

CHRISTIANITY *(defined)*
A Study of 1 John
“You CAN Face Your Future without Fear”
1 John 4:15-21

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INTRODUCTION: We are honoring mothers today. It’s not easy to be a mother. I read this story recently. Sharon is a mother with a four-year old daughter. One night she asked her if she had brushed her teeth. Her daughter said, “I not only brushed my teeth, I brushed my dog’s teeth, too.” Sharon explained to her that she shouldn’t brush her dog’s teeth. The next day, Sharon replaced her daughter’s toothbrush with a new one. Her daughter asked, “Why did you give me a new toothbrush?” Sharon reminded her that she had used it to brush her dog’s teeth. Her daughter said, “But Mommy, I didn’t use my toothbrush to brush the dog’s teeth; I used yours!”

We’ve been talking about love for a few weeks. Have you discovered that some people are hard to please? Some people believe that one the spiritual gifts is the gift of criticism, and they use it freely. As you know there are many sites where people can leave reviews – like Yelp, Tripadvisor, and Google reviews. I’m not making these up. These are some of the crazy complaints that some people have made: (1)

Restaurant review: The restaurant said children eat free, but my 19-year-old daughter still got charged for her meal. (2) Snorkeling in the Caribbean: “No one told us there were fish in the water. Our children were terrified.” (3) Trip to Italy: You assured us Italy was the best place for an authentic food experience. We went to a Mexican restaurant in Rome and the waiter was Italian. (4) Hotel Review: “The maid who cleaned our room made our towel into a swan shape. I don’t like swans.” (5) Trip to Paris: “We bought Ray-Ban sunglasses from a street vendor for 5 Euros, only to find out they were fake.”

(6) Beach Resort: “The beach was too sandy. We had to clean everything when we returned to our room.” (7) Visit to the Louvre: “The Mona Lisa was too small. What a disappointment.” (8) Statue

of Liberty: (1/5 stars) It's just a statue in the middle of the water. We thought it would be bigger.

There are some people who can never seem to be pleased. And we find those kinds of chronic complainers hard to love. As I mentioned two weeks ago, we often say that there are some people who are hard to love. Actually, they are impossible to love – in our strength. That's why we need the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts.

John is continuing to write about love in 1 John 4. I call it the real love chapter of the Bible because the word “agape” appears twenty-seven times in just twenty-one verses. Let's read more about God's love in 1 John 4:15-21: *(love = 14x)* **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister.**

Many of you have watched the popular Avengers movies. They have made more than \$7 Billion. In the last installment, End Game, some of the Avengers figure out a way to go back in time to undo the damage Thanos caused when he killed half the population of the universe. Time travel has been a popular science fiction subject since H.G. Wells wrote The Time Machine in 1895. If you had a chance to travel to your future, would you do it? Some of you would do it in a heartbeat, but some of you might decline because the idea of the future seems scary to you. Well, you don't need a time machine because the Bible tells us a great deal about the future. And my main thought today is that you can face

your future without fear. Let's consider three powerful truths from this passage:

1. OUR DESTINY: All of us will face judgment. Every person, whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian, you will face judgement in the future. The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, ***"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."*** When the Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once" it is speaking of the absolute certainty of death. Someone has said the only two things certain in life are death and taxes. Will Rogers said, ***"The only difference between death and taxes is that death doesn't get any worse every time Congress meets."***

Death is certain – and so is judgment. So what is your attitude as you consider your death and the following judgment. Let me ask you:

(1) Do you have an attitude of anxiety? Do you fear the future? In verse 18, John uses the word "fear" four times in connection with judgement. Many people fear judgment because they think of the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of time. John described it in Revelation 20: ***"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence...and I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne...the dead were judged according to what they had done...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire...the lake of fire is the second death."*** (Revelation 20:11-15)

The most prominent painting in the Sistine Chapel is *The Last Judgment* painted by Michelangelo. It is a huge painting the covers the entire front wall. In it, Jesus can be seen with His hand raised as if He is issuing orders. In the bottom of the picture, he painted people who were crying out in anguish from being sentenced to eternity separated from God. Michelangelo painted one of his Vatican critics as King Minos, the king of hell with a hideous snake wrapped around him. It's a scary scene. And it is bad news for anyone who spends their entire life rejecting God's gift of eternal life.

(2) You can have an attitude of assurance! Born-again believers won't be at the Great White Throne Judgment – only the spiritually dead will be there. Romans 8:1 reassures us ***"That there in NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

This judgement is called the *Bema*, which means judgment seat. But this judgment isn't for condemnation, it is one of commendation. It will be a time Jesus passes out rewards for our service. It will be a time of rejoicing and rewards. And we don't have to face that judgment with fear. You can face it with absolute assurance.

