

1 John – God is Love: Week Four

What it Means to Know God

Day Three: How to Identify Perfect Love

“I know what it means to love, but I have no conception what love is when it rolls in the bosom of an infinite God”. (H.W. Beecher)

“He that will not think God’s thoughts shall not know God intellectually. He who will not observe the working of God in his conscience will not know God morally. So also, he who will not love, shall not know God essentially for God is love. Love understands love. Nothing else does.” (V.E.Rankin, Howard University, “Knowing God by Love”)

*“If we love one another, God abides in us, and **His love is perfected in us.**” 1 John 4:12*

*“God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. **By this, love is perfected with us.**” 1 John 4:16b, 17a*

*“There is no fear in love, but **perfect love casts out fear...**” 1 John 4:18*

Today we will look deeper into “perfect love”, and how we are to identify it.

I. Perfect Love means reaching the goal that the Father has for us to love one another.

The first thing you will notice, as you read through the verses and quotes above, is that perfect love is something that happens over time. It is clear by the fact that John tells us how to achieve it, that God considers it something attainable.

The word “perfect” in the Greek language is “teleios”. It means to bring to an end, to complete, accomplish, finish, to reach a goal. This word is used of Jesus when he accomplished the Father’s will.

Jesus said, “On the third day I reach my goal” Luke 13:32b. The phrase “reach my goal” is the same Greek word as the word “perfect”. This statement could be read as “on the third day I am **perfected.**”

As followers of Jesus, we should desire to reach the Father’s goal for us too, which is to love with agape love. Perfect love reaches the goal set for us by the Father.

II. Perfect Love casts out fear.

Read 1 John 4:17-18

The person who has reached this goal of love is no longer afraid. He or she does not fear man. He is not trying to please man, or fear what man can do to him. John is not speaking of a healthy fear of danger, or the fear of God that is an awareness of the awesome power of God. Proverbs says that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. But John is talking about the kind of fear that comes from the enemy.

“The Christian fears but is never governed by his fears. Fear is not a ruling motive but is subordinate to hope. To cure our soul of fear, fill it with hope and trust.”
(James Freeman Clarke)

In verses 17-18, the fear that John is speaking of has to do with eternal punishment. Anyone who is in Christ, who has had their sins forgiven, does not need to fear eternal punishment.

“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” Romans 8:33-35a

As we look at “reaching the goal” to love with agape love, let us also consider the obstacles that are in our path. If we are serious about wanting to grow in love, and reach the Father’s goal for us, we need to know some things about our enemy.

III. Perfect Love must overcome evil – in the Unseen Realm of the Spirit.

Read Ephesians 6:11-13 and answer the questions.

What does Paul tell us to stand firm against by putting on God’s armor?

We struggle against

- a. Rulers
 - b. Powers
 - c. World forces of this darkness
 - d. _____
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God knows that we will have to overcome some wickedness, some demonic spirits, to reach our goal. After all, Satan is the Prince of this world. Don't worry – God has provided everything we need!

Don't forget that God has given you His Spirit, who is with you always.

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence...If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me”. Psalm 139:7

Yes, we must overcome the traps that Satan puts in our way but remember, *“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4.*

Read 1 Peter 5:8-10

In this passage, we are told that our adversary, the devil, acts like a roaring lion. He is seeking someone to devour. The thing to remember is that he is just “seeking”. We don't have to let him devour us.

What are we told to do in verse 9?

What four things will the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, Himself do for you? (v.10)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

You and I must learn to resist the enemy. I've heard it said that the enemy is like a bee without a stinger! He can make lots of noise, but he can't sting us – unless we let him. If we don't understand what God's Word teaches us regarding the enemy, we will hear his deceptive lies, and instead of what we know is true, we will be deceived. Think of it as though you leave the front door to your house wide open and allow the enemy to have access anytime he wants. God tells us to resist him – so close the front door!

Jesus gave you authority over unclean spirits. Let's look at a few more verses.

Read Luke 4:33-36

Why was Jesus able to rebuke the evil spirit? (v.36)

Read Luke 10:16-20

Jesus told his disciples and 70 others their names are recorded in heaven and that (v.20)

Read 2 Timothy 1:7

God hasn't given us a spirit of timidity (or fear) but of

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

1. What are we told to do to every thought that is not in obedience to Christ?
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2. What does God expect us to do to all speculations and lofty things that are raised up against the knowledge of God?
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3. Just to be really clear – who is the one doing the destroying – us or God? _____

We are clearly told in Scripture that WE are to resist, WE are to choose light over darkness, righteousness over evil, and love over fear.

