

FIRST JOHN

Chapter 4

Test the Spirits

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

4:1 *spirit.* A person moved by a spirit, whether by the Holy Spirit or an evil one. (CSB)

“Spirit” here is not the Spirit of God, but the spirit of man, and even the spirit of errorists, teachers who pervert the Word of God. (Stoekhardt)

Cf 1Tm 4:1. A spirit is a creature without flesh and bones. There are faithful spirits (angels) that serve God and His elect, and there are rebellious spirits (demons) that Satan has disguised in his attempt to nullify the works of the Son of God in the lives of every person. Satan tried to stop Jesus but could not; now he is after those. Satan tried to stop Jesus but could not; now he is after those to whom Jesus would give eternal life. There is no neutral ground, and no mortal human being is independent – one either believes in and belongs to the Spirit of God or one believes in and belongs to Satan and speaks accordingly. (TLSB)

test the spirits. Cf. 1Th 5:21. (Mt 7:1 does not refer to such testing or judgment; it speaks of self-righteous moral judgment of others.) (CSB)

This means an examination of words and actions in light of the whole testimony of Scriptures. Luther: “The emphasis is on the words ‘test the spirits,’ for with these words he touches their boasting as with a needle. If it is as if he were saying ‘Those who boast of the Spirit will come to you. But test the spirits.’” (TLSB)

The spirit of the prophet becomes known by his words and teaching. Hence, Christians are called upon to test and examine these spirits and prophets. They need not judge hearts and thoughts. The nature of the prophet reveals itself plainly in his preaching and teaching. (Stoekhardt)

And Christian are here exhorted not to believe every spirit, every prophet who may come to them, but they should first put their teaching to a test. They are to consider carefully the nature of the spirit that dwells in them and that speaks out of them. “Spirit” (pneuma) is what we may call the intellectual and spiritual tendency of a teacher. Upon that they should have eye. They are to consider whether the spirit that speaks out of the prophet is God-directed or man-directed, whether his teaching meets with God’s approval, or whether it is merely designed to please men, whether the wisdom of God or the wisdom of men is proclaimed. All depends on the question, “Is the teaching of the teacher in agreement with divine truth?” (Stoekhardt)

false prophets. A true prophet speaks from God, being “carried along” by the Holy Spirit (2Pe 1:21). False prophets, such as the Gnostics of John’s day, speak under the influence of spirits alienated from God. Christ warned against false prophets (Mt 7:15; 24:11), as did Paul (1Ti 4:1) and Peter (2Pe 2:1). (CSB)

These are those who speak by the spirit of the Antichrist and are doing the work of the jealous devil, who always tries to deceive man by counterfeiting the wonderful works of God. (TLSB)

This particular caution to Christians is necessary, “because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” These proclaim their own word. They are prophets, but false prophets who preach falsehood and lies, however in such a manner that they couch them in Biblical words and phraseology. They spice their preaching with Bible verses, and always try to give their teaching a Biblical flavor. But while they feign great piety, both in speech and behavior, they spread false doctrine and mislead their hearers to a false belief. (Stoeckhardt)

One who propagates lies and false belief without seeking cover under the disguise of God’s Word, and one who openly disavows Bible teaching is called, not a false prophet, but a scoffer. A false prophet always pretends to teach what the Bible teaches and cloaks his error in Biblical phraseology. (Stoeckhardt)

4:2 *confesses.* Not only knows intellectually—for demons know, and shudder (Jas 2:19; cf. Mk 1:24)—but also confesses publicly. (CSB)

No one can sincerely confess, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. The triune God Himself provides the confession that this man, Jesus, is God Almighty (Mt. 16:16-17; Jn. 6:44). (TLSB)

Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Thus John excludes the Gnostics, especially the Cerinthians, who taught that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at his baptism and then left him at the cross, so that it was only the man Jesus who died. (CSB)

To confess the man Jesus Christ as Lord and God in the flesh is the confession of all apostolic eyewitnesses. The apostles saw, heard, and touched the resurrected Christ. (TLSB)

4:3 *does not confess Jesus.* The incarnate Jesus Christ of 1:2. (CSB)

