

# The Thoughtfulness of Divine Love 1 John 4:16.

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon emphasizes the thoughtfulness of divine love, which is a nature that is shared with us through the Holy Spirit, and is the source of our ability to love one another.*

**Scripture:** John 1:18, Romans 5:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 1:6, Philippians 3:21, 1 John 4:9-10, 1 John 4:12, 1 John 4:16-18

**Topics:** "Divine Love", "Assurance in Christ"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound thoughtfulness of God's love as depicted in 1 John 4:16, illustrating how God has considered humanity's plight from sin to judgment. He explains that God's love is manifested through the sending of His Son, who provides eternal life and serves as the propitiation for our sins, allowing believers to have boldness on the day of judgment. Darby highlights that true knowledge of God comes through love, which is perfected in believers as they dwell in Him and He in them. He reassures that there is no fear in love, as believers are made righteous through Christ, reflecting His image and standing confidently before God. Ultimately, Darby calls Christians to recognize and enjoy the fullness of God's love, which has been thoughtfully extended to them throughout their journey of faith.

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## Transcript

This passage is one of much beauty and comfort to the earnest and lowly soul, for it presents to us God, thinking of us from our state of utter sinfulness on to judgment itself, and displays His love from beginning to end.

In general, the epistle presents us divine life, that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested here below in the Person of the Lord Jesus, communicated to others, that thing, as it is said, which is true in Him and in us.

The Gospel of John, besides the doctrine of the Comforter, presents to us God manifested in the Son, and life in Himself; the epistle, life communicated to us, and that life known in its fruits of love to the brethren, and obedience or practical righteousness.

In the passage before us, love is especially the subject, and first love as partaking of the nature of Him who is love. He that loveth is born of God and knows God; partakes of the nature and knows Him who is it,

as partaker of it.

Possession of a nature (and without possessing it is impossible), makes us know what that nature is, what the Being is who has that nature. A mere animal does not know what a man is, his way of thinking, feeling; a man knows what a man is. What an angel is, save as the part of connection with God necessarily reveals some elements of his nature, he does not know. He that loves, knows God, for he is born of Him, being partaker of the divine nature: a blessed truth, the spring (righteousness being introduced), of eternal joy and infinite delight.

But when we come to the practice down here, we find difficulty in it. I love the brethren: what coldness after all, often self has come in, and I fail in love. I cannot trust my own heart a minute. Can I really say I am born of God and know God when I find so much in a treacherous heart that belies after all what I desire? I hope, I fear - there is no liberty of spirit. And it is so far well; but, therefore, the blessed Spirit gives us the knowledge of love from another side, and where it is perfect: in God Himself, His ways and dealings. In this the love of God is manifested towards us, in our case. But let me briefly analyse the passage, that we may seize its completeness and bearing. First, in verses 9, 10, God's love to the sinner; verse 12, the enjoyment of His love in the saint; and 17, perfected in the boldness it gives us for the day of judgment.

First, His love to us as sinners. The eternal object of God's delight, His only begotten Son, was sent in blessing to us, and with this two-fold object - first the positive blessing, what is given, that we might live through Him. We were dead in sin, God gives us a new life - a divine life. We no longer live through Adam, but through the Son of God. He that hath the Son hath life. Our existence towards God is divine life in Christ. God has thought of our ruin in love, and given us eternal life in His Son.

But we were guilty also, as responsible beings before Him. Here His love has met us. He has given His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is not law, nor duty, though it was there, but because it was there, ruin, failure, and condemnation. But love is not in that we love God (which is what we have to look for in our hearts if we seek the proof of life there, but then really under law); that law required, and rightly - but in that God loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins. It is not requiring what we ought to be from us, just as this is, but putting away, making a holy propitiation for our sins. We are dead in sins, and He gives us life. We were guilty, and He has given Him to make propitiation for our sins. He has met our whole case, in both its aspects as sinners. Now the love of God is known, the heart free, the conscience purged, he can exhort us to love one another.

