

# CHAPTER 4

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN 4

In this chapter the apostle cautions against seducing spirits; advises to try them, and gives rules by which they may be known, and by which they are distinguished from others; and then returns to his favourite subject, brotherly love. He exhorts the saints not to believe every man that came with a doctrine to them, but to try them, since there were many false teachers in the world; and gives a rule by which they may be tried and judged, as that whatever teacher owns Christ to be come in the flesh is of God, but he that does not is not of God, but is the spirit of antichrist that should come, and was in the world, (~~1~~ John 4:1,2), but, for the comfort of those to whom he writes, he observes, that they were of God, and had overcome these false teachers, through the mighty power of the divine Spirit in them, who is greater than Satan, and all his emissaries, (~~1~~ John 4:4). He distinguishes between seducing spirits, and faithful ministers of the word; the former are of the world, speak of worldly things, and worldly men hear them; but the latter are of God, and they that have any spiritual knowledge of God hear them; but such as are not of God do not hear them, by which may he know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error, (~~1~~ John 4:5,6). And then the apostle returns to his former exhortation to brotherly love, which he enforces by the following reasons, because it is of God, a fruit of his Spirit and grace, and because it is an evidence of being born of God, and of having a true knowledge of him; whereas he that is destitute of it does not know him, seeing God is love, (~~1~~ John 4:7,8), and having affirmed that God is love, he proves it, by the mission of his Son, to be a propitiation for the sins of such that did not love him, and that they might live through him; wherefore he argues, that if God had such a love to men, so undeserving of it, then the saints ought to love one another, (~~1~~ John 4:9-11). Other arguments follow, engaging to it, as that God is invisible; and if he is to be loved, then certainly his people, who are visible; and that such who love one another, God dwells in them, and his love is perfected in them; and that he dwells in them is known by the gift of his Spirit to them, (~~1~~ John 4:12,13), and that God the Father so loved the world, as to send his Son to be the Saviour of it, before asserted,

is confirmed by the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of it; who also declare, that whoever confesses the sonship of Christ, God dwells in him, and he in God; and who had an assurance of the love of God to them, who is love itself; so that he that dwells in God, and God in him, dwells in love, (<sup>(1)</sup>1 John 4:14-16). And great are the advantages arising from hence, for hereby the saints' love to God is made perfect; they have boldness in the day of judgment, since as he is, so are they in this world, and fear is cast out by it, (<sup>(2)</sup>1 John 4:17,18), but lest too much should be thought to be ascribed to love, that is said to be owing to the love of God to them, which is prior to theirs to him, and the reason of it, (<sup>(3)</sup>1 John 4:19). And the chapter is closed with observing the contradiction there is between a profession of love to God, and hatred of the brethren, seeing God, who is invisible, cannot be loved, if brethren that are seen are hated; and also the commandment, that he that loves God should love his brother also, (<sup>(4)</sup>1 John 4:20,21).

**Ver. 1.** *Beloved, believe not every spirit,* &c.] The apostle having mentioned the word “spirit” in the latter part of the preceding chapter, takes an occasion from thence to return to what he had been suggesting in the “second” chapter, concerning the many antichrists that then were, and whom he points out, and here cautions against. By “every spirit” he means, either every doctrine that is pretended to come from the Spirit of God, or every teacher, who professes to be qualified and sent by him, and to have his light, knowledge, and doctrine from him. Every true minister of the Gospel has the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit, more or less, to qualify him for his work; he is separated, and called to it by him, and receives his spiritual light and knowledge from him; it is he that teaches him sound doctrine, and leads him into all truth, as it is in Jesus, and brings every necessary truth to his remembrance; and who succeeds his ministrations to the good of souls: but there are some who call themselves the ministers of the Gospel, who, though they may have some natural abilities, and a share of human learning, and a notional knowledge of things, yet have never received either grace or gifts from the Spirit; nor have they been ever called by him; nor are their ministrations according to that divine word which is inspired by him, nor attended with his demonstration and power; wherefore, though some professing to have the Spirit of Christ are to be believed, yet not everyone; and though the Spirit is not to be quenched in any, nor prophesying to be despised, yet care should be taken what is heard and received: some persons are so obstinate and incredulous as not to

believe anything that is declared, be the evidence what it will; as the Jews would not believe Christ and his apostles, though what they said agreed with Moses and the prophets, and was confirmed by miracles; and others are too credulous; at once receive every teacher, and embrace every upstart doctrine: this they should not do,

*but try the spirits whether they are of God;* not by human reason, especially as carnal and unsanctified; for though the doctrines of the Gospel are not contrary to true reason, they are above it, and not to be judged of by it, and are disapproved of and rejected by carnal reason; but by the word of God, which is the standard of all doctrine; and whatever agrees with that is to be received, and what does not should be rejected. And so to do is very commendable, as appears from the instance of the Bereans, who on this account are said to be more noble than those of Thessalonica, (<sup><4471></sup>Acts 17:11); and from the commendation of the church at Ephesus, (<sup><4480></sup>Revelation 2:2). And this is what every believer, every private Christian should do; to them it belongs to read and search the Scriptures, and prove all things, and judge for themselves of the truth of doctrine; and to such a probation or trial of the spirits, spiritual light, knowledge, judgment, sense, experience, and divine guidance are necessary, which should be asked of God, and an increase thereof; and all such diligent searchers, and humble inquirers, are capable of making judgment of persons and doctrines, whether they are from the Spirit of God or not, for the Spirit of God never speaks contrary to his word: and the reason why such a trial should be made is,

