

Love Is of God,' and 'God Is love.' 1 John 4:7-21.

by John Nelson Darby

God's love for us is demonstrated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this love enables us to live a righteous life and have boldness in the day of judgment.

Scripture: 1 John 4:7

Topics: "Living in Christ", "God's Love"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that the essence of Christianity is not just about grace and justification but about the life of Christ manifested in us, which is characterized by righteousness and love for one another. He explains that God's love is revealed through the sending of His Son, who provides life and propitiation for our sins, allowing us to live through Him. Darby contrasts the teachings of Paul and John, noting that while Paul focuses on justification, John reveals God's nature and love towards humanity. He encourages believers to recognize that God's love dwells within them through the Holy Spirit, which should inspire them to love others and live righteously. Ultimately, he reassures that perfect love casts out fear, especially concerning the day of judgment, as believers are seen as righteous in Christ.

Transcript

The great subject of this epistle is not the grace manifested towards us as sinners, dealing with us as such, and justifying us; but another side of Christianity, and that is, the life of Christ, "That eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us," that is, in us; and then "which thing is true in him and in you;" we live by this life of Christ. Then the apostle unfolds this life of Christ in two great principles - righteousness, practical righteousness, doing God's will and commandments - and the other, loving the brethren: just what His own life was; so when we have this life, it bears the same fruit - perfect in Him of course - still, characteristically, it is that same life of obedience and love to the brethren.

The difference between Paul and John is, that Paul speaks of man being presented to God, justified and accepted in Christ; but John has a great deal more of revealing God to man. In verse 9, he does speak of the work done for us - not in us - for he goes to the way in which it has been manifested and done. In the Gospel of John you get, first, eternal life in the Person of the blessed Son of God down here - God Himself manifested; and then, in the epistle, he goes on to the expression and re-production of this life in us. Paul is much more upon justification and acceptance - the two things we want - eternal life and acceptance with

God.

This fourth chapter takes up what God is towards us in love. In speaking of the life, it goes through the whole condition of man, from the time of his utter sinfulness since he was born, to the day of judgment; and then life, and how we are brought into the blessed knowledge of what it is. The fact of having life, does not in itself enable me to say, I am perfectly accepted in the Beloved: even supposing it is really there, it does not do for righteousness before God. The effect of being quickened and having life, is to make us understand that we want righteousness. We look on ourselves, and see that this will not do for God; and if it will not do, how are you going to be accepted of Him?

The first thing is, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God;" v. 7, one of the traits of this new life, the nature only. An angel cannot understand what is passing in my mind; we must have a divine nature to know God, and if I have, I know God. An animal has the same nature as that of which it is born. There is the spirit of love in us - we are born of God, and know God, and therefore we know what love is. If I am only partaker of this divine nature, I see faults in myself, and know nothing of righteousness. When a person is quickened, he sees the difference between things, and consequently is uneasy and restless, and finds a root of evil in himself - flesh working in him - even when he has known forgiveness; for he has to learn what he is, as well as what he has done. Well, then, the apostle turns to what is not his common subject. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us." (Ver. 9.) Not a bit of what is in us, but he turns round to show what God has manifested Himself to be towards us: so he begins at man's utterly lost condition, and goes on to the day of judgment. "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." All my Adam-life gone and judged, and another life come in, that I might live by it. God sends Him into the world that we might live through Him, and I am looked at consequently, as dead in sins. If a man is dead, there is not a movement in him towards another; and what is more, if you try to awaken it, you cannot: there is nothing spontaneous, and nothing to be awakened - and that is a sinner's natural state. Nothing in them towards God; in fact, God has tried everything - promise, law, the prophets, His Son, and the Holy Ghost - and it is all no use. And now He sends His only begotten Son, and I get another kind of life, "that we might live through him," because we were dead.

