God took hold of my heart, Ye are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...”
20. Bunyan continues—“But oh what a turn it made upon me! Now was I as one awakened out of some troublesome sleep and dream, and listening to this heavenly sentence, I was as if I had heard it thus expounded to me: Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but

behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am pleased with him...”

C. We learn what to do with remaining fear

1. Here I largely refer to the latter part of v18—“but he who fears has not been made perfect in [or, with] love...”
2. A certain evidence that God’s love has had such an influence within us, is that we have a confidence with reference to the day of judgment...
3. The knowledge and belief of God’s love for us, results in a casting out of all carnal and slavish fear—and so the presence of this fear is evidence that our knowledge of God’s love is imperfect...
4. Let me state this another way—to the degree that God’s love is perfected within us, so will be our confidence or boldness before God...
5. Let me illustrate—think of a building that is being completed—every day the works add various pieces that bring the work to its perfection...
6. This is similar with reference to every Christian person—they are being perfected by the Spirit through the process of Christian maturity...
7. And some are more fully completed while others are yet in their beginnings—and yet each one is being perfected with reference to God’s love...
8. This my friend, serves as a sure test in discerning our present spiritual maturity—to what extend has God’s love been perfected within our hearts...
9. How far has God’s love filled our souls—how much confidence have we been given as a result of this love...
10. I suggest that if we judge ourselves by this standard we must all confess how far we are from perfection—how immature we really are...
11. This my friends, is the mark of a mature Christian—one who has the love of God perfected within them, which results in humble confidence before God...
12. When we contemplate that final day, what comes to mind—are we flooded with a sense of uncertainty and fear—if so, we must own ourselves to be immature...
13. But can you envision that day, within the eye of your soul, with a sense of confidence, with a sense of longing and loving anticipation...
14. Some of you may know that 1John 4:17-18 was a favorite of Charles Wesley in attempting to proof his doctrine of Christian perfection...
15. But the perfection that this text speaks about is manifested by a confidence or boldness with reference to the day of judgment...
16. This is Christian perfection and is should be attained by every Christian—and in those cases where it is lacking it can only be explained by Christian immaturity...
17. But oh my friend—may I leave this sermon by saying a few words to you who have no hope but Christ and yet retain a measure of fear in considering that great day...
18. If the perfection of God’s love casts out fear, then what you and I need is a heightened sense and knowledge of God’s love in Christ...
19. Oh my dearly beloved—there is only one way to elevate your fears—fix your eyes more fully upon Christ in whom God’s love is found...