

## ***Living in the Love of God (John 15:9–11)***

### **INTRODUCTION**

John 15 is where we're beginning tonight. This is one of the chapters of the deepest revelation of God's heart as He desires to relate to His people. It's the revelation of abiding in the vine. At the very center of this teaching, Jesus unveils His heart of love to us.

It begins with Jesus saying, "Abide in Me, and I will abide in you" (Jn. 15:5, paraphrased). I've found through the years that the way to read that is to use the word *talk* in place of the word *abide*. Jesus is saying, "Talk to Me, and I will talk to you, and you will bear much fruit." To the measure that we abide or continue the dialogue with Him, to that measure we bear fruit. That fruit is the internal fruit of a transformed heart, and it's external fruit. It's inspiring and impacting people to live before God in righteousness. It doesn't necessarily mean we'll impact thousands, but we will impact people at a deep level. That's the fruit. The quality of the fruit is what's in focus here. "Abide in Me; talk to Me, and I will talk to you, and you will bear fruit."

### **THE HOLY OF HOLIES OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS**

I don't know a chapter in the Bible that's deeper in terms of its truth than John 15. Some people have called it "the holy of holies of the teaching of Jesus." Tonight I want to talk about the foundational truth that equips us to love God and to love other people. If you get this truth, you'll be equipped to love God and to love people. It's very simple: to know and to feel the affections of God's love.

Now, this is the simplest truth in Scripture. At the same time, it's the deepest truth in Scripture. It's a paradox. It's the introduction into the kingdom of God: the revelation of God's love. It's also the deepest place that we will go in the age to come. It's the revelation of the ocean of God's being; the ocean of God's heart; the affections of the love of God. God loves us the way that God loves God. I believe this is the simplest, yet the deepest truth, in the Word of God.

I'll say it again. Jesus is going to declare it here in verse 9. God loves us in the way that God loves God. This one truth, to experience and to understand the affections that God has for us, will equip our hearts to love God, will equip us to love others, and it will equip us to bear fruit. That's what abiding in the vine in John 15 is all about.

One of the most dramatic statements in the Bible comes from the lips of Jesus. It's here in John 15:9. If you're looking for a favorite verse, this needs to be one that you consider for your life verse—not that you need to have one. It must have been so shocking when He said this. He was talking to the twelve disciples. He said, "As the Father loved Me, in the same way I have loved you" (Jn. 15:9, paraphrased).

That must have made them stop in absolute shock. "What did He say?" I can imagine Peter hitting John: "Did you hear what I just heard?"

Let's read it again. Jesus is at the Last Supper. They're sitting around the table. He's hours away from going to the garden of Gethsemane, and then to the cross. Here He gives the ultimate revelation of His heart. This truth will change your life. Even in this hour of our life, in the years to come, and in the ages to come, He will continually unfold this truth. We will learn it little by little through the weeks and months ahead. We will learn

it little by little in the decades ahead in our life. In the ages to come, we will still be learning this truth. It's the ocean of God's heart. It's endless, the way God feels; the affections of His heart for His people.

Jesus said, "As the Father loved Me"—again, I imagine Him pausing. "As the Father loved Me."

Think about it. How much does the Father love the Son? He says, "In the same intensity, in the same measure, as He loves Me, that's how I feel about you."

The enemy wants to obscure this truth so we never get hold of it. This one truth will radically change your emotional makeup. It's progressive. We may have moments where we gain big steps forward in a short amount of time, but usually, inch by inch we grow in this revelation. Jesus feels towards us the same intensity with which God loves His Son.

### **"ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU"**

He goes on and makes a statement that's going to be our key exhortation tonight. He says, "Abide in My love. Live in it. Go deep in it. Stay focused on it. Never leave this subject, ever." To *abide* means to live in it. In that one statement, "Abide in My love," He was giving us the focus of our life as a believer. For the rest of our life, in this age and in the age to come, He's defining our journey as a believer—to abide in His love. There it is. It's very simple. In essence, He's saying, "Stay focused on it. Don't get so busy doing the work of the kingdom that you forget to stay focused on this. Go deeply in My love. Never leave the dialogue with Me about My love."

