

THAT YOU MAY

KNOW

A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN

“Assurance and
the Reflection
of God’s Love”

1 John 4:11–14

Franciscan Friar, Kietrich Kolde (1435–1515)

“There are three things I know to be true that frequently make my heart heavy. The first troubles my spirit, because I have to die. The second troubles my heart more, because I do not know when. The third troubles me above all: I do not know where I will go.”

—*The Christian’s Mirror (Christenspiegel)*,
a German Roman Catholic catechism (1470) that
served as a guide for religious confession and
self-examination.



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PER R. D. IACOBVM CHIFLETIVM,
*Itemque Canones & Decreta iuxta ordinem rituum
Decretal.*

PER D. A. BARBOSAM I.V.D.
&

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COLONIE AGRIPPINÆ,

Apud IOANNEM KINCHIVM sub
Monocerote, M.DC.XLIV.

Cum Privilegio Sacra. Cajar. Maiest.

The Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1545–1563)

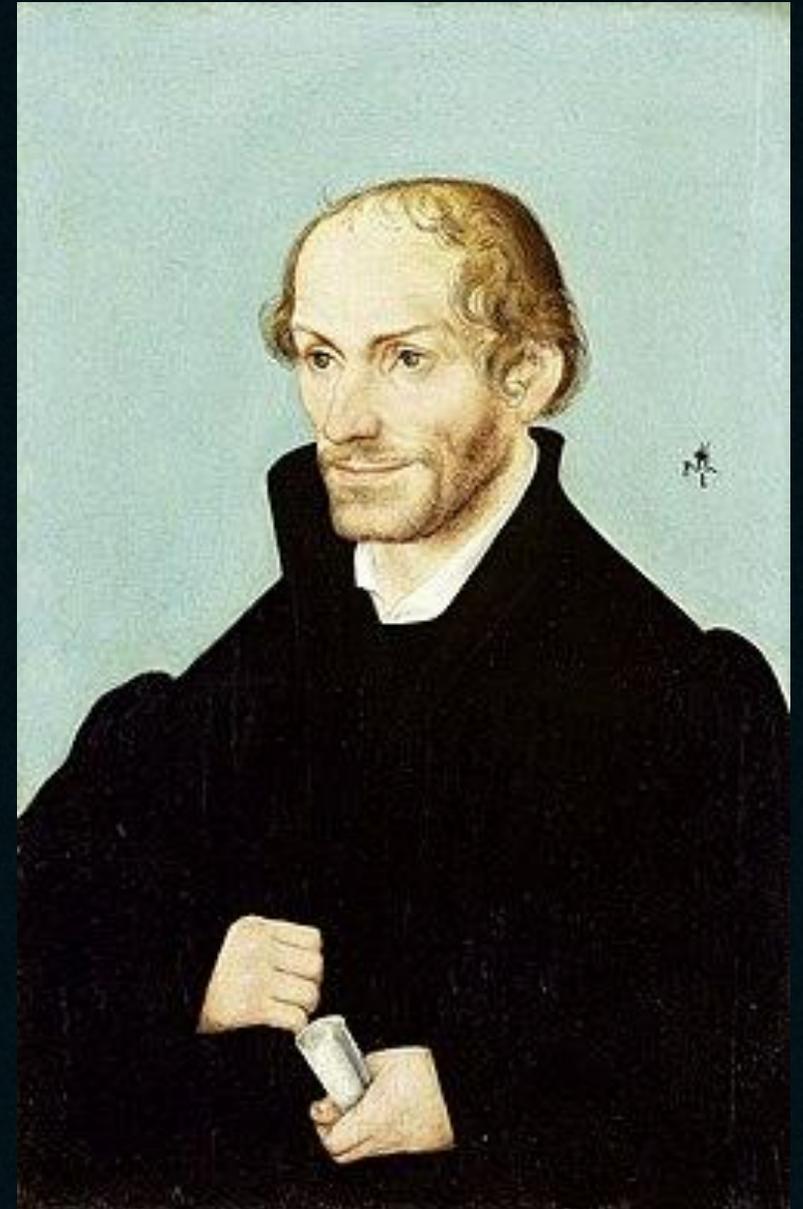
“No one can know with a certainty of faith . . . that he has obtained the grace of God. . . . If anyone saith, that a man, who is born again is justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate: let him be anathema.”

