

The Power of Love

1 John 4:13-21

Introduction: 1) Our actions are often determined by our identity, who we are and who we think we are. John wants us to be loving (actions), but first he wants us to know we are loved as those who abide in God thru the gift of His Spirit (identity). Have you taken the time to reflect on who you are in Christ? Have you stopped to consider some of the incredible ways you have been blessed and loved by God? Just meditate a moment on the following:

Through Christ, I am dead to sin (Romans 6:11).	Through Christ, I am free from the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:24).
Through Christ, I am spiritually alive (Romans 6:11; 1 Corinthians 15:22).	Through Christ, I am declared blameless and innocent (Philippians 2:15).
Through Christ, I am forgiven (Colossians 2:13; 1 John 2:12).	Through Christ, I am a light in the world (Matthew 5:14-15; Philippians 2:15).
Through Christ, I am declared righteous (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21).	Through Christ, I am victorious over Satan (Luke 10:19).
Through Christ, I am a child of God (Romans 8:16; Philippians 2:15).	Through Christ, I am cleansed from sin (1 John 1:7).
Through Christ, I am God's possession (Titus 2:14).	Through Christ, I am set free from the power of sin (Colossians 2:11-15).
Through Christ, I am blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).	Through Christ, I am secure in him (1 Peter 1:3-5).
Through Christ, I am a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20).	Through Christ, I am at peace with God (Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:6-9).
Through Christ, I am free from the law (Romans 8:2).	Through Christ, I am loved by God (1 John 4:10).
Through Christ, I am crucified with him (Galatians 2:20).	(<i>Gospel Coach</i> , 71-72)
Through Christ, I am an heir of God (Romans 8:17)	

2) That is an impressive list. It is a supernatural list. It is a list that reveals the power of the Spirit and the power of love all because “the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (4:14). “If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (4:11).

3) Loving others as we have been loved by God is not an easy thing to do. Loving and praying for our enemies as Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:43-48 can seem nearly impossible. Even loving our brothers and sisters in Christ at times can be a real challenge. We need some supernatural assistance. We need to remember who we are in Christ and what we have received from the Father. When we do, an amazing thing will happen. We will love others as we have been loved by God. And, by the way we love others, we will make visible the invisible God this world so desperately needs to see and come to know. That is indeed the power of love! Three movements in this text unwrap for us for I am calling “the dynamo of love.”

I. Love is an evidence that we have the Spirit

4:13-16

1) These verses are Trinitarian to the core. When we experience the power of divine love we experience the work and enjoy the fellowship of the Triune God. John Piper says, “I think we will love each other and those outside with a distinct, supernatural love when we taste the fellowship of the Trinity” (“Love One Another for Love Is of God”, 5-12-85). I like the sound of that.

2) The Spirit is on display in verse 13. The Son takes center stage in verses 14-15. The Father is highlighted in verses 14-16. God sent His Son to die for us. He sent His Spirit to live in us. Both are gifts of grace. Both are evidences of His amazing love for us. And, the love that we now have for God and His children is a revelation of the Holy Spirit who is within us through our relationship with Jesus. Love is certified proof that God now resides in us, not in a pantheistic sense, but in His personal presence.

1) We abide in the Spirit's presence 4:13

1) Verse 13 begins with the phrase "by this we know." It is interesting and instructive just how many times John uses this phrase in this letter:

- 2:3 – By this we may be sure that we know him...
- 2:5b – By this we may be sure that we are in him...
- 3:10 – By this it may be seen who are the children of God...
- 3:14 – We know that we have passed out of death into life...
- 3:19 – By this we shall know that we are of the truth...
- 3:24b – By this we know that he abides in us...
- 4:2 – By this you know the Spirit of God...
- 4:6b – By this we know the spirit of truth...
- 5:2 – By this we know that we love the children of God...

- 5:13 – I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you might know that you have eternal life.

2) John wants his readers to know, to be assured of many things. Here he wants them to know they abide in God and that God abides in them thru the gift of the Holy Spirit, the 3rd person of the Triune God. Now, how do they know that this mutual abiding in the Spirit is real? Is true? Verse 12 provides part of the answer: because we love one another and His love is maturing and reaching its intended goal. But, most likely John is looking ahead to verses 15-16. Putting it all together we know we abide in God and God abides in us because 1) He gave us His Spirit as a grace gift at conversion, 2) we confess Jesus is the Son of God (Savior of the world, v. 14) and (3) we abide in God's love and His love abides in us.

3) God gave us His Spirit and He will never take Him from us. He is ours now and forever. For all of eternity there will be this mutual indwelling between us and the Holy Spirit. What a blessing. What a gift.