Remember, the subject of John 15 is, "Talk to Me, and I will talk to you, and you will bear much fruit." Now He gives us the subject matter that He wants us to talk to Him about; the subject with which He wants us to encounter Him. He says, "I want you to encounter My heart: specifically, the affections of My heart for you. To what measure do I have affections for you? There's only one measurement: the same way the Father feels about Me. Anything less than how the Father feels about Me is coming up short on this truth."

I've read different books on the love of God and different men's ideas. We're constantly tempted to bring this down to a manageable level. Beloved, this isn't manageable. This is so big; it boggles our mind. It's out of the reach of our ability ever to exhaust this revelation. You may go deeply in it for fifty years. When you stand before the Lord and look back, you'll find you've only gone a few inches into the ocean of God's love for you. A million years will go by; we'll look back after that and we'll find we've only gone a few feet into the ocean of God's love. We will never exhaust this subject. We will never get to the bottom of this ocean. The way God feels about us is the way the Father feels about the Son; the way the Son feels about the Father, and the way they both feel about the Spirit, and vice versa.

He says, "Abide in My love. Stay focused on it. Don't ever leave this subject. Make this the point of your dialogue with Me, your abiding in Me. Go deeply in it. Never leave it; never graduate from it. Live in this subject forever."

Wow. Jesus knows more about love than any man who ever walked the earth, and He said, "Never graduate from this focus." Never, ever. He would know better than anyone how important it is.

**“IF YOU KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, YOU WILL ABIDE IN MY LOVE”**

In verse 10, He goes on and gives us a very helpful exhortation. At first, we might read this the wrong way. We might read it from a negative perspective. It's like He's saying, "I love you; that's the good news. Now the bad news that is you have to obey Me." That's sometimes how we read this passage: "Wow, God loves us the way God loves God. Good news. Live in it forever. OK, I got it. Go deeply in it; abide in His love. I got it. Oh, the negative news: we have to obey."

Jesus didn't change subjects. He was giving us a very important instruction of how to live in God's love. When He says, "Keep My commandments" (Jn. 15:10), in essence He's saying, "If you want to experience the power of My love, you have to live in agreement with My heart. If you live in agreement with darkness, it will diminish your capacity to experience the brightness and the grandeur and the glory of My love that I have called you to experience all the days of your life. If you live in darkness, it will diminish your ability to experience and feel My love."

When we obey Jesus, we don't earn His love. When I say we obey Jesus, I mean we set our heart to obey. None of us obey Him perfectly; but the setting of our heart positions our heart so that we can experience and feel more of His love.

**LIVING IN AGREEMENT WITH DARKNESS HINDERS OUR ABILITY TO KNOW LOVE**

I've talked to believers all the time over the course of my years in ministry. They say, "I can't feel the love of God at all." Sometimes it's just a demonic attack. Other times they have wrong ideas about God; they have strongholds in their mind. They have wrong thinking because they grew up in a religious setting that taught them wrong ideas about God's heart. They think God is mostly mad or sad when He relates to them. They don't know that God is glad when He relates to them. It's not the devil's attack in the direct sense, but it's wrong ideas. For many people, the reason they can't feel the love of God is because they're actively living in an area of compromise and they're not warring against it. When we live in agreement with darkness, it cuts off our ability to feel the power of love. Again, we don't earn love by obedience, but we position ourselves to feel it and understand it more and more and more.

Jesus was actually being positive here. He didn't say, "I love you, I love you, I love you. That's the good news. The bad news is that you have to grit your teeth and obey Me. You have to endure Me in My ways."

