

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 JOHN 3:1-4:6

There's a Peanuts cartoon strip where Charlie Brown is conversing with Lucy. She says, *"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 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 and 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 interrupts him, *"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."*

And this is the problem we're having in our world today. We're having a hard time explaining, and even talking about love. Definitions and dialogue have broken down. Emotions are raw. Nerves are frayed. Tweets get misinterpreted. We all need understanding.

And here John comes to our rescue. He 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 with a bang, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” The Greek word translated “*manner*” means “from what country.” It speaks of a behavior or trait indicative of a particular nationality.

It reminds me of a joke, “Heaven is where the police are British, the chefs are Italian, the mechanics are German, the lovers are French, and it's all organized by the Swiss.” Such a world would be heaven indeed!

Whereas, Hell is where the police are German, the chefs are British, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss, and it's all organized by the Italians.”

Different countries in the world are known for their own peculiar proclivities. *And so is heaven!* Heaven is known for what's in such short supply on earth - *love!*

And particularly God's love! Ephesians 3:18 speaks of “the width and length and depth and height” of Christ's love. His love is **wide** enough to cross borders and break down walls. It's **long** enough to outlive years and disappointing memories. It dives **deep** enough to reach the lowest sinner. And it rises **high** enough to touch the heart of God and atone for all our sins.

Think of the degree of love it took for the eternal, holy, impeccable God to make children out of sinful, rebellious, onerous us. Spiritually speaking, I was a dumpster diver -

when I think of where I've been, the scraps I've sucked on, the scum I've swam in, the depths to which I've sunk, the shameful stuff I've done.

Yet God in heaven made a way for me to become His kid. Those who are in Christ are now children of the King. *Behold the mind-blowing love God has for us!*

But he continues in verse 1, **“Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”**

Jesus was THE Son of God - He reflected the Father in all He did and said - yet the Jews brushed Him off, they called Him a blasphemer. They didn't recognize God's Son, because they didn't know God the Father.

And this is the sad case for all God's children.

In Christ we are co-heirs with Jesus - beneficiaries of divine grace and mercy. We are members of God's forever family; yet we're either brushed aside and ignored - we're scoffed at and persecuted. We too are not recognized and appreciated for who we really are!

Movie star, Helen Hunt, is a successful leading lady and director. In 1997 she won an Oscar for best actress. She's also won four Emmy Awards, and four Golden Globes. Yet she's not always recognized.

Recently, Helen placed an order at her neighborhood Starbucks. When she went to pick up her drink, fellow actress, Jodie Foster's name was written on the side of the cup. Later Helen tweeted, **“Ordered my drink @Starbucks asked the barista if she wanted my name. She winked and said ‘We gotcha’ #JodieFoster.”**

And just as the barista didn't recognize the movie star, this world doesn't recognize us for who we are.

If you're a Christian your heart is the sight of a miracle. God's Spirit now resides in you! Your heart is a sacred place. Yet instead of being treated as special, you're often treated as a number, or just another face in the crowd, or stereotyped, or even racially profiled.

Don't let the way the world treats you effect how you see yourself! As Christians don't allow the world to press us into its mold, *rather than live out what God has put in. We need to remember who we are in Christ.*

In Colossians 3:3 Paul writes to the believers, **“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”**

We need to realize the Christian life is **the hidden life**. The world looks at the Christian, and our devotion makes no sense. They scoff, **“She's committed herself completely to Christ, and has nothing to show for it!”**

And in a sense the world is right... Our God is invisible... Our home is over the horizon, out-of-sight, off-the-map... Our greatest rewards are still future...

Our Savior is seen only through eyes of faith...

Our helper, the Holy Spirit, is like the wind - *He's spiritual rather than tangible - sensed not seen...*

Our treasure is buried in our hearts... Our source of joy, and love, and power, and peace is accessed only from the inside of our lives. *The handles are on the inside.* In short, our **“life is hidden with Christ in God...”**

Yet one day our plight will change, verse 2, “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.” One day, God is going to let the cat out of the bag! What we truly are - the glorious children of God - will be revealed! *Everyone will 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 of the Church, Christians will be given new bodies. Our rotting flesh will be transformed. Rather than defined by our physicality or our race, we'll radiate God's glory.

Our current bodies are too opaque. All you see of me now is the like the dust jacket of a book. *And we all know you can't judge a book by its cover.* My eternal body will be more transparent. When Jesus comes the glory on the inside of me, will be seen from 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 or grows tired.

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

Recall Jesus vanished before the disciples on the Road to Emmaus; then He 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. They say rather than changing our world for the better, rapture believers just sit on their hands, and twiddle their thumbs, and bide their time waiting for a future event... but that’s not true!

In verse 3 John says the rapture hope is a powerful motivation for godliness today! “**Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**”

A young lady with a date to the prom isn’t idle 30 minutes before the boy picks her up. She’s primping and getting ready. She wants to look her best when he comes for her. And likewise the Bride of Christ wants to be at her best when Jesus returns. It’s the constant expectation of His arrival that keeps us on our toes.

