

Confident at God's Judgment

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Bible Verse: 1 John 4:17-21

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Well, there is certainly plenty to distract our minds in the days in which we live between the news of the day, between the challenges of life and all of the things that are associated with being sinners in a fallen world. It's a wonderful opportunity for us to come back to God's word. I said recently that I believe that it is obvious that we are living in the open spiritual conflict described in Ephesians 6:12, that we wrestle not with flesh and blood but against the powers and the principalities and the powers of the air. It is a serious time in the life of the world, it's a serious time in the life of the church, and the surest thing, the best thing, the only thing that we can do in such times is to come back to God's word, our refuge, our fortress, and let it remind us of the wonderful provision that God has made for us in Christ. So if you're feeling challenged by life today, if you're feeling the difficulties of life, then this is going to be a wonderful time of encouragement to you.

I'm going to read from the passage that Matt opened with and just to keep it fresh in our minds. 1 John 4:17-21 is our text for this evening. 1 John 4 beginning in verse 17 says this, it says,

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.

We've spoken many times about the reality that there is a judgment day that is coming for all men. You and I have an appointment, an appointed time from God at which we will stand before him in judgment and that's true of the entire world, that's true of everyone in this room, everyone outside of this room, everyone that has ever lived is facing a day of judgment before God and that's a matter to take seriously, it's a matter to take soberly because Scripture describes judgment as being something that will be terrifying for sinners.

In the book of the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah in chapter 1 describes it this way beginning at verse 17, Zephaniah 1:17, it says this, "I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD'S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth." Well, suddenly when you read those words with a believing heart, suddenly you're lifted beyond the passing politics of today and you realize that there's something far more serious than what we see in the day's news. There is a coming terrifying judgment on sinners and when you realize that each one of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that each one of you have sinned and fallen short of his glory, that each one of you have inherited corruption from your parents and you manifest that corruption in your lives, then you realize that this is a most sober matter, that a holy God is going to deal with sinful men in a terrifying way.

Well, the reality of that should bring fear to any heart to realize that, and yet as we read in this passage today, what we find its theme is that you can actually be confident at God's judgment. You can be confident at God's judgment and the question that I would ask you to consider this evening is whether you will be bold on judgment day? Will you be confident when God's judgment comes, that it will be well with your soul? This passage and this entire book of 1 John is given to the aim of giving you that confidence, that faith, that strength, that understanding. Let me just remind you in 1 John 5:13, we'll get there in two or three services, 1 John 5:13 it says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." This theme of assurance, this confidence that it will be well with our souls on judgment day, and what I want you to see as we consider this is this reality, it's that Christians should anticipate God's judgment with a sense of confidence. The terror that will fall on the world will not fall on you if you are in Christ and that is the sweetest message that anyone could know and possess in his heart and to have as his assurance that whatever comes in this life, it will be well with your soul on judgment day and that is the thing that we want to explore here this evening.

There's a two part aspect to tonight's message and predominantly we're going to spend most of our time on this first point about being confident in the presence of God. Confidence in the presence of God. There's a false confidence and a true confidence that you could take. There are those who have a false confidence based on an irreverent approach to God, based on a lack of taking seriously his holiness and what his word says about his judgment on sin. They have a confidence but it's no more than an uninformed bluster, thinking that things will be well with them in their own self-righteousness. People like that will face the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew 7, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." We're not talking about that tonight, we're speaking to Christians tonight and bringing the comfort and the assurance of God's word to those of you that know Christ that you might be able to process these things in a way that brings a deep and settled peace to your soul, an anchor that holds in the storms of life and in the storms of judgment, that it will be well with your soul.

