

# WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Sunday Morning Message

July 10, 2016

*“Being Made Perfect in the Perfect Love of God”*

I John 4:7-21

## READ I John 4:7-21

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

<sup>13</sup> This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. <sup>16</sup> And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup> This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF I JOHN

Have you ever had struggles with confidence and the assurance of your salvation? There was at time in my life that I had some major struggles. I had left a very legalistic church that basically questioned the salvation of anyone who left their group. This particular group had some severe doctrinal error and the leaders definitely had a lack of Christian love. The Apostle John was writing to his spiritual children in Ephesus and was deeply concerned that false teachers were upsetting their walk with Christ and undermining their confidence and assurance. These heretics were claiming to have the so-called inside track and deeper enlightenment, when the fact was they were the ones deceived. He wrote this letter to re-establish the truth about Christ and gospel and to expose these false teachers and their false teaching. These false teachers espoused a philosophy called Gnosticism that perverted and denied many of the basic truths of the gospel. The Apostle wrote this letter to give them the truth about Christ and the characteristics of true believers, one fundamental characteristic being love.

This morning we are going to focus on this theme of love, specifically on how we can develop a mature love that casts out all fears and insecurities in a believer's life and creates a deep assurance and confidence in the Lord.

Look again at I John 4:18

<sup>18</sup> *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

Here's what I want you to see this morning: As a believer, you can mature in your relationship with God to a place of assurance and bold confidence that is free of all fear. This place of assurance is not for just a special few, but is available to every one of us who know Christ.

To understand this perfect love, consider the parent/child relationship. As good parents, we certainly love our children when they're young. But as immature children, they don't fully appreciate and understand our love. As our children get older, they develop the capacity and maturity to appreciate our love and also love us back. We always love them as our children, but as they mature the depth and demeanor of our love grows as they come to understand and experience it as a more mature person.

Our heavenly Father loves us fully as His children and wants us to grow in our relationship with Him to a mature relationship with Him that is confident and knows that He loves us completely, a love that removes all fear. As we face life's trials, these challenges present us with an opportunity to develop this deep trust of His love for us. As you experience this amazing love of Christ as you face these difficulties, you grow to trust that no matter the trial, temptation, or circumstance, you are kept in the loving arms of Jesus. As your appreciation of His love grows and begins to dominate your life, you will be compelled to fervently love and serve others as a reasonable response and expression of your gratitude to Christ and His love for you.

This letter of I John provides us with many principles that can lead us to this place of assurance called perfect love. This morning we are going to consider four of them. I'll give them all to you now, and then we'll look at each one individually.

### **#1 THE PRINCIPLE OF THE REGENERATION**

*To become perfect in love, you first need to experience a spiritual rebirth.*

### **#2 THE PRINCIPLE OF A RENEWED MIND**

*To become perfect in love, you must marinate in His love by saturating your mind with the gospel.*

### **#3 THE PRINCIPLE OF A GROWING CONFIDENCE**

*To become perfect in love, you must learn to fully rely and trust in His love.*

#### **#4 THE PRINCIPLE OF INTENSITY**

*To become perfect in love, you must be compelled to love others as an expression of your love for Christ.*

#### **#1 THE PRINCIPLE OF REGENERATION**

*To become perfect in love, you first need to experience a spiritual rebirth.*

Have you been born a second time? Do you know what it is to be loved by God as your Father? Have you received His saving love? Do you love Him? Do you love His people? If so, you have evidence of new life...one who has a new birth. In the third chapter of the gospel of John, a religious leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to discuss spiritual matters concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus told him that if he wanted to see the kingdom of God, he had to have a second birth, a spiritual birth. The fact is that we are all born physically into this world spiritually dead. We need a supernatural Spirit produced regeneration. We must be born again. For us to believe and love Christ and love others, we need a new nature. In the words of the Apostle Peter, we need to partake of the divine nature, God's nature, which is love.

Love comes from God, because God is love. If you know love, you love others. If you have this new life, being born again by the Spirit of God, then you have received this very nature of God, which is love. He is the author of all love, and if you are loved by Him, then you will love others, especially the rest of the family. If you are His child, you have your Father's nature which is love. It is a resident fruit of the Holy Spirit that dwells in you. For this fruit to grow and mature into a perfect love, you must first be regenerated and filled with the Holy Spirit who produces this fruit of the Spirit which is love.

