

“Be Perfect Part 3” (1 John 4:7–21)(11.29.20)

1 John 4:7–21 (ESV) God Is Love

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.

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 his Son to be the Savior 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 love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Be Perfect Part 3”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. It is the first day of the Christian New Year. This means that for Christians we can think of the year 2020 as over as we embrace the Christian new year of 2021. Hallelujah! It is perfectly fitting that we start our new year in anticipation of the Coming of Christ. We remember and celebrate the First coming of Jesus in his birth into this world. And, we joyously anticipate Jesus’ return when the kingdom of God will be fully realized. This outlook should frame our worldview and establish a context for our daily.

Equally appropriate is that the Christian year ends with a Thanksgiving celebration. This exercise of our gratitude toward our God and Father not only acknowledges our faith and trust in Him, but also affirms that every good gift comes from God. Although this past year had significant challenges, I pray that you found things for which you gave thanks.

Thanksgiving has traditionally been a time for family gatherings. In our highly mobile society, this may be more important nowadays than in past generations. Often families are geographically distanced. We come together and reconnect. We tell stories and build on our family connection. We share great quantities of food while we share stories and remembrances. There is genuine human connection. As we sang in our opening hymn: blest be the dear uniting love.

This year, we had a couple of births to celebrate in the family. Carol and I became great-grandparents for the first time and one of my nephews made my sister a first-time grandparent. It is inevitable for people to look at a baby and try to figure out who they look like. At our Thanksgiving dinner, I looked at our grandsons and the other family members and noticed the resemblances.

Paul tells us in today’s 17th verse, “As Jesus Is so also ARE we.” There must be a family relationship. Love is the life force that enables us to be perfected. In what ways are we like Christ? The answers to that critical question are given in a summary of 16 commentaries.

“As Christ dwells in God, so we dwell in God. As Christ is related to God in love and fellowship, so we are related to God. As Christ is the Son of God, so we are sons and daughters of God. As Christ is righteous, so we are righteous. As Christ is loving, so we are loving. As Christ was the expression of God on earth,

so we should be the expression of Christ on earth. As Christ is confident, so we are confident. As Christ is loved by God, so we are loved by God.”

Does that describe you? Do you want it to describe you?

BODY:

Our culture has coined a term called “true love.” It is normally associated with romantic love where two hypothetical “soul mates” find each other. Let me tell you what true love is. A man who loves God whole heartedly and loves his neighbor as himself and a woman who loves God whole heartedly and loves her neighbor as herself join together in holy matrimony – that is true love. As you know, this incorporates what the Bible calls the two greatest commandments.

Prior to the writings of our New Testament Scriptures, agape, the supernatural love of God, was barely conceptualized. We say, as John said in this renowned 8th verse, “God is love.” The pagans worshiped fertility gods as their gods of love. The exercise of their worship is categorically called sin in the scriptures. Look at our culture and tell me which concept of love is most prominently celebrated?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, love your enemies and those that persecute you. And then five verses later, he calls on us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. In many places Jesus tells us that our love for Him is tied directly towards obedience to His word. In fact, it is part of our abiding in Him, which we will talk about more in a few minutes. Jesus gives us a definition of love – to lay down one’s life for a friend. And of course, He proved this with His own life.

If I counted correctly, John used the word love 27 times in today’s 15 verses. Obviously, he believes a correct understanding of God and our relationship to God must include a correct understanding of love. And there is a perfection, a maturing, and a completion, which happens because of God’s love. God’s love is perfected **in** us. God’s love is perfected **with** us. When this happens, we are freed from fear. To rightly understand the love of God, we must go to the beginning. We love because He first loved us. This may refer to our love for God or to our ability to love at all. It seems consistent to me for it to mean our ability to love at all. Why? Because we are made in God’s image and therefore we were made to love, for God is love.

It is generally assumed that We love because He first loved us simply means that God loved us before we could love Him back. What if “first” refers us back to the beginning, to creation?

Every generation has asked the question, “Why are we here?” A Christian might ask, “Why did God create humankind?” Because God is love, He created us in the image of the Godhead, to be loved by the Godhead and in turn to love God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Notice that each person of the Godhead has a role in our perfection in love.

Now, to really love, we have to have free will. A robot cannot love. My granddaughter, Bailey, asked my son, Joshua, “Daddy, why did God put the tree with the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden?” He told her, “God wanted us to choose Him.”

But our first parents, through the deception of that serpent, Satan, did not choose God. Having one commandment, they fell short. They doubted God and God’s goodness. “Was God holding out on them?” they wondered. The lust of the eye and the prideful pursuit of usurping God’s authority gave way to rebellion.

The Father of Lies told Eve she would NOT surely die. So sin and death entered the world. Adam and Eve then hid from God in their shame. Creation became cursed and they were banished from the Garden of Eden and cast into a fallen world.

The Apostle John, the beloved disciple, tell us, “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.” And, Jesus tells us, John 3:16 (NIV84) “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

None of this was a surprise to God. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:19–20 (NIV84) ¹⁹ [You were redeemed] with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the

creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.” And, John tell us in Revelation 13:8 that Jesus is the Lamb slain from the creation of the world.