So we want to consider, first of all, this confidence in the presence of God. Look at verse 16 with me as we remember the context. John had just spoken about our mutual indwelling in the love of God. Verse 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." Now that's a significant aspect of context here is that John is speaking in the context of the love that God has for his people. Earlier in chapter 3, verse 1, he said, "Beloved, we are children of God and what manner of love is this that God has made us so that we would be called children of God, the sons of God?" So there is this family love that God has placed us in. There is this self-giving love that he has placed on his children that takes away all fear. If the Father loves us and the Father is the one who is the judge, then it can only go well for us. It can only be well for us if we are in this love of God and on the receiving end of what he has done.

Now the fact that he has loved us in Christ, the fact that Christ gave himself in love for us, that he bore our sins at the cross, that he bore them in his back, as it were, and he suffered the wrath of God when the Father forsook him and he cried out in dereliction, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" All of this done in a voluntary act of loving self-sacrifice for us, then there should be something that starts to dawn on your mind. It should start to dawn on your mind that if God has done that for us, if Christ has done that for us, then it can only be well for us in the end, and the perfecting aspect, the maturing of that is shown in verse 17 where the benefit of that indwelling love takes root in our perspective about our future destiny.

Look at verse 17 now with me. He says, "By this, love is perfected with us, so that," here's the purpose of it and here's the purpose of the perfection of the love of God on us, it's that, "we may have confidence in the day of judgment, "that we could have a sense of certainty that God will not cast us away, that that terrifying judgment that is described by the prophet Zephaniah is not going to fall on us because Christ has already intervened on our behalf and now acts as our shield and our defense against that judgment. This is the most important thing in the world. This is the most important thing that a person could settle in the reality of their heart is to know that they are in this love of God.

Now how can we have that kind of judgment? How can you have that kind of judgment when you, yourself, are a sinner? Maybe you come in tonight conscious of your recent sins and you've come in troubled by the nature of life and by the things that have happened in the recent past, and your soul is in turmoil tonight even though you have this underlying confidence that indeed you are in Christ. Well, let's explore what John grounds our confidence in. Why is it that we can have confidence in that day of judgment and not fear it? Verse 17, he makes a rather obscure statement here. He says, "because as He is, so also are we in this world." As He is, so also are we in this world. Well, he's making a reference, he's making a statement about Christ and saying because of who Christ is, then that somehow guarantees us confidence in this world as we look forward and face the prospect of judgment and the question is what is it about Christ that makes us confident. Something about Christ gives us confidence as we contemplate judgment and John does not explain it here in the verse, he just makes this summary statement, and so it's easy to kind of read through that rather quickly and just kind of have a bit of a fog

on your mind, "Oh, that sounds good but I'm not sure exactly what he means." Well, let's take some time from the broader context of this letter to understand what John has in mind here. He has taught us many things about Christ already in this letter so he is making this summary statement about Christ here in verse 17 that is built on the foundation of what he has said in key passages earlier.

So what has he said about Christ as it – watch this – what has he said about Christ as it pertains to us and the reality of God's judgment? What has he said about Christ that would pertain to our confidence at the judgment seat of God? Well, let's just look at a couple of key passages here. He's told us four things about Christ that I believe inform the way we should understand this. He says because as Christ is, so also are we in the world. Well, what can we say about Christ? Look back at chapter 2, verse 1. Who is Christ? Well, he is our Advocate with the Father in heaven. Chapter 2, verse 1, picking it up in the middle of the verse he says, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." We have, who Christ is is he is the representative of his people before the throne of God and the Father accepts him at the throne of God. So Christ represents us at that holy throne. Christ helps us, which is what the word means, at that holy throne. Christ stands before the Father and we are in Christ and therefore we have a brother in heaven who pleads our cause, who represents us before the Father in a perfect way that the Father has already accepted. So we have an Advocate. Christ is our Advocate in heaven.