Now we have to do with a saint, and he has more privileges than being forgiven and having life. No man has seen God. How know Him, even if we have a life and nature which capacitates us thereto know Him as an object fully before our souls, and so known. Before the world this was in Christ personally present revealing Him (see John 1:18), and He was rejected. But how in us? If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Here is the saint's privilege. He enjoys the love of God, poured out in his own soul. God dwells in him by His Spirit, and makes His presence known in infinite and enjoyed love, but as dwelling in the believer. It is not still that we love Him, but that His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us. It is in our hearts, but what is there is the love of God, known and enjoyed by His presence. If God thus dwells in us - which we know, because He has given us of His Spirit, and sheds that love by His very presence abroad in our hearts - we may well say perfected in love, for what is more perfect than God in love, and what more perfect exercise and display of it in communication to us than His dwelling in us Himself, who is it perfectly, and sheds it abroad in our hearts by His presence;

but even this looks out when the proof of it is to be given. We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. You cannot separate the enjoyment of God's love in us by His presence, from that in which it has been perfectly displayed in His own work to His own glory. And this portion of the Christian is not a special or extraordinary proof of progress. It is the Christian state. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God. For God, if He dwell in us, is infinite, and we dwell in Him, feel surrounded, and are, by His goodness, love, power, so that our abode and rest is in Him, and in the fulness of His love. All this may be realised in different degrees, but it belongs to every one that confesseth Jesus, the lowly Man, to be the Son of God. Of course, he does not speak of hypocrites.

But again the apostle carefully brings us back to look at the love as in God, as displayed towards us. We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. Whatever the enjoyment of the love and the realisation of it, it is always the love in Him, sovereign love, which He hath had to us. We know God. God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Here, though the love is ever the same, what God is and what He displays to us, yet the order of thought is somewhat different. I am dwelling in love, the enjoyment and consciousness of this love, and its power to exercise towards others. I dwell then in God, for God is love; dwelling in this he dwells in God, and this is what God is. His soul rests, reposes, and confides in Him, surrounded by His goodness, and so as that love is active in his soul, shed abroad and exercised there, God is in him, God being love, and deigning to dwell in us. First it was the fact, God dwells in the saint, and as infinite, the saint in him. Now as to his enjoyment and privilege he dwells in God; and then as to the activity of love, God dwells in him. The first fact is this state, and the double blessedness of God Himself, and the activity of His love. All this is simple. Rich and eternal and pure life now enjoyed in joying in God Himself, and exercised as it was in Jesus, in love to His, and every sinner around.

We now come to the third step in this blessed chain of love. Herein is love perfected with us that we might have boldness for the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world. Love has looked on from the time of, our sin, looked in and dwelt in us by the way, and now tells the tale of its perfectness for that day, when God's judgment calls all in question but the fruit of His love. But how should this meet the day of judgment? Here love is perfected with us, we are as Christ is who is the judge; what fear, then?

Oh, how has love thought of us, from the state of sins and death right on to judgment, and given us to stand now, "in this world," as Christ Himself is before God. Who shall find fault in that! Shall Christ whom we are like, or God whose delight is in Him? We have boldness for the day of judgment. No place in which the Christian is so bold, when he knows his place in Christ. When we stand before His judgment-seat we shall be perfectly like Himself; and as He is, so are we in this world.

Many a sincere person, I mean, sincere Christian, does not see this his place in Christ. He may say, I am a poor sinner, and the cross just suits me. Blessedly true. But change the phrase: I am a poor sinner, and the judgment-seat just suits me! That will not do. Yet we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ. (2 Cor. v. 10.) There we must be fit for the judge. A dirty man is fit to be washed, a debtor for one who comes to pay his debts, but a righteous person for a judgment-seat; and we have here the measure of this: Christ, who sits to judge, is my righteousness.

