

1 John 4:17-21 (NKJV)

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

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

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?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

How are you like Christ?

This morning we are going to look at the reality of being like Christ. We will also see the **confidence** that comes when we are **like Him** and specifically **how it is** that we are **like Him**.

Last week we looked at this verse:

1 John 4:16 (NKJV)

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.

John loves this word "**abiding**". Think of this abiding as your home. We all have homes. We **dwell** in those homes. When we are **away** from those homes they have an appeal to us. We want to return at some point. It is our base. It is where we are probably **most comfortable** to live. We may not spend every moment in it, but it gets the bulk of our time. There is no place like home. That is how it is with a believer's abiding in God and God abiding in them. It is home. The Holy Spirit is **at home** in us and we are **at home** in our relationship with God. It is the point we gravitate to. There is nothing else like it. When we stray, we want it back. We miss it. We find ourselves at some point running to it because it is irresistible to us. The more time we spend in it, the happier we are. (In our Covid experience we might be tired of being in our homes. So the analogy isn't perfect, I know) But normally the more time we spend away, the less satisfied we are. That is the abiding that happens as we know the truth of God and believe it, which leads us to knowing more and believing it more. That is the context on which verse 17 appears. It is in the context of **being home in God and God being home in us**.

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Here is the main point. Assurance of God's **love** for us and God's **acceptance** of us, comes largely connected to **our love for each other**.

John was addressing a church that was experiencing many difficulties. It was not easy for them. They had external **persecution**. They had the gnostic **false teachers** appealing to them to leave their faith. They had their **anti-Christ** influences. Along with this they had the normal trials of **flesh, the world and the devil**.

He wanted to help them. And this is how he is doing it. He wants them to be **certain** of some things that were **crucial** to be **certain** about.

The same is true for us. John's words of comfort and encouragement are for us too.

And this is where that certainty comes. It is that **we dwell in love**. Love is our home. Love is where we live. Love is the deciding factor in our decisions. We gravitate to love. Christians are people who are controlled by the principles of love. Love is the controlling factor in their lives.

That is not normal. To love those who love us **is** normal. But to die for an enemy, that is highly unusual in this world.

Verse 17 says that ¹⁷ **Love has been perfected among us**

We shouldn't get distracted by the word "perfected". It also means complete and mature. But it gives us an important insight into what God is shooting for in our lives. We have talked about it before, but I don't think we can make too much of it. **One of God's goals for your life, if you are His, is to make you a lover like He is a lover.**

There are many ways you can describe the sanctification process in your life. Yes Christ is doing many things. He is changing us in many ways if we are truly following Him. But the end goal is that very same thing that Christ said was the **most important commandment**. He would not state one commandment by itself. He was asked for one, but the other could not be left out for His answer to be complete.

People are to love God and love people as a result of loving God. So if God is carrying out His purpose in your life, what would you **expect Him to be doing**? Does it not make sense that He is causing you to increase in loving Him and loving others? That is the **maturity** Christ wants. That is the **target**. That is the **end** game. And that is what God is doing in your life.

Do you have people in your life that are **hard to love**?

Are there people in your life that have **stretched your limits**, who have responded in ways that **aren't fair**? Guess what God might be at work doing? You are in **love** school. Marriage is love school. Family is love school. Church is love school. Work is love school.

Now we can pick a hundred ways to respond that **avoid** learning what we need to learn. But the quickest easiest way to **move on** is to ask the Lord, **what do you want me to learn?** What do you want me **to do**, because I will do it no matter what it is? How do you want me to put **my** selfish interest aside to meet **this person's need?**

That is how a believer lives. That is the standard operating procedure of a Christian. And it has to be true in our families, in our church, and in the world. We tend to cling to our rights like Styrofoam pellets cling to a garbage bag. We have a natural tendency to measure every relationship using the standard of self benefit and self payoff. When we are not actively dwelling in Christ, this is what will come out. You don't have to do anything special in order to evaluate **other's treatment of you** by what **you think you deserve**. That is natural. That is instinctive.

And if we think that kind of living and loving is ok, just ask yourself this simple question.

If Christ treated me according to the standard I am applying to others, what would have happened to me?

Think about this when rage forms inside us or we want to pity ourselves due to other's treatment of us.

If Christ treated me according to the standard I am applying to others, what would have happened to me?

We see at the end of verse 17 it says this-
as He is, so are we in this world

Christ is the standard of love. He is the model. He shows us what love is. So **how is He?** Well, how is He **to us?**

Do you ever disobey Him? How does He respond? Does he reject you? No. He may discipline us. He may distance Himself from us. He may allow consequences to have their effect. But He is there, all along, moving us in His direction. He is doing everything to restore relationship.