No, He's saying, "If you want to go deeply, you have to combine it with a spirit of obedience. Why? Because your agreement with light by your life choices is directly related to your ability to experience and feel more." He says, "If you do that, you'll abide in My love. You'll stay focused on it; you'll go deeply in it."

**OUR HEARTS ARE DEFILED AND DIMINISHED BY COMPROMISE**

There's a lot of teaching today in the Body of Christ, particularly in the Western world. It's a false teaching of grace, taught in a way that empowers people to live passively in their walk with God, and empowers them and gives them boldness to live in compromise. They understand grace as a covering for living in compromise: "Hey, we're under the grace of God. We can live lazily, ignore our relationship with God, do anything we want spiritually, and live in compromise. After all, we're under grace."

It's a complete distortion of the doctrine of grace. Because the doctrine of grace, when properly understood, empowers us to feel God. It empowers us to agree with God.

Jesus is saying, “If you want to abide in this ocean, if you want to swim in it, if you want to feel its power, you have to live in agreement with Me.”

Don’t look for people who will find Bible verses for you to back up your sinful compromise. There’s always a bunch of believers that can find Bible verses to tell you why you can keep doing certain things, but it’s against what the Holy Spirit wants for your life. What wisdom is it for me to get a few people to agree with me and pat me on the back so I feel good about continuing in compromise, but I never feel the love of God, and don’t abide, and don’t go deeply in the love of God? What have I gained? My heart is defiled; my heart is diminished. My heart is stifled in God. I don’t want to be stifled in God; I want to feel the love of God. I want to abide in love, go deeply in it, and stay focused on it.

In verse 11, He says, “These things I have spoken to you” (Jn. 15:11). In other words, “Why did I give you this teaching in John 15:1-10?” He’s talking about the whole ten verses before, where He said, “Abide in Me; talk to Me, and I will talk to you.” “Stay focused on the love of God,” is the essence of this teaching. He says, “Why did I give you this teaching? So that My joy would be imparted to you; so that you would have a supernatural impartation that would grow over time” (Jn. 15:11b, paraphrased).

This isn’t a one-time deal. His joy will touch our spirit and change our emotional makeup, little by little. He says, “I’m after you feeling this. I’m after you experiencing more. I want you to experience more. I want your joy to remain and I want it to be full. I want it to reach the fullness of what I have ordained for human beings in this age.”

In the age to come, our joy will have even a greater measure. I want whatever God will give the human spirit in this age. That’s the vision of my life. “How far will You let me go? What’s the measure that You’ll give the human spirit in this age? How much of the Spirit can You touch my heart with?” That’s what fullness of joy is. It’s not the fullness compared to the age to come, but I want the fullness of what’s available in this age. I don’t want it just for a moment one afternoon, or in one heavenly experience. I want it to remain. I don’t mean every minute of every day you’re just captured with a sense of joy. He’s not talking here about laughing and feeling happy, although I appreciate that. There are times for laughing and feeling happy. But when Jesus talks about joy here, He’s talking about a deep, inward sense of connection with God and a sense of wellbeing that’s very deep. It’s a sustaining joy deep in the inner man. It’s more than just being happy for an hour. He’s talking about something that can last throughout our life—through the mundane, through the trials and tribulation. It even sustains us when we fail and we sign back up. When we fail, we call sin *sin*, we repent, we receive the forgiveness of God, we push delete, and we get right back into that sense of wellbeing called the joy of God touching our spirit.

### **THE FATHER LOVES YOU LIKE GOD LOVES GOD**

In John 17:23, Jesus says the same truth from a different angle. In the passage we just looked at, He said, “In the way that the Father loves Me, that’s how I love you.” Here He says, “That’s how I love you, but it doesn’t end there. The Father loves you in that same intensity, too” (Jn. 17:23, paraphrased). It’s not just that Jesus loves you like God loves God. The Father loves you like God loves God. It’s not like Jesus is the nice One, but the Father is distant and far away. No. They both have equal intensity of love and affection for us, just as they have for one another. There’s no end to it.