#### **#2 THE PRINCIPLE OF A RENEWED MIND**

*To become perfect in love, you must marinate in His love by saturating your mind with the gospel.*

So how has God shown us His love? Since we can't physically see Him, how can we understand His love, His nature, His heart, and His being which is love? What does love look like? In a word, Jesus, the eternal Son of God. The exact representation of God who is love.

#### Hebrews 1:1-4

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

Love is not a noun, it is a verb. It is living, real, and active. What does it look like? The Father has shown us his love through His Son, who is the exact representation of His being. The Son

displays the very nature of God, which is love. God sent His Son to earth on a mission; a mission of redemption that demanded Jesus DO something. In eternity past, God chose a people for Himself to display His greatness and glory and grace. He also ordained a plan to save these people from their sins. He sent His Son to rescue and redeem these rebel sinners and reconcile them to Himself. So Jesus the Messiah came to this earth and was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows. He came to die for unworthy, unclean rebels. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. The people that God chose were anything but lovely. It was not our beauty and loveliness that motivated the Father to send His Son to save us. It was a sovereign expression of His character, which is love. So Christ came, and He chose twelve Apostles who walked with Him and were first hand eyewitnesses of His perfect sinless life, His supernatural miracles of compassion and love and healing, His grace, His mercy, His kindness, His righteous anger, His holiness, His wisdom, His grace. They saw God's love in the flesh, first hand. They also witnessed His trial, His accusers, His agony in the garden, His scourging, His meekness, His struggle and His humble submission to the Father. And they saw the nails, the whip, the sword in His side, the blood, the crown of thorns, the wooden cross. As He hung on that cross, they felt the judgment and wrath of God as darkness covered the earth for three hours. They heard their dying Savior cry out "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" as the sinless lamb of God took the punishment and wrath for the sins of His people. The Father had sent the Son on a mission, to be a propitiation, to take the punishment due sinners and appease the righteous fury of a Holy God. And Jesus completed that mission and cried "It is finished" and died.

Oh beloved, savor this amazing good news, the profound wisdom of our God. Do you really appreciate and understand the perplexing dilemma? God is love. God is holy. How can a holy God love unholy people and remain holy, righteous and just? There is but one way for God to remain holy and also love sinners. His justice has to be satisfied. He cannot just love sinners and disregard His holiness. This would be unjust. For God to love and accept sinners, these sinners must be cleansed of their sins. This is the central question of the ages; How can an unrighteous, unclean sinner be loved and accepted by a righteous, holy God who hates sin? There had to be a legitimate way to remove their sin. The law of God demands a penalty be paid for sin to satisfy justice. There had to be a sin bearer – one to take away the sin. Sin is a falling short of the righteous standard, a violation of the law. It not only is wrongdoing, and also a lack of right doing. Because God is holy, perfect, righteous, and just, there is only one appropriate remedy for sin. The penalty must be paid. The wrath, punishment, and judgement due sin must be appeased and exhausted. The righteous requirement of the law must be satisfied. The wrath, just punishment, and judgment of God must be carried out toward all sin. God is no respecter of persons. For God to love and accept a sinner, that sinner's sin must be removed, and the just penalty for that sin must be suffered by a substitute, and that penalty is death. For centuries, God's people killed thousands of animals as sacrifices to cover their sins. But the blood of bulls and goats could never take away that sin. All of those sacrifices and shed blood pointed to the ultimate perfect substitute. Man had sinned, so the substitute had to be a perfect man. No sinner can bear the sins of another. This substitute had to be fully human, and also one that was pure and faultless, untainted by the sin of the fallen head of the human race, Adam. It had to be one born apart from sin.