Wherever I go, whatever I do – I need to first ask myself if Jesus returned this moment is this where I’d want Him to find me? We want to be *pure... for sure!*

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.**” Lawlessness is what we’ve seen this week as peaceful protests devolved into rioting and looting. It’s a reckless disregard for law and order.

*But now think of lawlessness as the same disregard for **God’s laws and order.*** Imagine, ransacking His order for

marriage, or sexuality, or personal integrity. To ignore or transgress His law does violence to His glory.

Yet here's the good news, sin can be paid for by proxy. In God's court someone else can make my bail or pay my penalty. **This was done by Jesus.** The One in whom "*there is no sin*" took away my sin and yours.

"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 to sin.*"

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

And man's problem is not that he occasionally misses God's glory. *It's not that his eye will mist up, or he'll get distracted, or his hand slips...* **It's that his aim is bad.** Our problem is internal. Our nature is stained by sin. We're warped and 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 can no longer slip up and sin. *It happens*, but the problem is no longer a warped nature. Evil is no longer internal to my spirit - *its external.* It's

the pressures of this world, or the devil, or my flesh that cause me miss the target.

That means the key to living the Christian life is to abide in Christ. Rely on Him to live His life through me.

As believers there'll be times we miss the mark, but it's no longer because we can't aim correctly. 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 at times 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.” It's like father like son. A child of God acts godly. Whereas, evildoers are the devil's children. A child will mimic his or her dad.

I've told this story many times, but it illustrates the point. Once me and my three older kids were walking around the corner of the house: *Zack, Nick, and Natalie*. They were just tots. We'd turned the corner when I spit into the yard. That's when Zack spit; then Nick spit; then... *you guessed it*, my darling daughter spit. Kathy saw it, and I heard about it, but it happened.

Kids take after their father, and it's true spiritually. If God is your Dad you'll make a habit of doing what's right, but if you habitually sin, or harbor hatred; then regardless what you claim, 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 this world to break Satan’s chokehold, and set us free from the devil’s influence.

In John 10:10 Jesus exposes Satan’s goal, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.” Satan works to rip us off. He’s out to kill - our joy, our peace, our thanksgiving - but Jesus is our bodyguard. He’d take a bullet for you... *or even a nail.*

Satan tries to destroy, while 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 (i.e. “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 other words, righteousness and unrighteousness is in the genes. Actually, today, every dysfunction and sinful behavior is blamed on genetics.

From serial killers, to homosexuals, to alcoholics, folks claim they were born that way. *And in a sense they’re right...* We’re all born with a proclivity to sin.

We can all blame our problems on the sin nature we inherited from the first man, Adam. Yet we still have a responsibility. We can be born again through Christ! Jesus will take out our *defiant spirit* and replace it with a *compliant spirit* - that loves God and loves others!

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.” Recently, two Russian women swapped two year old toddlers. The hospital had sent the families 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 written on her baby boy’s ID bracelet.

DNA tests confirmed the mistake.

And here John says that many churches make the same mistake. We actually send people 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 surrender to God’s will, or harbors hatred toward certain people - *you can get baptized until your fingertips prune up - or attend church more than a church mouse - or tithe with a automatic bank withdrawal - but you’ve got a problem.*

We’re hearing a lot these days about how everyone needs to help put an end to racism. I’ve concluded the best thing I, and preachers like me, can do is make sure church-folk know

you're not a true believer if don't *do what's right and love one another*. 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. It's been said, “A man green with envy is ripe for trouble.”

And that was certainly true in the case of Cain.

The story goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. In fact, *do you know what the first man and woman were doing after they sinned and got kicked out of the Garden of Eden?* Answer: “They were raising Cain!”***

Cain was their first son. Their second son was Abel.

Abel realized His lawlessness, and that God wanted justice. *God wants justice too*. And since the wages of sin is death, Abel brought a sacrifice to God's altar.

But Cain was a proud man. He brought God his crops - *the work of his hands*. Rather than offer God what **God** wanted, Cain offered what was convenient for *him*. And God rejected Cain while accepting Abel.

Of course, this sent Cain into a rage. He was angry.

Cain didn't get what he wanted, and took out his frustrations on Abel by attacking and killing his brother.

Understand, *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, so that man will take out his anger, and failure, and envy on God's representatives.

This is why John tells them not to be surprised by persecution. He writes in verse 13, **"Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you."** *And neither should we be shocked if you and I are hated for Jesus' sake.*

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 us, **"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. Anger may never pull an actual trigger, but folks can pull a trigger in their 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 - I can go a second mile, and make small sacrifices for other people.

John 3:16 tells us how God loves us... *He gave His only begotten Son.* Now **1 John 3:16** tells us how we ought to love one another... *by laying down our lives.*

“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 up your heart...

It may be that for some reason God speaks to you and shuts down your effort, but never shut up your heart. 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.

Notice here, three traits of genuine love... **It sees needs, it feels needs, it meets needs.** Verse 18, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Anyone can talk a good talk, but true love is love in action. It’s love that embraces truth.

And if you’re a white person at this time in the history of our nation, here’s how you can love a black person.