The Father has delighted in Jesus from eternity past. Go back a million years. How happy was the Father about the Son? Really happy. Jesus said, “That’s how the Father feels about you.” Beloved, this radically shifts the way we interpret our relationship with God. The devil doesn’t want truth to be made clear. Again, it’s the introduction to the kingdom of God; it’s the simplest truth, but at the same time, it’s the deepest truth that we never, ever exhaust in the age to come. So our journey begins and our journey unfolds around this truth. The devil doesn’t want us to feel it; he doesn’t want us to get it. The devil will confuse our mind. He’ll do anything to keep us from laying hold of this, and the joy, the deep inward sense of connection of God that can last through all the days of our lives.

### **LEARNING TO ABIDE IN THE ETERNAL FOUNTAIN OF DESIRE**

It’s only logical that God loves us like God loves God, because “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16). God is the eternal fountain of desire. That’s what His personality is like. He’s not just a God of power at a distance, observing our life, detached and uninvolved until we do badly, when He intervenes to correct us; or, if we get in trouble, to deliver us. Beloved, He’s more than a God of power who stands at a distance, who watches us and involves Himself when we sin in order to teach us, or, when we get ourselves in a mess, to deliver us. No, He’s deeply involved at the heart level with us, each step of the way through the journey. He is love. He’s the very fountain of desire. He’s the fountain of overflowing desire. He’s volcanic desire. That’s an illustration from the natural. It’s explosive; it’s bigger than anything we can imagine. It comes from the very core of His being. This fiery river of desire erupts and spreads through the whole kingdom of God. We can have it to the degree that we want it if we will abide in it.

“Abiding in it” means staying focused on it, going deeply in it, never leaving it. Many people, when they hear about the love of God, say, “Wow.” They underline it in their Bible. Then they don’t talk to God about it much. Maybe they’ll bring it up occasionally. Jesus said, “Stay involved in this dialogue about My heart of love. Stay involved with Me in the conversation about this. Let Me unfold it to you. Live with a spirit of obedience so that you can experience more of it as the weeks and months and years unfold.”

Again, obedience doesn’t make us deserve it. Obedience, the spirit of obedience, positions us so that we can feel more of it in a deeper way. I want to feel more and I want to feel it more deeply. A spirit of obedience is a spirit of agreement with His heart. We can’t live in agreement with darkness, in disagreement with His heart, and yet feel His heart. It’s a contradiction. It doesn’t work that way. He’s the very fountain of desire.

God isn’t just power, He doesn’t just have power and wisdom; He’s the fountain of overflowing desire. In this desire, He wants to relate to the people whom He loves. In this desire, He wants to make us feel loved. I mean, when you love someone, you want them to feel loved. He wants us to feel loved. He has spoken in His Word. His Spirit is ready to reveal this to us in a greater way, but many of God’s people, though they’ll talk about love, won’t stay locked in on it. They move on quickly. They touch the very superficial ideas of the love of God and they move on to “something deeper.” This desire isn’t just a desire to relate to us and to make us feel loved; it’s to celebrate our dignity and our value. We can’t imagine how much God values and celebrates our dignity before Him. He gets who we are far beyond what we do. He understands the truth about us much more than we understand the truth about us—the positive things about us, who we are to Him. When you love someone, you take pleasure and delight in who they are. He has delight and pleasure. He is love. He is delight. He’s pleasure in pure, holy ways. He wants to give Himself to us. He doesn’t want to be at a distance with great power and wisdom, and intervene when we mess up or get ourselves in a jam. No, He wants to be involved with us abiding in the vine; talking with us as we talk to Him throughout the day. The issue is that He leaves it in our hands.