*because many false prophets are gone out into the world:* such who pretended either to a revelation of future things, and to foretell things to come; or rather to a gift of prophesying, or preaching in Christ's name, to be "prophets" and spiritual men, and ministers of the word, but were "false" ones; who either predicted what did not come to pass, or rather preached false doctrine, by corrupting the word, and handling it deceitfully, and so imposed upon and ruined the souls of others, as well as deceived their own: and there were not only one, or two, or a few of these, but "many", as our Lord had foretold, (<sup><4481></sup>Matthew 24:11,24); and which makes the reason the stronger for not believing every spirit, but trying them; and the rather, since they were not sent of God, but called out by his churches, but were "gone out" of themselves; of their own heads, and without any mission from God or man: and "into the world" too; they were in every part of it, and especially where there were any churches of Christ;

into which they first crept in privily, and at unawares, but afterwards became public preachers of the word, and then separating from them, set up openly in the world for themselves.

**Ver. 2.** *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God, &c.*] This is a rule by which believers may know whether a man professing to have the Spirit of God, and to be called and sent by him, and whether the doctrine he preaches, is of him or not:

*every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God;* or of the Spirit of God; that is, every doctrine which carries this truth in it; or every man that owns, and professes, and publishes this doctrine concerning Christ, is on the side of God and truth; and which contains several articles in it, respecting the person and office of Christ; as that he existed before he came in the flesh, not in the human nature, or as man, or as an angel, but as the Son of God, as a divine person, being truly and properly God; so that this confession takes in his divine sonship, and proper deity, and also his true and real humanity; that the Messiah was incarnate, against the Jews, and was God and man in one person; and that he was really man, and not in appearance only, against the heretics of those times: and it also includes his offices, as that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Messiah, which the Jews denied, and that he was the anointed prophet, priest, and King; and so is a confession or acknowledgment of all the doctrines of the Gospel, which came by him, as a prophet; and of his satisfaction, sacrifice, and intercession, as a priest; and of all his ordinances and commands as a King; and that he is the only Saviour and Redeemer of men. Now, whoever owns and declares this system of truth, “is of God”; not that everyone that assents unto this, or preaches it, is born of God; a man may believe, and confess all this, as the devils themselves do, and yet be destitute of the grace of God; but the spirit, or doctrine, which contains these things in it, is certainly of God, or comes from him; or whoever brings these truths with him, and preaches them, he is, so far as he does so, on the side of God and truth, and to be regarded.

**Ver. 3.** *And every spirit that confesseth not, &c.*] The proper deity and sonship of Christ, his true and real humanity, and his Messiahship; or any of his offices, doctrines, and ordinances; or his satisfaction and righteousness; or that peace, pardon, justification, life, and salvation, are by him; all which are meant by what follows,

*that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*: this clause is left out in the Ethiopic version, and that without hurting the sense, since it is easily supplied from the preceding verse; and the Alexandrian copy, and the Vulgate Latin version, only read “Jesus”: and the latter reads the whole thus, “and every spirit that dissolves Jesus”; that separates the two natures, human and divine, in him, and makes two persons of them; or denies either of them, either that he is truly God, or really man, or denies him to be Jesus, the Saviour; who, as much as in him lies, destroys his person, office, and work, and makes void his obedience, sufferings, and death:

*is not of God*; neither he nor his doctrine are of God; his doctrine cannot come from God, being contrary to the word of God; and he himself is neither born of God, nor on his side.

*And this is that [spirit] of antichrist*: who is against Christ, or opposes himself to him; as he who denies his sonship, his deity, his humanity, his offices, and his grace, manifestly does; every doctrine that is calculated against these truths is the spirit and doctrine of antichrist:

*whereof you have heard that it should come, and even now already is it the world*; in the false teachers, the forerunners of antichrist; (see Gill on “~~GEN~~1 John 2:18”).