The thoughts and words of such a person are contrary to divine truth. What such a teacher thinks and says is not of God. Faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God makes the difference between a Christian and an unchristian person, as well as between a true prophet and a false prophet. Such false prophets have appeared in Arianism and Rationalism. They deny the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, namely that the Son of God appeared in the flesh, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (Stoeckhardt)

spirit of Antichrist – We should have an eye to this especially as to what position teacher takes regarding the article of the person of Christ, what he teaches and confesses concerning His person and office, and perhaps also as to which points he remains silent. Also those are marked as false prophets who fail to confess that Christ is come in the flesh, who withhold a clear statement concerning the divinity of Christ, and who try to pass over this whole matter in silence. Also that is the spirit of Antichrist. And if one does not stand right toward the article of the divinity of Christ, then also everything else that he teaches is antichristian error. (Stoeckhardt)

Satan would draw us away from our true Savior, who suffered, bled, and died and still has scars to prove it. All false christs have this in common: none of them come as God in the flesh of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 John 7-11). Hus: “Here the spirit is subtle and heretical, denying Jesus to be very God and very man” (The Church, p. 91). (TLSB)

4:4 *from God.* An abbreviated form of the expression “born of God” (2:29; 3:9–10). (CSB)

Christian who are born of God have already overcome all ungodliness and are in fellowship with God. God is in them, and God is greater than he that is in the world, that is the devil. In the power of God they can overcome all the assaults of the devil, and have overcome them. And so they are also enabled to withstand false doctrine which the false prophets seek to destroy them. (Stoekhardt)

them. The false prophets (v. 1), who were inspired by the spirit of the antichrist (v. 3). (CSB)

he who is in the world. The devil (Jn 12:31; 16:11). In v. 3 “world” means the inhabited earth; in vv. 4–5 it means the community, or system, of those not born of God—including the antichrists (see note on Jn 1:10). (CSB)

Satan usurped the dominion over earth that God had entrusted to Adam in the beginning. But Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection decisively overturned the dominion Satan usurped. He is very angry because he knows his time is short (Rv. 12:12). But Satan cannot harm those who have Christ dwelling in them through faith in Him (1Jn 5:18). Luther: “‘Christ is stronger; He has overcome, is overcoming, and will overcome that strong man in us (Lk 11:21-22).’ Still the devil does sometimes overcome us in the flesh, in order that even in this way we may experience the power of the Stronger against that strong man and say with Paul (2 Cor 12:10): ‘When I am weak, then I am strong’” (AE 26:193). (TLSB)

4:5 They have a worldly character. They have a worldly nature and mind, “and therefore they speak of the world.” All their teachings, however Christian they may appear, are nothing but worldly wisdom. “World” (kosmos) is here again the body of ungodly people, who oppose Christ. Hence, what these false prophets say and teach is all designed to overthrow Christ and to destroy those who follow Him. They are (out) of the world, are really children of this world, and therefore the best they can offer is worldly wisdom. (Stoekhardt)

Unbelievers speak and do only what comes from unbelief (cf Jn 3:6). (TLSB)

4:6 *we* – Here the Apostle introduces the antithesis. “We” is set against “they,” the false prophets. Those who, like the Apostle, present sound teaching are of God. They have their nature from God; they receive their teaching from God. It is God who directs their spirit and determines their doctrine. What they proclaim is divine truth. (Stoekhardt)

listens to us – The Apostle here speaks to the hearers. Whoever recognizes God as his personal God, and so has fellowship with God listens to us and recognizes what we say as divine truth. The godly character of the hearer is attracted by the godly message of the preacher who is of God, and they give credence to the words of the preacher and follow him. (Stoekhardt)

All who are in fellowship with God recognize and listen to the true teaching of Christ when they hear it. (TLSB)

not from God – If unregenerate people are mingled with Christians in the congregation so that they outwardly also hear the divine message, they do not hear aright. The godly preacher may preach what he

will; such hearers will not understand him and will not open their hearts to his message, because they lack the proper organ for profitable hearing, namely, a godly nature. (Stoekhardt)

Spirit of truth. The true teacher is moved by the spirit of truth, who is permeated by divine truth and so confesses and proclaims the truth which God reveals. (Stoekhardt)

spirit of error. Behind every false teaching and empty idol is a very real demon (cf 1Co 10:20). (TLSB)