—*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,*
Canon 15, “On Justification” (1547)

The Front Line of the Reformation

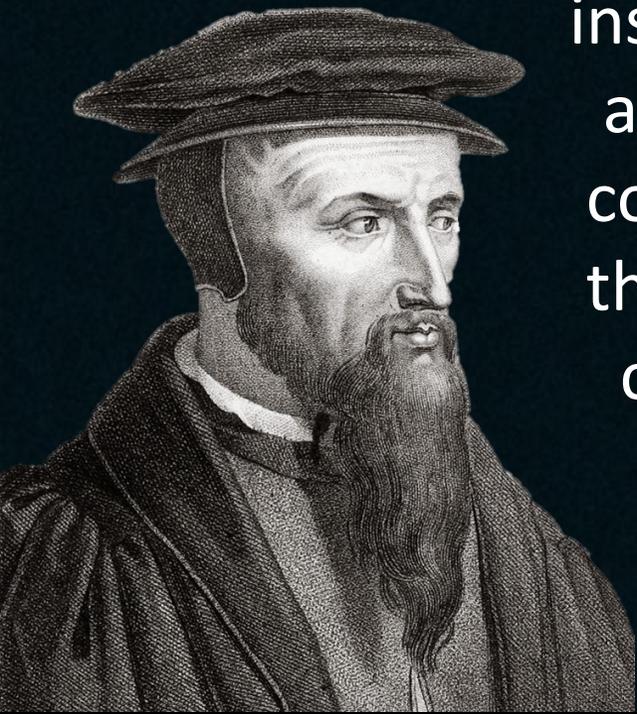
“Assurance is the discriminating line
of Christianity from Heathenism.”

—Philip Melancthon (1497–1560)



“There was another most pestilential error, which not only occupied the minds of men, but was regarded as one of the principal articles of faith, of which it was impious to doubt: that is, that believers ought to be perpetually in suspense and uncertainty as to their interest in the divine favor. By this suggestion of the devil, the power of faith was completely extinguished, the benefits of Christ’s purchase destroyed, and the salvation of men overthrown. For, as Paul declares, that faith only is Christian faith which inspires our hearts with confidence, and emboldens us to appear in the presence of God (Rom. 5:2). On no other view could his doctrine in another passage be maintained: that is, that ‘we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8:15).”

—John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 27



“Assurance and the Reflection of God’s Love” – 1 John 4:11–14

GOD/FATHER

- invisible
- loves
- abides
- sends
- gives

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be the Savior of the world.*”

GOD/SON

- Saves
- (manifests God’s love)

GOD/SPIRIT

- (enables God’s love)

Men of the Word



I. The Compulsion of Divine Love

1 John 4:11

*“... if God so loved us,
we also ought to love...”*

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (4:11).

- **1 John 4:7a** – “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God.”
- **“Beloved”** – “one who is dearly loved”; also found in 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7; communicates affection and affirmation; John dearly loves them, but he knows that God loves them even more (see 3:1a).
- **“If God so loved us”** – the “if” portion of a conditional statement, intended to provoke thought; John assumes this condition to be *true*; emphasizes the nature of God’s love as described in vv. 9–10.
- **John 3:16** – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

“Beloved, if God so loved us, **we also ought to love one another**” (4:11).

- **“We also ought”** – begins the “then” portion of a conditional statement; the truthfulness of the condition leads to an undeniable conclusion; “to be under obligation to meet certain social or moral expectations” (see also 2:6; 3:16); emphatic—“we ourselves”; John includes himself.
- **“To love”** – “It is a call for a high, unselfish love which freely seeks the true welfare of the one loved” (Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, 196–97).
- **“One another”** – other Christians; the unique, exclusive, and reciprocal love of Christ’s disciples for each other.

▪ **John 13:34–35**

Men of the Word

“Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?”

—**Matthew 18:33**

“bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

—**Colossians 3:13**

FORGIVE

Men of the Word

Christian Love

Hugh Binning



PURITAN  PAPERBACKS

“If God hath forgiven me so many grievous offences, if he hath pardoned so heinous and innumerable injuries, that amount to a kind of infiniteness in number and quality, O how much more am I bound to forgive my brethren a few light and trivial offences? . . . With what face can I pray, ‘Lord, forgive me my sins,’ when I may meet with such a response, ‘Thou cannot forgive thy brethren’s sins, infinitely less both in number and degree?’ . . . What unparalleled ingratitude were it, what monstrous wickedness, that after he hath forgiven all our debt . . . yet we should not have compassion on our fellow servants even as he had pity on us!”