**Ver. 4.** *Ye are of God, little children, &c.*] This, with what follows, is said for the comfort of the saints, and to deliver them from the fears of being drawn aside by the delusions of the false prophets, and antichrists; since they belonged to God, were his elect, and therefore could not be finally and totally seduced; they were the children of God by adopting grace, and could not become the servants of men; they were born of God, and so were kept by the power of God unto salvation, as all that are begotten unto a lively hope are; they were enlightened by the Spirit of God, and had a discerning of truth from error, and therefore could not be imposed upon:

*and have overcome them*; the false prophets, being in a good cause, fighting the good fight of faith, and having good weapons, particularly the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and invincible arguments from thence; and also gracious assistance from the Spirit of God, who gives a mouth that none can shut, and wisdom that none can resist; as well as an inward experience of the truth, and power of Gospel doctrines: a testimony within themselves, which will stand the whole shock and opposition of the enemy: the Vulgate Latin version reads, “and have

overcome him”; antichrist, whose spirit was then in the world; or the world itself, or Satan, the god of the world; and so the Ethiopic version reads, “and have overcome the evil one”, as in (<sup><4123></sup>1 John 2:13,14); the reason of which victory, and which adds to the comfort and support of saints in their present warfare, is,

*because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*; by “he that is in the world” is meant either the devil, the prince and god of the world, and who goes up and down in it, dwells in the hearts of the men of it, under whose influence they are, and in whom he works effectually; or antichrist, whose spirit was now in the world, and whose doctrine was propagated by the false teachers, in whom he began to appear; but he that is in the saints, either God who dwells in them, and their in him, (<sup><4115></sup>1 John 4:15); is mightier than the man of sin, and his emissaries, to keep and preserve from all corruptions, and every false way; or Christ, who dwells in their hearts by faith, and is stronger than the strong man armed, and able to save and deliver out of his hands; or the Spirit of God; and so the Arabic version reads, “the Spirit that is in you”; who is in the saints, as a spirit of regeneration and sanctification, as a spirit of adoption, and the earnest of their inheritance; he is able to carry on the work of grace in them, and finish it, and will do it; and he, as a spirit of truth, is more powerful than the spirit of error; and when the enemy comes in like a flood, or pours in a flood of errors and heresies, he lifts up a standard against him, causes him to fly, and secures the saints from being carried away with it: compare with this the Septuagint version of (<sup><3941></sup>Psalms 124:1,2), “if it had not been the Lord who was on our side”; which render it thus, “if the Lord had not been in us”.

**Ver. 5.** *They are of the world, &c.*] That is, the false prophets and teachers that were gone into the world, and had the spirit of antichrist in them; these were as they were when they came into the world, under the pollution, guilt, and dominion of sin, in a state of unregeneracy, carnality, and darkness; they properly belonged unto it, and walked after the course of it, and were under the influence of the god of it, who led them into error; and were sensual, and indulged themselves in worldly lusts, and were seeking after worldly things; supposed that gain was godliness, and had men's persons in admiration because of advantage; their nature and disposition, their principles and practices, and their ends and views, were worldly; and were quite different from Christ and his apostles, (<sup><4174></sup>John 17:14,16),

*therefore speak they of the world*; they speak the wisdom of the world, or that in which the world thinks wisdom lies, and cry up for true knowledge, and right principles; and this they do with the enticing words of man's wisdom, or in words which man's wisdom teacheth; speaking great swelling words of vanity, which take with vain and carnal minds; and preach doctrines suited to their own taste, and the taste of others, as carnal and worldly men; such as the purity of human nature, in its first conception and birth, its freedom from any original corruption, and from any concern with the sin of Adam, only with actual sin of its own; and the power of it to do that which is good, keep the law of God, and obtain his favour; the non-necessity of any internal work of efficacious grace, a reformation of life and manners being thought sufficient to render a man acceptable to God, and prepare him for eternal happiness; the doctrine of justification and salvation by works; all which are pleasing to carnal men: hence it follows,

*and the world heareth them*; the wicked of the world; worldly and unregenerate men attend on their ministry, approve of what they deliver, and receive it with pleasure, and believe it: this expresses both the quality of the hearers of false teachers, that they are that part of the world, the worse part of it, which lies in wickedness; and the quantity of them, the greater part of the world, as it was foretold by Christ, and his apostles, that they should deceive many, that many should follow their pernicious ways, and that they should draw many disciples after them; wherefore the numbers that attend such persons, as it need not be wondered at, since both preachers and hearers, and the doctrines preached and heard, are all alike, they are of the world, so it should not be stumbling to the people of God.

**Ver. 6.** *We are of God*, &c.] Not only as the chosen of God, the children of God, regenerated ones, and believers, but as ministers of the Gospel; they were chosen, and called, and sent of God to preach the Gospel, and were qualified for it, by gifts received from him, and had their doctrine from him, as well as their commission and mission: they were not of the world, and therefore did not speak of the world, nor things suited to worldly men; but being of God, they spoke the words of God, which were agreeable to him, which made for the glory of the three divine Persons, and were consistent with the divine perfections; which maintained the honour and dignity of the persons in the Godhead; which magnified the grace of God in salvation, and debased the creature:

*he that knoweth God*; not only as the God of nature and providence, but as in Christ, and that not only professionally, but practically; that has an experimental knowledge of him, that knows him as exercising lovingkindness, having tasted of his grace and goodness; that knows him so as to trust in him, and love him; for such a knowledge of God is meant, as has true real affection to him joined with it; so that it is he that loves his name, his glory, his truths, and his ordinances: he