4:1–6 Whenever a teacher speaks of a “Christ” or a “Jesus” or a “God” who comes to us without human flesh, know this: it is a demon speaking through a man, a demon who is seeking to destroy both your faith and your soul everlastingly. “Whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” (2Jn 11). Faith in the heart cannot be seen; it can only be shown through acts of love. The greatest testimony is the true flesh-and-blood testimony of God’s love manifest in Jesus. • Lord, enable me to test all spirits for what they are and remain forever faithful in Him, the only God-man and Savior of the world. Amen. (TLSB)

God is Love

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

4:7–5:12 Final appeal for the congregations to examine their faith and practice. (TLSB)

4:7–5:3 The word “love” in its various forms is used 43 times in the letter, 32 times in this short section. (CSB)

The world continually falls for many flavors of phony loves. Note true love’s three characteristics. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

First, love’s eye (cognitive): Divine love is clear-sighted. The triune God does not in blind love “fall for” sinners. He sees the sad fact that we are sick to death with sin, hate, guilt, and fear. God’s eye weeps. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Second, love’s heart (emotive): Divine love is determined. The triune God loves with purpose. His love plans to transform us into his own image. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Third, love's hand (behavioral): Divine love is action, fearlessly self-sacrificial. "It is primarily an attitude toward another that moves the will to act in helping to meet the need of the one loved" (Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* [Chicago: Moody, 1985] 351). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:7-8 The little Greek word *ek* in v 7 identifies the source of love: God. He is the giver of love and the one who shows us what unconditional love is all about. For a fourth time, John exhorts his readers to love each other (3:11, 18, 23; cf. also 4:11, 21; 2 John 5). Further, John places love in a divine dimension: when one loves, one shows that he or she has been born of God and knows God. Love involves knowledge, comprehension, and understanding. Thus ours is a love that knows God, but a lack of love indicates not knowing God, because God is love (v 8). In all this, John is not discussing just any type of love humanly understood. In the preceding chapters of his epistle he has carefully defined *agapē*, "love," as the love of God in Jesus Christ which is reflected in the lives of those who believe in him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

John consistently uses the definite article with God in this pericope, and usually elsewhere in his writings. He is directing the reader's attention to the one true God, the one who has loved us in his Son, Jesus Christ. It is this particular God that needs to be revealed to a loveless world through the love of his children. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

4:7 *love is from God* – What the world considers love is actually selfish and self-centered, but all true love is from God. Love of sinful pleasures is misplaced affection, which corrupts what is good. E.g., it is natural to want to have a spouse and a family. But to steal someone else's spouse or family would be a perversion of a God-given desire. (TLSB)

born of God – Only God can make Christians (cf. Jn. 1:12-13). One way this happens is through Baptism. Another way is through the preaching of the Word of Christ. (TLSB)

knows God – A sinner can know God only through faith in Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

4:8 *does not know God*. Only those who are to some degree like him truly know him. (CSB)

Such a person has not learned to know God as his own God. He is yet a total stranger to Him. (Stoeckhardt)

God is love. In his essential nature and in all his actions, God is loving. John similarly affirms that God is spirit (Jn 4:24) and light (1:5), as well as holy, powerful, faithful, true and just. (CSB)

God's nature is turned toward and bound up in seeking, working, and being for the welfare and benefit of others – namely mankind. Love fittingly describes the nature of God; His love is revealed in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

4:9 *only Son*. God sent His Son into the world that we sinful men, who deserve death, should have life through Him. God is Love, and He has manifested His love particularly in this that He gave us His Son. That is the highest evidence of God's love: He sent His Son into the world which by nature was hostile to Him, so that we might not die, but live. (Stoeckhardt)

God went to the ultimate extreme to show just how much he loves us: he sent his only, unique Son (*monogenēs*). This is the same word John used in his gospel to describe Jesus as the only-begotten of the Father (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

live through him – Believers live through Jesus Christ, who died, rose, and ascended into heaven so that He might fill all heaven and earth (Eph 4:10). He is present with all believers through His chosen means of grace: His Word, Holy Baptism, in the Lord’s Supper. The Word made flesh is our source of life, our mediator; we live only because of Him, as Jesus Himself taught (Jn. 6:57). (TLSB)

4:10 *loved us* – Not man, but God has originated love. He was the first One to love. All efforts of men to love would have failed, had God not loved them first. Love began when God loved us. So not we, but God is the originator of love. (Stoekhardt)

