

## **1 John 4:12-16 (NKJV)**

**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 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**

**14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *as* Savior of the world.**

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

**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.**

Can you love God directly?

If there were no human beings on the earth other than you, could you still love God?

Have you ever noticed in your own understanding of scripture that even when you conclude something, on further reading you find out that there is more to the story? Well the text this week, like most weeks, stretched my thinking more.

Look at verse 20 of Chapter 4

## **1 John 4:20 (NKJV)**

**20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?**

Verse 20 reasons that if you don't love the brother that you **can** see, you must not love the God that you **cannot** see. And both are necessarily possible, and even mandatory.

Plus the first commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the first 4 of the ten commandments tell us how we are to love God. And we can do that even if we are in isolated confinement.

We are to have no other gods.

We are to make no graven images.

We are not to take the name of God in vain.

And keep the Sabbath

That is what God told the Israelites to do. Some believe the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment has changed some in the New Testament. Some don't. But the point is, we **can** do those things, we can **love God** and **express our love**, even if others are not around us. So if the question is, **can you love God directly**, the answer is **yes**. There are also lots of New Testament commandments that we display

our love to Christ directly by obeying. Christ made lots of commands that we must obey, and by obeying them, we **express** our love and we **prove** our love. We must understand this concept to properly interpret our text this morning. I didn't go through all my prior sermons but it would not surprise me if I overstated the importance of loving each other by stating it as being the only way we can love God. It is not, and I hope I didn't say that.

But, in regard to how Christ **manifested** His love to us, He manifested it by **meeting our needs** and we **manifest** His love to each other the same way. And it is too true that we can easily fool ourselves about our love for God, but it is much harder to fool ourselves about our **love for each other**. And it is also true that God gave us **each other** to love and that is a **primary application** of God's love.

It is also the only way that we can meet God's needs. Ultimately God has no needs. But His people have lots. So to manifest the love Christ had for us we must display it to each other.

Now with all that said- let's take a look at verse 12

### **1 John 4:12 (NKJV)**

**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.**

This is another passage that various preachers have gone in various directions. And these are always the trickiest passages.

Some say you can only love God by loving others. You cannot love God directly. We have already talked about how that cannot be the true answer here.

Others say love must exhibit itself in the here and now. So to love you must **do something**. And since you cannot see God, you must do something to humans.

But we have already discussed that this cannot be true based on the entirety of scripture.

OK then. What does it mean?

Well let's take a look at the context.

### **1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV)**

**7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

**8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

Now let's skip on down to verse 12 from here.

### **1 John 4:12 (NKJV)**

**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.**

Now let's take vs 9-11 as an amplification of the idea that **God is love**.

**1 John 4:9-11 (NKJV)**

**<sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.**

**<sup>10</sup> 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.**

**<sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

If we divide it this way we see that the theme, at this point, is the **assurance of salvation**. And love of the brothers is a **necessary proof** for this assurance. It shows **we know God** and we know God as a **God of love**. Love of the brethren is important because we are born of God and those born of God must love.

This is important from the standpoint of knowing God.

If we jump back to the beginning of the book we see that the topic of fellowship with God came up very early.

**1 John 1:3 (NKJV)**

**<sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

We see right away that our fellowship **is with** the Father and his Son Jesus. Then we walk through the fact that loving brothers is integral to having fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Then we arrive at verse 8. **Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

Now here is the million dollar question we keep asking. How can we know if we are in the fold? How do we know if we are a believer?

We all have that craving. I trust that we are all growing in the Christian life. And this growth often requires us to do difficult things. We may have given up all of our other trusts in all other kinds of security. Maybe if our income is threatened, we no longer panic. But we trust. Maybe the relationships that provide us security are no longer idols, but we trust God to provide for us. Maybe we have become trusting experts, weaning ourselves from every idol. But there is one security we must be **confident** of. There is something we **must** know. We must know it is all **worth it**. We must know that all these promises we are claiming apply to us. We must know that God will reward us for any sacrifices we make. We can't just know that He **usually** does. We have to know that He will do that **FOR ME**.

So how are we sure.

And what John presents in verse 12 is first how we do **not** get that assurance. Our assurance is not based on an external event. Our assurance is **not** based on seeing God.

Isn't that a first impulse with us? Isn't that especially true of new Christians. We want to have some experience where we hear from God's mouth that He exists and that we are truly saved by Him.