Verse 10 is entirely another thing. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now I have my guilt met, for we were guilty in our sins; He sends His Son to make propitiation for them. I was dead, and guilty, lying in my sins, and God has thought upon me, and has been willing to spend the best and most blessed thing in heaven His own Son, that I might get life in this new way - life, when I was dead, and propitiation for my sins, that they may be all cleared away. I find Him beginning where I was, expecting nothing from me. The only time you find the Lord pronouncing a curse upon anything, was, when He came to look for fruit upon the fig-tree, and there was nothing but leaves, and He said it should never bear fruit - man is judged in his condition. Man, the thing cultivated of God, brought forth wild fruit. "Let it alone this year also." God, in Christ's ministry, so to speak, digging about it, and dunging it, but at the close of His ministry, it withered away. That was man's condition; and, having judged the Adam-life, He sends Christ, that I might live through Him.

As regards my state, He has met my whole case in Christ; God has manifested His love. But my soul wants to know this love. Well, if I look at myself, I cannot. I may say, I do think there is something in me, for I love His saints and His word; but it is sinful nature that makes me discomfited and in uncertainty, and there can be no settled peace. But here is God's love manifested towards me as guilty and dead; and the blessed Son of God came, that we might live through Him: there is nothing but evil in your heart, so He comes and brings life. Yes, I say, but I am defiled and guilty all this time. Oh, He says, I am come to be the

propitiation for these sins. The blessed manifestation of God's love is, that I find what is in God's heart about me; that He has done what was needed for my state, and revealed it too. It is what is in God's heart that is my comfort, not hunting anything out in my own. I know that God has acted on His own love, and revealed this love to me, where I was in all my sins. There I get this manifestation of God's love; He knew everything that was in me, and He sent His Son to put it away - He has acted from His own heart, unasked and unsought, and sent His Son. I insist on this word "manifested," because I have it demonstrated. How do I know what is in God's heart? Because He has given His Son - the very best thing He could give. There we have the first thing in which His love is shown out, both for life and propitiation: another life, which produces what is good in me, and not what is bad; thus it comes out in love to the brethren. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

Verse 12. "No man hath seen God at any time." How can I know a person I have never seen? What makes this passage more striking is John 1:18. What is the answer to it there? That the only begotten Son has declared Him. If a person wanted to know God really (divine teaching for it of course), there was Christ to reveal Him, manifesting Him in love. "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. In His place of Son, He would necessarily know God as Father, infinitely and perfectly. He who knows God in the closest affection, He has revealed Him, and He must of course tell you what He was as He knows Him. There you get the way He was presented to the world.

Now mark the difference here. "God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" - not the love to the sinner, but the love enjoyed in the saint: it is another step on. When I see the manifestation in the midst of the world, if anybody had eyes to see, there was the Father to be seen - but here it is "God dwelleth in us," that is the way "we know," and "His love is perfected in us." Well, if I have God dwelling in me, I can see His love; the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts - what more can I ask? It is a wonderful truth, God dwelling in us.

Verse 13. "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." The Holy Ghost dwells in us, as Paul says to the Corinthians, even when they were going on badly. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost," how can you go and use it for sin?

Verse 15. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." Of course He is not speaking of hypocrites; but if there is the real confession of Christ as the Son of God, God dwells in me, and I in Him, by His Spirit. There I get the love, not manifested to the sinner, but the direct, positive enjoyment of it by the saint. It is the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in the believer, which distinguishes and characterises him. The working of this verse is most blessed. Supposing I find a timid soul, why, I say, God is dwelling in you - do you confess that Jesus is the Son of God? Of course I do, he says, it is my hope and joy. Then you have God dwelling in you. But see how it acts on the conscience, supposing it is a person who has known these things only in the conscience - I say, You have God dwelling in you, but how far have you thought of Him to-day? Perhaps not once; Well, is that the way you are treating God? You know the truth that God dwells in you, and yet you are not even taking the trouble to think of Him once the whole day! It rejoices the feeble soul, but on the other hand, it tests the conscience; for how have you been treating this wonderful Guest - how much have your hearts been upon Him - watching not to do anything to displease Him - but to glorify Him? How far short it puts the low idea of Christian life you are dragging through - not to scandalize the world!

That is the second way I get the love known - it is shed abroad in my heart as a saint. God has taken me up, and cleansed and adopted me, and now He comes to dwell in me: and that is the condition of every Christian, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God." We cannot think too much of what characterises the Christian, that the Holy Ghost dwells in him.

