

The Course of True Love  
I John 4:17-21

August 19, 2007

- A. Scripture Reading – what struck me first in this passage was ...
  
- B. True Love Marks its Course by a Transformed Life . . . . . 4:17
  - 1. what is the basis whereby love is perfected in us (see also vv 12, 16)?
  
  - 2. what is ‘perfected’ love (Cf., word as used in John 4:34)?
  
  - 3. Hebrews 9:27 – what is everyone’s universal outlook?
  
  - 4. Romans 8:1 – what is NOT everyone’s universal outlook? Why not?
  
  - 5. I John 3:14, 18, 21-22 – in view of these, what does love perfected in us give to us?
  
  - 6. Matthew 25:34-40 – do you think that the righteous whom Jesus is describing were spending time being pleased with their good works? ... why or why not?
  
  - 7. Romans 7:18 – why are we unwilling to apply to ourselves the term ‘Christ-likeness’?

- 8. What should we realize about being Christ-like ...
  - a. ... in the future (I John 3:2)?
  
  - b. ... right now (2 Corinthians 3:18; cf also Eph 2:8-10)?
  
- C. True Love Marks its Course by a Life Without Fear . . . . . 4:18
  - 1. why can there be fear in the world’s ‘love’?
  
  - 2. why does having God’s love do away with fear?
  
  - 3. what should you not expect with the exercise of ‘perfected love’?
  
- D. True Love Marks its Course back to its Source . . . . . 4:19
  - 1. we love because God’s love ...
  
  - 2. we love because God’s love ...
  
- E. True Love Marks its Course to its Destination . . . . . 4:20
  - 1. ‘perfected love’ in us should be directed to those whom ...
  
  - 2. what does this imply about the term ‘brother’ in this verse?
  
- F. True Love Marks its Course by its Obedience . . . . . 4:21
  - 1. Matthew 22:35-40: which of these two commands can be obeyed without obeying the other? ... explain how!

—{1}. **1 John 4:17-21. . . . . The Course of True Love**

A. Scripture reading (NAS) and introduction

1. <sup>17</sup> By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love, because He first loved us. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

2. the course of a river

- a. In the mid-east there is a geographical feature known as a wadi. A similar feature in the south-western United States is called an arroyo. These are miniature valleys, deep gullies, cut sharply out of the soil, whose path inevitably follows from higher to lower ground ending as it arrives at a river, a lake or a sea. Most of the time these are dried up. But when there is a heavy melt of the mountain snow, or a sudden heavy rain storm, these are filled with a torrent of rushing water, carving the wadi or arroyo still yet deeper, as the water rushes on its way to its destination
- b. the wadi or arroyo is a sharp, visible marking showing the course of the water as it tumbles eventually to the sea
- c. in a similar fashion, the passage that we have just read, lays out the sharp, visible marks whereby we can see the course of true, genuine love as it flows from its source in God on high, through us, to the world in which we live.

3. Our theme today is that God's love, shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, will engrave upon our life the very clear and visible marks that it is true, that it is genuine, that it is from Him.

4. outline

- a. 17: True Love Marks its Course by a Transformed Life
- b. 18: True Love Marks its Course by a Life Without Fear

- c. 19: True Love Marks its Course back to its Source
- d. 20: True Love Marks its Course to its Destination
- e. 21: True Love Marks its Course by its Obedience

B. True Love Marks its Course by a Transformed Life. . . . . 4:17

1. *By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.*

- a. This verse falls naturally into three sections
- b. 1. Beginning 'by this' or 'in this' or 'herein'
- c. 2. Beginning 'so that' or 'in order that'
- d. and 3. Beginning 'because' or 'since that'

2. *by this, love is perfected with us, (or 'in us', or 'among us')*

- a. what is the 'by this' that leads love being perfected in us?
  - (A) it could refer to part 2, the confidence that we can have
    - (1) but that is a goal, a purpose of perfected love, rather than a basis for its being perfected
  - (B) it could refer to part 3, the likeness we have with Christ, and this can be argued fairly strongly
    - (1) yet this is more a secondary reason, even a result, rather than the root cause of love being perfected
  - (C) it seems best to understand that what John is about to say is an outcome of what he has just said in verse 16: *"We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."* (NAS) – love is perfected with us based upon the abiding relations between God and ourselves; this is also in agreement with verse 12 of this chapter.
- b. what is this 'perfected' love – is it God taking our flawed human love and making it without flaw and without fault?
  - (A) you have most likely heard this hymn at a wedding
    - O perfect Love, all human thought transcending
    - Lowly we kneel in prayer before Thy throne,

That theirs may be the love which knows no ending,  
Whom Thou forevermore dost join in one.