2) We confess the Son as Savior 4:14-15

1) Our motivation to obey God's command to love one another (4:7, 11, 12) can become a delight and joy when we look to Christ and soak in what He did for us. Loving others will not spring forth out of guilt, but out of gospel gladness and gratitude. We are not motivated by our failures but by His

forgiveness. We are moved to love because of our connection to Christ who has so lavishly loved us.

2) These 2 verses have a strong missionary pulse surging thru their veins.

In verse 14 John in apostolic witness affirms what he has seen and what he continually witnesses to. In verse 15 he addresses what he confesses and the blessings that accompany that confession.

3) Now, what did he observe first hand, directly as an eyewitness that he must testify, bear witness, to? It is this: “the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” Once again John directs us to Jesus and what the Father has accomplished by His Son. In the Son the Father:

Revealed the word of life (1:1)	Sent the Christ (2:22-23)
Brought eternal life (1:2)	Makes possible the new birth (2:29)
Cleanses us from all sin (1:7)	Sent the righteous and sinless One (2:29; 3:4)
Gave us an advocate (2:1)	Takes away our sin (3:5)
Propitiates our sins (2:2; 4:10)	Destroys the work of the devil (3:8)
Gives us an example to follow (2:6)	Sacrificed His Son (3:16)
	Gives us life (4:9)

To all of this we can shout “Hallelujah! What a Savior!” This is the Savior the Father sent and this is the Savior we share with a world of 7 billion people; 16,500 people groups; 7,100 which are unreached, totaling more than 3.6 billion persons on planet earth.

4) Jesus came to die for this world and we have the assignment to tell them this good news. But remember as Carl F.H. Henry well said, “the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.” But, when it gets there in time and they do hear it and confess it as their heart cry (v. 15), something wonderful happens. They are converted, regenerated, born again, born of God. And, God now abides in him or her and they now abide in God. Their life is in God and by the Spirit God’s life is in them. This is true for all who confess Jesus as Savior.

3) We know the Father’s love

4:16

1) For the 2nd time in chapter 4 John declares, “God is love” (also v. 8). And what a loving God He is. How do we know? The gift of the Spirit in verse 13. The gift of the Son in verses 14-15. So, we know and believe as a settled reality in our souls that the God who is love indeed loves us. Furthermore, as we abide in the love of God, the God of love abides in us! Thus we see faith and love and knowledge working together to assure our hearts that this God of love is my God, my Father. Warren Wiersbe says, “The more we love God, the more we understand the love of God. And the more we understand His love, the easier it is to trust Him. Afterall, when you know someone intimately and love him sincerely, you have no problem

putting your confidence in him” (pgs 150-51). This is indeed a “Father God” we know we can trust.

II. Love gives us confidence as we await the day of judgment 4:17-18

- 1) John shifts gears and changes direction at this point. He wants to bring into the discussion both the subject of judgment (v. 17) and the subject of fear (v. 18). Loving others out of gratitude for how we have been loved in Christ has consequences not only for the present, but also for the future.
- 2) The argument John has built to this point is powerful. It runs something like this: loving others (4:7, 11, 12), possessing the Spirit (4:13), confessing the Son (4:15) and mutually abiding in God and His love (4:15-16) brings God’s love to its full and intended goal, its perfect purpose in our lives. Two wonderful purposes of that goal is confidence when I stand before God on judgment day (v. 17) and the complete absence of fear when I do (v. 18). How is this possible? The answer is because on that day when you stand before God He will see you as He sees His dear Son. The love of God will have done its perfect work as it is applied to that day when we stand before God.

- 1) We can be confident for the future 4:17

1) Love has an intended goal. The word “perfected” carries the idea of completion, being brought to maturity. Abiding in the love of God gives us “confidence”, boldness for judgment day.

2) Judgment Day is something every person should consider with healthy seriousness. It is real and it is coming. No one spoke more often or more vividly of judgment than did Jesus. The word “hell” (Gr. *Gehenna*) is used 12 times in the New Testament. All but one comes from the mouth of Jesus (see James 3:6 for the one exception). The very purpose of His coming was to help people be prepared and ready for that day. John says we can not only be ready, we can be confident. Why? Because on that day, “as he is, so also are we in the world.” What does John mean by this? I think the answer is something like this: because we are in Christ, abiding in Him and He abiding in us, we stand in relation to God and the world the same way Christ does. John MacArthur says it beautifully, “This stunning statement means the Father treats the saints the same way He does His Son Jesus Christ. God clothes believers with the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), and grants the Son’s perfect love (Matt. 9:36; John 10:11, 14-16; 13:1; 14:21) and obedience (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; 18:37). Someday believers will stand before God’s throne as confidently as their Lord and Savior does. When they reach that final accounting, they will see

the fulfillment of 1 John 3:2b, “We [believers] know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” (p. 171).