Now secondly, who is Christ and what has he done, what is it about him that would make us confident in judgment? Well, look at verse 2 as it expands, as John expands on the person of Christ he says in chapter 2, verse 2, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." Christ is now in heaven as the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation is that word that indicates that Christ is the sacrifice that has turned away the wrath of God. Christ has offered himself, he offered himself as the sacrifice for sin on the cross and that he is by nature, he is by very essence the propitiation for our sins. He has satisfied the wrath of God. He has turned away the wrath of God. And so we have in heaven at the present time we have an Advocate who represents us. We have an Advocate who himself is the propitiation for our sins. He has paid the price of our sins and now based on that sacrifice, he represents us before a holy God.

Look over at chapter 4, verse 10. John comes back to that theme again in chapter 4, verse 10 when he says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." So twice John has highlighted the reality that Christ has done everything that is necessary to satisfy the judgment of God for his people and because Christ is that propitiation, because he is the Advocate, that gives us confidence at the judgment seat of God.

Now we're not done yet. Thirdly, we could say this. We're answering the question what is it about Christ that makes us confident? First of all, he's our Advocate; secondly, he's our propitiation; thirdly, if you just go up one verse to chapter 4, verse 9, we see that he came to give us life. He came to give us life. So in verse 9 it says, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might

live through Him." Now look, beloved, the purpose of Christ coming was to impart life to you as one of his children, as one of the objects of his saving work, and we see that John's whole context as he speaks about these things is the love of God, his care for you, his mercy and his kindness toward your soul. Now look, let that sink in and, again, we're back to the fact and we're colliding once again with our legalistic unbelieving bent that the word of God is consistently like water wearing down the rock of our heart to change us and to soften us and to understand the good purposes of God toward you. God has sent Christ and Christ is our Advocate. He is our propitiation. He came to give us life and he did all of this in love. He did it all in care for your soul.

Now and so what we see here is, is that the purposes of God toward his people are not unto judgment but unto life, and Christ has secured that. You do not secure that with your own good works or with your pleasing behavior before God. Christ has secured that for you. Long before you were born, Christ took care of everything that was necessary for your salvation. He took care of everything that was necessary for you to go through the judgment of God safe and secure and that is a wonderful position of blessing, and because that's what Christ has done for you, that's what Christ has done for you in love, then judgment cannot be something that actually is a threat to you anymore. It couldn't be because the very purpose for which Christ came was to give you life. Christ has sacrificed himself and satisfied everything that God would require of you. Christ in essence said, "Father, require it from Me. I will take care of it for them." And that's exactly what he did. In his life of perfect obedience, in his sacrificial death which paid the price of sin, Christ has done everything that is necessary for you to find acceptance at the throne of a holy God. And that's who Christ is. That's what he has done, and the whole point of it is to give you life as a believer in him.

So there should be dawning on your consciousness a realization, a recognition that it truly is well with your soul if you are in Christ and this is far far better – listen – there's so many people wrapped up in what's happening in the news these days and it is easy to get swept up with it but, beloved, you understand, right, that everything that would ever happen in the news no matter what it would be here in this life, it's all ultimately temporary and even your life here on earth itself is temporary, and that means that the things that are of the greater priority to you are the things that are eternal. That's why Scripture calls you, that's why Jesus calls you to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you. Yes, we don't like what's happening in the world but there is something of greater value, greater importance that we find our perspective in and that's the reality that we have a soul that's gonna live forever and eternity is going to be a lot longer than the 70 years here on earth or whatever happens in the next six months in our political cycle. We just have to come to realize what's eternal and of ultimate significance than that which is merely transitory and passing. And what is most significant for you is what's going to happen to you when you die, what's going to happen to you when you stand before God in judgment. If we lived in a perfect idyllic world, if everything went according to your preferences in the political realm, the social realm, the economic realm and everything was just perfect on earth but you stood naked in your sins before a holy God and were cast into hell, what good would

that be? As Jesus said in Mark 8:36, "What profit is there if a man gains the whole world and loses his soul?"