*heareth us*: not only externally, constantly attending on the ministry of the word, as such do; but internally, understanding what is heard, receiving it in love, cordially embracing it, and firmly believing it, and acting according to it:

*he that is not of God*; who is not born of God, but is as he was when born into the world, and is of it: and who does not righteousness, nor loves his brother, nor confesses the divinity, humanity, and offices of Christ, and so is not on the side of truth, nor has the truth of grace in him; (see ~~1~~ 1 John 3:10 4:3); such a man

*heareth not us*; he is a mere natural man, a carnal and unregenerate man; and such an one cannot attend on a Gospel ministry, or receive Gospel doctrines, which are with him senseless, stupid, and foolish notions, yea, foolishness itself; nor can he know and understand them through ignorance, and want, of a spiritual discerning; they are hard sayings, and he cannot hear, nor bear them; and when this is the case, it is a plain token of unregeneracy, and that such persons are not of God; (see ~~8~~ John 8:47).

*Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*; the difference between truth and error; can distinguish one from another, and discern who are the true ministers of Christ, and who are the false teachers; for not only the word of God, the Scriptures of truth, are the test and standard, the touchstone to bring them to, and try them by; and the doctrines they severally bring show who they are; but even their very hearers distinguish them. Spirits, or men pretending to the Spirit of God, may be known in a great measure by their followers; they who have the spirit of error, and are of the world, they are followed, and caressed, and applauded by the men of the world, by unregenerate persons; they who have the spirit of truth, and are of God, they are heard and approved of, and embraced by spiritual men, by such who know God in Christ, and have tasted that the Lord is gracious.



**Ver. 7.** *Beloved, let its love one another, &c.*] The apostle having finished what he proposed to say concerning the trying of spirits, returns to his former exhortation to brotherly love, and which comes with fresh force and strength; for since worldly men follow, hear, embrace, and cleave to the false teachers; such as are of God, and on the side of truth, should love one another, and their faithful ministers, and stand fast in one spirit by the truths of the Gospel, in opposition to every error:

*for love is of God:* to love one another is the command of God, it is his revealed will, and is well pleasing in his sight; it comes from him, is a gift of his grace, and a fruit of his Spirit, and which he teaches regenerate ones to exercise:

*and everyone that loveth* God, as the Alexandrian copy reads, or Christ, and the saints, who seem to be particularly meant:

*is born of God;* for love to the brethren is an evidence of regeneration; (see Gill on “<sup><sup>α&beta;</sup></sup>1 John 3:14”);

*and knoweth God;* he knows God in Christ, and therefore loves those who have the grace of God in them, and the image of Christ upon them; he knows the mind and will of God, being taught of God to love the brethren; and he knows the love of God, and has had an experience of the grace of God, which influences him to love the saints.

**Ver. 8.** *He that loveth not, knoweth not God, &c.*] If a man loves not the children of God, those that are born of him, he does not know, so as to love God, the Father of them; for to pretend love to God, the begetter of them, whom he sees not, and not love those who are begotten by him, and are visible objects of respect, is a contradiction, and cannot be reconciled: (see <sup><sup>α&beta;</sup></sup>1 John 4:20). This clause is left out in the Ethiopic version, and is transposed in the Syriac version, which reads the text thus, “for God, is love, and whoever loveth not, knoweth not God”. By which reading, the following reason stands in close connection with (<sup><sup>α&β;</sup></sup>1 John 4:7).

*For God is love;* he loves himself; there is an entire love between the three divine Persons, who are in the strictest, and in the most inconceivable and inexpressible manner affected to each other; their love is natural and essential: God loves all his creatures as such, nor does he hate any of them, as so considered; and he bears an everlasting, unchangeable, and invariable love to his elect in Christ Jesus; of which an instance is given in the following verses, and is a reason why the saints should love one another;

that they might be like their heavenly Father, by whom they are begotten, and of whom they are born, and whose children they are; seeing he is love itself, and in his breast is nothing else but love. So the Shekinah is, by the Cabalistic Jews<sup>f43</sup>, called **hbha**, “love”.

**Ver. 9.** *In this was manifested the love of God towards us, &c.*] The love of God here spoken of, and instanced in, is not his general love to all his creatures, which is shown in the make of them, and in the support of them in their beings, and in his providential care of them, and kindness to them; but his special love towards his elect, and which was before it was manifested; it was secretly in his heart from everlasting, and did not begin to be at the mission of Christ into the world, but was then in a most glaring manner manifested: there were several acts of it before, as the choice of them in Christ, the appointment of him to be their Saviour, and the covenant of grace made with him on their account; these were more secret and hidden; but now the love and kindness of God appeared, broke forth, and shone out in its glory; this is a most flagrant and notorious instance of it, in which it is exceedingly conspicuous; this is a most clear proof, a plain and full demonstration of it:

*because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world;* the sender is God the Father, who is distinguished from the Son that is sent; of which act of sending, (see Gill on “~~Exo~~ Romans 8:3”) and (see Gill on “~~Ro~~ Galatians 4:4”); and for him, who is that God against whom we have sinned, and is that lawgiver that is able to save, and to destroy, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, to send his Son to be the Saviour of sinful men is an amazing instance of love; and which appears the more manifest, when it is observed that it is “his only begotten Son” that is sent; of which (see Gill on “~~Jo~~ John 1:14”); and the place he was sent into is the world, where his people are, and where their sins are committed, he came to expiate; and where he was treated with great indignity and contempt, and suffered many things, and at last death itself: the end of his mission was,

*that we might live through him;* who were dead in Adam, dead in sin, and dead in law, and could not quicken themselves; nor obtain eternal life for themselves, by their performances. Christ came, being sent, that they might have life, and that more abundantly than Adam had in innocence, or man lost by the fall; and accordingly they were quickened together with him; when he was quickened, after he had been put to death, they were virtually

and representatively quickened and justified in him; and in consequence of his death and resurrection from the dead, they are regenerated and made spiritually alive, and live unto righteousness; and through his righteousness wrought out for them, and imputed to them, they are in a legal sense alive unto God, and alive and comfortable in their own souls, living by faith on Christ, and have a right and title to eternal life; and which they also have through him, and which is chiefly intended here; for the design is not only that they may live spiritually and comfortably here, but eternally hereafter.

**Ver. 10.** *Herein is love*, &c.] The love of God, free love, love that cannot be matched: herein it is manifested, as before; this is a clear evidence of it, an undoubted proof, and puts it out of all question:

*not that we loved God*: the love of God is antecedent to the love of his people; it was when theirs was not; when they were without love to him, yea, enemies in their minds, by wicked works, and even enmity itself, and therefore was not procured by theirs; but on the contrary, their love to him is caused by his love to them; hence his love, and a continuance in it, do not depend on theirs; nor does it vary according to theirs; wherefore there is good reason to believe it will continue, and never be removed; and this shows the sovereignty and freeness of the love of God, and that it is surprising and matchless:

*but that he loved us*; that is, God; and so the Syriac version reads, “but that God himself loved us”. The Vulgate Latin version adds, first, as in (ⲉⲓⲛⲟⲩⲓⲛⲓ 1 John 4:19); the instance of this love follows:

*and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins*: this is a subordinate end to the other, mentioned in (ⲉⲓⲛⲟⲩⲓⲛⲓ 1 John 4:9); for, in order that sinful men may possess everlasting life and happiness, it is necessary that their sins be expiated, or atonement be made for them, which is meant by Christ's being a propitiation for them; that the justice of God should be satisfied; that peace and righteousness, or love and justice, should be reconciled together; and kiss each other; and that all obstructions be removed out of the way of the enjoyment of life, which are brought in by sin; and that the wrath of God, which sin deserved, be averted or appeased, according to our sense apprehension of it; for otherwise the love of God people is from everlasting, and is unchangeable, never alters, or never changes from love to wrath, or from wrath to love; nor is the love of God procured by the satisfaction and sacrifice of Christ, which are the effects of it; but hereby the way is laid open for the display of it, and the application of its effects,

in a way consistent with the law and justice of God. This phrase is expressive of the great love of Christ to his people, and of his substitution in their room and stead; and so it is used among the Jews for a substitution in the room of others, **wtbha bwrl** , “to express the greatness of love”<sup>f44</sup>; (see Gill on “**⚭25** Romans 3:25”) and (see Gill on “**⚭3** Romans 9:3”).

**Ver. 11.** *Beloved, if God so loved us, &c.*] As to send his Son to be a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, and to obtain eternal life for us through his sufferings and death: the apostle uses the same language his Lord and master did, (**⚭6** John 3:16);

*we ought also to love one another*; for those who are the objects of God's love ought to be the objects of ours; and if God has loved our fellow Christians and brethren to such a degree, as to send his Son to die for them, we ought to love them too; and if we are interested in the same love, the obligation is still the greater; and if God loved them with so great a love, when they did not love him, but were enemies to him, then surely we ought to love them now they are become the friends of God, and ours also; as God loved them freely, and when unlovely, and us likewise in the same manner, and under the same circumstances, then we ought to love, and continue to love the saints, though there may be something in their temper and conduct disagreeable: God is to be imitated in his love; and his love to us, which is unmerited and matchless, should influence and engage us to the love of the brethren, who have a far greater claim to our love than we can make to the love of God; and which indeed is none at all, but what he is pleased to give us.