So, God knew that Adam and Eve would sin. Because of His love, there was already a plan in place to redeem people and creation. Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, the Son of God, very God of God, was made manifest to dwell among us. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. That is the first part of what we remember and celebrate during this Advent season. The Son putting on human flesh, becoming the infant Jesus.

From the very first, God loved us and made us for love. Even though we would fail, there was a plan in place to demonstrate the Lord’s love. Jesus would pay for our sins when He became a curse for us, crucified on a cross. So, God himself would assume our place and our penalty. Jesus chose to lay down His life for us. His sacrifice was and is the propitiation for our sins. Jesus satisfied the wrath of God – a perfect wrath – satisfied perfectly.

How can we appreciate the perfect love of God unless we understand His perfect holiness? Many people object to the idea of God requiring Jesus’ death, an ignoble, tortuous, painful death. They forget that Jesus intentionally demonstrated love for friends by His death. They do not understand the seriousness of sin and its extreme contrast to the perfect righteousness of God. Everything our God IS and does is perfect. We are in no position to judge the Lord’s plan of redemption.

Who is this Jesus? Not only is He the propitiation for our sins, the apostle John tells us: Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Love is from God – Jesus is sent from God. Jesus is God. Therefore, Jesus is love. Jesus is God’s love made manifest among us.

A love triangle is normally considered a bad thing; but, I would like to recommend a love triangle to you that is a good thing. I want you to imagine a triangle with God at the top, yourself at the second point, and all other people at the third point. Each leg of the triangle is our actions towards each other. The whole area within the triangle is supernatural love. Do you live in this love triangle? Perfecting love produces intentional loving actions toward your God and toward ALL people.

“A friend of Reverend Maxie Dunnam told him about a woman in Africa who had discovered the great joy of the indwelling Christ. Overwhelmed with gratitude, she wanted to do something for Jesus and the kingdom.

But she was blind and seventy years of age; therefore her contributions did not seem to be very significant. She was uneducated, but she came to the missionary with her French Bible and said, “Would you mind underlining John 3:16 in my Bible in red?” The missionary was very intrigued to see what she was going to do.

The woman took her Bible and sat in front of a boys’ school in the afternoon. When school was dismissed, she would call to a boy or two and say to them, “Boys, come here please. Do you know French?” Very proudly, they said that they did. Then she would ask, “Please read to me this passage underscored in red in my Bible.”

They did. Then she would ask, “Do you know what it means?” They would say, “No, we don’t know.”

And she would tell them the story of Jesus. Twenty-four young men became pastors due to the work of this blind woman, touched by the contagion of the light in her which Christ brings.”

Have you been born again? Have you been born from above? Have you been born by the water and the Spirit? Then God the Holy Spirit has been given to you. John makes this amazing claim: “...we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” It is easy to understand that we can testify to this truth; but how have we seen it? The Holy Spirit has revealed this truth to our spirits. The scriptures testify to it over and over again. We have seen God save our souls and others too. When we have eyes of faith, we see God at work all around us.

If that is true for you, then God is abiding in you and you in Him. Do you confess that Jesus is the Son of God? This is only possible through the work of the Spirit and is further proof of the blissful abiding relationship. Do you believe in such a great love? If you know it and believe it, then you are living in the

love of God. How can you not be perfected in love? You live, and breathe, and move in the love of God. John tells us, God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In Jesus and through Jesus – what a promise!

CONCLUSION:

Reverend Alexander Maclaren explains how we assume the family resemblance of our heavenly Brother and Savior:

“THE PROCESS BY WHICH THIS LIKENESS IS SECURED. Our love is made perfect by dwelling in God, and God in us; in order that we may be thus conformed to Christ's likeness, and so have boldness in that great day. To be like Jesus Christ, what is needed is that we love Him, and that we keep in touch with Him. But remember such abiding is no idle waiting, no passive confidence. It is full of energy, full of suppression, when necessary, of what is contrary to your truest self; and full of strenuous cultivation of that which is in accord with the will of the Father. Lie in the light, and you will become light. Abide in Christ, and you will get like Christ.

Christian people, lay this to heart; you are to be mirrors of the love to which you turn for all blessedness and peace. It is of no use to say, 'My religion is the love of God, unless the love of God is manifested in the love of man. If you love God, you will love those that God loves, those for whom Christ died, those who are just like what *you* were when you learned that God loved you. The service of God is the service of man.”

Reverend Andrew Murray teaches in his devotional book, Perfect love:

“Let us look back on the steps in the life of perfected love that have been set before as thus far. The Divine love entering the heart, manifests itself first in loving obedience to Christ. Of that obedience, love to the brethren in active exercise becomes the chief mark and manifestation. In this obedient love and loving obedience, the principle of fellowship with God, God abiding in us, is developed and strengthened. Of this fellowship the Holy Spirit gives the evidence and abiding consciousness. Such is the path in which love is perfected. Obedience to Christ: love to the brethren; the indwelling of God in us, and us in Him; the communication and revelation of all this by the Holy Spirit: all these are correlated ideas -- they imply and condition each other. Together they make up the blessed life of perfect love.”

Remember as Jesus IS so also ARE we. These verbs are present tense. The apostle John does not limit this statement by saying we **shall be** in the future. He is saying that through God's abiding in us and us in Him, we **are** perfected in love, and we **ARE** just like Jesus.

Praise be to God!

Amen and amen. Let us pray.