

# 1 John Chapter 4 (vv.7-21)

After presenting the second *doctrinal* test in a short parenthesis [4.1-6], John resumes and concludes his final appeal for love, the *devotional* test [3.11-24; 4.7-21]. In the KJV, John uses the English translation 'love' **91** times in his writings. **38** (42%) are found in 1 John, **24** (26%) being in the present passage (4.7-21). *Robert Law: It is in these verses that First John rises to its sublimest height. Here are sentences of pure gold and unadorned. The paragraph is worthy to be set beside the prologue to John's Gospel as the loftiest that man has ever been inspired to indite.*

There are *four* words in classical Greek for love. John consistently and only uses the word *agape* throughout this epistle. **1. Eros**, not found in the NT, is a desire which seeks its own satisfaction. It is often used of passion between husband and wife. **2. Storge**, is a natural obligatory love for family members (Romans 12.10). **3. Phileo**, is affection that responds to love from (kindness), or qualities in, another. **4. Agape**, is practically unknown in non-biblical Greek. It is not simply an emotion, but supremely to do with the will. Basically, *agape* is a deliberate choice to sacrifice self for the benefit of others, regardless of their merit or worth. Thus, *agape* love is unconditional. *Eros* is all take; *phileo* is give and take; *agape* is all give. *Jerome (347-420AD) records that when John became so infirm that he could not preach he used to be carried to church and content himself with the exhortation, 'Little children, love one another.' When his hearers wearied of it and asked him why he urged this duty so constantly, he replied, 'Because it is the Lord's command, and if only this be done, it is enough'.* John's gospel presents numerous examples of the *agape* love of Christ. He constantly used His resources to meet the needs of others. Hospitality (1.38-39). Turned Israel's water into wine (2). Zeal for the house of God (2.17). Taught the truth (3). Devoted time to those who were despised (4.40). Healed the paralytic (5.6). Provided for physical needs (6.5). Guarded, protected and shepherded the sheep (10). Wept with Mary (11.33). Washed the disciples' feet (13). Prayed for others (17). Provided for the needs of His mother (19). Read Galatians 5.13-15.

## The Plea for Love [4.7-8]

These verses might be further divided as follows. The love of God: *toward* us as sinners (4.7-11); *in* us as children (4.12-18); *through* us as brethren (4.19-5.3). **v.7:** Like a repetitive refrain, John exhorts believers to 'love one another' three times (cf. v.11, 12), each occasion presenting a different motive. The reciprocal pronoun insists that love must be mutual and flow freely in *both* directions (Hiebert). This is not *exclusive* love (only our brethren), but *exemplary* love. We love one another because 'love is of (*ek*) God'. He is the source and origin of *agape* – it flows forth from Him as light radiates from the sun. Thus, everyone that habitually loves in this way must have been 'born' of Him (a past definite experience by which he partakes of divine nature) and 'know' Him (increasing through daily experience). Love is the uniting bond of the heavenly family. **v.8:** The person who is not characterised by *agape* has never come to know God personally and experientially (*aorist*) despite their profession (2.4). How can they when the one they profess to know **is** love? This is a statement of divine essence and nature (cf. John 4.24; Hebrews 12.29; 1 John 1.5), not just one description of His many activities. All God's activity is characterised by *love* (as well as *light*). As a tri-personal being, God has eternally experienced and enjoyed love (John 17.24). *Stott: Far from condoning sin, his love has found a way to expose it (because he is light) and to consume it (because he is fire) without destroying the sinner, but rather saving him.*

## The Divine Proof of Love [4.9-10]

**v.9:** The *agape* love of God was *revealed* (even *embodied*) in the sending of His Son. 'Manifested' means to 'make visible' or 'clear', implying that the sending of Christ was the supreme revelation of Divine love. In Him, God's message of love reached its climax (Hiebert). **WHAT:** God 'hath sent' (*perfect* tense) suggesting an authoritative commission which is now complete, having abiding and permanent results. **WHOM:** His 'only begotten Son' (*monogenes*), literally God's 'one of a kind' Son. 'Only begotten' is therefore suggestive of one who is unique and specially beloved (cf. Genesis 22.2; Luke 7.12; Hebrews 11.17). This Son has no equal, eternally dwelling 'face to face' with the Father; He is therefore uniquely placed to fully reveal His essence (love). No greater gift of God is conceivable, because no greater gift was possible (Stott). **WHERE:** He was sent 'into the world' – a world which exhibits a character altogether foreign and hostile to that of the Father (2.16). **WHY:** That we 'might live through (*dia*) Him', presupposing those to whom the Son was sent were spiritually dead. It is through His *work* at Calvary (past) and faith in His *person* (present) that eternal life is bestowed (John 5.21; 17.3). **v.10: HOW:** Christ made 'propitiation' for sins at Calvary through the shedding of His own precious blood. Divine justice in respect of sins has been satisfied thus enabling a holy God to move out in mercy to guilty sinners. Because God is *light*, He demanded propitiation (2.2); because God is *love*, He provided propitiation. No wonder John says, 'herein is *the* love' – this is the *pre-eminent* (not the *only*) expression of Divine love. Not that we loved God and therefore, in some way, merited this display of love. Quite the opposite! The human race *has* not (past) and *does* not (present) love God – but 'He loved us', despite what we are (Ephesians 2.4). In the ancient world, it was only thought appropriate to love those who were regarded worthy of being loved. But God *Himself* has loved sinners.

