1 John

An Exegetical Series

1 John 4:17-21: Love From God, Through Us

Summary of 1 John 4:12-16

- God’s invisible presence becomes visible through the love His people show one another. By the indwelling Holy Spirit, God transforms our lives and assures us of our fellowship with him. This assurance rests upon the truth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is truly God and truly man.
- In his divine nature, Christ is also the Just and the Justifier, the source of eternal salvation and eternal life. Through the incarnate Son, God accomplishes our redemption, and through the Spirit, he confirms that we abide in his truth and thus abide in the Triune God

Summary of 1 John 4:12-16

Emphasis Last Week:

- **God's Love Made Visible:** We love as he loved us—Jesus demonstrates this love
- **Fellowship Through the Spirit:** Indwelling of the Spirit—Affirmation
- **The Son of God Confessed:** Truth and Testimony

Key Takeaway: Our assurance rests not on perfect love, but on the faithful Triune God who saves us through His Son and transforms us through His Spirit.

Where We Are in John’s Letter

The Emphasis of Love:

- **Love as Evidence:** This is how we know we abide in God generally (**1 John 2:5-6**)
- **Love as an Embodied Pattern of Life:** This is how we live if we say abide in God (**1 John 2:15–4:6**)
- **Love as a Theological Reality:** This is who God is and how we have assurance that we abide in God from a holistic understanding (**1 John 4:7-21**) — **We are here! and there are three key movements in 4:7-21**

Movement in the Theological Reality

I Movement: 4:7–11

Love Demonstrated: God Loved Us First

- God defines love by taking the initiative to send His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Having received this gracious, self-giving love, we are commanded to love one another in the same pattern.

The emphasis: How God's love is revealed and demonstrated—we must embody this example of love toward one another!

A Result of God’s Love

II Movement 4:12–16

Love Affirmed: God Abides in Us and Perfects His Love in Us

- The invisible God is manifested through our love for one another. The Spirit assures us that we abide in God, affirming our fellowship with him as we confess the apostolic truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Through the Spirit, we know that we belong to God and are being transformed by his love.

The emphasis: God’s presence and our fellowship with him are affirmed more fully within the theological reality

The Result / Consequence of God's Love

III Movement: No Fear, but Hopeful Assurance

- We are again faced with a key question within the movement of this text:
  - How should we understanding the opening phrasing, "In this way" of verse 17?
  - Does it look forward to the "so that" in the following sentence or does it look backwards—or connected to—what was just previously stated?

No Fear, but Hopeful Assurance

Perfect Love = Confidence (1 John 4:17)

- John revisits the concept of love being made “complete” or “Perfected” by what was said before:
  - In essence, God’s love is made complete/perfect in us through loving one another which manifests the presence of God both in our lives and in the lives of those we are loving
  - Yet, there is a natural consequence or result that stems from this practice of love in the Christian life!

No Fear, but Hopeful Assurance

Perfect Love = Confidence (1 John 4:17)

- There is an inclusio happening in verse 17:

"The relationship of believers to God in the world can and should reflect that of Jesus to God (as it was on earth, and as it still *is* in heaven: ***this includes the Son's own 'confidence' before God***)". He paraphrases v. 17, "As he [Jesus] is (in the Father's love), so we are (in him, and therefore in the Father's love) in the world (obediently making God's love known)."

Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 205.

No Fear, but Hopeful Assurance

Incomplete Love = Fear of Punishment (1 John 4:18)

- As love is perfected in us, it casts out fear from us not because we have confidence in and of ourselves but because of the effectual love of God worked out of is and within us!
- Notice the interesting tension, here, though! The “one” mentioned is someone who has experienced and has grown, in some fashion, in their love of God yet it remains “incomplete” which results in fear of God’s punishment

No Fear, but Hopeful Assurance

Incomplete Love = Fear of Punishment (1 John 4:18)

- There are two sorts of Christians in this particular verse that John is speaking to: **(1)** Those Christians who soberly have an understanding of God's just judgement via **Rev 20:11-17** and **(2)** those Christians who fear "making it" as it were, and having to suffer God's judgement in the end
- It is this latter part that John is speaking to! He is noting that they simply haven't come to a more full understanding of God's love and thus fear when they shouldn't!

No Fear, but Hopeful Assurance

Incomplete Love = Fear of Punishment (1 John 4:18)

- The encouragement from this fear of God's punishment is found in the most popular verse in all of Scripture:

"16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

➡ Jesus took the punishment creates fear! There is no punishment for you if you are in Christ (Cf. **Rom 8:1-2**)

Returning to the Practical Aspect of Love

Love Defines the Disciple (1 John 4:19-21)

- First, verse 19 affirms this precious, dual truth:
  - Human love, in general, is what it is because God is Love, and because of this theological truth, there is human love in general—true love always tracks back to God!
  - Our love as Christians is what it is because of God's love for us and his demonstration of that love through the Gospel and the transformation of the Holy Spirit in us

Returning to the Practical Aspect of Love

Love Defines the Disciple (1 John 4:19-21)

- Second, verse 20 takes us back to John's two realities:
  - To claim to love God and to follow Jesus Christ and yet express the opposite toward God's people means, by proxy, at least, and directly to God, at most, that person does not truly love God as revealed by Jesus Christ
  - Think back to v. 12—if this verse is true, our rejection of fellow Christians by not loving them is, in turn, not loving God whose character is manifested by their love to us!

Returning to the Practical Aspect of Love

Love Defines the Disciple (1 John 4:19-21)

- Verse 20 implies all that has been said about love for each other and now more in terms of our theological reality:
  - Because the Christian fellowships with God (**1 John 1:3-4**) and, in turn, with other Christians, there is a mutual expression of God's love to each other and an experience of God's love (Cf. 1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1-2; 3:16, 19; 4:9-10, etc).
  - Hating one another is ultimately hating God himself!

Returning to the Practical Aspect of Love

Love Defines the Disciple (1 John 4:19-21)

- Thus, the command, in verse 21, is clear and straightforward, and Jesus's words are clear:
  - **John 13:34:** "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."
  - **John 14:15:** "If you love me, keep my commands.
  - **John 15:17:** "This is my command: Love each other."

Application in Full 1 John 4:7-21

I Movement: God's love is revealed through his initiative in sending his Son in demonstration of the love we must model our lives upon toward one another.

II Movement: God's indwelling presence is affirmed through the Spirit's work in us and our confession of Jesus Christ, an important piece of assuring us of our fellowship with Him.

III Movement: God’s love reaches its intended purpose in us, producing confidence before Him rather than fear of judgment, which, in turn, compels us to love one another.

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