## **THE GOD WHO HAS EVERYTHING WANTS SOMETHING**

A few verses before this, in verse 5, He says, “Talk to Me, and I will respond back. You start the conversation, and I’ll continue it if you start it. Whenever you get uninterested in talking with Me, then I’ll get quiet. You want to talk more? I have more to say. If you’re tired of talking, I’ll wait patiently. Why? Because love will not impose itself. I’ll wait. You want to abide? I’ll abide in you. I’ll talk. I’ll abide more in you as well. You take the initiative and you start the conversation. To the degree that you want it to develop, I’ll go with you to that degree.”

The God who has everything wants something. What an amazing statement. The God who has everything wants something. The reason He wants something is because He is love. He’s the fountain of desire. When He wants something, it doesn’t mean He needs it. His desire isn’t a statement of His need; He’s self-sufficient. He wants relationship with us. He desires it. He doesn’t need us to make Him complete. He’s complete in the fellowship of the Trinity. By the very nature of love, He deeply desires to bring us into the relationship; to be deeply involved with us and let us feel the pleasure He has over us; to let us feel the desire He has for us.

## **LIVING IN THE REALM OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S LOVE**

Paragraph B. We’re going to abide in love the rest of our days. I mean, for billions of years. The enemy doesn’t want you to abide in love. The enemy wants you to hear a few messages on the love of God. In place of the word *love*, put the word *affections*. “Abide, live, dwell, go deeply in My affections.” Everyone has heard about the love of God, but few people go deeply in it. They don’t stay focused on it; they don’t bring it into the conversation with God in a consistent way, which is called “abiding in the vine.”

We abide or we live; the words *abide* and *live* are interchangeable. We live in the realm of the experience of God’s love in various measures. In other words, right now we only have a small capacity to experience a small amount of this. But beloved, a little of this goes a long way. But each one of us in this room has a different capacity to experience it. We want it to be our life vision to have the greatest capacity that a human being can have to experience the love of God. Make this your life vision. This one statement, “Abide in My love,” defines our life and our journey.

## **HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE SIGHT OF GOD**

You may get a really famous ministry one day where millions of people know you. That doesn’t mean you’re successful in God. Being successful in God isn’t about how many human beings know you, even if they think you’re amazing. I would define being successful in God by this one statement: the measure to which we abide in love. To abide in it means we understand it, we feel it, and we respond back in love. To the degree that we receive it and respond back in love, that’s the measure of our success. When I stand before God one day, He’s not going to ask me how big the conferences were at IHOP-KC; He’s going to ask me how big my heart was and how much I experienced love. I’m going to be measured, like you are, by the degree to which I walked in love; by how much I received it, and responded accordingly—not by how many people knew my ministry. The reason I say that is because some people think success is measured by how many people know and respect their name and their ministry. That’s not what success is. Here it is, right here: abide in love. That’s the definition of success: the ability to receive it and understand it, which is the same thing, and the ability to respond, to offer ourselves back in love.

Lock into this truth. Focus on it fiercely. Don't let any Bible teacher come and steal this from your heart. Beloved, we have this from the mouth of Jesus.

Different folks through the years have said, "Well at IHOP-KC, you guys focus on the love of God, but we..."

I say, "No, it's not IHOP-KC. We got this straight from the mouth of Jesus. There's no greater authority than the mouth of Jesus. We're not that good at it, but boy, we're locked in on it. We're going after this thing."

Because I believe, not only that it pleases His heart, but that this is the way that will sustain us in doing the other works of the kingdom. If we go deeply in love, we'll stay persevering in our obedience; we'll stay persevering in our service to other people and bringing the gospel to others.

### **OUR HEARTS ARE SAFE FROM BURNOUT IF WE STAY IN GOD**

A lot of people say, "I'm burned out." I've heard it for years. What that normally means is, "I got treated badly. I didn't get what I wanted at the last church I attended. They treated me badly, I got my feelings hurt. It's really bad. I'm burned out." It usually means, "My feelings are hurt," with a few other words you could add to it.

Beloved, if we abide in love, we can live without being burnt out in the kingdom. Because the people may say it wrongly, treat you wrongly, they may completely mistreat you, but you have a river moving on the inside of your heart.