Well, reverse the logic of that because it goes both ways. If your soul has been secured and you have gained heaven in Christ, then what's the comparative significance of the world by contrast? Everything, it's all about perspective, beloved. It's all about having an eternal perspective. Once we have it sealed in our minds we really are marching toward our date of destiny at the throne of God, then everything about your concern and your ultimate priority is, "That day has to go well for me. Everything else can go wrong and if that day goes well, then I'm good. If that day fails and I'm cast away in the end, then it doesn't matter what's happened good to me in this life." These things are just so plain and obvious when they're spelled out for us, aren't they?

So what John is saying, then, here in verse 17, look back at it with me when he says love is perfect with us, it's the idea that the consummation of the love of God for us at this point in the passage is that we would understand the work of Christ in such a way that it would give us confidence, security, peace, assurance in the day of judgment because we are resting in Christ, and because as he is so also are we in the world.

Now just one other aspect about it here. Who is this Son of God? Who is this Christ? Well, fourthly, he is the Savior of the world. Verse 14, "the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." And so you have Christ your Advocate, Christ your propitiation, Christ the one who gives life, Christ the Savior of the world, all of this done, all of this done for you in the love of God as a great a merciful gift that you never deserved and never could. That's who Christ is. That means that the Father accepts Jesus. The Father is pleased with his Son and Jesus has done everything that is necessary – watch this – Jesus has done everything that is necessary to enter into heaven, to enter into the throne room of God, to be in his presence without condemnation.

Now what does that mean for you and why does that bring confidence to you if you are a Christian? Well, it's wonderful. It's wonderful. It means that your status before God corresponds to the status that Christ has before God. You are in Christ. He has shared his righteousness with you. He has covered your sins with his shed blood and as a result of that, the way that God accepts his Son is the exact same way that he accepts you now as you're walking through this earth. So what it means is that the Father accepts Christ and just as Christ has that status before God, if you are a true Christian today you have that exact same status because the righteousness of Christ has been charged to your account, your sins have been charged to Christ who has paid them in full, and therefore in the words of Romans 8:1, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no condemnation now and there never will be. The Father accepts Christ and just as Christ is, verse 17, look at it there again, just as Christ is accepted in the presence of God, so also are we in this world. We are accepted before God and therefore we can be confident, we can approach judgment without fear because the status of Christ belongs to us here on earth. It's wonderful truth.

Let's look at a parallel passage, not really parallel but another passage in Ephesians 3 that gives us this same understanding. Ephesians 3. Paul, of course, has already expounded on the reality of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone in chapters 1 and 2, and now in chapter 3, verse 11, he says this, he says, "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." Scripture is teaching us that in Christ we have a position of confidence before this holy God. We can go boldly into his presence because everything that would otherwise have separated us from him has been satisfied and taken care of in Christ. By his righteousness he merited heaven for us. By his death he took away the sins and cleansed us from that which would have separated us otherwise from God. And so everything that kept us from God has been dealt with and now in Christ who is our Advocate, who is our propitiation, who is the giver of life, who is the Savior of the world and all of that in love, this one who has this magnificent exalted position before the Father, you're in him. He covers you. He protects you. He has brought you in in such a way that you could never be cast out. God would have to break and violate his own holiness and promise before you could ever be cast away from him. I want to tell you, that brings peace. That gives us a sense of confidence, an assurance that the Father who has set his love on me once will never take it away. The Father who never changes is not going to change the verdict. In Christ you have not only been declared not guilty, you have been declared righteous, righteous according to the full merits of Christ himself and as a result of that, you belong in heaven and you will one day be there without fear of judgment and so we have boldness and confident access in him.