### The Practice of Love [4.11-12]

**v.11:** Since God has 'so' loved us (in manner, degree and extent), we are morally bound (obligated) to love one another.

**v.12:** No man has 'gazed upon' (attentively contemplated) the essence of deity (Exodus 33.20). But the unseen God, who was once revealed in His Son (John 1.18), is now reflected in His people as they love one another. This is clear proof of God's indwelling presence (by the Spirit) and the ultimate goal (perfecting) of His love in us. *Spurgeon: Do not selfishly say, 'I want to sit down and enjoy the love of God. I will never say a word to anybody about Christ. I will never give a poor creature so much as a brass farthing. If you think this way, you are a plugged-up pipe. You are of no use. You will have to be taken out of the system. For the system of love-supply for the world requires open pipes, through which love divine may freely flow.* The divine circle of God's love is fulfilled when we love one another. Divine love exists in the heart (Romans 5.5), but it must expand in the life. The implanted seed must bring forth foliage and fruit.

### The Pledge of Love [4.13-16]

**v.13:** There are several witnesses to assure believers of their close and intimate relationship with (or, *dwelling in*) God. God's witness is *internal* (the Spirit) and *external* (the apostles, v.14). The believer's witness is *verbal* (v.15) and *practical* (v.16). First, the indwelling Spirit is the assurance of and means by which believers dwell 'in God' (eternal union), and 'He in us' (John 14.23). **v.14:** Second, the apostles ('we') had 'attentively' and 'carefully' observed the Father's sent Son – the resulting impression of which was still with them. To this they were constantly bearing witness. 'Saviour of the world' is a title used exclusively by John and recalls the name of *Zaphnath-paaneah* given to Joseph (Genesis 41.45). The name can mean both 'sustainer of life', 'revealer of secrets' and 'saviour of the world' – all of which were true of Joseph, and gloriously true of Christ (cf. John 4.14, 29, 42). The false teachers denied they had sinned, and so argued the atoning death of Christ was unnecessary (1.6-2.2). The inference is, of course, the more divine love operates in us, the more effective will be our testimony to the Saviour (FB Hole). **v.15:** Third, the saviourhood of Christ, potentially for the whole world, necessitates the need to 'confess' Him. The word means to 'agree with' (i.e. believe) the testimony of the apostles. The *arist* suggests a decisive, definite act which represents a sustained attitude of the heart. A confession of 'Jesus' as 'the Son of God' was very costly in the first century. It divided a person from Judaism and the social life of paganism which was the throbbing heart of many cities and societies. The whole epistle shows that the full confession was: *Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, who came in flesh to be the Saviour of the world by giving Himself as an atoning sacrifice for all* (cf. 4.2; 5.1; 2 John 7). Such a confession implies total *surrender* and *obedience* to the one confessed and proves the reality of a person's vital, spiritual relationship with God. **v.16:** The fourth and final assurance of vital relationship with God is 'dwelling in love' – thus developing and confirming the truth of v.12. John's readers had come to 'know' (and *still* knew) the love of God 'in' (*en*) them, and 'believe' (and *still* believed) the love of God 'to' them. They were immersed in divine love which was now operated in their experience and flowed out to others.

### The Perfection of Love [4.17-21]

**v.17:** John now elaborates another theme of v.12 – the 'ripened fruit' (perfection) of love. When 'the love' is properly developed in a believer's life, it brings forth the *fruit* of 'boldness' in the day of judgment (vv.17-18) and love for one another (vv.19-21). 'Boldness' means 'freedom of speech' implying fearless confidence. The evidence of genuine conversion is apparent in a life characterised by love, and thus there is nothing to fear in respect of a coming day of judgment. John is using 'judgment' in a broad, *general* sense to encompass a final time of reckoning before God. But in John's writings, the believer does not come into judgment – he has passed out of death into life (John 5.24). In fact, believers are presently in this world, positionally, as Christ is now in heaven – that is, beyond the reach of judgment (Romans 8.1). Our standing before God is the same as the standing of our glorified Lord. We shall be as He is *perfectly* (3.2). We ought to be as He is *practically* (3.7). We are as He is *positionally* (4.17). **v.18:** 'Fear' has the sense of alarm or dread, e.g. the fear of a criminal facing condemnation. Those who have experienced, and exercise, 'the love' have no such fear. Divine love bearing fruit in the believer 'throws out' the fear of 'torment' (punishment). The person whose life is habitually beset by the fear of impending judgment has not known the love of God in their experience.

**v.19:** The *second* fruit of perfected love is habitual and practical love for fellow brethren. Believers are not characterised by 'fear' but 'love'. Literally the Greek reads, 'As for us, let us be loving, because He Himself first loved us.' No object of love is stated so it is unrestricted in its scope. Our capacity to (*agape*) love, whether *upward* (God) or *outward* (man), is due entirely to God's prior love *for* us and *in* us. **v.20:** The person who claims to be 'loving' God but shows a continuing attitude of hatred to an assumed brother (cf. 2.11; 3.15) is a 'liar' (character). The God that cannot be seen is represented in life's experience by His children that are 'continually before one's eyes'. To love them is to love God; to not love them (i.e. hate) is to deny any relationship with God. *Stott: It is obviously easier to love and serve a visible human being than an invisible God, and if we fail in the easier task, it is absurd to claim success in the harder.* James uses a similar argument in relation to faith (James 2.14-17). **v.21:** To love one another is not optional, sporadic or partial. It is a *continuing* obligation (duty) towards *all* the brethren (John 13.34; 14.15; 15.12, 17).