People get burnt out because they get disconnected from the love of God, not because they got a bad deal in the church. I have never met anyone who didn't get a bad deal in the church. I'm serious. If they have been in the church ten years and they haven't got a bad deal, maybe they have a man-pleasing spirit and just agree with everyone all the time. I guess there are a few like that. I've never met that guy. Everyone gets a bad deal if they relate to people. Sooner or later, beloved, if we relate to God, we stay in that river. I don't even mean we've gone that deeply. We've only done it a little. Our hearts are renewed; we're growing; we can stay focused.

I remember it was twenty years ago, or more, right here in this very building. I was preaching on the subject of the love of God. Allen Hood was only about twenty or twenty-one years old back then. I gave this exhortation. I heard him tell the story a number of times. I said, "Read from Genesis to Revelation, and mark every verse that describes God's emotions, His affections. But not just His affections: all of His emotions, from His joy, His jealousy, His love, His mercy, His goodness, and even His anger. Mark down all of His emotions. Go through the whole Bible."

Allen Hood said, "I'm going to do it." It took him a year or two, or maybe a little less. He went through the whole Bible and marked every verse he could find, and then began to pray over them.

He said, "It radically changed my inward life when I began to study and experience God's emotions." I'll give the same exhortation. Abide in love. Mark everywhere, Genesis to Revelation, where some emotion related to God's love or His affections is expressed. Begin to ask God to reveal it to you. It will change your life in a radical way.

## **HIS JOY WILL REMAIN IN US, AND OUR JOY WILL BE FULL**

Paragraph C. He says, “My joy will be in you” (Jn. 15:11). That means we’re going to have an emotional transformation.

Again, joy has a happy dimension. Joy has a peaceful dimension. Joy has a sense-of-well-being dimension. Joy has a deep sense of connection with God. I only say that so that you don’t limit joy to “exuberant happiness.” That’s only one of the facets of the diamond of joy. When Jesus talked about joy. He was talking about something that was very deep and profound in our lives.

Paragraph C. When we feel God’s joy, we feel His affections. It exhilarates our hearts. It exhilarates our heart to feel the joy of God. Not only that, but it gives us confidence in our walk with God. Beloved, to have confidence in our walk with God is what we want, second to nothing. Because when we have confidence in our walk with God, we run to Him instead of from Him when we stumble and fail. When I see a believer who has confidence in their relationship with God, they feel God’s pleasure over them. They feel God’s enjoyment over their life; they feel God’s delight in them even in their weakness. When they have confidence in this, their spirit comes alive in God in a most dramatic way.

## **THE SECRET OF BECOMING MATURE IN OUR LOVE**

Let’s look at Roman numeral two at the bottom of page one. We’ll only take a moment on this.

John wrote the Gospel of John. Obviously he wrote John 15. There he was writing the teaching of Jesus. Now he writes the epistle, or the letter of John. He writes 1 John. Here in 1 John, he writes how love affects all our emotions. In 1 John 4:17-18, he gives us one of the clearest statements of how love affects our emotions. I mean it’s a very, very powerful statement. In these two verses, he describes how love affects the human emotions. He starts in verse 17. He says, “Love has been perfected among us in this” (1 Jn. 4:17). He’s going to tell us the way we can experience love in a mature way. When he says love is perfected, he’s talking about in our experience. He says, “I’m going to tell you how love can become mature in your experience.” Whatever he says next is really, really important. We’re talking about the man who was called “the apostle of love,” describing how love affects the emotions. This is human psychology from a biblical point of view *par excellence*. Look at verse 17. This is how love works. This is how it’s perfected. This is how it works in you.

## **“AS HE IS, SO ALSO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD”**

Then he writes a strange sentence. It’s like he changed the subject, but he didn’t. He said, “This is how it works. This is how we have boldness in the day of judgment: because as Jesus is, so also are we in this world” (1 Jn. 4:17b, paraphrased).