- (B) is this perfected love in us alike in quality and measure to the Love of God to whom that hymn is addressed?
  - (C) we looked at this question last week when we were considering the verse 12, “No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (NAS)
  - (D) for those who were unable to be with us, let me repeat in part what was said:
    - (1) the word means to accomplish its purposed design
    - (2) this is the word Jesus used concerning His ministry, ‘Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish (perfect) His work.” ’ (John 4:34 NAS) – Jesus was not perfecting a flawed work of God but rather accomplishing God’s purpose and design in the work of salvation; so then,
    - (3) God shed abroad His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit for a purpose, to accomplish an end
    - (4) that end is the mutual love of His children
  - c. Rev. John Piper <sup>-(2)</sup> has illustrated the meaning of this first clause, “By this, love is perfected with us,” by these words: “In this, that is in your love for each other, God’s love is put into action and so reaches its appointed goal. It does not remain at the imperfect stage of mere talk, but reaches the stage of action.”
    - (A) not simply saying ‘we should witness’ but sharing faith
    - (B) not just talking about the hungry, but feeding
    - (C) not merely bemoaning baby Christians, but teaching
3. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; ...
- a. make no mistake about it
    - (A) there must be a day of universal judgement – there is no escaping this truth
    - (B) “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,” (Hebrews 9:27 NAS)
    - (C) now, the word judgement itself can be neutral – it can at the same time refer to the punishment of the wicked and the vindication of the righteous – but the point is that all humanity must stand

before God the Judge (who is called the Judge of all the earth) yet only those who are in Christ, who are crucified with Him, will be able to stand

(D) so while there is universal judgement, there is not a universal condemnation: *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1 NAS)

b. when God's love in us has been perfected by action

(A) when, as 3:18 says, *"Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."* (NAS)

(1) *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. ..."* (1 Jn 3:14 NAS)

(2) then we can have confidence in that day

(B) we have come across that word confidence before

(1) in 1 John 3:21-22 it has to do with the boldness, the freedom of speech we have in prayer to God

(2) *"... we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him..."* (NAS)

(C) Jesus draws a touching picture of this unassuming innocence and confidence in Matthew 25:34–40: *"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'" (NAS)*

4. Finally, in this first verse (and we spent longer on this verse because the rest of the passage is an enlargement upon it), we read, *"because as He is, so are we in the world."* ... or since that

a. here we have the secondary cause of love being perfected

b. it is the transformed life of the believer

- c. I think that all of us shy away from applying to ourselves the description of 'Christ-likeness' – not merely false modesty but from a genuine feeling of our own weakness
- d. we echo with John Newton our wonder at God's amazing grace 'that saved a wretch like me' and with Paul, 'For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh' (Rom 7:18)
- e. yet we need to recognize that God has an intended work, a purpose in our lives, to be realized not only in the future, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." (1 John 3:2 NAS), but also,
- f. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (NAS) – that is in the present, progressive tense; right now! How is God changing you?
- g. true love marks its course by a transformed life

C. True Love Marks its Course by a Life Without Fear. . . . . 4:18

1. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.
2. what verse 17 says in positive terms, verse 18 repeats in the opposite, negative terms. The perfected love – the love with a purpose that God has implanted in us – is not on speaking terms with fear
  - a. fear knocked at the door, faith answered, no one there<sup>{3}</sup>.
  - b. by this word 'fear' here we are not talking about the awe and reverence which we must feel toward the Living God
  - c. but the fear involved when facing punishment
3. There is no fear in love ...
  - a. most of what the world counts as love does know fear
    - (A) fear that the love will not be returned
    - (B) fear that the love will not last
    - (C) fear that 'this isn't the right person'

- b. but the love of which we are speaking; that is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit
- c. is not a fear-based love nor a fear-causing love
- d. but, on the contrary,

4. **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear ...**

- a. this love is an antidote to fear
- b. why? ... because, as we have seen
- c. experiencing this love is a further evidence, a further test provided by John whereby we make have the reassurance that we are truly born of God and possessors of eternal life
- d. and, from a practical standpoint,

