

THROUGH THE BIBLE

1 JOHN 3:1-4:6

There's a Peanuts cartoon strip where Charlie Brown is conversing with Lucy. She says to him, *"You know what I don't understand? I don't understand love!"*

Charlie Brown agrees, *"Who does?"*

Lucy is really worked up over the subject. She vents her frustration, *"Explain love to me, Charlie Brown..."*

Charlie Brown replies, *"You can't explain love. I can recommend a book, or poem, or a painting, but I can't explain love."* She pleads, *"Try, Charlie Brown, try!"*

Charlie Brown gives it a feeble attempt, *"Well, let's say I see this beautiful, cute, young lady walk by..."*

Lucy interrupts, *"Why does she have to be cute and beautiful? Huh? Why can't a young man fall in love with a girl who has freckles and a big nose? Explain that, Charlie Brown!"* Lucy is now extremely agitated.

Charlie Brown shrugs, *"Okay, let's just say I see this girl walk by with this great big nose..."* Again, Lucy jumps in, and interrupts, *"I didn't say, **great, big** nose."*

Finally, Charlie Brown walks away muttering, *"You not only can't explain love, you can't even talk about it."*

Well in tonight's chapters, the Apostle John not only talks about love... *he explains it!* He defines *God's love for us*, and the importance of *our love for one another*.

Chapter 3 begins, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” This term “*behold*” is a call to stop what you’re doing, and seriously ponder. “*Check it out!*”

“*Behold what manner of love...*” Check out the brand, or type of love “*the Father has bestowed on us.*”

In Ephesians 3:18 the Apostle Paul prays that God would enable us to comprehend “the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ.”

He mentions **the width of God’s love**. His love reaches everywhere and to everyone. It crosses borders, and breaks down walls. It grows in sidewalk cracks. It pops up in the most unexpected places.

He speaks of **the length of God’s love**. When we’re a distant memory to the people closest to us, we’ll still be the object of God’s love - the apple of His eye.

The depth of God’s love - God’s love is weighted so it always sinks to the bottom. No matter how *low you go* you’re never out of the reach of God’s love.

Then he exalts in **the height of God’s love**. A love that sacrifices His only Son for the likes of us is a love that’s over our head. God’s love rises to peaks none of us can climb! It tops all our earthly concepts of love.

“*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*” Rebellious, dirty little street urchins like us have been adopted by the King of kings, and made His kids!

Behold the *mind-blowing* love that God has for us!

He continues, “Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” I love the paraphrase of these verses, “What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it - we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are. But that’s also why the world doesn’t recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who He is or what He’s up too.”

Jesus was the Almighty God. He knew the mysteries of creation. He understood each person he came in contact with better than they knew themselves.

Yet Jesus Himself was *brushed aside by the masses as a mere teacher - accused by the religious establishment of being a charlatan - executed by the hierarchy as a blasphemer...* Obviously, Jesus was never really recognized or appreciated for who He was.

And this is the Christian’s problem. In Christ we’re co-heirs with Jesus - kids of the King - beneficiaries of divine grace and mercy - members of God’s forever family... yet we’re either brushed aside and ignored, or scoffed at and persecuted. We too are certainly not recognized and appreciated for who we really are!

Legendary actor, Cary Grant, tells the story of bumping into a man on the street. The fellow looked at him, and said, “Hey you’re... um... I know who you are... Don’t tell me... you’re Rock Hud... No, you’re...”

He thought he’d help the man out and finish his sentence, “*Cary Grant.*” The guy snapped back, “No, that’s not it! You’re...” Well, just like the man who didn’t recognize Cary Grant, the world doesn’t recognize us.

Your heart is the sight of a miracle. The Holy Spirit purified you - and now resides in you! Your heart is a sacred place. *It should be a tourist attraction!*

Yet instead of treating you as special, the folks you work with ignore you or view you with disdain. Don't be shocked if they treat you the way they treated Jesus!

Yet one day our plight will change. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Hey, God is going to let the cat out of the bag!

One day, what we are - the glorious children of God - will be revealed to everyone! *Everyone be in awe of us!*

When Jesus appears in the clouds we'll be on *Cloud 9*. In 1 Corinthians 15 we're told that at the rapture we'll be given new bodies that radiate God's eternal glory.