What? It seems like he changed the subject suddenly. He said, “Let me tell you how love works: it works in us in such a way that we have boldness in the day of judgment. The reason we have boldness in the day of judgment is because, as Jesus is, so also are we in this world.” Again, there are some strange phrases there at first reading.

The day of judgment is when God is fully revealed to the human race. There’s no more powerful day in terms of human beings encountering God than the day of judgment. The veil between man and God is lifted and the full, unveiled glory of God is presented before the human spirit. The human spirit will tremble before God on that day. The unbelievers will absolutely be filled with dread. Even believers in the Bible, when they experience the

presence of God, often tremble and fall like dead men, as John did in Revelation 1. When he saw Jesus in His glory, he fell like a dead man trembling. John said, “There’s going to be a surprising dynamic on the last day.” When the full glory of God is unveiled and we stand before Him, instead of dreading it, we’re going to have a strange emotion. We’re actually going to have boldness and confidence. Put the word *confidence* in the place of boldness. He says, “We’re not going to have dread. We’re going to have an opposite emotion. We’re going to have confidence.”

Beloved, how can we have confidence in the presence of the fully unveiled majesty of God? How could we ever have confidence at that level? John says, “I’ll tell you how: because as Jesus is, so also are we. In the same way that God the Father accepts Jesus, in that day we will see He accepts us exactly like He accepts Jesus.”

When the full truth is revealed, we will have boldness and confidence. Our spirits will be invigorated when we see the whole truth. Then he says this really interesting phrase. He says, “We have boldness, or confidence, in the day of judgment. Because in the way the Father accepts Jesus, He accepts us.”

Look at the last phrase there: “As Jesus is, so also are we when we finally get to heaven.” No, that’s not what it says. “As Jesus is, so also are we, even in this age while we’re in the flesh.”

Beloved, did you know that right now in this world, right now tonight, He accepts you like He accepts Jesus right now? Not only can we have boldness on the day the glory of God is fully unveiled; we can have boldness and confidence right now. That’s John’s point. He says, “If we have boldness on the most intense day of human history, how much more can we have boldness right now? Do we really understand that the way the Father receives Jesus is the way He receives us because of the blood of Jesus?”

### **“THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE; BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR”**

We’ll end with verse 18. He said, “Let me explain how boldness or confidence works in the human emotions. There’s no fear when love is understood. When love is understood, there’s no fear” (1 Jn. 4:18, paraphrased). He doesn’t say the words, “When love is understood,” but that’s what it means.

When love is experienced and understood, there’s no fear in the relationship. What John is saying is this: “If we could grasp the way God feels about us, we wouldn’t have the negative fear.” We would have the fear of God; that’s a positive fear. We wouldn’t have the negative fear of wanting to draw back from God, even in our weakness.

He gives the key principle in verse 18. He says, “There’s no fear when love is understood properly. As a matter of fact, perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn. 4:18, paraphrased). Instead of the word *perfect*, put the word *mature*.

A mature understanding of love drives fear out of the relationship. John is giving biblical psychology of how the human heart works. He says, “You have fear in your relationship with God? I tell you how to get rid of fear. The understanding of the love of God, the ocean of His love, abiding in love, will drive fear out of the relationship entirely.”

Beloved, we want to go deeply in love. We want to study it. We want to combine it with a spirit of obedience. With a spirit of obedience, we have the ability to feel the power of love more strongly. Fear, the negative fear, is driven out of the relationship between God and us.

He goes on now and says, “Let me tell you how it works: wherever there’s fear, it involves torment.”

Where people have fear in a relationship—fear of rejection is the idea: fear of judgment, fear of punishment. When you meet with someone and you have the assurance that they really enjoy you, you have no fear when you’re meeting with them. If you meet with someone and you don’t know how he or she feels about you, you may have a little fear at first. After a while, when you find out that this person really likes you, the fear goes away. When you’re going to meet someone and you know they’re mad and they’re going to correct you, when they’re really going to give it to you strongly, particularly if they’re an authority figure, you’re sweating bullets the day before: “I have to meet with the guy tomorrow, he’s so mad at me, and he’s my boss.”