John goes on to clarify that love did not originate with us; we did not love God or others first. God loved us first and defined true love by sending his Son for the purpose of removing our sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

We are saved not by our love for God but by the love of God for us in sending Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Luther: “Provide yourselves with armor from Scripture concerning justification, which takes place through faith. Collect, I say, a number of Scripture passages that ascribe righteousness to God. Then, if you put your reliance on these passages, you will be able to stand even after a fall, for example, after the acts of fornication, murder, and other sins” (AE 30:295). (TLSB)

propitiation for our sins. God showed men what love is, when He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. In chapter 2:2 the Apostle used the same expression. We are reconciled to God by the blood of the Son of God, by the suffering and death of Christ. But what gives worth and value to that blood, suffering, and death is the person, who brought this sacrifice, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is Himself the propitiation for our sins. His propitiation was the prerequisite to our life. (Stoekhardt)

4:11 *love one another* – God Himself has made the beginning with love, with love toward us and has set the pattern for our love toward others. At the same time He has obligated us to thank Him and to return such love toward our brothers. So the Apostle uses God’s own deed of love toward us as a most potent means to make his exhortation effective. (Stoekhardt)

If this is how God has loved us, it follows that we should love one another. John does not identify who these others are that we are to love, but Christ answered that very question (Luke 10:25–37). We live in a world characterized by humanism—the belief that man is basically good, and can solve his problems through his own efforts and achievements. The solution, according to humanism, is education and philanthropy—a love of other human beings for their own sake. Man has become the center of the universe through superhuman feats that years before were only dreams. Now that the moon has been conquered, space exploration has become routine, and medical science is hot on the trail of a cure for cancer, it is no wonder that many see man as the source of goodness and love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Listen to the lyrics of the love songs in the media today—it is ironic that when people are described as possessing so much (hedonistic) love without any reference to God, the divorce rate is soaring over 50% and so many human relationships are unstable. The type of love that abounds in the world today is fickle, unreliable, and unsatisfying. But the love that comes from God is unconditional, deep, satisfying, and eternal. It is this kind of love that Christians are called to reflect in their lives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

4:12 *No one has ever seen God.* Since our love has its source in God's love, his love reaches full expression (is made complete) when we love fellow Christians. Thus the God whom "no one has ever seen" is seen in those who love, because God lives in them. (CSB)

We do read in the OT time and again that God appeared unto the fathers. However, what they saw was no more than some sort of vision. No one on earth was ever privileged to look upon God's wonderful essence. (Stoekhardt)

No mortal sinner has ever seen God directly and fully. A sinner may see God only through faith in Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

abides in us – If we have sincere love for one another, that is a sure index of God having made His abode in our heart, and so we live in fellowship with God. Though no man has ever seen God, He, God, approaches so closely to Christians that He dwells in their very heart; and their love is an evidence of His presence and a reflex of His glory. (Stoekhardt)

love is perfected in us – God's love for us has achieved its purpose in us when it causes us to love others. As we love others, we know that God's love is remaining in us. (TLSB)

God's love has reached its aim and purpose. Here the Apostle obviously would not claim that a Christian's love has reached the stage of perfection. Not man's love to God, but rather God's love to us is here spoken of. God had this purpose in mind that He wanted to make His abode in our heart. So He gave us His Son. But God was not yet satisfied with this quest of His love. He desired to approach even closer to us, namely, to set up His throne in our heart. And when that goal is reached, when He makes His abode in us, then the grand purpose of His love has been accomplished; then the end that He wanted to reach in us is attained. (Stoekhardt)

And in whom is this love perfected? In those who love one another. But we must ever be careful to maintain that God's love to us comes first. By faith we receive His love into our heart, and, with His love, God Himself. And so by faith we enter into fellowship with God. However, where God's love has been received into the heart, there it also impels to love, to brotherly love. And where this effect becomes manifest, there we can with certainty draw the conclusion that God dwells in that heart. (Stoekhardt)

4:13-21 One of the characteristics of John's writings is the repetition of key words to develop theological themes. John builds on what he has said earlier, reinforcing the themes while rising to a higher plane. The flow of his discourse is like a rising spiral. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