You can **see** the injustices that occur way too often. The fear, the suspicion, the unjust profiling that awaits African-American sons. And before you spout theories as to why it happens, *can you just see that it does?*

There’s a young black man in our church, he’s a wonderful kid, he’s worked hard to buy his first car. But he wouldn’t drive it until he got his tags in the mail; for fear of what might

happen if he was pulled over. *When my sons bought their first car getting arrested because they didn't have proper tags, never crossed their mind.*

We need to **feel** the effect this bias has on our black brothers and sisters! Moms fear for their sons. Wives fear for their husbands. How does a black man react when the blue lights are in his rearview mirror, and he's done nothing wrong? The fear might not always be justified in the moment, *but why is it always there?*

A few weeks ago a black employee of Calvary CSM, *everyone's friend Vernon*, had to move some sound equipment from our cabin to the church. It was late that night before Vern could get to church to do his job, so he called a Gwinnett County police officer that attends, to let him know what he was doing, *just in case...*

When Vern told me what he'd done and why, it broke my heart. You can doubt if he really needed to make that call, **but you need to feel why he did!**

I'd trust Vernon with my life, and it deeply troubles me that someone else might not trust him with lousy sound gear; and for no other reason than his skin color.

Will you stand up for equality when racism raises its ugly head? Will you speak up when ignorance is being spouted? Will you lay down your life for a brother in Christ - *even a brother of another color?* Don't just love in word, *or on Facebook*, but love in deed and in truth.

Then 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, 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, God knows it too. You can't fool God. He speaks even louder than your heart speaks.

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God." It's been said, "Your conscience is like a baby, it has to go to sleep before you can." If you know there's a twinge of hatred or prejudice in your heart, it's time to repent before God!

"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 lives by God's law and order - is a heart that's in harmony with God - *and from that heart will flow prayers that are likely to be answered.*

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."

One of mankind's tendencies is to complicate. It's said, "America has 35 million laws trying to enforce 10 commandments." But God keeps His commandments simple... **believe in Jesus and love one another.**

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 we have in the spiritual realm. Love is demonstrated in objectively - we love 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 can plant thoughts in my mind - the world sends messages - 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 identification 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 spiritual façade of any impression, **discover what it says about Jesus.**

A spirit - or inner influence - that isn't *correct about* and *honoring of* the person of Jesus is evil and should be rejected. If it doesn't exalt Jesus; it's not of God!

So let's say your boyfriend tells you he's been praying about it, and he believes God would approve of the two of you having sex tonight... you need to test the spirits, *and how would you do that?* “What did Jesus teach? Would He agree?” The answer is “no.”

In particular, John was 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.**

These false teachers denied that God had come in human form. They believed that matter was intrinsically evil, thus God would never have taken a physical body.

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 appeared, but not in flesh and bone. He was a phantom. They concocted tales of Him walking on the beach and leaving no footprints.

Other Gnostics believed the Spirit of God rested on the man Jesus until just before He crucifixion - at which point *the divine spirit* departed from *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.**

Thus John writes, *“Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.”*

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

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

Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons, and other cults affirm Jesus' humanity, but they deny His Godhood. He was an angel, or “a god” - but 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.”* Revelation 13 speaks of a global leader, who leads a last days revolt against God. He's Anti-christ.

But his spirit has been around since *John's day*.

And even *today* there's a strong spirit of antichrist in our 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 every ideology, except those who speak for Jesus... *The evil Antichrist has yet to appear, but his spirit is already at work.*

Verse 4, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Remember, as Christians we face an evil trinity: the world, the flesh, the devil.

*The **world** wants to beat us up... The **devil** attempts to rip us off... Our own **flesh** tries to drag us down...*

Needless to say, the Christian life is not a sheltered life. God allows us to undergo hardships, but in all that we undergo our God promises to help us overcome.

And here’s how, let’s read verse 4 again, “Because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Remember, **One plus God equals a majority!**

At times it may appear as if the world is stacked against you. Your opponent’s hand is loaded with Aces and Kings - just remember you have the trump card!

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

When you **need strength**, recall the God who hung the heavens dwells in you... **Need wisdom**, keep in mind the mind of God that knows all mysteries abides in you... **Need calm and composure**, hey, the God who slept through the storm rides in your boat... And when you **need love**, don’t forget the love that sacrificed itself upon a tree, is now alive in your heart.

Let me suggest we all put this verse to memory, “*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. Let God train your ear and you’ll hear God. But tune your ear to this world and you’ll be deaf to the voice of God through His people.

And note in verse 6, when the Apostle John says, *“we are of God”* the *“we”* refers to himself and the other apostles. Then when he says, *“He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us”* he’s not on some ego trip. He’s affirming the position the first 12 apostles occupied in God’s plan for His Church.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20 that the Church was built on the foundation of the apostles! Thus, those led by God’s Spirit would pay attention to the apostles who God had been authorized to speak on God’s behalf.

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

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

In closing, love not in word only, but in deed and truth. Real love *sees needs, feels needs, meets needs.*