2) We can be confident with no fear 4:18

1) The phrase “no fear” is quite popular. It was created as a clothing brand in 1989, opened its first retail store in 2000, launched an energy drink in 2003, and filed bankruptcy in 2011. Apparently its staying power and shelf-life was limited.

2) Such is not the case with the love of God. Verse 17 gives the positive side. Verse 18 the negative. When God’s love has reached its intended goal and accomplished its perfect work, fear before God is “cast out” and the dread of punishment is vanquished. This is one of the joys and blessings of knowing God as Father. This holy and righteous judge is also our daddy, our Abba Father. In contrast, those who do have the fear of future punishment gave evidence that something is wrong, that God’s perfecting work of love has not done its work in their lives. So, out of gospel gratitude for who you are in Christ, love others as He has loved you. The threat of punishment will disappear. The fear of punishment will evaporate. Love never fears judgment or punishment. It is bold. It is confident.

III. Love is a command because it reflects God’s character 4:19-21

1) In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus addressed the two great commandments: loving God and loving others. There He made what many would see as a startling statement. He said loving your neighbor is like loving God. Now in our text, John will add that you cannot love God without loving your neighbor. In fact to say you love God while hating a fellow human being just will not work. In fact, it turns you into a liar and gives evidence that you actually don't love God either.

1) To love God and hate your brother is to live a lie 4:19-20

1) Verse 19 is one of the most simple and straightforward verses in the Bible. The theological order is important. "We love." Why? "Because He first loved us." God took the initiative not us. Our love finds its origin in God's love. He loves us, and the love that now abides in us and has been perfected in us overflows in loving words and actions to others. The Father's prior love is source and cause for our love of others. If I am not loving others as I ought, then I do not know God's love as I should. That, in essence, is John's argument in verse 20.

2) Once again we encounter an "If anyone says" statement (see 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9). Here the person under examination says one thing but does another that contradicts his words. With his lips he says, "I love God", but

in his heart (and actions?!) he “hates his brother.” John’s verdict is quick, clear and to the point, “he is a liar.” Literally the text says, “liar he is.”

3) John’s logic is flawless as he makes his argument. It is what we call a lesser to greater analogy. The gist: you do not love the brother you can see, therefore it is impossible to love the God whom you have not seen. Visible love for visible brothers and sisters makes evident the invisible love that you have for the invisible God. John says love for God and hatred for your brother cannot coexist at the same time in the same heart. If you do not love His creatures then you cannot love the Creator. If you do not love His children, then you do not love their Father. Failure to love his bride is a great offense to the Bridegroom.

John Stott is right when he notes, “It is obviously easier to love and serve a visible man than an invisible God and if we fail in the easier task, it is absurd to claim success in the harder” (173). God calls us to walk in the truth. That involves loving God and loving others.

2) To love God and love your brother is to obey God’s command 4:21

1) Verse 21 is basically a summation of John’s discourse on love that began back in 4:7. It also, in a very wise theological strategy, look to the words of Jesus to settle the issue and answer any remaining questions or objections someone might raise.

2) “This is the commandment we have from him” refers again to the words of Jesus concerning the greatest commandment found in Matthew 22:37-39 and Mark 12:30-31. What Jesus gave us was a commandment. It was not a suggestion or recommendation. It was not just a good idea we might consider. If we truly love God then we must truly love our brother as well. The Godward and human aspects of love cannot be divided. They cannot be separated. They really are the bookends of all the commandments. They are the “heads and tail” of the same coin of love. Our ability to actually love God is wedded to the reality of our love for fellow human beings.

3) And, such a love is not sporadic or periodic. It is not occasional. It is continual. It reflects and puts on display for all to see the love of God for sinners that was put on public display on a bloody Roman cross when “the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” (4:14).

D. Edmond Hiebert makes a striking observation, “Since God’s love is no longer visible in the presence of the incarnate Christ here on earth, God is manifesting His love as it is now displayed in His people” (*BibSac*: Jan-Mar 1990, p. 83).

Conclusion: In Luke 7:47 Jesus says that those who have been forgiven much will love much. We have been forgiven much. We have been forgiven everything we have ever done wrong or ever will do wrong. So, living in the power of that truth

made possible through the perfect atoning death of Jesus (4:10), let's love wholly the God whom we have not seen but someday will, and let's love well the brother and sister we have seen today. There really is supernatural power in love. If you have any doubts, just look to the cross! The Crucified God declares it to be so.