Do you see the need? Do you hear the cry? Who is worthy? Who is holy? Who is pure? Who is willing to offer that worthy, perfect, holy, life as a substitute to bear the penalty for sinners? Who is able and willing to stand in gap, and appease the wrath of a Holy, Righteous judge? Do you recognize our desperate state? Only One is worthy. Only One could fulfill this purpose. Only One was a pure and acceptable sacrifice. And over 2000 years ago, on a wooden cross, the sovereign Creator of the universe, Jesus Christ, was crucified and died. The evidence of that death was undeniable. It was the shedding of His blood. He had to be a holy and pure substitute without sin, the only One that could carry that sin and provide the payment for that sin....a propitiation....a satisfaction....a complete exhaustion of the wrath due the sinner. But that's not all. Though the sinner now has an acceptable sacrifice for his sin, he still stands in need of righteousness. Only the righteous will stand in the day of judgment. Think carefully with me. All of us not only do wrong, we also do not do the good that we ought. We must have our sins taken away, but then we stand naked and in need of a robe of righteousness. Who might give us the righteousness we need? Who alone is lovely, clean, and pure. Who lived and loved and always did what is right? There is One, and only One. The Lord Christ Jesus. And He came and not only took away our sin, and also gave us His righteousness. A righteousness that is freely given to all who come and forsake their sin and place their full reliance and trust in that righteous one, and forfeit all confidence in their own deficient efforts and self-righteous works.

Oh brothers and sisters, behold your Savior. Behold the Son of God. See the lamb, and be stricken to your heart with great joyful sorrow. Weep in anguish and pain for your sin that caused Him to die, and sing with great joy and thanksgiving because He willingly came and carried that sin, and gave us His righteousness. And now come boldly to the throne, without fear of punishment, knowing that He pleads his merit in our behalf and ever lives to intercede for us before the throne of God. Fear no more, my brother and sister. Behold the love of God, the deep love of Jesus, and the deep love of your heavenly Father for His people. How can it be that we who are sinners would have the love and affection from a God we despised and rejected. Who is this God of heaven who would craft and execute such a plan of amazing love and mercy? Such love. Such grace. It compels us to love and serve others to the praise of His glory.

Listen again to the words of the Apostle John; This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and gave us His Son. This is the perfect love that will banish all fear of punishment. This is the love that will spawn a fearless confidence and boldness to come and receive what we need to fulfill our mission of purpose of proclaiming this good news to the world to the praise of His glorious grace. And if you are here this morning, and have not bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus, and received His forgiveness and mercy, hear the call to come and be washed and be clean, to turn from you wickedness and be set free, to strip off your filthy rags of self-righteous and be clothed with a righteousness from on high. Come and be captured and overtaken and decimated by this astounding, astonishing love of God. Heed the call to turn away from your sin, and turn to the One who alone loves without limits. Such love is unstoppable. It cannot be defeated. No devil. No sin. No evil. This eternal love God that has been displayed in the gospel shall never pass and never cease and never fail. It is the essence of our God and Savior, and it is our life.

John touched Him. John ate with Him. He heard Him preach. He watched Him heal the sick, cast out demons, and feed the multitudes. He beheld His glory at the transfiguration. He walked with Him and talked with Him, and sat at His feet. He watched Him suffer and die. He beheld Him risen from the dead. He watched as He ascended into heaven. And today, through the Word of God, we have seen Him through this eyewitness testimony of the display of the love of God. And whosoever believes this testimony will be saved from his sins and adopted into the family, fully accepted and loved by God. Today, if you hear His voice, and if you will obey the gospel, you will be saved from God's wrath. This is good news, that you can be safe from the wrath and punishment and furious judgment of God. This holy God has provided a way for you to escape. I beg of you to flee from that wrath and run to Christ.

So God the Father has shown us His love in His Son. He sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins. This is how God loved us, even when we did not love Him. This love of God for us is the basis for our loving each other. Though we can't see God, we can see His love through His Son whom He sent, and through the testimony of those who walked with Him. And if we know His Son, we also know God, and therefore we can and must love one another.

### **#3 THE PRINCIPLE OF A GROWING CONFIDENCE**

*To become perfect in love, you must learn to fully rely and trust in His love.*

This is how we grow and mature in this living relationship with God; we have been given His Spirit. Because we have the Spirit, we recognize and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior. The Spirit, who is God, lives in us and produces an assurance in our hearts as He bears His fruit of love in and through our lives. As we live moment by moment sustained in this powerful love, we mature in our expression of this love to others. We grow stronger in His love as we show His love. To show His love, we must rely on His love. Our Father God places us in difficult circumstances, tailor made to mature our faith and bring us into this perfect, mature love. As we experience the fellowship of Christ's suffering, we become more like him. It is through the trying of our faith that we are purged, purified, strengthened and brought to maturity. This growth to a perfect love is a process that occurs as we learn to love others as we have been loved, to express unconditional love to undeserving people. His love is made complete in us as it flows from Him, through us, and out to others.