Have you ever trampled on the good things He has given you? Maybe He has given us precious **relationships**, but we only focus on the ones you don't have. Maybe He has given us wonderful **resources**, but our focus is on something we don't have. Maybe he has given us a family and our focus is on how difficult it is to have a family instead of focusing on the blessing that we are given. We take to that kind of **lack of appreciation** like a duck takes to water. But how does Christ respond to you? Is He not gracious and patient with you, even though you offend Him? He does not ask any more **from us** than how **He** treats **us**. He never asks us to **love others** more than **He has loved us** or in a different **attitude** than **He has loved us**.

Have you ever been ignorant of sins you commit that are offensive to God? Maybe it takes years to see them. How did He treat you? He is not asking you to do a single thing **more** than He has done **to you**. Didn't He display all kinds of longsuffering to us? Hasn't He been merciful not to badger us continually, but to allow us time to come to the understanding of our sin. He is only asking the same of us.

Do you see what I am getting at? We have people that we feel wronged by. And sometimes we truly **have been** wronged by them. And our flesh wants to make them pay. Our flesh wants to say I have rights. I want justice. I deserve better. I cannot forgive that,. It hurt me too deeply.

Did Christ not have a **better argument** on every one of those fronts than we do to reject us, to refuse to love us? But He put Himself aside and looked at us from the standpoint of **our need**. He withheld what we **deserved**. He would not give **Himself** what **HE** deserved. He laid that aside for our benefit. And He paid **everything** so we could have **what we needed**.

We often say that we need to be smart. And there is truth to that. We certainly need wisdom when attempting to love people. But we never want to be smarter than Christ. He did not do very good at getting what He deserved in His relationship with us. He did not do well at protecting himself from hurt. He did not do very good **negotiating** what **He spent for us** verses **what He got**. He gave a perfect life to get very imperfect creatures, prone to wander and prone to disobey. We never want to be smarter than Christ. He is our model for love.

as He is, so are we in this world

So how is HE?

Well how does He tell us to treat those **in the world** who give us nothing but trouble. This is easy to read but hard to practice. I am already seeing things that I do at work that I should not do.

Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV)

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

⁴⁴ **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,**

⁴⁵ **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. Notice again that vs 48 uses the word **perfect**, just like our text. And it is the same exact **context**. As Christ **is**, so we should be **in the world**. A mature lover.

See how God treats those who **hate Him**, who are **ignorant** of Him, who **malign** Him, who **mock** Him, who **mistreat** His people?

He does not strike them dead. He does not deal with them in kind (although that is reserved for some future time)

No, he sends rain to grow their crops, to provide for their food and drink. He sends them **blessing** when they deserve a **curse**.

He calls them **evil**. He knows they are **evil**. He knows what they do is **evil**.

But He still blesses them with earthly provision. Every day he allows people who openly and continually mock him the ability to breath the air that God created. What **mercy**. The next time you see someone actively mocking God and you see them able to walk off the stage with a healthy gate, you are watching how God treats the world.

That is the model. And that is why He can say **love your enemies**. Give **blessing** to those who would prefer to **steal** God's blessings from you. Do good things for those people. Pray for them that they might come to Christ. And why?

It shows off your spiritual genetics. **That you may be sons of your Father in heaven**. You are to be a display on this earth of the way that God loves. It will get the world's attention.

So when we read "**As He is**, so are we in this world", this is **how He is**. This is how God is. This is how Christ is. So this is how **we** should be. We **give** to those who would like nothing better than to **take** from us. We look to meet their need, even when we know they have no such intention toward us. God does good to those who Hate Him. So should we.

What else does it mean?

Philippians 2:5-11 (NKJV)

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let's look at this closely. Try to put yourself in Christ's spot. There is no question that He **deserved** the seat He was in. He was **worthy** to sit at the right hand of the Father. Now, who was **not** worthy of Him leaving that seat **for**? Us. Keep in mind that He died for us while we were still in the state of being His enemy. That is what scripture clearly says.

So what would our argument have been if **we** had been in **Christ's seat**? Might we have argued, this is not **smart**. Won't I be rewarding bad behavior if I die for these people. Look at how they have treated us. We had to wipe nearly all of the humans from the face of the earth at one time. And this batch is no better. They deserve punishment, not the sacrifice of my life.

Aren't we tempted to think that way when we don't want to love someone? Isn't that how we are tempted to get out of paying a price for someone who is undeserving? Aren't we naturals at looking out for what is in it **for us**?

But we are to be **as He is, so are we in this world**

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

We are to exchange our **thinking** and **computing** and **evaluating** about **who** is worth loving and **when** they are worth loving and **drop all that**. And we pick up a new model, a **new mind**, a new way of thinking.