The redemption God has planned for us in Christ won't be complete until the last vestiges of sin and death and decay are purged from our fleshly bodies.

Our rotting flesh will be transformed. God will give us new bodies that will reflect God's beauty and glory.

Our current bodies are too opaque. *What you see is not always what you get. The life of Christ abides in us. But that's not always apparent to those who look at us.*

Our eternal bodies will be more translucent. The glory on the *inside* will be seen by folks on the *outside*.

Today, we wonder what these future bodies will look like? Imagine being clothed in a resurrection body? A body no longer vulnerable to pain, sickness, soreness.

A body that's never breaks down.

We can mull over its characteristics, but John squelches our curiosity with five words, **“we shall be like Him.”** We'll have the same type body - with the same capabilities Jesus had after His resurrection.

Recall Jesus vanished before the disciples on the Road to Emmaus - then appeared in the upper room in Jerusalem. His body wasn't limited by time and space.

I'm not sure all that **“Christ-like”** includes, but one thing is certain, we'll be the envy of the angels... beautiful beyond description... *we'll be like Jesus!*

Today, skeptics label the doctrine of the rapture as a form of escapism. Rather than live an overcoming life in the here and now - they accuse rapture advocates of sitting on their hands, and twiddling their thumbs, and biding their time, and waiting complacently... Not so!

John says the hope of the rapture is a powerful motivation for godly living! Verse 3, **“Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”**

A young lady who lands a date to the prom with the most stellar guy in the school won't be idle 30 minutes before pick up. She'll be primping and getting ready.

She wants to look her best when he shows.

And likewise the Bride of Christ wants to be at our best when Jesus returns. A constant expectation of Jesus' soon arrival is what keeps us on our toes.

Wherever I go, whatever I do - I need to first ask myself if Jesus returned tonight is this where I'd want Him to find me? For *sure*, we'll want to be *pure*!

Verse 4, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin." When John the Baptist saw Jesus on the banks of the Jordan, he pointed to Him and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus came to put an end to our sin.

In God's economy sin is transferable. The sin of the guilty can be passed on to the innocent. Jesus could bear *our sin* because "*in Him there is no sin.*"

"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him." Please understand what this verse does not mean. John is not teaching sinless perfection. He said earlier, 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We all *blows it* and John *knows it*!

In the Greek the verb "*sins*" is in the present tense, and could be translated, "*whoever continues in sin.*"

The Greek word is "*harmatia*" or "*to miss the mark.*" It was a term used when an archer missed his target.

Man's problem is not that he occasionally misses God's glory. It's not that his eye tends to mist up, or he gets distracted, or his hand slips... *No, his aim is bad.*

Our problem is internal. Our nature has been stained by sin. We're warped. We can no longer shoot straight.

This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus births in us a new nature. He transforms our spirit with the Holy Spirit. He turns us into **a straight-shooter.**

Of course, this new nature doesn't mean I will no longer slip up and sin. It'll happen, but the problem is no longer internal to my spirit - *it's external*. It's the flesh, the world, the devil that now causes me to miss.

That means the key to the Christian life is learning to live out the supernatural instincts Jesus implants in my heart - *to love God and to love others* - and overcome the outward enemies that want to stunt that love.

As believers there'll be times we'll miss the mark, but it's no longer because we can't aim correctly.

As we learn to overcome the flesh, the world, the devil we'll hit the target more consistently. It's said, "**A believer isn't *sinless*, but he does *sin less and less...***"

Before I came to Christ I occasionally slipped up and did good, but the flow of my life was toward sin and selfishness. Now that I'm in Christ I slip up and sin, but my prevailing desire is to love God and please Him.

Verse 7, "**Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.**" Like father like son. A child of God acts godly. A kid who runs to evil is of the devil.

Hey, the older I get the more I act like my dad. From the jokes I tell, to the way I walk, I am my father's son.

Once me and my three older kids were walking around the corner of the house - *Zack, Nick, and Nat.*

The kids were just tots. We'd turned the corner when I spit into the yard. That's when Zack spit - then Nick - then... *You guessed it...* my little darling daughter spit.

Kathy was on the back porch and saw it! She couldn't believe I was teaching my little girl to spit.