**Ver. 12.** *No man hath seen God at any time, &c.*] The same is said by the Evangelist John, (**⚭18** John 1:18); but here it is observed with a different view, and upon another account; there it signifies that no man has seen and looked into the counsels and designs of God, and been able to make a discovery and declaration of his mind and will, his love and grace, and which is there ascribed to the Son of God, (see Gill on “**⚭18** John 1:18”); but here the sense is, that whereas God is invisible in his nature, and incomprehensible in his being and perfections, so that there is no coming to him, and seeing of him, and conversing with him in a familiar way, and so not of loving him as he is in himself, and ought to be loved, as one friend sees, converses with, and loves another, and finds his love increased by sight and conversation; then we ought to love the saints and people of God, who are visible, may be seen, come at, and conversed with, (see **⚭1**

John 4:20); for this clause stands among the arguments and reasons for brotherly love:

*if we love one another God dwelleth in us*; not as he does in his Son, by union of nature; nor as in heaven, by the displays of his glory; nor as in the whole world, by his omnipresence and power; but by his Spirit, and the communications of his love, and by his gracious presence and communion, which he indulges the saints with; for such who love one another, as they appear to have the Spirit of God, of which that grace is a fruit, so they are by the Spirit built up a fit habitation for God, and by which Spirit he dwells in them; and such may expect the presence of God, for they who live in peace, the God of love and peace shall be with them:

*and his love is perfected in us*; not that love of God, with which he loves his people; for that admits of no degrees, and is not more or less in itself, or in his heart; but is always invariably and unchangeably the same, and is full, complete, and perfect in his own breast, as it was from all eternity; and does not pass by degrees, or gradually rise from a love of benevolence to a love of complacency and delight, or increase as our love does to him and to one another, on which it has no dependence: nor is this love perfected in the saints in this life; that is to say, they have not perfect knowledge and enjoyment of it; nor have they all the effects of it bestowed upon them, and applied unto them; the perfection of it, in this sense, will be in heaven: but the love with which God is loved is here designed; and it is called his, because he is both the object and the author of it; and this is no effect as to degrees; yea, sometimes, instead of abounding and increasing, it goes back, it is left, and waxes cold; and it will not have its completion till the saints come to heaven, and then it will be in its full perfection and glory, when faith and hope shall be no more: but the sense is, that this grace of love is sincere and hearty, and without dissimulation; it is unfeigned love; and it is in deed and in truth, and not in word and in tongue only; and this appears to be so, by the love which is shown to the brethren, the children of God; so that love to God in the saints is perfected by love to the brethren, just in such sense as faith is made perfect by works, (<sup>3102</sup>James 2:22), that is, is made to appear to be genuine, right, and true.

**Ver. 13.** *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us*, &c.] That there is a communion between God and us, and a communication of his love and grace to us, and an exercise of grace upon him; for God dwells in

his people by his Spirit and grace, and they dwell in him by the exercise of faith and love upon him: and this is known,

*because he hath given us of his Spirit:* not of the essence and nature of the Spirit, which is the same with the nature of the Father and of the Son, and is incommunicable; but either of the gifts of the Spirit, which are divided to every man as he pleases, and which being bestowed on men, and used by them, for the profit and advantage of the church of God, show that God is with them, and dwells among them of a truth; or of the graces of the Spirit, such as faith, hope, and love, which are each the gifts of God; and these being bestowed and exercised, are proofs of the mutual indwelling of God and his people; (see Gill on “~~and~~ 1 John 3:24”).

**Ver. 14.** *And we have seen, and do testify,* &c.] This seems to be particularly said of the apostles, who had a clear discerning of the love and grace of God, manifested in the mission of Christ into the world; for though no man had seen his nature and his person, yet they had seen his love, and the exceeding riches of his grace, which he had shown forth in Christ Jesus; and they had also seen Christ, God manifest in the flesh; they had seen his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father; they had seen him with their bodily eyes; they had seen his works and miracles; they had seen him dying and risen again from the dead, and go up to heaven; they were witnesses, and eyewitnesses of him, and bore a faithful testimony of him, and for him, and particularly set their seal to this truth,

*that the Father sent the Son [to be] the Saviour of the world;* not of every individual person in it, for there are some that will go into everlasting punishment, and even a world that will be condemned; Christ is not in fact the Saviour of all the individuals of human nature, and therefore was not sent to be such; for if he was, the end of his mission is not fully answered; nor of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also, and who are chiefly intended by “the world”; (see Gill on “~~and~~ 1 John 2:2”); and even of all the elect of God, styled his people, his sheep, his friends, his church, and the sons of God; and it may be said of all that believe in him throughout the whole world, without any distinction of nation, age, sex, state, or condition: and Christ is the Saviour both of the souls and bodies of these, from all their sins, original and actual; from the power of Satan, the bondage and curse of the law, and wrath to come, and he is the only, able, willing, and complete Saviour, and who saves with an everlasting salvation.

**Ver. 15.** *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, &c.*] The only begotten of the Father; that he is not a mere man, as the Jews, and Ebion and Cerinthus said, but a divine person, equal with the Father; which contains all that relates to the dignity of his person, and his fitness for his office as a Saviour, and which was the test of faith in those times, and the grand article of belief: not that a bare assent to this had what followed annexed to it; for the devils believed and owned that Jesus was the Son of God; and so might, and did, unregenerate persons, as the centurion at the cross of Christ, who know nothing what communion with God is; but this confession is such as is attended with a believing in Christ from the heart unto righteousness, life, and salvation, and a cheerful obedience to his ordinances and commands, from a principle of love to him, and faith in him, things not to be found in devils and carnal men; (see <sup>5109</sup>Romans 10:9,10).