Verse 16. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us:" and no wonder, if He is dwelling in us. If a person asks me, How do you know that God loves you? The proof is, that He has given His Son for me when I was a sinner. But if he asks me, How do you enjoy it? Oh, by the Holy Ghost which He has given me. It is a practical point with the Christian, because I have never to grieve this Spirit. He is not uncertain about the love - he knows very well he does not live up to it, though that is no excuse; still we do fail, and often; he knows he is not all he would wish to be - but he knows God is all He could wish Him to be for him. There I get this blessed effect, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us" - we know and understand it, divinely, through the Holy Ghost, and there is not a doubt or a cloud. If we wish to know the measure of it (for it is His love, not mine to Him), the soul walks in the consciousness of this blessed, divine favour, and the measure is, that the Father has loved us as He loved Christ.

Verse 17 is a further step, which is often a hindrance to people. It goes on to the day of judgment - to the end. "Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." There I get the Christian condition. It is a great thing to connect experience with the absoluteness of grace. A person living on experiences is always doubting; the mistake is not in having the experience, but in looking at it. You must have the experience, for something must pass in our hearts about divine things; the harm is in looking at it. The effect of the Holy Ghost working in me is to make me look at Christ: He makes me in this experience to look at Christ as my only resource. He does not set me looking into my own heart, but He shows me that Christ is the answer to all the wants my experience gives me. Faith never leads me to look at my state, but it leads me, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, to look at Christ. Wherever there is divine faith in what I believe, there is no doubt at all. For instance, if I ask a person, Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Of course I do, he says, but that is what is making me so miserable, for I never care about Him as I ought - there is the experience you see. I may reason about it, but where there is faith in exercise, I set to my seal that God is true; and if I set to my seal that God is true, I am absolutely certain. The moment I think that God has said, "This is my beloved Son," and through grace I believe it, I am divinely certain. A doubt may come into my mind about something else - how can God have me when I have gone on in such a way - but I am not doubting that He is the Son of God. The word of God is brought into my soul as true, and I set to my seal that God is true, "God that cannot lie." The prodigal was perfectly certain that there was goodness in his father's house, but he doubted whether he could have it. There was no doubt about the house, or about the goodness in the house, but when he thinks of the consequences of his sin, he begins to doubt. When he comes to his father, he does not say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants," because he is perfectly certain of his father's heart, for he is on his neck. If I say, Look what I am, I do not see how God can receive me - there comes in the doubt, but, I am certain about this other truth, that "Jesus is the Son of God."

Many a soul whose trust is in the blood of Christ, if he thinks of the judgment-seat, is not quite sure where he is. You say, the cross just suits you, but can you say you are a poor sinner, and the judgment-seat just suits you? It is another thing, and brings up this - that when God is exercising judgment, it is a question whether I can stand in that clay. If I have my sins upon me, of course I cannot, and there is uncertainty and cloud.

Well, God has thought of it for us: it is not hope in the day of judgment, but "boldness." It is always wrong to hope about the day of judgment, for this reason, that if God entered into judgment with us, it is certain condemnation. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified," It is true that when God works in a soul, you never get a case where there is not some hope: if He brings the light of His truth into the soul, He is light and love, so there is some revelation of love. When the prodigal was perishing, it was the recollection of the love of his father's house - though he did not know whether he could have part in it - that carried him to his father: - love that was sufficient to draw him to the very place he feared he had no right to. When God deals with the sinner, and makes him feel his sin, it is always the attraction of His love. With Peter in the boat, in Luke v., he says, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." What did he go to Him for then, if he tells Him to go away? Because his heart was drawn. We all go through that state, for there is the attraction of the love of God, and the effect of the light.