Some people spend their whole Christian life seeking this kind of experience. They feel they cannot believe if something dramatic does not happen to them like this, where God reveals Himself.

But that is not where our assurance is **to come from**. To seek it is to waste our time and weaken our faith. If we expect such a thing we will continually be disappointed with God. He does not promise it like that.

Let's look at Moses's experience-

### **Exodus 33:18-23 (NKJV)**

**18 And he (Moses) said, "Please, show me Your glory."**

**19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."**

**20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."**

**21 And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock."**

**22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by.**

**23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."**

We are told several times in scripture that a man cannot look on God and live. So this is not the path to assurance.

Several commentators make the point that this is here to wean us from pursuing mystical experiences. We are not promised it. And we should not pursue it. It is contrary to God's normal actions in a believer's life. God certainly does this kind of thing from time to time, but our assurance should not be based on something He does not promise to provide.

Now remember that the disciples wanted to see God too. They wanted this assurance. They wanted to know for sure that they too were secure in their beliefs. It is very instructional when we look at that transaction and Christ's response.

### **John 14:8-11 (NKJV)**

**<sup>8</sup> Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."**

Don't we see ourselves in Phillip? God if you would just show me you, if you would just reveal your glory so I can know that you really exist. I only want to know that I am right in following you, in serving you, in loving you. If you would just show me, everything would be settled forever.

**<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"**

**<sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.**

**<sup>11</sup> Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.**

Jesus essentially says that **He** is the manifestation of the **Father** in flesh. When you see Christ you see the **exact image** of the Father. You are not going to see the Father. That is not going to happen. But you are not being short changed. This isn't like God sending his secretary or something. You are seeing the Father's representation. You are seeing the Father's authority. You are hearing the Father's words. You are seeing the Father's works. The Father is in me. We are one.

Now, Jesus goes on, you can believe this because **my character is convincing**. Or you can believe it because **the miracles are convincing**. But you have got to believe in Me because you are not going to get more than that. I am enough evidence. I am sufficient.

Do you ever have doubts, not only about your salvation, but even about the existence of God? Do not fear them. Pursue the truth. Look into it. Our faith holds up to scrutiny. Listen to RC Sproul and people like Him. Read both sides of the scientific arguments for creation. Read the literature of apologists. Study the proven validity of the scriptural record. Don't believe your doubts. But let them drive you to action. You have nothing to fear. There is a real God. And He sent **Christ** in the flesh to represent Him to us and to save us from Sin. You need not fear anything. You cannot see God. But the record and person of Christ is truly all you need to be convinced, once you believe that Scripture is true.

And then hope is held out to us.

We do not see God now. But look at this promise.

## Matthew 5:8 (NKJV)

<sup>8</sup> **Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.**

Will this be the Father or only the Son? I cannot imagine that any of us would be disappointed to only be allowed to see the Son. Would it not be a wonderful thing to be in Christ's presence? To have the opportunity to spend a few hours with Him alone? We do not know what eternity will look like, but we will have plenty of time to be with Christ. So if you want to see God now, just hold that thought. That is **not for now**. But it is for later.

So going back to our context-

This is the general understanding- We know that God is love. We saw what happened to Christ. We have these solid facts. We have the Holy Spirit So we don't see God. That is not a problem. That is not needed in order to have assurance.

He has given us of His **Spirit**. We confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

Then this line of reason that is established - If we love one another, we know that this God **who is love** lives in us and **we dwell in God**. That is what the book of 1 John is shooting at. That is the primary point of assurance.

And this is the practical application for us. I will read a quote from Martyn Lloyd Jones

Quote-

**If I find myself loving a person who is not lovable, if I find myself praying for someone who has been persecuting me and has been dealing with me despitefully, if I find myself helping someone who has done his or her best to harm me, if I find myself doing that... I know that God is love and that He is within me, because if He were not in me, I would never do it. I do not want to do this by nature; so if I love the brethren, I have a certainty that God is love. "No man hath seen God." How may I know that God is and that God loves me and that God is love? Here is the answer: If we love one another, God dwells in us. I do not have visions, I do not hear audible voices, I do not seek some material substantiation of what I claim; but I have it within me. So God must be in me. Otherwise I could never do what I am doing.**

God wants believers to have assurance. It empowers our hope. It gives us reason to obey. It is the foundation for our experience of joy. It affirms that all of the promises of God are not only **true**, but they are **true for us**.