Now while we're still in Ephesians 3, let me just add a little couple of other comments to it. Paul goes on to pray in verse 14. These truths are so wonderful and so magnificent and so far beyond the realm of sight and the physical sense that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to understand them and to grasp them properly. And so Paul prays for his readers of this epistle but it's a prayer that is consistent with the prayer of Christ in John 17, that he desires us to see his glory, but we'll stay here in Ephesians 3. Look at verse 14, he says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Paul says, "I want the Spirit of God to help you grasp the magnitude of what the riches of Christ are that have been given to you. I want you to understand that so that you would be strengthened in this bold and confident access that is yours in Christ to approach a holy God." So we see that there is this sense of confidence that is intended to permeate your Christian life; that you are not to be weak and faltering and as a Christian fearful of God in a way that is concerned about the way that he might ultimately deal with you. Everything that he would have dealt with you according to sin, he did that at

the cross and now the gates of love have been opened. The floodgates of mercy have been pulled back and we are awash in them.

So Christ in the presence of God in heaven, we share that status on earth. God will never condemn Christ. That's who Christ is and that means that he will never condemn us who are in him. Stated differently, the position of Christ belongs to us. He did his work for us. And so God looks at you through the lens of Christ and he sees you in the sphere of love of his beloved Son. What does God see? What does God see as a judge when he looks upon you? He sees perfect righteousness based on the life of Christ. He sees no sin in the sense that the sin has been atoned based on the shed blood of Christ, and as we point to many times, God says, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Well, beloved, if God's not going to hold your sins against you and if God views you in the sphere of the righteousness of Christ and has credited that to your account, then what is it that would ever separate you from him? What could possibly go wrong for you in Christ? What could separate you? Tribulation or distress? Famine? Persecution? Naked? Peril or sword? Principalities? Angels? Any other created thing? What can separate you from Christ? The answer is absolutely nothing. Your sins are covered. Righteousness has been credited to your account and as a result of all of that, you're supposed to contemplate these things and come to a settled conclusion in your mind, "That means the day of judgment will not bring me harm. Judgment has been satisfied and therefore I live with confidence. I live day to day with confidence knowing that my eternal future is secure and it is well." That means that, I like to say these things from time to time without emphasizing it too much because people start to think I'm morbid, but I like to prepare people for this final day of your earthly life, it means that if you are conscious on your deathbed and you're conscious that your life is ebbing away from you, that at that very moment, at that very moment, at that very time, that very episode, that ultimate episode of life, it means you can lie there in peace. You can lie there with a heavenly smile on your face knowing that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; to know that when I draw my final breath, I will inhale my next one in the presence of Christ in heaven and it's all going to be well with me. I don't need to bear on my mind at that time, I don't need to bear on my mind my prior life of sin and all of the things that would bring guilt and shame to me, and that would cause my soul to tremble at that time. I don't need, I don't have to, I can die in peace, let's put it in a positive way, I don't need to die in fear because Christ has covered me and if he went to the cross and his arms stretched out on the cross to pay for my sin, you say to yourself, then surely those hands that bore the wounds for you, surely those hands will gather you up either directly or through the instrumentality of his angels. Loving omnipotent hands will gather you up and usher you into the presence of heaven so that the day of your death, the day of judgment holds no fear. It couldn't. It could not possibly go wrong for you if you are in Christ. Judgment is impossible when you belong to this one who is life, who is propitiation, who is your salvation.

Now look at verse 18 as John makes this plain here. Remember, he's talking about the context of judgment. This is not talking about the reverential fear of God that is an appropriate aspect of Christian living. He's talking about fearing God in a cringing way in the contemplation of judgment when he says this in verse 18, "There is no fear in love,"

no fear in love, "but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." To the extent that you might still have some fear of judgment as a believer in Christ, it's an indication that there's room for spiritual growth. It's for you to understand that that condition of fear is not to be a mark of the Christian life. Fear is an indication that you still dread punishment for your sin but how could that be? How could you be afraid of that if Christ is your Advocate? If Christ is your propitiation? If Christ is your Savior? If God accepts Christ and you are in Christ, then he accepts you the same way that he accepts Christ and Christ was welcomed gladly into heaven at his ascension. Then there's no place for fear.