5. **... because fear involves punishment ...**

- a. will the expression of God's love result in punishment?
- b. John's answer is no! ... so how could fear be involved?
- c. if you because of Christ's controlling love should express that love in practical acts, does your conscience shout out at you, 'look out! ... you're going to be punished!'
- d. of course not
- e. true love marks its course by a life without fear

D. True Love Marks its Course back to its Source. . . . . 4:19

1. **We love, because He first loved us.**

- a. we love because His love is a motivation
- b. we love because His love gave birth to love in us

2. the motivation of God's love for us

- a. it's easy to have wrong motivation in our acts
- b. Bill Bright relates <sup>-(4)}</sup>.

(A) At a high school graduation, one student was overheard to remark: "Yeah, I finally made it. It's

a good thing, too. If I had blown it, my parents would have killed me!"

(B) In contrast, during the ceremony one of the student speakers, a beautiful, black-haired Oriental girl who had been born in the Far East, declared through her tears, "I want to express my deepest appreciation to my American parents for loving me and for giving me the opportunity to get an education in this great land. I want to do everything I can to show them how much I love them and to make them proud of me."

c. so we can view this verse in terms of motivation

I love Thee because Thou has first lovèd me  
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;  
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow:  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

3. but the other aspect is just as, if not more, important

a. those wadis or arroyos can be followed back to the source from which arises the water filling them from time to time

b. so it is with the love of God

c. C. H. Spurgeon comments on this verse, <sup>-(5)</sup>. "the source and spring of true love to God – whenever it really exists, has been created in the bosom by belief of God's love to us" – that is, we cannot possibly show love to God, and His love to others, until we have first accepted His love to us, until we have appropriated His love, making it our own.

d. true love marks its course back to its source: God

E. True Love Marks its Course to its Destination. . . . . 4:20

1. 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.

2. if the source of this love is God, then its destination – target – is determined by God; it must needs to be directed to those whom God loves

a. in our studies in first John we have already noted



- (A) that in a special way believers are beloved of God
- (B) they are His chosen, His special, His treasured people
- b. but God's love does not stop there
  - (A) although people may reject it
  - (B) God loves them – that is the statement of John 3:16
  - (C) this is demonstrated daily in God's general providence
  - (D) so I should be unjustifiably bold if I were to limit the term 'brother', here to just other Christians

- 3. it's easy to love friends and hate our enemies
  - a. to respond in love to those who love us
  - b. to respond in hate to those we deem hate us
  - c. but that was not the way with Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God: from the very cross as He was reviled by those who passed by, in love He prayed, 'Father, forgive them'
  - d. Matthew Henry comments, <sup>-(6)}</sup> *As God has communicated his image in nature and in grace, so he would have our love to be suitably diffused. We must love God originally and supremely, and others in him, on the account of their derivation and reception from him, and of his interest in them.*
  - e. we know His love to be perfected in us when it reaches the destinations for which God intends it
  - f. true love marks its course to its destination

F. True Love Marks its Course by its Obedience. . . . . 4:21

- 1. *And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.*
- 2. Jesus summed up the whole responsibility of man with the two great commandments
  - a. *One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22: 35-40 NAS)
  - b. and, if you think about it, John in this verse shows that these two are inextricably linked together

- (A) loving God must result in loving our fellow man
- (B) loving our fellow man only takes place by loving God
- c. Dorothy Day, a Roman Catholic social activist, said this, <sup>-(7)</sup> "I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least." ... that's worth thinking about.

G. Conclusion – God's word for us today is this: God's love, which is the only real true love, should have its course graven, marked in us, by transformed lives, by lives lived without fear, by showing its source to be from God and its direction at those whom God loves; that in all this we are being obedient to His 'love' commands.

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, [www.holwick.com](http://www.holwick.com). Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. “Perfect Love Casts Out Fear” by Rev. John Piper, Kerux sermons #3634
3. “Fear and Faith”, Kerux illustrations #5354
4. “The Right Motivation” by Bill Bright, Kerux illustration #28117
5. “Love’s Logic”, p. 304, volume 9, Spurgeon’s Sermons; republished by Baker Books
6. In Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible, *in loc.*
7. Quotes on Love, Kerux illustrations #5332