

DEVOTIONAL

PERFECT LOVE
FEBRUARY 7, 2021



Discussion Starter: What does God's love mean to you?

Key Passage: *"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. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he 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: whoever loves God must also love his brother."* (1 John 4:18-21)

1. God's love brings confidence, not fear.

Since fear is associated with punishment (v.18), the person who has not experienced God's forgiveness through faith in Christ lives in dread of future judgment. But the Christian who has trusted in Christ's payment on the cross for sin looks forward to the future with confidence and joy, securely leaning into God's love, rather than existing in fear.

The word "*perfected*" (v.18) means "complete, mature." It is a sign of spiritual growth and maturity when we face the future with assurance that we have been perfected – we have been made complete – in God's love. In Romans 8:38-39, Paul emphasizes our security in God's love: "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" In these wonderful verses about our security in God's love, it is as if Paul exhausted his vocabulary in trying to imagine a situation in which we, God's children, would be separated from God's love—and Paul can't imagine any situation! We are safe and secure in God's love—there's no need to fear!

Discuss: Why do you think many Christians do not feel secure in God's love?

Discuss: How would you explain the security of God's love to a new Christian?

2. Because God loves us, we are capable of loving others.

Verse 19 says a lot in just a few words: "*We love because he first loved us.*" Once we have experienced God's love, His love will empower us to love others, including people who are difficult, demanding, or just different. God does not want us to be reservoirs where His love is held and stored; rather, He intends for us to be conduits through which His love flows to others.

Discuss: In what ways has God's love changed you?

3. A person who does not love people he can see cannot reasonably claim to love God who he cannot see.

Since God is spirit (John 4:24) and He cannot be seen in all His divine essence, the world is to “see” God through His love. This is why John asserts that anyone who says he loves God who he cannot see, but hates someone he can see, is a liar: *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he 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: whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (v.20-21).

Discuss: Why is it more difficult to love someone you can see than someone you cannot see?

Discuss: Since God commands us to love others (v.21), how would you respond to someone who says, “Love is simply an emotion we feel—we cannot obey a command to feel a certain way”?

Discuss: Knowing that God commands us to love others (v.21), how would you respond to someone who says, “We have no control over who we love—that’s why we say I ‘fell into love’ or I ‘fell out of love’”?

Jesus said our love for others would be the key characteristic that would identify us as His disciples: *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35).

Discuss: Why do you think love for others—above other important aspects of the Christian faith such as moral behavior and sound doctrine— is the means by which we believers are to distinguish ourselves from non-believers?

Discuss: In what ways can your love for others affect your walk with God?

For Further Study

The Four Loves by C.S. Lewis

Who’s Pushing Your Buttons? Handling the Difficult People in Your Life by Dr. John Townsend

“Ways Christians Can ‘Love One Another’ Well Today” article at www.crosswalk.com