But it's inevitable, kids mimic their dads. As the old saying goes, **"The nut doesn't fall far from the tree."**

Kids act like their father, and this is true spiritually.

If God is your Dad you'll make a habit of doing what's right - but if you habitually sin, and harbor hatred in your heart, then you're a child of the devil.

Verse 8, **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."** Jesus came into the world to break Satan's chokehold on humanity - set us free from His clutches.

In John 10:10 Jesus exposes Satan's goal, **"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."** He works to rip us off - but Jesus provides 24 hour-a-day security. Satan is out to kill - but Jesus is a bodyguard. He'd take a bullet for you... *or even a nail.*

Satan wants to destroy. Jesus desires for you a better life. He promises “life and life more abundantly.”

Jesus opposes the works of the devil. The words that roll from Satan’s lips most often are, “Foiled again!”

Verse 9, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin (or “sin continually”), because he has been born of God.”

Listen to how JB Philips translates verses 8-9, “The man whose life is habitually sinful is spiritually a son of the devil, for the devil has been a sinner from the beginning. Now the Son of God came to earth with the express purpose of undoing the devil’s work.

The man who is really God’s son does not practice sin, for God’s nature is in him, for good, and such a heredity is incapable of sin.” In essence, righteousness and unrighteousness is in the genes. Today, every dysfunction and sinful behavior is blamed on genetics.

From serial killers, to homosexuals, to alcoholics people duck responsibility because they say they were born that way. And in a sense they’re exactly right...

We’re all born with a certain proclivity toward sin.

We can blame all our problems on the sin nature we inherited from Adam. But we can’t duck responsibility, *since we can be born again!* Jesus is the answer!

Jesus takes out our *defiant nature* and replaces it with a *compliant nature*. One that loves God. Thus, if you’re truly born of God you’ll love Him and obey Him.

Verse 10, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” A few years ago I read of two Russian women who swapped 2 year old toddlers.

The hospital sent them home with the wrong babies.

One mother was reminiscing, and looking over the memorabilia of her child’s birth. She noticed another mother’s name on her boy’s maternity ward ID tag.

DNA tests confirmed the mistake.

Yet here John confirms that many churches make the same mistake. We can send folks home thinking they’re a child of God, when they’re a child of the devil.

The way to know for sure is a spiritual DNA test.

If your life stubbornly opposes any thought of submission to God, and if there’s a general disdain for people - then you’ve got a problem. A true believer will want to please God and love others. DNA doesn’t lie.

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.” Of all the roads that lead to hatred, jealousy is the shortest.

It was jealousy that turned Cain into a murderer. Its been said, “A man green with envy is ripe for trouble.”

And that was certainly true in the case of Cain.

When God accepted his brother, Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's, he was outraged. Cain was a proud man. Rather than humble himself and correct his attitude he vented his anger and took out his frustration on Abel.

Realize, *men of God* like Abel, are easy targets for people *mad at God*, like Cain. A man's arms are too short to box with God, but a man will take out his anger, failures, and envy on God's representatives.

And this is why John tells us not to be surprised by persecution. He says in verse 13, **“Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you...”** *Don't be shocked.*

For her first 7 years in school, our daughter, Natalie attended a Christian school. In 8th grade we enrolled her in public school. And on the night before her first day, I told her... **“Natalie, I'll make you two promises.**

First, you will be persecuted for being a Christian. I hope not often. I trust not by a teacher - but at some point it'll happen. Yet I also promise you that when it does happen Jesus will be there to give you strength!”

And I think Nat would tell you I was right on both counts. *Don't be surprised when the world hates you.*

Verse 14, **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.”** Love is evidence of spiritual life. It's how you check for a spiritual pulse.

“He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught, **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'”**

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Obviously, murder carries more serious consequences than mere anger, yet the *deed* comes from the *seed*. It’s the same evil, just different degrees.

Murder is uninhibited anger. Its anger that’s thrown off restraint. Thus, though he never pulls the trigger, he who hates has the potential for murder in his heart.

Verse 16, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Here’s what I call “cross-think.”

If Jesus went to the cross for me - then I can go the second mile, and make small sacrifices for other folks.

John 3:16 tells us God loves us. **1 John 3:16** tells us that since He does, we ought to love one another.