*God dwelleth in him, and he in God;* (see Gill on “<sup>5113</sup>1 John 4:13”); this should encourage to an open and hearty confession of Christ as the Son of God, and Saviour of sinners, and to a public profession of his name, and faith in him, and an holding it fast without wavering.

**Ver. 16.** *And we have known and believed, &c.*] Or have a full assurance and knowledge of, and faith in,

*the love that God hath to us;* shown as in many instances, so more especially in sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, to be the Saviour of us, and that we might live through him.

*God is love;* (see Gill on “<sup>5118</sup>1 John 4:8”):

*and he that dwelleth in love;* who dwells by faith upon the love of God as displayed in Christ, and abides in the exercise of love to God and to the saints:

*dwelleth in God, and God in him;* (see Gill on “<sup>5113</sup>1 John 4:13”); the last clause, “and God in him”, is left out in the Syriac version.

**Ver. 17.** *Herein is our love made perfect, &c.*] Or love with us; which some understand of the love of God towards his people, and which is shed abroad in them: this indeed removes all fear of an awful judgment, and renders that amiable and desirable; and such who are interested in it, shall stand in that day with intrepidity and boldness; and this sense may seem to be favoured by the Syriac version, which reads, “his love with us”; and

especially by the Vulgate Latin version, which renders it, “the love of God with us”; but it is best to understand it agreeably to the context, of our love to God, which is with and in our hearts; and which is made, or made to appear to be perfect, true, and genuine, by our love to the brethren; since the love of God to us does not admit of degrees, nor does it, or the reality and sincerity of it, depend upon our love to the saints; (see Gill on “[1 John 4:12](#)”);

*that we may have boldness in the day of judgment*; not of men's judgment, when brought before judges, governors, and kings, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, and stand at their bar, where saints, who have true love to God and Christ and the brethren, have stood with great courage and intrepidity, and shown much boldness, and used great freedom of speech; nor of judgment in this life, which sometimes begins at the house of God, though the saints often have great boldness and presence of mind, and freedom of expression both to God and man in a day of affliction, as Job had; but of the future judgment, which, though it will be very awful and solemn, Christ the Judge will appear with great majesty and glory, and all men will stand before him, and the books will be opened, and the judgment will proceed with great strictness and justice, and will issue in the everlasting perdition of devils and wicked men, yet the saints will have boldness in it: while evil men and devils tremble at the thoughts of it now, they rejoice and are glad; they love it, look for it, long for it, and hasten to it; and will stand fearless, and without the least dread, while others will flee to the rocks, and into the holes of the earth; and they will use freedom of speech with Christ, as the word here signifies; they will sing his new song, and ascribe the glory of their salvation to him, and express their praises of him, and love to him, then and to all eternity: and this boldness the saints may be said to arrive at through a perfect, or sincere, and genuine love of the brethren; for by this they know they are born again, and are born to an inheritance incorruptible, which they have both a meetness for, and a right unto; and knowing hereby that they are passed from death to life, they justly conclude they shall not enter into condemnation, and therefore are not afraid of the awful judgment: hereby they know that their faith is right, and that therefore they are manifestly the children of God; and if children, then heirs, and so shall be saved, and have everlasting life:

*because as he is, so are we in this world*; which may be understood either of God, to whom the saints are like; for such who are born again, as those who love the brethren are, they are partakers of the divine nature, and bear



a resemblance to God, even in this present state of things; and as it becomes them to be holy in all manner of conversation, as he is holy, and to be merciful to wicked men, as he is merciful, so to love the saints as he does, and to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgive one another, as he for Christ's sake has forgiven them; for as God is love, they should be all love likewise; or of Christ, (see <sup>ARAB</sup>1 John 3:3,7); and that with respect to God; as he is the Son of God, so are they the sons of God; he by nature, they by grace and adoption; as he is loved by God with an everlasting and unchangeable love, with a love of complacency and delight, so are they loved by him with the same kind of love, even while they are in this world; and as he is the chosen of God, and precious, so they are chosen in him, and unto salvation by him. The Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, render it, "as he was": and the sense may be, as he was in this world, so are they; and which may regard not so much likeness in nature, though there is an agreement in that, excepting sin, but the sameness of state and condition; as he was a man of sorrows, attended with afflictions, loaded with reproaches, and followed with the persecutions of men, so are they; nor need they wonder that they are the objects of the world's hatred and contempt, since he was also; as he was tempted by Satan, forsaken by his friends, and deserted by his God, so sometimes are they in this world; and as he went through a variety of sufferings, and death itself, to glory, so through many tribulations do they enter the kingdom: moreover, as he now is in heaven, so are they in this world; even as he is in heaven, so are they representatively in him, while in this world; and as he is righteous, being justified and acquitted from all the charge of sin he took upon him, and therefore will appear a second time without sin, so they are completely righteous in him: and once more, as he is, so they are, or should be in this world; they should be holy as he is holy, and be humble, meek, and patient, as he is, and walk as he walked; and particularly love the saints and one another, as he does; and which seems to be greatly intended here, and must be understood not of an equality, but of a likeness. The Arabic version reads the words conditionally, and as depending on the preceding clause, "if as he was, we are in this world"; and then the sense is, that the saints shall have boldness in the day of judgment, provided they are in this world as Christ was.