Fear involves torment. Fear of rejection, fear of punishment, always brings torment. It brings an emotional storm. But John says, the believer who has this feeling of condemnation and shame, this feeling of rejection, which all of us do by nature, hasn’t been perfected in his understanding. He’s not rebuking this person; he’s actually telling us out of the storm of negative emotions, “The man who has fears hasn’t been perfected in his understanding of the love of God. If he’ll spend time focusing and going deeply in the subject of how God feels about him, it will drive fear out of the relationship. Torment will be out of the relationship and he will have confidence with God. The storm on the inside will go away. Then he will bear fruit and have joy.” Joy, again, is that diamond with many facets. Many facets of the joy of God will be deep in their spirit.

Beloved, this is the way to walk in victory, right here. Let’s read the whole two verses again. Now that I have laid out the principles, let me just end by reading through the passage.

“Love has been perfected. Love has been made mature in your Christian experience in this way. Here’s how love is made mature. We know that we have confidence even on the judgment day. On the most intense day of human history we have confidence. How much more can we have confidence, or boldness, now with God? Why? Because in the same way God accepted Jesus because of the cross, He accepts us. Not just in heaven, either; He accepts us now, even in this world” (1 Jn. 4:16-18, paraphrased).

What’s the impact of that? There’s no fear of rejection; there’s no fear of punishment (1 Jn. 4:18). There’s no fear of being pushed out of the relationship where love is mature in understanding. As a matter of fact, fears that we have by nature in our walk with God, because we have grown up with wrong ideas about God, will be driven out of the relationship by the perfect understanding of the love of God.

Why do we want fear out of the relationship? It’s obvious that we want it out. He really gives a strong description here. Fear involves the torment of being punished and rejected.

By the way, this is true in human relationships as well as our relationship with God. Whenever you’re fearful of rejection, you have torment emotionally. It unsettles you; it makes you feel terrible, etc.

All of us by nature have fear in our relationship with God. John goes on and ends with this: “Don’t camp out there. Grow, perfect, or mature, in your understanding of the love of God, and fear will be driven out of the relationship.”

Amen.

## **MINISTRY TIME**

Everyone in this room who loves Jesus, your response is, “I want to abide in love. I want to go for this.” I can’t have a ministry time of asking, “Who wants to commit to abide in love?” There would be no point in going forward. You’re all right now standing before God saying yes. I want to lead you in that commitment. I would like you all for a moment to close your eyes so that you’re not distracted by the people around you.

Here’s the exhortation. Abide in love. Stay with it. Go deeply. Study it. Meditate. Never, ever leave this subject. Never graduate from it, ever.

You’re saying to the Lord, “I believe in the love of God, but I don’t abide in it. I don’t dwell in it. I don’t camp out there. I don’t lock into that subject, but I’m going to, by the grace of God. Starting tonight, I’m going to. If I used to, I’m going to sign back up tonight. I’m going for this. This is what I want.”

Just talk to the Lord for a moment. This can shift the way you pursue your spiritual life. Right now, it can shift. I’m thinking of the ATC students, who are fifteen years old. Allen was twenty-one or twenty-two. He made this decision back in those early days. Twenty years later, or more, he testifies that it radically shifted his life when he made the love of God—experiencing it, understanding it, and studying it—the premier focus of his journey in God.

We do many things out of that. We impact and serve others, and many, many things. I believe this could be a night where this could mark your heart. I’m talking to the teens here, and all the rest of us as well. Twenty years from now, you could have Allen’s story. I’m not saying you’ll have his calling. That’s not even the point. You could have his journey, his heart journey; you could say, “I went after this.”