At the Great White Throne Judgment, those whose names were not found written in the Book of Life were cast into the Lake of Fire, which is the second death. But when you are born again, your name is written down in the Lamb's book of life. Jesus told Nicodemus, it's like being born again. So here's how it works. There are two deaths and two births. When you die physically, that's the first death. But for those found guilty at the Great White Throne, they will also die eternally. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again if he wanted to see the Kingdom. So here's the truth. If you're born once, you'll die twice, but if you're born twice; you'll only die once.

Here's another way to illustrate it. Let's say that you're driving down the street and see a policeman with a radar gun pointing your way. You glance down and see that you are driving 15mph over the posted speed limit. You have anxiety and fear because you're guilty. But let's say you look down and you are driving exactly the speed limit. There's no fear, instead there is assurance. That's the way it is with followers of Jesus, we have been declared not guilty, and God's perfect love drives out all fear.

So that's our destiny. Now, let's talk about our:

2. OUR DEBT: We can never repay the debt of love we owe. In verse 19 we read that we love God because He first loved us. God loves us so much that we could never in a million years be able to pay back the debt of love we owe Him. In verse 10 John wrote, **"Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."**

Okay, let's pay hymn trivia. I'm going to give you a phrase from a hymn and you try to think of the hymn it comes from. The phrase is, "The debt of love I owe." Give up? It's from the old hymn, **"Alas! And did my Saviour Bleed?"** It was written in 1735 by Isaac Watts. The first

verse says: **“Alas! and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sov’ reign die, Would He devote that sacred head, For such a worm as I?”**

Let’s hold it there for a minute. I can remember years ago when we were meeting in the old sanctuary which we call the chapel now. We bought hundreds of copies of the New Baptist Hymnal. One Sunday I was preaching and I pointed out the Baptist music editors had changed that verse. They must have thought the word “worm” was too uncouth or distasteful for a group of dignified Baptists, so they changed it to **“Would he devote that sacred head for sinners such as I.”** I pointed out that when King David was struggling with an episode of sin, he wrote in Psalm 22, “I am a worm, not a man.” So I had everyone take the hymnal out of the rack and turn to page #139. Then I had them take a pen or pencil and write in the word “worm” in that hymn. I’m told you can still find some copies of those hymnals with the word “worm” written in.

The hymn continues in the next to last verse: **“Thus might I hide my blushing face; While His dear cross appears; Dissolve my heart in thankfulness, And melt my eyes to tears.”** The final verse contains the phrase I mentioned: **But drops of grief can ne’er repay; The debt of love I owe; Here Lord, I give myself away: ’Tis all that I can do.”** Isaac Watts wrote that you can look on the cross and cry rivers of tears. But that won’t pay back the debt of love that we owe. Nothing can pay it back, so the only way we can come close is by giving ourselves to the Lord.

God paid an enormous price for our redemption, one that can never repay. The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:18: **“God paid a ransom to save you from the impossible road to heaven which your fathers tried to take, and the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver as you very well know. But he paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.”**

Now let’s talk about our:

3. OUR DEVOTION: We love others because God first loved us.

We have a debt of love that we'll never repay. But the way we show our appreciation to God is by obeying His command to love others. John offers two contrasting attitudes we have toward others.

(1) Hating someone is a contradiction of our faith. A person can talk about how much they love God. They can even sing songs like, "Oh how I love Jesus." But if they don't love their brother or sister, they are lying. John expressed it in these words in 1 John 4:20: **"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."**

As many of you know, I grew up in Alabama. As I grew up, I came to understand that Alabama is one of the most racially segregated states in the country. I can remember seeing water fountains and bathrooms for colored people only. And we never had any black folks attend our church.

Let's go back to 1979 and I was 26-year-old pastor of a church running a little over 100 people in central Alabama. I led the church to spend the outlandish price of about \$5000 to buy a church van. Then I enlisted a couple of men to van through a nearby mobile home park on Saturdays and offer to pick up children and bring them to Sunday School.

Everything was going great until one Sunday morning, the driver picked up a little African American boy and brought him to Sunday School. Our Sunday School Superintendent was a big man named Vernon. He had red hair and temper to match. He stomped into my office that morning and slammed the door. His face was red and his veins were popping out as he yelled, "Did you know there is a (and he used the n word) boy in our Sunday School?"