How wonderful God is to provide such a thing.

Now let's look at our text again this morning.

## 1 John 4:12 (NKJV)

**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.**

Now what does it mean that His love has been **perfected** in us. Does this mean that we will love people perfectly. Well no. As long as we sin, and that will be as long as we live in these bodies, our love will not be as pure as God's love, with no pollutants, no selfish motives. No. But the word for perfect also means carried out to completion.

Have you ever wondered what God is trying to accomplish by winning people to Himself all over the world? Well I am sure that there are **many** things, but one thing is that He wants **little Christ's** all over the world. He wants the world to see what His love looks like.

One ultimate objective in our salvation is that we become like God in this one aspect. That is his end goal. He is making people **who have been loved into lovers**. That is what He wants.

We might get the idea when we read scripture that the Christian life is all about not sinning. And I do not want to make light of this or give the idea that sin does not matter. But I can say with confidence that God **wants more** than someone who doesn't do things that are **forbidden**. God wants a kingdom of lovers. God wants a people who **look like Him** because they **love like Him**. That is the best reflection of Him. Now Christ loved us and He was sinless. We are not going to achieve a **sinless state** in this life. But it is clear that our lives can be described as being **lovers of God and people**. That is the completion that God is shooting for. And the believers and the non believers in our lives are the practice grounds. They are the exhibition grounds. They are where this is fleshed out.

Do you ever get the idea about the Christian life that I am **not allowed** to do **this thing** and I am **not allowed** to do **that thing**. And I **must** do this thing and I **must** do that thing? If so, we are not grasping the beauty of the Christian life. We are not capturing the big picture. We are missing the **essence**. God wants to make you a **lover**. He wants you **first** to be a **lover of Him**.

**Secondly** He wants you as a lover of **others**, first His people, and second those people who might come to Him.

His design is way bigger than a list of rules. Those rules are, in essence, a guide to loving. He is telling us **how to love** and **how not to love**. How to love **God** and how to **love people**. God wants to make you into such a **representative** of His, such an **ambassador** of His, that you **reflect** Him to this world. You are the salt and light **influence of eternity** in this world. He does not want someone who is checking off a **checklist** of what you did good

and what you didn't do bad. He has something way bigger in mind for His children. He wants them to take a part in the **family business**. He wants them to be like their **dad**. He wants to complete the process by having us be a **lover** like Christ is a **lover**.

Any other goal for our lives is too small. Don't allow yourself to be defined by something else. Don't let any earthly pursuit define you. God is about **miraculous** things. He is reproducing **Himself** and His Character **in you**. And that is the **completion** He desires. In eternity we will be perfect. In this life we can do the most that can be done in this life and that is to be a **lover of God who loves people**. And we do it in the framework of the revealed will and Word of God.

Now there are a lot of things that are **not** the **end** God is working toward. We find them in 1 Cor 13. It is interesting to look at this passage and look at what is worthless to God. It seems like pretty good stuff.

Not eloquence in speaking the truth. Without love that is nothing.

Not the gift of speaking the truth in a way that understands all the nuances. Without love...nothing.

Not the gift of faith that would have God exhibiting Himself powerfully. Without love...nothing

Not self sacrificial giving for the giving's sake. Without love...nothing

No. That is not it. Those things are nothing to God by themselves. They are zeroes.

They are not the end God is shooting at for your life. If you think they are, consider this a **blessed** day. You will wear yourself out with those things. No that is not the end.

What is the end?

**1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)**

**<sup>13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

Let's see what Jesus said about this topic.

**Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV)**

**<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'**

**<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

**<sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.**



**46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?**

**47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?**

**48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.**

God is producing a race, a humanity that looks like Christ, a people set apart, men and women whom He will raise to this **height** and to this **level**, men and women who love even as God loves. That is the peak. That is the best. That is the goal. **That is God's will for your life.**

And at the end of the day, it is the most secure assurance that we can have while living in this skin. If **we** love like **God** loves, that is the most **like God** we can be. That is as close to perfection as we can be. If you can look at your life and you **see love**, praise **God**. Bask in your assurance. It may be reason to dance or jump up and down and maybe even sing a new song. **If you are a lover, you are a brother.** And you are, in that way, a reflection of our Lord.