“But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” If you’ve got the goods, and you see a need don’t shut your heart...

Now it may be that God speaks to you and restrains you from helping for some reason! *HE* might shut your heart. But a Christian’s first impulse should be to help.

God’s love is aggressive, not passive. It doesn’t bury its head, or sit on its hands. Real love is love in action.

It sees needs. It feels needs. And then it meets needs. Verse 18, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

Once a bride went to buy the material she would use to sew her wedding dress. She was looking for a heavy coarse fabric. Cloth that would rustle as she walked.

The salesperson asked her why... The young lady explained, "My fiance' is blind. He won't be able to see me, so I want him to hear me when I reach the altar."

This is a love that sees a need, and feels a need, and then meets a need. As Christians let's never stop seeing, or stop caring, and or stop reaching out in love!

And verse 19, "And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him."

Love breeds confidence in my relationship with God.

I know I'm a true child of God not because I pray three hours a day, or never miss church, or always give an offering, or teach a Sunday School class, or even speak with tongues - I know that I know God because His love fills my heart, and is revealed in my actions.

Jesus said to his disciples in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." It's true, love is the believer's birthmark.

"For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." If you know there's hatred in your heart, then realize God knows it too.

You can't fool God. No one can't pull the wool over God's eyes. He knows all things. God sees all things...

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God." It's said, "Your conscience is like a baby, it has to go to sleep before you can."

If you know you're carrying a grudge - if there's a twinge of bitterness and hatred in your heart - then it's time to repent and confess it to God! Ask for His love.

“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” A heart that's free from hatred, and that desires to please God - is a heart that belongs to a person in harmony with God's will.

And the prayers that flow from such a heart are the kind of prayers that God is willing to answer.

Verse 23, “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.”

Mankind's tendency is to complicate. I've heard it said, “We have 35 million laws trying to enforce ten commandments.” But God keeps His commandments pretty simple... *believe in Jesus and love one another.*

The Jewish Law included 613 commandments that covered every aspect of life. Jesus condensed God's commandments down to two. Believe on Him, and love one another. *How much simpler can He make it?*

Religion is complexed and complicated, but following Jesus is simple. All that's necessary to walk with God is to trust Jesus, and love your brother. Make trust and love your emphasis, and you'll enjoy the peace of God.

Chapter 3 ends with a reminder of the Holy Spirit, “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

But chapter 4 begins with the acknowledgement of other spirits... “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

In addition to love, another source of assurance for the believer is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

No one becomes a *child of God* without receiving the *Spirit of God*. The Holy Spirit births God’s nature in us.

Yet here’s the problem with the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Love is demonstrated in objective ways - in deed and truth - yet the leading of God’s Spirit is subjective.

The human spirit is like a satellite dish - it picks up *all kinds of signals* from *all kinds of sources*. God speaks to me - the devil plants thoughts in my mind - the world sends messages - my emotions influence me - my own conscience and sub-conscience are active - even a late night pizza can cause disturbing impressions.

This is why John cautions us to “*test the spirits, whether they are of God.*” And in these next few verses John tells us how to run a spiritual ID check.

Verse 2, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.”

Simple enough... To peel back the appealing façade of any impression, discover what it says about Jesus.

A spirit - any inward influence - that isn't *correct about* and *exalting of* the person of Jesus is evil. If it does not affirm and honor Jesus. If it does not bow to and glorify Jesus, then you know it's not of God!

So a single young lady walks in and says, "I felt God wanted me to sleep with my boyfriend last night. We're in love. And it just seemed to be the right thing to do."

Okay, it is now our job to test the spirits?

And we test the spirits in light of Jesus! Is this what Jesus taught? Is this taught in the Scriptures Jesus affirmed? Would Jesus agree with her sentiments?

Hey, [WWJD... what would Jesus do?](#)

In particular John is dealing with a deception that had presented itself to his readers. In his day the truth was under attack from a heresy known as Gnosticism.

The Gnostics denied that God had come to earth in human form. They believed that matter was intrinsically evil, thus God would never have taken a physical body.

To the Gnostics, Jesus was one of many reflections or emanations of God, but not actually "[God Incarnate](#)" or "[God in the flesh.](#)" They denied Jesus' humanity.

