First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John
When God's Love Reaches Its Goal
1 John 4:13-21

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There are a few moments in life that remind you of your age. I had one of those this week. I received an invitation to my 40th high school reunion. It got me thinking. Would I want to go back to those high school years?

But then I asked myself, what about middle school? Would I want to go back there even for a day? That answer came quickly. "No, not even for a minute!" Because when I think about my middle school experience, I remember questions that always seem to be present: Do I belong? Where do I fit? How do people see me?

If you are in middle school right now, you are not the only one asking those questions. And if you are long past those years, do not be surprised if some version of them still shows up in most areas of your life. But beneath all of those questions is a deeper one: Where do I stand before God? Can I know that I belong to Him? Can I stand before Him with assurance, not confusion, with confidence, not fear?

Some of you know what it is to carry that question more often than you would ever say out loud. And the goodness of God is that He does not leave His people guessing before Him. He does not leave us wondering whether we really belong to Him.

In 1 John, John keeps bringing believers back to: remain in God, continue in the One who is your life, abide in Christ. Jesus said it plainly in John 15:5. "Abide in Me, and I in you… apart from Me you can do nothing."

So, when John speaks of abiding, he is not describing a small corner of the Christian life. He is describing the real life of the believer who is resting in Christ. And in our passage today, 1 John 4:13-21, John shows us three movements here: assurance, confidence, and love.

The big idea for this morning is:

Because God has loved us in His Son and given us His Spirit, believers may live with assurance before Him, confidence for that day of judgment, and visible love toward one another.

Let's begin with assurance.

ASSURANCE

1 John 4:13–16
By this we know that we abide 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 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

John begins and ends these verses by assuring believers that abiding in God is real. He says, “By this we know.” (v 13) "*we have come to know and to believe" (v 16)*
God has made a way for us to stand on settled, not shaky, ground before Him. And throughout these verses John describes the Christian life with this glorious refrain: "we abide in God, and God abides in us". And John says we can know this abiding reality in three specific ways.

ASSURANCE 1: He has given His Spirit.

First, He has given us His Spirit.

I John 4:13
By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”

And God gave the Spirit to be a witness of this abiding.

Romans 8:16
The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God…

Our assurance of abiding does not begin with us climbing up to God. It begins with God coming near to you.

ASSURANCE 2: God the Father sent His Son.

After the assurance of the giving of the Spirit, John immediately points us to Christ.

I John 4:14-15
We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Hope rest in the true Jesus whom the Father sent. Our confession joins the confession of the Apostles: God the Father sent His Son. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Savior of the world.

This is not empty religious language. It is the confession of a heart that is resting in the Son the Father really sent. You do not confess the Son truly unless God is already at work in you. And where Christ is denied or blurred, abiding is not present, no matter how spiritual the language may sound. He has given us His Spirit. He has sent us His Son. Then John gives a third assurance.

ASSURANCE 3: We have come to know and believe His love.

1 John 4:16
So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

Not merely hear about it. Not merely hope it might be true. This is not vague or uncertain. We have come to know and believe the love God has for us. John gives us three simple words to believe, “God is love."

If God is love, then who defines love? It is God who defines love. And He has displayed and explained that love most clearly in and through Jesus, His Son.

So, we do not look to the world to explain love or our emotions to interpret love. And John says the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

So how do we know we are abiding in God and that God is abiding in us? Because God has not left us without witness. He has given us His Spirit. He has sent us His Son. He has brought us to know and believe His love.

The God of salvation will not leave His people in confusion. And His love in us is not standing still. It is carrying us somewhere. And you may be surprised to hear the ultimate purpose of His love. Let’s now read 1 John 4:17-18, where John tells us what God's love is preparing in us.

<u>CONFIDENCE</u>

1 John 4:17–18
By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

God’s love in Christ is being brought to its full purpose in His people. And what is that purpose? *“So that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.”* (v 17) When you hear that phrase, "Day of judgment," what is your first response? For some, that is an unsettling thought. This is where the passage rises to its height point. God’s love does not merely comfort us in the present. It brings believers to confidence before God in the day of judgment. And that confidence is a bold, holy, unashamed standing before God on the final day. This is not confidence that rises from our sincerity or our effort. It is

confidence grounded in what God has done for us in His Son. And John tells us why this can be true.

I John 4:17
Because as he is so also are we in this world. Our confidence before God is grounded in where we now stand in Christ. ***As He is, so also are we in this world.*** The reason we can face that day with confidence is that we do not stand before Him on our own record, but in Christ's standing before the Father. Our standing before God is now abiding with/in Him. That is why John can say in verse 18.

I John 4:18
"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

John is not mainly talking here about anxious personalities, emotional fragility, or the ordinary fears that come with living in a broken world. He is talking about fear in the light of final judgment. He tells us plainly: ***"For fear has to do with punishment."*** If you have ever imagined standing before God and secretly wondered whether condemnation might still be waiting for you, John is speaking directly into that fear. And John says that where God's love has reached its intended goal, that fear is cast out. Because where Christ has bore punishment, punishment is no longer hanging over the believer. Is Romans 8:1 echoing in your heart right now?