Read Philippians 4:4-9

In this passage, Paul explains that we have choices. We choose what we will allow into our minds and hearts. We have a will, and if we want to walk in love, and to reach our goal of agape love, we need to resist the enemy's traps, and choose to love. Exercise your will and say no to any unclean spirit.

1. What will help us guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus? (v.7)

2. List some things we should choose to dwell on.

IV. Perfect Love tests the spirits to know if they are from God.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" 1 John 4:1

I believe that God gives us a **conscience** to help us hear the voice of God's Spirit. Our **conscience** will give us signals. My conscience lets me know when something is not right. Do you know what I mean? I might see or hear someone talking and saying all of the right things. They may call them self a Christian or may even be a Bible scholar. It would be very easy to be deceived by their words.

But – my conscience becomes uncomfortable, and I sense that the person is not genuine. I begin to notice other red flags, such as the way he or she treats people, or a lack of humility. My conscience is troubled – my stomach feels sick.

"I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit." Romans 9:1

*"...holding to the mystery of the faith **with a clear conscience.**" 1 Timothy 3:9*

*"and **keep a good conscience...**" 1 Peter 3:16*

What do I do in a situation where I have used my own spiritual discernment to test the spirit, and I sense in my conscience that the spirit is not of God?

Here is what I do:

1. I quietly pray to the Holy Spirit for His discernment – asking Him to make clear to me what spirit I am dealing with. This is more of a confirmation, to help me know if I am not hearing from God correctly.
2. If the spirit is not of God (whether it is just a thought, or someone is talking to me), I will speak either silently or audibly, letting the spirit know I resist it, and I take authority over it in the Name of Jesus. Such as “Fear – I rebuke you!”
3. If the unclean spirit (let’s say it is the spirit of fear) is not leaving, I take out my sword. The Word of God is my sword. All I must do is get out my sword – by speaking the Word of God out loud – and that spirit quickly flees (not just walks, he runs!) He knows that I have authority, and that I know it. He can’t deceive me – I know too much. We are mighty Women of the Word.
4. I keep standing firm, as long as necessary. I say things like – “In the name of Jesus, by the blood of Jesus, Jesus is my Lord and Savior, etc. or I quote verses like 1 John 4:4. *“Greater is He that is in me than He that is in the world.”*
5. Sometimes I say– I choose light over darkness! I choose Truth over error! I choose righteousness. If I am dealing with the spirit of fear, I might say, “God didn’t give me a spirit of fear, but of love, power and self-control.” The main thing is to resist him – and he will flee from you. It isn’t the words or a certain prayer, it’s about believing, and showing the unclean spirit by your faith, that you can’t be deceived. You need to know and believe that you are a child of God. The devil already knows and believes.

I am sharing this with you, because I have been surprised at how quickly the enemy leaves when we boldly resist him. I have also prayed with others who were dealing with a variety of unclean spirits. Listen to your conscience and be in prayer asking God to give you discernment. Remember, He wants you to overcome. When you overcome, He overcomes. And when you overcome – the church overcomes. We are all members of one body.

Read 1 John 4:10-19

Remember, John is writing this letter, so that we will learn how to have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and with each other. To have this kind of fellowship, we need to truly walk in agape love.

1. As we learn to abide in Him, and know that He abides in us, what is our assurance that we are abiding in Him? (v.13)

2. John has seen and is testifying that the Father has sent the Son to (v.14)
_____ of the world.
3. Whoever confesses that (v.15) _____,
God _____ and he in God.
4. John says, “we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us”. Here is the question – **have YOU come to know** and **have YOU believed** that God loves you and that He abides in you? _____
5. What does v.19 say is our reason for perfecting love?

Read Matthew 5:43-48

If we want to truly know God, we will come to know Him as we abide in Him and learn His ways. When we learn to love, we will come to know the God of love. This passage from the Sermon on the Mount reminds us of who we are to love. According to Jesus, anyone can love a good friend – but only sons (or daughters) of the Father can love their enemies. Remember, we want to reach the goal set by our Heavenly Father. He knows we can achieve the goal with His help.

What does Jesus want us to be in verse 48? _____