But when I look on to the day of judgment, I cannot rest on that, for it is judgment - it is righteous dealing with sin, and not love. If I have not righteousness, I cannot stand. "There is none righteous, no, not one." There always will be some hope in the soul really taught of God; but I am perfectly certain that if God deals with me in my sins, it is all over with me. I know I am a child of wrath, and I am not looking to myself to answer for my sins. You could not judge Adam when innocent; but since Adam departed from God and listened to Satan, he has turned God into a Judge who condemns him. There would be no judgment at all, if we had not departed from God. They thought Satan more kind and good than God, and turned God into a Judge by sinning, and therefore it must be condemnation. If I think in that way of judgment, I become of course, unhappy. But supposing I am "the righteousness of God" in Christ; how can I be afraid of judgment, if righteousness is the thing he is judging by? "There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear." I can say now, that when I look up to the day of judgment, there is no time that I am so clear; the ground is the cross.

But in what state shall I come before the judgment seat of Christ? Christ will come and fetch me, to have me with Him. The next thing, He will change my vile body, and fashion it like unto His glorious body. When He shall appear, He will judge the quick and dead, but I shall be like Him. The moment I have the full effect of Christ's work, I shall be perfectly like the Judge. What God has done is, first, to show us that the One who is the Saviour is the One who is to be the Judge; and besides that, I find I am in Christ - the righteousness He judges by, I am in Him. That is where we are for judgment. God has thought of me as a sinner, He has given His Son - given me life in Christ - put away my sins, and put me in Christ, and given me the Holy Ghost; and now in the day of judgment, I am as Christ is; I am like the Judge, even in my body. True, we shall all have to give account of ourselves, but we are in glory when we do.

Take another aspect of it. Paul has been eighteen hundred years in heaven with Christ - are you going to take him out of heaven to judge whether he ought to be there? Before God, "as he is, so are we in this world:" well, then of course I have boldness. Is there any good in myself? No, I have no good in me - I was totally lost, I had no hope, but God has redeemed me out of that place; Christ is my life and righteousness, and the Holy Ghost in me makes me know it, so that I enjoy it; well, as Christ is so am I. So the apostle at once gives the consequence, "There is no fear in love." (Ver. 18.) The whole world is convicted of sin, because they have rejected Christ; then I cannot look for righteousness anywhere in the world; but God has set Christ at His own right hand, and that is where I look for it now. This love of God has settled the whole thing, from the time we were dead in sins to the day of judgment.

And now mark how blessedly the effect comes in in verse 19. "We love him, because he first loved us." It does not say, we ought to love God - of course we ought - for the Spirit of God is giving us this sense of

love - God's love for sinners, and enjoyment of it as saints. What a blessed thing it is that God has loved us in this way! Well, then, I love God. Supposing a child were to say to me, I love my mother quite enough! I should say, You are a wicked child, you do not love her a bit. But supposing that child came to me and said, Oh, if you only knew my mother, all her patient kindness and unwearied ways, and I am so naughty and often grieve her - well, then, I say that child loves his mother. The sense by the Holy Ghost of all this perfect love from the time we were utter sinners to the day of judgment, tells me that I am to be loving Him. This saying that God dwells in us, gives me a measure and motive for walking, which nothing else ever could give me; as to whether I am behaving myself as if God were dwelling in me; and then I find myself thus surrounded infinitely in everything, by all that God is. I am nothing compared with the space, but I know I never can get out of it, dwelling in God who is love - He may have to chasten me; but I do not go and chasten all the little children in the street, but my child. I am in that favour which is better than life.

Do you just ask yourself, and see whether you can, in thus putting yourself before the judgment seat of Christ, be perfectly at ease? Are your hearts simply rejoicing and bright in the consciousness of the day of judgment? If there is any fear, we do not know the love of God fully. I am not afraid of God loving me too much. "If God be for us, who can be against us," and He is for us in every detail of our life, too.

The Lord give us in exercised and humbled hearts (there cannot be too much exercise) to have the sense and consciousness of divine love; the proof of it being in Christ, and the enjoyment by the Holy Ghost; and then to look up and see that He is coming to take us to be with Him. The Lord give us, as emptied of self, judged self, to find what it is to have Christ in us, and we in Christ: - to do nothing to grieve the Spirit. If we thought of God dwelling in us, how careful and watchful we should be to do nothing to displease Him.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-nelson-darby/love-is-of-god-and-god-is-love-1-john-47-21/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net