—Hugh Binning, *Christian Love*



II. The Completion of Divine Love

1 John 4:12

"... His love is perfected in us."

“No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us” (4:12).

- **“No one has seen God at any time”** – John seems to deviate from his argument by making an assertion about God’s *invisibility*, but his point is to emphasize that God makes His presence known *through love*.
 - **John 1:18a** – “No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.”
 - **John 4:24** – “God is spirit.”
 - **John 5:37; 6:46; 14:7–11**
- “Believers who love one another demonstrate that the unseen God lives in them” (Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 175).

“No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us” (4:12).

- **“If we love one another”** – another conditional statement (see v. 11), this “if” is expressed not as a fact, but as a hypothetical; John includes himself in the “we.”
- **“[Then] God abides in us”** – the first of a two-part “then” statement; the language of *spiritual residence* and *life-giving relationship* (John 15:1–11; see 1 John 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 24, 27, 28); “in us” = “among us.”
- **“The unseen God, who was once revealed in His Son, is now revealed in His people if and when they love one another”** (John Stott, *The Letters of John*, 164).

“No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us” (4:12).

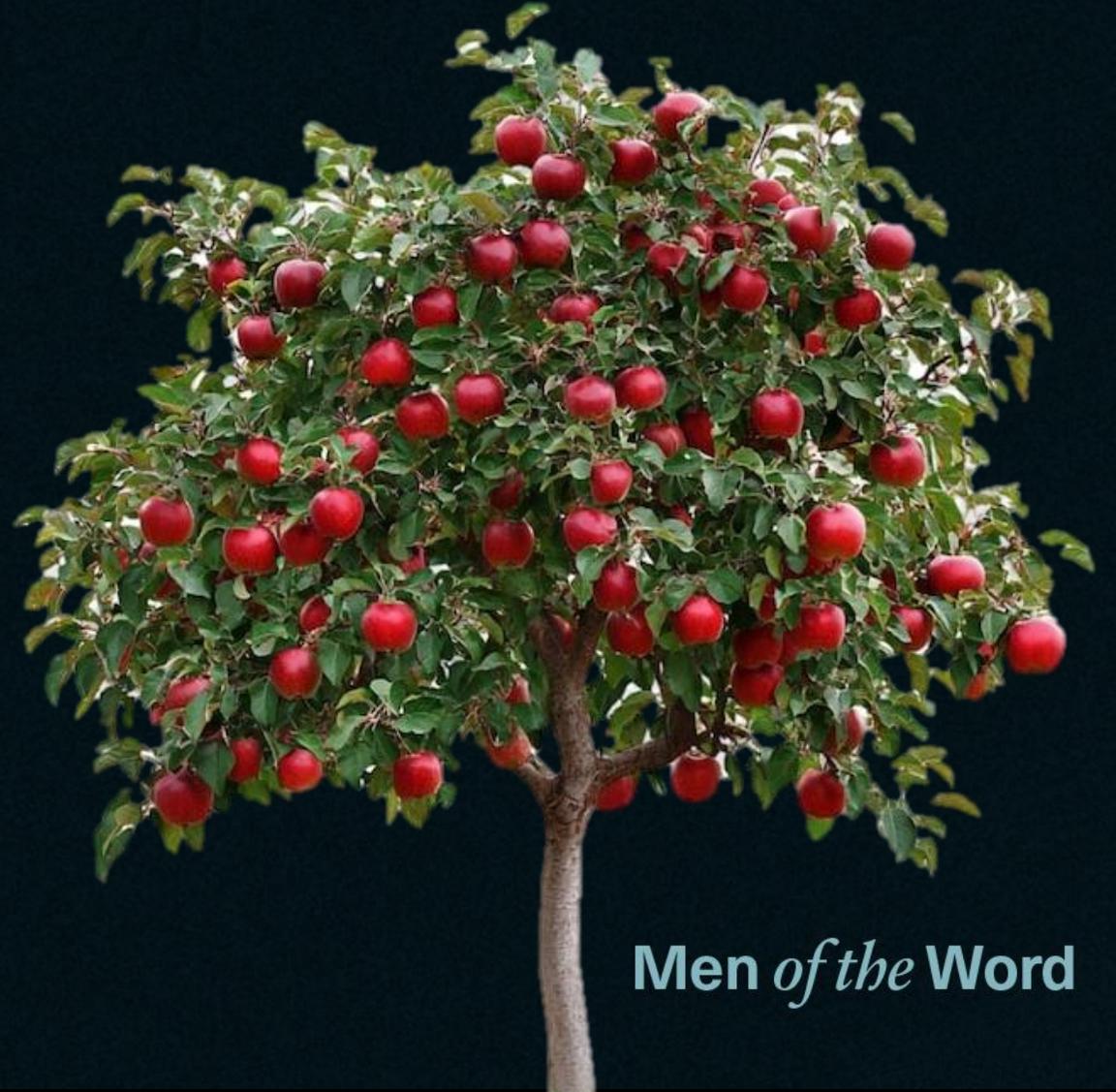
- “[Then] His love is perfected in us” – the second of the two-part “then” statement; the language of *completion* (1 John 2:5; 4:17–18); “in us” = “among us.”
 - The expression of God’s love was described in 4:9–10.