**Ver. 18.** *There is no fear in love*, &c.] In the love of the brethren; where that is, there is no fear: so far as that prevails and gains ground, fear removes; not the filial fear of God, the new covenant grace of fear, which

is the beginning of wisdom, and is consistent with faith, hope, love, and spiritual joy; but either the fear of men, which brings a snare: those that truly love Christ, his Gospel, and his people, they are not afraid of men; the spirit of power, love, and of a sound mind, is opposite to a spirit of fear, nor can they stand together; and such strength there is sometimes in brotherly love, that the saints are not afraid of death itself, but freely lay down their lives for one another; (see <sup>GR16</sup>1 John 3:16); or it may be rather, that they are not afraid of the day of judgment, and of hell and damnation; where hatred of the brethren has place, there is a fear and dread of these things, as were in Cain; but those that love the brethren, they know they are passed from death to life, and shall not enter into condemnation, and therefore are in no fear of any of these things:

*but perfect love casteth out fear*; when love to the brethren appears to be perfect, that is, genuine and sincere, and a man knows that from the bottom of his heart he sincerely loves the saints, he concludes from hence, as he may, the truth of his faith, which works in this way; and this frees him from the fears of men and devils, and of the future judgment and wrath to come. The Jews have a saying <sup>f45</sup>,

“worthy is his portion that rules over the place of fear, for lo, there is nothing that rules over the degree of “fear” but “love”.”

*Because fear hath torment*: it distresses a man, fills him with anguish, and makes him restless and uneasy, and keeps him in servitude; through the fear of men, of the devil, death, judgment, and hell, he is all his lifetime, or as long as this fear lasts, subject to bondage: or “fear has punishment”, as it may be rendered, and is by the Vulgate Latin version; it is a punishment itself to a man; and its being criminal deserves punishment, and is punishable; (see <sup>GR18</sup>Revelation 21:8);

*he that feareth is not made perfect in love*; or “by love”; that is, he that is possessed, and under the power of a servile fear of punishment, is one who is not, by the love to the brethren, made to appear to himself to be a sincere lover of God, and true believer in Christ; for was he, he would not be in fear of destruction and death, since whoever truly loves God, and believes in Christ, shall certainly be saved; though such persons, at times, may not be without their doubts and fears.

**Ver. 19.** *We love him, because he first loved us.*] Lest love to God, and so to one another, should be thought to be of ourselves, and too much be

ascribed unto it, the apostle observes, that God's love to us is prior to our love to him; his love is from everlasting, as well as to everlasting; for he loves his people as he does his Son, and he loved him before the foundation of the world; his choosing them in Christ as early, and blessing them then with all spiritual blessings, the covenant of grace made with Christ from all eternity, the gift of grace to them in him before the world began, and the promise of eternal life to them so soon, show the antiquity and priority of his love: his love shown in the mission and gift of his Son was before theirs, and when they had none to him; and his love in regeneration and conversion is previous to theirs, and is the cause of it; his grace in regeneration brings faith and love with it, and produces them in the heart; and his love shed abroad there is the moving cause of it, or what draws it first into act and exercise; and the larger the discoveries and applications of the love of God be, the more does love to him increase and abound; and nothing more animates and inflames our love to God, than the consideration of the earliness of his love to us, of its being before ours; which shows that it is free, sovereign, distinguishing, and unmerited. Some read the words as an exhortation, "let us love him"; and others as in the subjunctive mood, "we should love him", because, &c. some copies read, "we love God", and so the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions, and the Alexandrian copy, read, "because God first loved us": and so some others.

**Ver. 20.** *If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother,* &c.] Than which profession nothing can be more contradictory, not black and white, or hot and cold in the same degree:

*he is a liar;* it is not truth he speaks, it is a contradiction, and a thing impossible:

*for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen;* his person, which might have drawn out his affection to him; and something valuable and worthy in him, which might have commanded respect; or his wants and distresses, which should have moved his pity and compassion:

*how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* it cannot be thought he should; the thing is not reasonable to suppose; it is not possible he should; (see Gill on "[1 John 4:12](#)").

**Ver. 21.** *And this commandment have we from him,* &c.] Either "from God", as the Alexandrian copy and the Vulgate Latin version read; and that

to love the brethren is a commandment of God, is clear from (~~4173~~1 John 3:23); or from Christ, for it is also a command of his, even his new commandment, which he has given, and his people have received from him:

*that he who loveth God, love his brother also*; (see ~~4134~~John 13:34) (~~4152~~John 15:12,17); which is an argument persuading to attend to the one as well as to the other; for the same command that requires the one, requires the other: and he that transgresses it in one case, is a transgressor of it, as well as in the other.