Of course they couldn't deny Jesus actually walked the earth. Jesus of Nazareth was a fact of history.

There were too many eyewitnesses who saw Him.

Thus, the Gnostics tried to skirt the obvious. They made wild claims that Jesus had appeared, just not in flesh and bone. He'd been a phantom, a spirit, an apparition. They concocted fanciful tales of Jesus walking on the beach and leaving behind no footprints.

Other Gnostics believed the Spirit of Messiah rested on the man Jesus until just before He was crucified - at that point *the divine spirit* departed *the human Jesus*.

They couldn't bear the thought of God actually being crucified. In various ways Gnosticism rejected the biblical truth that **Jesus was fully man and fully God.**

And this is why in verse 2 John says very specifically, *“Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.”*

This was a direct rebuke of the Gnostics. As was 1:1, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...”* Jesus was no ghost. John had touched Him.

In John's day the heretics denied Jesus' *humanity*.

It's interesting that today the heresies concerning Jesus have largely flipped. Today, they deny His *deity*.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, other cults affirm Jesus' humanity - but they deny His Godhood. He was an angel, or *“a god”* - but He was less than *“the God.”*

Yet John's teaching applies to both denials. **If you're not right on about Jesus you're all wrong about God!**

Verse 3, “**And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.**” Antichrist is the one-world leader spoken of in Revelation 13. He denies the true Christ, and leads a revolt against God. The man surfaces in the *last days*.

But the spirit of antichrist - an anti-God and anti-Christ mood - has been around since *John's day*.

Even *today* there's a strong spirit of antichrist in the world... You can't watch a movie out of Hollywood without hearing the precious name of Jesus taken in vain. Society advocates free speech for all - except the person who wants to talk about Jesus. *The Antichrist has yet to appear, but his spirit is already at work.*

Verse 4, “**You are of God, little children, and have overcome them...**” Realize, we face a trifecta of evil: **the world wants to beat us up - the devil attempts to rip us off - even our own flesh pulls and drags us down.**

Yet God has made us overcomers!

The Christian life is not a sheltered life. A believer takes some hits - but he overcomes. He fights through, rises above, climbs over all that's thrown against him.

A child of God doesn't just *undergo* hardships, he or she *overcomes* hardships! Christians are like Timex watches, ***we take a licking, but we keep on ticking.***

And here's how we overcome, verse 4, “**Because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.**” Always remember, **One plus God equals a majority!**

At times it may appear as if the world is stacked against us. Your opponent's hand is loaded with Aces and Kings - just never forget you hold the trump card!

Greater is He in you, than all that's in this world!

When you **need strength...** Remember that the power of God that hung the heavens, and flung the myriad of stars into their orbits, dwells in you.

Need wisdom... Keep in mind, that the mind of God that understands all mysteries abides in you.

If you **need calm and composure...** Don't forget the One who slept in the back of the boat knowing He had mastery over the storm is also now riding in your boat.

And when you **need love...** Remember the love that sacrificed itself upon a tree pulsates in your heart.

Let me suggest we all put to memory this verse, *"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."*

Verse 5, *"They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them."*

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Our ears hear only what they're tuned to hear. If God trains your ear you'll listen to God. If your ear has been tuned to Satan you'll have no interest in listening to the people of God.

Remember John was the last of the 12 apostles.

And it was to the original apostles Jesus gave the authority to bind and loose. They bound the Church to certain obligations, and loosed the Church from others.

In essence, Jesus gave to the first twelve apostles and their associates - *and to only them* - the authority to determine for the Church her doctrine and practice.

Thus, Paul can write in Ephesians 2:20 that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles!

Now here in verse 6, when John says, “*we are of God*” the “*we*” refers to himself and the other apostles.

And when he says, “*He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us.*” John isn’t on some ego trip. He’s affirming the special position the twelve apostles occupied in God’s plan for His Church.

Those who are of God will pay attention to those God authorizes to speak on His behalf - the apostles.

This is how the Church has always judged truth from error - was it spoken by an apostle, or under His authority - if so, then it’s of God and inspired by God.

If not, then it’s of the world and should be rejected.

And that’s where we’ll end tonight - at verse 6. We’ll finish the rest of 1 John chapters 4-5 next week...