Virtue is in giving up that which **we have** and **enjoy** and sometimes maybe even **deserve**, and we do whatever is necessary to **meet the need** that is evident. And no matter how much we do it, we will never even get close to reaching a level of sacrifice and expense that **Christ went to**. We will never pay so much as He chose to. That truly is a **new mind**. That is a **supernatural** mind. That will never come from a lifestyle of **self** love. It will only come through the supernatural fruit of the Spirit of God living in our lives.

So again we need to look at our lives and ask:

If God had treated me as I have treated this situation or this person, what would have happened to me?

Look at the difficult people or difficult situations in your life.

If God had treated me as I have treated this situation or this person, what would have happened to me?

OK Let's finish out verse 17

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

I am approaching this verse like this.

7 Love has been perfected among us in this: because as He is, so are we in this world

That looks to me to be the reasoning. And the middle phrase lets us know a byproduct of this truth.

that we may have boldness in the day of judgment

Now maybe the first thing we should note is that there **will be** a day of **judgment**. There are lots of opinions by lots of people how that is going to work out. Some say there will be two separate judgments, one for believers and another for non believers. The things that are argued about the most are not the most important thing. The most important thing is that there will be a day of judgment. God will separate the sheep and the goats.

He says **permanent** things to them.

It is easy to watch the evil portrayed in the news and have a righteous indignation about the evil and insanity being portrayed by some of the players. It is easy to be angry about it.

But what about judgment day? Those people are destined to face that judgment day, just like we will. And on that day they will experience the **worst result** that can be imagined. They will be destined to an eternal destruction. Most scholars believe it will be eternal suffering. It will at least mean eternal punishment of one kind or the other.

When Jesus was talking about judgment in Matt 25 He said this:

Matthew 25:31-32 (NKJV)

31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats.

then

Matthew 25:34 (NKJV)

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed

of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

then

Matthew 25:41 (NKJV)

⁴¹ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

then

⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

We have every reason to believe that the punishment is as eternal as the reward is eternal. The torment is not necessarily eternal, but the punishment must be. There are no reversals to those who are saved and there are no reversals to those who are lost.

That is the real doom that the unbelievers are going to face on a real day just like this day.

Do we really want that for them? Do we have any compassion at all? Those people who don't know Christ, those people who are carrying out agenda's that are completely against what we believe, that is what they are facing. Can we really not care at all about their souls? There is a sense that God is not the kind of God who desires their destruction.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

There is more to be said on this topic, but we can see that God has a great deal of compassion on humans. And He instructs us to **desire the salvation** of those that we find most **offensive**. We don't have to worry that if we are **too compassionate** that justice won't one day be served. Justice certainly will be served. But we would do well to desire **what God desires** for all these people who live in a way that is offensive to God.

So there is a day of judgment. And it does not matter how many people mock the very idea. Their mockery will be cut short on that day. It is a certainty. But praise God we believers do not need to be afraid. And our verse gives us the reason.

Love has been perfected among us in this: because as He is, so are we in this world.

I think in order to gain the fullest perspective here we must also include what 1 John has told us earlier.

A person who is **in Christ** does not need to fear God's judgment throne. There are two reasons.

First we learned that **Christ is our propitiation**. He has taken upon Himself the wrath of God that we deserved. He has satisfied God's wrath. He has appeased the wrath of God. Salvation is by Christ alone through faith alone. That is the doctrinal truth on which we all hang our assurance. But again, much like before, John does not allow us to hang our assurance on that belief as if it can be **all by itself**. James tells us that faith without works is dead faith. It is actually no faith at all.

So John must add the phrase at the end of verse 17. **as He is, so are we in this world**.

This is the proof that what Christ **could do** in a person, He **did do** in us. Love is the proof that we are His child. Loving actions prove that not only is it **possible** to have one's sins forgiven, it proves that **MY** sins are forgiven. There is no other explanation for it. If I respond to being mistreated and taken for granted and overlooked and whatever else, with love, with reaching out to meet that person's need, I prove that this **miracle counts for me**.

Again this is why I believe that love for others is probably the greatest assuring factor in a believer's life.

What do you think when you think of the judgment of God? Are you afraid? Or are you bold? Are you confident that you will stand the judgment? We will speak more about this next week.

John tells us that we **can** and **should** reach a spot where we truly are confident. A believer that is living **for** Christ and living **like** Christ has nothing at all to fear in judgment. We know that the promises of God are true for **all believers** and we are confident that **we are one** because a miracle happened to us. And we live a life of love. And that life resembles the life of Christ. We have some of the same family characteristics, with love being the predominant one.