When I appear there, I shall appear in glory, shall be like Him, bear His image, having been raised in glory - my vile body fashioned like His glorious body. Here there is no room for fear. Grace has put the believer in Christ now, and through His work he is accepted in the Beloved; as He is so is the believer in this world.

How can I fear if I am as Christ? Note, it is not as He was. He was without sin, knew no sin even when He was down here. If I say I have none, I deceive myself, and the truth is not in me.

But my place before God is in Christ, not in the flesh. There is no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus. But as He is, now He has finished the work and by Himself purged our sins, having by one offering perfected for ever those who are sanctified, through the offering of His body once for all, and now as He is, so are we in this world, accepted in the Beloved. I repeat, what room is there for fear? Is not this love, perfect, thoughtful love, that in the place of judgment, there we find perfection?

Then, I know I am like the judge, like the Lord in glory, like my Saviour. Gracious love that has thought of my sins, and spiritual death in them; blessed and blessing love, God's dwelling in me; and perfected love, in that I am as Christ, God's own Son, so that where surely fear might be, fear is cast out. Love has made me know now what love has done, and while it makes me enjoy itself now, God dwells in me and I in Him, makes me look back and see it active when I was a dead sinner, a love that flows from itself out to me, so that I reckon on it, yea, learn its perfectness when I might fear, and find that love had counsels of infinite wonder, to make me as Christ the Son of God, a man in glory, and righteousness of divine perfection, even the one before whose judgment-seat I shall stand, like Him, His righteousness mine.

Love has left nothing unthought of that could make me exalt God as infinite in grace, and enjoy His goodness in a righteousness which He has made mine. There is no fear in love. Where shall fear find a place, from my state of death in sins up to the judgment-seat of Christ? He cannot love me too much, but He cannot love me more, and my heart is at rest.

And note here, though we pass through it, and it is very natural that we should, yet hope as to the judgment day is not the true feeling of a believer at all. We hope because we see goodness, and know there is such a thing as redemption; and we fear because we see that there is that in us which cannot stand before the judgment of God. We vacillate, are ill at ease, and when the thought of judgment comes in, there is torment because there is fear. God would not have us so. He would not we should have torment. He would have us walk with Him happy, and in confidence. Fear is not confidence. But if we have to be judged, that is, our state decided according to our works in that day (for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat), we shall certainly be condemned. Enter not, says the heart that knows what sin, and what flesh is in God's sight - enter not, into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. But the believer has learned this as to himself before the judgment comes, and has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, and knows that redemption is as certain as complete, and divine righteousness as satisfactory, if I may use so feeble a word, as his condemnation was certain. He does not mix up as his portion judgment for sin, and redemption from sin. He owns fully the one and his own deserved condemnation, and believes fully in the other. He does not destroy the force of both by mixing them together. Judgment according to what he is, would, he knows, have been certain condemnation. Divine righteousness (and we are the righteousness of God in Christ) is necessary and perfect acceptance. Grace has given it to him, has made it his. As He is, so are we in this world, for we have it by faith, we have boldness in the day of judgment, and there is no fear in love, our portion is perfected in this. Raised in glory, he is manifested before the judgment-seat, but glorified before he is there, his vile body fashioned like Christ's glorious body, by that power which can subdue all things to itself. Knowing then as he is known, he looks back from that blessedness, bearing the image of the heavenly, on the countless ways of love, which has brought a poor feeble creature, justified through Christ the Lord, all the way along, that he might know himself, and the love which has led, thought of, sustained, borne with, lifted up, and brought there to enjoy and praise, made like the Lord, the love that has done it, and to dwell in a holiness

where no evil can enter, and which is only joy, and find Jesus the Lord of glory the First-born among many brethren. We love Him because He first loved us. But oh, how imperfect are our thoughts of that day. Our part is to dwell in and think of Christ, to serve Him with an undivided heart here.

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