It's your privilege, my friends, to live without fear of the judgment of God if you are in Christ. That's your privilege. It's your prerogative. I would go another direction and say it's your responsibility. This is what you are to embrace and to believe. God in love has poured out his eternal saving intentions on you. Let that sink in. God, the holy God, the sovereign God, the merciful God, has said, "I would have you in My family." Christ, as it were, said, "I will accomplish redemption for you." The Holy Spirit says, "I will apply that redemption to you." Father, Son and Holy Spirit working in Triune perfect harmony to bring you into this place of perfect safety on your miserably sinful soul. Does something of the nature of the love of God start to dawn upon you? Do you understand that this is a gift given to you apart from your works, that you are saved apart from your merit, that you do not deserve this and it's not because you first sought after God either. Let's do away with Arminian distortions of such things.

Look at verse 19. He says, "We love, because He first loved us." This salvation that you enjoy in Christ, my friends, it was God's idea, not yours. It was his grace, not your works. It was his will operating on yours that brought you to Christ rather than and in complete contradistinction to your will operating on God forcing him to respond. God worked on you and you responded as a result rather than you doing something that God responded to. We love because he first loved us.

So I've been speaking here almost exclusively tonight to Christians, trust him. Trust his love. Trust what he has done. Trust what God's word says about Christ and enter into this realm of confidence. And for those of you that are not in Christ, understand that where we started tonight's message is the realm of your life right now, terrifying judgment, full extraction of the penalty of sin at the cost of your soul throughout all of eternity. This judgment is real. This judgment is certain and there is only one way of escape.

So my friend, God in mercy has brought the Gospel to you and he offers it to you freely without cost. He says, "Come and drink of this water of which you have heard tonight. Drink of this water freely." Come to Christ and be saved and step out from that realm of judgment into this realm of love and security of which we've been speaking. You can know it all through faith in Christ tonight. If you would come to Christ, God would grant the fullness of all of this to you immediately, instantly without any prior payment on your part.

So salvation leads to this kind of confidence and it should lead to a second result that we'll only address briefly here. We've talked about confidence in the presence of God. Well, what this salvation does is it has a second effect that John has been speaking about throughout his letter, it's about love in the presence of believers. Love in the presence of believers and the idea is this, is that there is this vertical confidence that we have based on Christ and his work for us. We have this vertical confidence before God that floods our soul with peace and joy and confidence, with joy, chapter 1, verse 4 of this book. Well, that vertical love flowing down into our souls spills over horizontally into the lives of other believers and that's the idea of what John is speaking about here as we look at verse 20. Love for God and love from God produces love for fellow Christians.

Verse 20, look at it with me. He says, "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." Now beloved, just think about everything that we've talked about here this evening and understand the flow of thought here. Understand that hostility toward other believers, understand that hostility even toward your enemies is inconsistent with everything that we've been talking about. If Christ in love has been a propitiation and an Advocate and a giver of life and a Savior to us, and you're on the undeserving unworthy receiving end of all of this, all of this great mercy and great love, and the Spirit of God has come and has changed your heart and made you someone new, on the basis of all of those truths and realities then isn't it obvious that the person who has received this gift of salvation is going to be different before men? It could be no other way. How could you be on the receiving end of all of that great love vertically and then be a person of hatred and hostility toward the men around you, particularly as the context requires here, particularly within the church, within the realm of your Christian family? How could that possibly be? This does not compute. This is a major error. This is a mission aborted. It does not work that way.

So John having taken us to the heights of the love of God and confidence at his judgment seat now applies it horizontally in life and says in a negative way, what he's saying is that this love that God has laid upon you changes you so that you obviously will love the ones around you. And if that horizontal dimension of life is absent, if you can live in hatred and hostility toward the believers around you, then you need to reconsider whether you've received the vertical love to begin with. The two are inseparably connected. The God who is love imparts his nature to his children, that means that his children become loving reflections of the love that they've received. So someone who is settled in anger, resentment, grudges, hatred, verse 20, it's obvious what that means. "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," is not able to, "love God whom he has not seen." You see, the reality of love is expressed in the human relationships that God gives to us.