- That expression of love now achieves its goal—in the transformation of selfish sinners into those who love sacrificially.
- “The circuit of God’s love is completed when we love one another” (Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 176).

“There is all the difference between its existence in the heart, and its expansion in the life, that may be observed between the root of the plant deposited in the soil and its rich and widespread foliage, and its clusters of flowers or fruits.”

—James Morgan, *The Epistles of John*,
332



Men of the Word

“A believer's heart is the garden
where Christ has planted this sweet
flower of His love.”

—Thomas Watson



Men of the Word



III. The Confirmation of Divine Love

1 John 4:13

“ . . . because He has given us of His Spirit. ”

“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (4:13).

- The invisibility of God raises questions about how we can *know* that God “abides in us” (end of v. 12).
 - John points to a *subjective/experiential* answer in v. 13, and an *objective/historical* answer in v. 14.
- **“By this we know”** – John asserts that the answer to this question is *knowable by learning*; he points forward to the answer.
- **“That we abide in Him and He in us”** – the content of what we *can know*; essential life/union/relationship with God (John 15:1–11).



“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us,
because He has given us of His Spirit” (4:13).

- “Because He has given us” – a one-time gift that has resulted in a continual possession; God is a *giver*.
- “Of His Spirit” – the indwelling, abiding presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, given once for all at the moment of regeneration.
 - **1 John 3:24b** – “We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”
 - **1 John 2:27** – “As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

- John does not go into detail here, but his language points us toward the doctrine of the *internal witness of the Holy Spirit*.
 - **Romans 8:14–16** – “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”
 - **Galatians 4:6** – “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
- The *internal witness of the Holy Spirit* is that ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer that enables him to recognize, esteem, understand, and appropriate God’s truth—thus confirming in our spirit our identity as God’s children.

- But why does John include this in his section on *loving one another*? Because the Holy Spirit is the *bestower* of love:
 - **Romans 5:5** – “. . . the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”
 - **Galatians 5:22** – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love”
- Calvin: “The sum, then, of what is said is, that since love is from the Spirit of God, we cannot truly and with a sincere heart love the brethren, except the Spirit puts forth his power. In this way He testifies that He dwells in us. But God by his Spirit dwells in us; then, by love we prove that we have God abiding in us. On the other hand, whosoever boasts that he has God and loves not the brethren, his falsehood is proved by this one thing, because he separates God from himself.”



IV. The Certainty of Divine Love

1 John 4:14

*"We have seen and testify
that the Father has sent
the Son"*

“We have seen and testify” that the Father has sent the Son
to be the Savior of the world” (4:14).

- Having given a *subjective/experience* basis for assurance in v. 13, John now provides an *objective/historical* basis in v. 14.
- **“We have seen and testify”** – the testimony of eyewitness that establishes *certainty*:
 - **“We”** = the apostles.
 - **“Have seen”** = “to perceive something above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye,” “to behold.”
 - **“To testify”** = “to confirm or attest something on the basis of personal knowledge or belief.”



“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

—1 John 1:1–3

“We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (4:14).

- **“The Father has sent the Son”** – the Father is not only the *giver* of the Spirit, who provides subjective assurance, but He is also the *sender* of the Son, whose life and teaching provides objective assurance.
- **“The Savior of the world”** – not in the sense of *universalism* (that Jesus redeems all of mankind), but in the sense of *universal appropriateness* (that Jesus is the One to whom anyone in the world can look to for salvation—Jew or non-Jew); see John 4:42; 1 John 2:2.
- This objective truth is not only the fundamental test of faith (“What do you say about Jesus?”), but the fundamental justification for the command (“Therefore, love one another”).

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