

May 20, 2012
Easter 7

"God's Love for You Is Perfect"

1 JOHN 4:13-21

We know that we live 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 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ 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 him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Love is a very beautiful thing. When someone loves you and cares about you it puts a smile on your face, a spring in your step and a song in your heart. The Bible is a book about love. It draws our attention to a heavenly Father who gave his Son to die for sinners who don't deserve his love.

Human love doesn't even come close to the love that our God has for us. We get frustrated with ourselves when we are not able to love other people the way we want. We suffer disappointment when people do not love us and care about us as much as we expect. In contrast to the imperfect love that we have for each other, we have God's love that is always perfect and will never fail us.

Some animals do a good job of loving us. Think of the warm greeting and unconditional love your dog gives you when you come home. If only human beings could be as loyal and loving as your dog is. The bumper sticker reads, "The more I work with people, the more I want to be home with my dog." Because of their loyalty we affectionately call our dogs, "Man's best friend." If only they did not have to die and leave us.

God's love will never fail you. Today I direct your attention to these words from 1 John 4 that speak to us about God's love that is perfect, that never disappoints and never fails. It transforms our lives.

God's perfect love is real

This perfect love of God is so real because it does not depend on us and how well we perform. It depends on God and what he does to bring us close to his love. "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." John does not say, "We think that we live in him and he in us," he says, "We know." It is the Holy Spirit who makes us sure of God's love by opening our eyes to see how our God gave us the gift of

his Son. Earlier in this chapter John wrote, "This is how God showed his love among us; He sent his only Son into the world, that we might live through him." Jesus called the Holy Spirit our Comforter. Think of all those special moments in your life where the Holy Spirit came to you and reminded you of how your Father was willing to give up his Son just for you, even though you don't deserve it.

You know God's love is real because Jesus came to die for the sins of the whole world. John had seen this first hand. "And we have seen and testify the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." John was with Jesus for three years. He heard Jesus talk about being lifted up on the cross for sin of the world. It was John who under inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded for us the words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." On the night of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, John saw the nail marks in the hands of Jesus, the first hand, forensic evidence, that the sin of the world was completely paid for and forgiven. If I can verify that I am still living in the world on this planet called earth (and I am), then I know that God's love and the gift of his Son has my name on it.

There is more evidence that God's love for you is real. "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." Jesus once asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter responded with these words, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." How do you know that God's love is real for you? Examine the evidence of change that has taken place in your life. You believe with all your heart along with Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. If someone very evil follows you home from church today and breaks into your home and threatens to take your life unless stop believing that Jesus is your Lord and God, I know what you would do. In the face of torture and death you would boldly confess as Peter did, "Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God." This bold confession of faith given to you by the Lord is evidence that God lives in you with his love and you are in God and his love. God's perfect love has created a new life in you that confesses Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

Do you want even more evidence this perfect love of God is real in your life? John writes, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." You know God's love because you have been led to rely on it and believe in it for your salvation. You and I both know that we were born into this world relying on our imperfect love to earn God's favor and God's love. Think of how dismal your life would be this morning if God's blessings and God's love depended on how well you love him and how well you do at loving others. All I have to do is take a small sampling of any part of my life this past week and examine it on the basis of God's perfect love and I fail miserably and so do you. That is why the prophet Isaiah said that we are all together unclean and unacceptable in the eyes of God. If I rely on the perfect love that God has for me and the perfect rescue plan than I can be sure of God's love in this life and for all eternity.

I want to illustrate this with a story that hit the news this past week about an Arabian horse that tried to swim off the coast of California near Carpinteria. Apparently the horse became spooked at some film shoot on the beach and started swimming out into the water towards the Channel Islands. The poor horse would definitely have drown had it not been for life guards and the Coast Guard which were able to get close to the horse, remove the saddle, put life vests under its head and then direct it back towards shore. One lifeguard

said, "I never trained for rescuing a horse." The rescue of that horse depended on a carefully executed plan on the part of the life guards and Coast Guard. In perfect love, your heavenly Father executed a perfect plan that was dependent on Jesus' perfect love to save you. Even the gift of relying on this rescue plan was a perfect gift that was given to you by your God and carefully executed by the Holy Spirit.

God's perfect love changes us

This perfect love that God has for you is life changing and life altering. It allows us to have confidence when facing God in the final judgment. "In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like." Judgment day is coming for all of us. "It is appointed unto man to die once and then comes the judgment." We will have to answer to God for how we have lived our lives. If I am dependent on the quality of my life to pass the test, then I am doomed because I have failed and God does not grade on a curve. However if my hope of passing the test on judgment day depends on the perfect life Jesus lived for me and the perfect death he died for me, than I can have confidence that I will pass not just with flying colors but with perfect grades. As we sing in the hymn, "My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus blood and righteousness."

This perfect love of God also drives out fear, not just fear of what's going to happen on judgment day, but fear of all the unknowns in life. "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." I knew a woman who said that this was her favorite verse in the Bible, "Perfect love drives out fear." The problem was that she had convinced herself that she had the ability to have this high level of love that could cast out fear. She did not realize that this perfect love mentioned here was not her love but God's love for us.

It says here that "fear has to do with punishment." We are careful not to exceed the speed limit or roll through a stop sign because the CHP may be watching us and will give us a ticket. We lock the doors in our homes and we lock our cars because we are afraid that someone may break in and steal from us. I have heard people respond to disaster and trouble with the words, "What have I done wrong to deserve this?" There is always the fear that things will not work out for you the way you hope they will. There are lots of different fears that we face every day in our lives. Will I find a job when I graduate? Will I be able to handle another bad report from the doctor?

Perfect love drives out fear. God's perfect love for us takes our fears away. I don't have to fear what the future holds because I know that my God who gave his Son for me holds my future in his loving hands. Life may seem like a jumble of knots, but the Lord knows the design he has for you as he works out everything for your good and his glory. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." And what are some of the verses that follow this? "Nothing else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This perfect love of God is so life changing and life altering it can take people who have a hard time loving other people and change them into people who love because God loved

them first. This verse is familiar to you I am sure. "We love, because he first loved us." We cannot say I love God and then hate my neighbor. That would make me a liar. If we cannot love our brother who we can see, how can we profess to love God whom we cannot see? If we love God, we must also love our brother. As I speak your heart muscle is pumping blood to over 100 trillion cells in your body. That's amazing. Even more amazing is how God's perfect love is coursing through every part of your being changing and altering you and giving you power to love people, even those who are hard to love who may have hurt you. Where did Joseph ever get the power to forgive his brothers who wanted to kill him at first but then sold him into slavery in the land of Egypt? It says several times in Genesis, "The Lord was with Joseph." His greatest blessing was the blessing of God's perfect love that gave him the power to forgive. Nothing is more beautiful than this perfect love. Amen.