At the time I didn't know that because I hadn't heard that he was there. And I said, "Vernon. I think we ought to welcome him to our church." He didn't like that so he said, "Well, either he goes or I go. Because I can't go a church with no (n-word again)."

I was a young, inexperienced preacher, so I didn't really know what to say. So I just said, "Well, Vernon, what do you think Jesus would do?" He didn't like that either, and I'll never forget, he stormed out and got in

his car and screeched out of the parking lot. I thought I was done. He was one of our four deacons and one of the biggest contributors to the church.

So, I had to compose myself and go out and preach that morning. As I preached, I didn't know if Vernon would ever be back. On Monday evening, Vernon came to my house. We were living in a parsonage at the time. Vernon sat down on the crouch and said, "Preacher, I didn't get much sleep last night. I thought about what you said. And I was wrong. All my life I've sung that "Jesus loves the little children of the world. Red and yellow black and white – they are precious in His sight." I figured if Jesus loves that little boy, I can love him, too. I will welcome him to our church if he comes back." By now, there were tears streaming down his face. It was amazing to watch a man who had been a Christian for many years transformed by the love of God. He really did love God and he found that he couldn't show hatred at the same time that he loved God.

(2) Loving others is a confirmation of our faith. On the other hand, when we love those who we might not ordinarily love, it is proof positive that we are a child of God. I'm not talking about loving those who love you. This includes loving your enemies and loving those who don't love you. Down in 1 John 3:14 we read: **"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters."**

Next week, God willing, Pastor Michael and I will preach a message from 1 John 5 entitled, "Spiritual Birthmarks." One of the most prominent marks of being born again is loving others.

God's heart is one of love. Does your life reflect that love? A few years ago the *Houston Chronicle* had an unusual picture on the front page. It was a picture of a grown woman who had her ear on the chest of a teenage girl. The caption explained that the woman's teenage son had recently died in an accidental shooting. The young girl had been waiting for a heart transplant for months. Her son's heart was successfully transplanted into the chest of the young girl in the picture. As she was listening to the beating of her son's heart, tears filled her eyes. When I read about that, I had this thought. I prayed, "Lord, I hope that when

people listen to my heart that they will hear the heartbeat of your Son.”
God’s heart is full of love.

My wife and I live on a cul-de-sac. There are eight houses on our cul-de-sac and we love all our neighbors. But you can’t drive through a cul-de-sac. A lot of people turn down our street thinking they are turning onto New Copeland Road, and when they reach the end of the cul-de-sac, there’s only one thing they can do – turn around and head back. It doesn’t lead anywhere else.

One time I heard Tony Evans say that there are two kinds of Christians. There are cul-de-sac Christians and conduit Christians. If you are a cul-de-sac Christian you are going to limit what God does in your life and you will experience a bunch of dead-ends and turn-arounds. If you are a conduit Christian you are someone through whom the Love of God flows. You aren’t just a recipient of God’s love; you are a channel of God’s love.

The more of God’s love you give and share, the more of God’s love you will receive. If you want more of God’s love, show God’s love more.

CONCLUSION: There’s a famous allegory that has often been falsely attributed to C.S. Lewis. Where ever the story originated, it makes a powerful point about the difference between the selfishness of hatred and the generosity of love.

A man had a dream one night and he found himself in Heaven. An angel met him and the man asked to see the difference between Heaven and Hell. The angel took the man to a door and opened it. The room was filled with large round tables. In the middle of each table was a large pot of stew that smelled so good the visitor’s mouth began to water.

People were seated around every table, but the visitor noticed that they were all thin and sickly. They appeared to be starving.

Then the visitor noticed that each person had a long spoon attached to their hands. The handles of the spoon were three feet long. Each person tried to dip the spoon in the pot to feed themselves, but the spoons were too long for them to bring the stew to their hungry mouths. The visitor shuddered at the sight of such frustration and misery.

The angel led him out and said, “That was hell.” He led him to another door and opened it. He said, “And this is Heaven.”

At first, the visitor thought it was the same room. There were round tables in the room each with a simmering pot of delicious stew in the middle of the table. But the visitor immediately noticed the difference in the people there. They were each equipped with the identical long spoons, but everyone seemed happy, nourished, and satisfied. They were laughing and talking.

The visitor said, “I don’t understand.” The angel said, “Just watch.”

Then the visitor noticed that each person dipped their spoon in the stew and carefully fed the person across the table from them. The angel said, “It requires only one skill – sharing. These people have learned to feed each other, while greedy people are miserable because they only think about themselves.”

All of us will face a future that includes judgment. But you don’t have to face it with fear. When the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, you can have confidence to stand before God. His perfect love for you drives out all fear.