So who is currently driving you crazy? Where do you lose patience? When are you ignored, mistreated and neglected? These people are not in your life by accident, but by design. For us to mature into a perfect love, this love must be experienced within our lives. We must be placed in circumstances and with people that will drive us to rely and trust in that love and its power. This is experiential, not just academic understanding. This maturity is developed in the context of such trying experiences. So what are the current people and situations your Father has designed to purge you of your self-centeredness and self-reliance, and humble you and cause you to abide and dwell and call on him continually? Beloved, there are no accidents and mistakes with God. He is truly working all things together for the maturing of His love within us, and the expression of His love through us, so that He might maximize the praise and glory of His Son.

The great encouragement from this lesson today is that you can learn to rely on His love, and as it fills and overflows in you, you will be delivered from all fear! The greatest fear in the world is the impending fear of death and judgment. In Christ, we have been saved from the fear of punishment, for our Savior took that on our behalf. However, to fully experience the joy and freedom from those fears, we must experience the evidence of His life within us. That life manifests as loving others the way we have been loved. Again, God is invisible. What we can see are the evidences of His presence. One way our heart is assured that He is in our life is when we love others beyond our own capacity and ability. If you are struggling today to love someone, yes, I mean that person you're thinking of right now, then call on Him and thank Him for this opportunity to experience this powerful resurrection power of the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead in your life. He has given us more than we need to show such love to others. As you yield to that work of the Spirit in your life, you will grow in your confidence and assurance as you rely and trust in this unstoppable love of Christ.

#### **#4 THE PRINCIPLE OF INTENSITY**

*To become perfect in love, you must be compelled to love others as an expression of your love for Christ.*

As we look at this last principle of intensity, I would like to look at a passage from II Corinthians.

#### II Corinthians 5:11-15

*<sup>11</sup> Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

The apostle Paul was so captured by the fact that Christ died for sinners and was raised came back to life he was accused by some as being out of his mind. He stated that Christ's love compelled him to press forward and serve others. Paul was inflamed with the love of Christ. Here's the lesson...to experience this perfect love that casts out all fear and produces a bold assurance before the Lord, we must become compulsive habitual lovers. Love must no longer be an option, but a continual must. As we bask in this gospel message and are filled with His love, this powerful fervent love that He has for us will inspire and produce with our hearts a love for Him that will manifest in loving others. In the book of the Revelation, the Apostle John records his vision of Jesus Himself addressing this same church of Ephesus.

#### Revelation 2:3-5

*<sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Consider*

*how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

This is certainly a sober admonishment from the lips of our Savior to church that He loved. Might He be saying this same thing to us this morning? How fervent and passionate is our love for Christ?

As you consider that question, you might find that your heart has cooled down, and the joy of your salvation is waning. What must you do? First, return to the gospel and consider your God and your Savior. As He revives your heart, then resolve to love Him by loving others. For His love to grow in you, it must flow from you to others. The fruit of love flowing from us to others is our sacrificial offering of thanks God. Love initially always comes from Him freely to us. He commands us to freely receive that unconditional love, and then freely give it unconditionally to others as an expression of love back to Him. This flow of love from Him through us to others and back to Him is our life. As it occurs day-to-day, you will mature to a place of fearlessness as we become like our Savior. Love takes risks. This love is unconditional. It is volitional. It is unfailing, unstoppable, and undeniable. It is supernatural, and the expression of the Spirit in us and through us. It is the display of God's nature and essence. It is the goal of our salvation, and the fullness of it is for you as His child.

### **Closing Questions**

1. Have you been born again? Do you know the Father? Do you know and love Christ?
2. What are some practical ways that you can regularly bask in the gospel?
3. What are some specific areas where you need to rely more on God's love for you?
4. Where do you see a waning love for Christ and others? What are some things you can do to rekindle your first love for Jesus? What are some ways you could show that love to others?