So my encouragement to you tonight would be that if there's anger in your heart, that you would seriously rethink it. Seriously. Seriously. Let's rethink what we're saying here. You claim to know Christ and yet you're hostile? You're angry in a settled way? Uh-uh. Uh-uh. No, that's not Christianity, John says, that's a lie. I'm just reading the word of God to you at that point. Look at it there, verse 20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his

brother, he is a liar." What could be more plain? No, if Christ dwells in you, you will love others in whom he also dwells. If a man, a woman, does not love the Christians that are in their lives, it's absurd to claim that they love the God who they say has saved them. That's not love. It doesn't work that way.

So this love – watch this – this love is a natural overflow of the new nature that God gives to us in Christ. It's a natural and the only possible response to having received such infinitely valuable, infinitely wonderful vertical love from God. Infinite love obviously would spill over into an expression of finite love here on earth, wouldn't it? How could it not work that way? So we have a new nature, we have an understanding that changes our heart motivations toward the ones that we live with but there's another aspect to it as well, it's also commanded of you. Verse 21, love in the presence of other believers, verse 21, "And this commandment we have from Him." Christ is our authority, Christ is our Lord. Yes, he is our Savior but he did not set aside his Lordship in saving us. He exercises that over our lives. He saved us in order to be our Lord and that we would reflect him and that we would obey him, and from his position of loving authority in our lives, he commands us to do something, he commands that, verse 21, "the one who loves God should love his brother also." This is his commandment. We love each other because it's a natural response to the love of God. We love each other because it's natural to do so because we share the same indwelling Spirit and we love because we want to obey. We love in obedience to our God. Jesus said the same thing, the exact same thing in John 13 when he said this, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you that you also love one another." Vertically he says, "I've loved you." Horizontally, "Then I command you that you would love one another."

So we have some spiritual inventory to take in our hearts tonight. One is to contemplate the saving person, the saving work of Christ, and secure in our hearts a confidence that it's well with our soul. If you lack that, you need to come back to God's word and ask him through his Holy Spirit to give you understanding. But we contemplate Christ and we come to this position of confidence. It is well with my soul. I sing it joyfully, "It's well with my soul." I say it dogmatically, "It's well with my soul." And nothing, nothing the commitment of your heart is, you say to yourself, "I will let nothing shake me from that confidence." And so we take inventory in the confidence realm and we take inventory in the realm of love as well. If God has so loved us, then what does that say about our love for one another, I ask you?

And with all of these things, we simply come to this closing thought: isn't it wonderful to be a Christian? Our sins are forgiven. We look to the day of judgment with confidence. We can go through this world with a perspective that others don't have. We abide in God's love. We love one another. We are in this unspeakably rich realm of love, peace, confidence, joy, assurance and holiness. I want to tell you, that's the place to be. That is the place to be and if you are there, then with me I'm sure you want to say, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift."

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for our Savior, for His righteousness and for His shed blood. How we love Him. How grateful we are that You have saved us and made us children of God, that You have given birth to us, as it were, and that now we can know these realms of unspeakable joy, of growth in holiness, and an abiding assurance that we have eternal life, and that we therefore walk through this world as pilgrims, we walk through knowing that this world is not our home, we're passing through to a greater and final destination where we will be welcomed as citizens of the kingdom of God, as children of our heavenly Father, and we will one day see our Savior face-to-face. We're confident of that, Father, through the testimony of Your word and the witness of Your Spirit who bears witness to these things in our hearts that indeed we are the children of God. We thank You for that. We pray for each one that they might know Christ by faith and that knowing Christ by faith, Father, we would abide in this love of God and express it to one another that our relationships within the body of Christ and within our Christian homes would be ever increasingly marked by a sweetness, a tenderness, a kindness of love that is a reflection of the great kindness, the great love, the great mercy, the great patience that You showed to us in saving us. We pray these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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