Romans 8:1
There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Perfect love casts out fear. And that also means something else. When we hear, "perfect love casts out fear," we often shrink it down to mean only the ordinary fears of life. But John is saying something even greater than that. God's love in Christ casts out the greatest fear of all: the fear of standing before God under judgment. And if the greatest fear has been dealt with in Christ, then every other fear loses its power to rule us. If I can stand before God in Christ with confidence on that day, then I do not have to be ruled by fear on this day.

- Fear of failure.
- Fear of rejection.
- Fear of being alone.
- Fear of losing control.

None of those fears are small and all those fears are real. But none of them are ultimate anymore. Because the God who has settled my future in Christ will not fail me in the present. And believer, do not picture that day as though Christ will save you now and then condemn you then.

John will not let us think that way. John is not trying to leave the believer trembling under condemnation. His burden is to tell believers that in Christ they may face that day

with confidence, and even joy and peace, because punishment is no longer our judgment.

Here is a belief statement for your heart and mind: The cross of Christ bore in full our condemnation and punishment.

These verses use courtroom language: judgment, punishment, fear. So, imagine the courtroom for a moment. God is the Judge. The day is set. The charges against us would undo us. But before that day arrives, Christ has already stepped in, taken our punishment, and secured our standing. So, when the believer stands before God on that day, he is not waiting to see whether punishment will fall. In Christ, that punishment has already been paid. That is why John can speak of confidence instead of fear. That is why this text is so precious. The day of judgment is real. John is not denying that day. He is telling believers how they may face that day. Not with fear. But with confidence.

And church, that confidence is rooted in Christ crucified and risen. Last week we remembered the weight of the cross, stayed silent before the tomb, and rejoiced in the resurrection. Love accomplished that. Love took on our punishment. Love answered our condemnation.

And now that same love is being brought to its full purpose in us, so that we may stand before God with confidence, not fear. And that confidence is a bold, holy, unashamed standing before God on that final day. And if that love has truly cast out fear before God, it will not stay hidden in the life of the believer.

LOVE MADE VISIBLE

1 John 4:19–21
We love, because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

John will not let the love of God remain invisible. That is where he takes us next. After assurance, and after confidence, John now shows us the visibility of that love in the believer's life. He says,

I John 4:19
We love, because He first loved us.

That means love does not begin with us. It begins with God. Love is not you trying to add something to what Christ has already done. Love is our response to the God who loved us first.

And that means brother-love is not an optional extra in the Christian life. It is the visible evidence that the love of God has really taken hold of us. John says something very direct in verse 20:

I John 4:20
If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar."

God's Word will not let us hide behind spiritual language. John brings our claim to love God down into relationships of everyday life. If the love of God has truly cast out fear before Him, that love will not remain hidden around us. It will become visible.

I recently watched this kind of love become visible. I have been walking with someone for a while now. I will call him Steve. Steve grew up in church. He knew the language. He knew how to be present. But he was carrying hidden sin and deep shame. And when we first started meeting, it was clear that shame still had the loudest voice, as though punishment and condemnation were still hanging over his life.

That shame did not stay private. It created distance. It kept him hiding. But over time, the truth of abiding began to sink in. He began to believe God really loved him. That in Christ, he was not being held at a distance. That in Christ, punishment was not still hanging over him.

And when that truth began to take hold, something changed. He stopped running from the Lord in shame and began running to the Lord in confidence. Not confidence in himself. Confidence in Christ. Confidence that Jesus really had paid for his sin. Confidence that when he stands before God, he will stand there in Christ, not under condemnation, but under God's grace.

And when that fear began to lose its hold before God, love did not stay hidden in his life. Repentance became real. And I watched him begin to move toward people he had once only avoided. Broken relationships began to be restored.

That is what John is saying. When God's love casts out fear before Him, that love becomes visible.

So here is the question John leaves us with. Has the love of God in Christ truly taken hold of me? Because if it has, then I do not have to stand before God in fear of judgment. And if it has, that love will not stay hidden.

So, believer, if you are still living as though punishment is hanging over you, hear the good news of God clearly. In Christ, condemnation is not waiting for you. The cross was and remains enough. So, stop looking at your record. Look to Christ. Abide in Him. Rest in His love for you. And let the love of God become visible in you. Visible in repentance. Visible in confession. Visible in forgiveness. Visible in loving your brother.

And if you are here today and you know you do not have this confidence before God, then do not look away from this day John is speaking about. There is a day of judgment coming. And apart from Christ, that day will not be a day of confidence for you. Apart from Christ, you will not stand accepted. You will stand on your own record. And your sin will not be hidden, excused, or dismissed before the holy God.

That is why this moment matters so deeply. The Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Jesus Christ came to save sinners. He came for the guilty. He came for the ashamed. He came for you. So do not stay where you are. Do not cling to your sin. Come to Christ. If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And all who come to Him by faith will find that in Him condemnation has been removed, forgiveness has been secured, and confidence before God is found in Him alone. We love because He first loved us.