

I John 4: 7-21 ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 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 his Son to be the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for 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. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot ^a love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Nothing is more important in life than knowing whether we have eternal life. We need to apply these tests:

- Are we aware of the witness of God's Spirit? (**4:13** above)?
- Are we joyfully confessing Christ? (**4:15** above)?
- Are we abiding in God's love (**4:16** above)?

As we have seen, John is writing this letter to Christians so that we will have assurance that we have eternal life. (**1 John 5:13** see p4). For John, eternal life means being united to God in Christ. All through this letter, he expresses it as God abiding in us and us abiding in God. Our answers to these questions

The next test John gives us is

the test of **perfected love (4:12, 17-18** above)

- What is this perfected (or completed (NIV)) love?

It is the very nature of God, reproduced in us, so that we love God and love one another.

John has told us that God's essential nature is love and it is out of his own nature that he loves. God loves within himself as Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit), and that love within the Trinity has flowed out to us in creation and redemption. If you took love away from God, he would cease to be God.

- What does it mean to be a Christian?

It is more than just giving intellectual agreement to a Christian creed, though we do have to know something about God and the salvation he offers. We do, of course, have to believe the Gospel but just believing is not enough. Even the demons believe and tremble but they are not saved.

Being a Christian is about having God abiding in us, and his Spirit given to us. If you are a Christian,

you have the life of God in your soul.

God is love so if we have the life of God in us then we will be people who are marked by love.

A glove on its own does not move or have any real shape, but when the hand is put into the glove, then the glove takes on the shape of the hand and moves as the hand moves. So it is when God comes to dwell in us by his Spirit – we take on the shape of God, we move when he moves and since he is love, we too will love.

- God intends that his love in us will accomplish love for him and love for others

This is the perfectly logical outcome of God abiding in us.

- Since God loves within himself as Trinity, it follows that when he comes to dwell in us, we will love him.

- Since, out of the overflow of the love within the Trinity, God loves us, then when he comes to dwell in us, we will love one another.

When we are loving God and loving others, then God's love is being perfected in us and is doing what he means it to do. The hand of God's Spirit in us results in us taking on the shape of the God who is love so that the invisible God is made visible in the world, and we move to perform acts of love. When that happens, then

God's love is perfected in us.

How do we recognise the perfected love of God in ourselves and others?

- 1) Perfect love casts out fear (vv17-18 above).** This does not refer to the reverential fear of God, which is a right fear, but to a fear that makes us afraid of God and of the Day of Judgement.

When Adam and Eve were created by God, they were created to have fellowship with God and they delighted in him, enjoying his presence. They walked and talked with him in the garden. After they had sinned against him by disobeying the one command he had given them, they hid from him because they were afraid of him and with good reason. Adam and Eve knew that they would now die, not just physically but also spiritually. They knew that they deserved the judgement of God, so rather than loving God and delighting in spending time with him, they were afraid of him. Fear of punishment and judgement gripped their hearts and made them afraid to come to God.

- However, the sin that Adam and Eve brought us into has been atoned for through Christ (vv9-10 above)

This is the love of God that has been shown to us, and those who know this love of God do not need to fear to come to him. We know that there is no longer any wrath of God against us, because it has all been taken by Christ.

There is only the love of God for us and that love of God has so won our hearts that we now love God.

God is our delight.

- Now we look forward to fellowship with him.
- Now we look forward to hearing what he has to say to us through his word
- Now we look forward to talking to him in prayer.
- Now we are not afraid of the Day of Judgement when Jesus returns.

Now the love of God has been perfected in us.

The Day of Judgement for those who believe is a day of **confident joy** because we shall be physically present with the one who loves us and who we love. Fear of judgement has been driven out by God's love in and for us.

We love God rather than fear his judgement.

John offers three tests, one negative, one positive and one practical:

- a) Fear of judgement (v18 above).** Where there is fear of the Day of Judgement, and not just a fear of death, it is a sign that a person hasn't experienced God's love. This is a negative test.
- b) We live as Jesus lived (v17 above).** When he was on earth, 2000 years ago, Jesus lived
 - With the assurance that he was God's Son
 - A life of sacrificial love towards his disciples

Through the witness of the Spirit, we have the assurance that God is our Father, and through the love of God poured into our hearts by the Spirit, we love one another. Where this is happening, we can have the assurance that God's love is being perfected in us and we are therefore not under the judgement of God. This is a positive test

- c) Love for God will be evidenced in us through obedience to God (2:5, John 14:15 see p4).** When we are keeping

Christ's commandments out of love for him, then we can be sure that God's love is being perfected in us and we can have confidence for the Day of judgement. This is a practical test.

2) Perfect love casts out hate (vv20-21 above). John uses strong language, wanting to leave us in no doubt that **we cannot say we love God while harbouring hatred in our hearts for brothers and sisters.**

John is telling us that hatred and love cannot exist side by side. Love for God and dislike for his people are as incompatible as oil and water. It is impossible to say God loves me, I love God and have no fear of judgement and at the same time intensely dislike those who God has brought into your life as brothers and sisters.

If you love God, you will love his people.

Whether or not we love one another has been the test of authentic faith throughout these verses. Our love, or lack of love, for God's people reveals if you truly know God, are born of him, have God abiding in you and are abiding in God. God loves his people enough to send his own Son to die to redeem them. If we are his people, he loves us and God means this love to result in love for others, especially our Christian brothers and sisters. (v21 above). We are not to store up his love for us and keep it to ourselves. He is the never-ending source of true love and he pours his love into us so that it can flow freely through us to others.

We know that God's love is being perfected in us when we love our brothers and sisters rather than hate them.

John shows us what this love looks like. (3:17 see p4). Love uses what God has given us to meet the needs of other people, as we can see from **Acts 4:34-35** (see p4). God's love was being perfected in them. To obey Christ's command to love one another will mean using whatever gift God has given us to serve others. It might be money, time, intellect or strength, to name just a few possibilities. We will not serve grudgingly. The quality of that love is seen in **1 Cor 13:4-7** (see p4). When that kind of love is at work:

- we make visible the invisible God
- we can have confidence that God's love is being perfected in us.

Take care, though. This is not about us trying to prove by our actions that God's love is in us. Rather, it is about the outworking of God's love in us as a first principle. **We love because he first loved us (v19 above).**

This perfected love in us only happens as God works in us.

Those who have experienced God's love at work in them can be sure that God means his love in us to find its perfection in us through love for him and love for others.

- Love for God will show in obedience to his commands and absence of fear as we ponder the Day of Judgement
- Love for others will show in the sacrificial giving of ourselves to meet the needs of others, and especially their need to be right with God.

That will only happen as we abide in the living God through fellowship with him, spending time

- listening to what he says to us through his word and talking to him about those things
- asking him to fill us with his Spirit and to enable us to know his love that is beyond human knowledge
- gazing on his beauty, especially as it is seen in Jesus, the one who is love incarnate

As we do that, so we will find ourselves growing in our love for God and our love for one another, and we will be perfected in love, showing the beauty of a life free from fear and hate.

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (v16)

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life

1 John 3:17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

1 John 2:5 -6 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments

Acts 4:34-35 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need

1 Cor 13:4-7 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.