4:13 *abide in him* - Here John emphasizes that Christians abide and remain in God. He uses the verb *menō* in vv 13, 15, and 3 times in v 16 to stress the relationship between the believer and God: God remains in him and he in God. The verb occurs 19 times earlier in the epistle. John speaks about this relationship with confidence: "We know" (v 13). This knowledge is imparted by the Spirit, who also bestows the confidence of faith. Confidence (*parrēsia*, v 17) in our acquittal on the day of judgment results from perfect or complete love which casts out all fear. This love which is "made complete" (*teteleiōtai hē agapē*, v 17) is "perfect love" (*he teleia agapē*, v 18). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

given us of his Spirit – No one can have genuine faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world unless God's Spirit creates and sustains that faith. It is never a mere physiological brain activity or an act of our own will. Genuine saving faith in Jesus cannot exist without the testimony of God's Spirit. The apostles

preached and recorded the Gospel by the power of Christ's Spirit, and we have received and believed the Gospel by the power of that same Spirit. (TLSB)

On the Triune's indwelling, the *unio mystica*, see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957) vol 2, 86–87, 409–10; vol 3, 112. Do your hearers “know” of this mutual, God-given indwelling? By means of our Baptism, God pours out the Spirit, faith, and love into our lives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

“The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22). “Love is a fruit which certainly and necessarily follows true faith. For if a person does not love, this indicates certainly that he is not justified but is still in death, or that he has again lost the righteousness of faith, as St. John says (1 Jn 3:14)” (FC SD iii 27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:14 John describes soteriology powerfully and precisely: “the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (v 14). The Father's love is active. It was not something that was done without thought as to the consequence. It results in salvation for the whole world, including us. John emphasizes this universal dimension of salvation in his gospel as well as in his epistles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Faith, fired up by the Spirit, is formed by the apostles' eyewitness testimony, the written Word. “It has been the Father's gracious purpose both to send his Son into the world as Savior and to send his Spirit into our hearts as witness (cf. Gal. 4:4–6). Christian certainty rests on both the objective historical fact of the Son's mission and on the subjective inward experience of the Spirit's witness” (Stott, 166). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:15 *confesses* – Confession of Jesus as God the Son is a fruit of true saving faith; not that we are saved by our confessing but that saving faith always desires to confess Jesus as the Son of God. No one with true faith wants to deny Jesus as God's only-begotten Son. (TLSB)

As we dwell in Christ, our love is not to be dormant; it is to be active just as God's love is active. We express that love through confessing that Jesus is the Son of God (v 15). The incarnation is vital in John's thought. Central to our faith is the recognition that Jesus is both man and God. John uses both the human name of our Lord, *Jesus*, and his divine title, *Son of God*. While Luke can use the term *son of God* to denote Adam, a human being, simply because he was created by God (Luke 3:38), John uses the term to denote God's “one and only Son” (*monogenēs*) whom he sent into the world (1 John 4:9; cf. John 1:18, where the best manuscripts call Jesus *monogenēs theos*, “the one and only God”). John says that the confession of the incarnation of God in Christ is an essential mark of true believers. Those who deny it, such as the proto-Gnostics John may have been writing against, do not remain in God, nor does God remain in them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

“Jesus is the Son of God.” See the size of the sacrifice, the size of God's love! Nothing less could take away the sin of the world. (See 1 Jn 4:10, 19; Rom 5:8.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

John's letter, a two-sided coin, both warns against heresy's counterfeits and affirms genuine faith. John decries “faith” without truth, and truth without faith, as well as “faith” without works, and works without faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:16-17 John stresses that it is the Spirit who gives knowledge and confidence: “we know and rely on the love God has for us” (v 16). John wants his hearers to live with confidence, but not just any type of subjective confidence; it is confidence based squarely on God’s love and instilled by his Spirit. It is a confidence that will carry one through even on the day of judgment (v 17). The Christian should have no fear of judgment day for Christ was judged for all our sins on Good Friday. The day Christ was judged was the day we were acquitted. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

4:16 *God is love.* Luther: “These are simple words, but they are words that require faith in the highest degree – faith against which everything that is not of the Spirit of God fights. Conscience, the devil, hell, the judgment of God, everything resist, in order that we may not believe that God is love but may believe that God is an Executioner and Judge. By ‘the world’ I also understand the adversaries of the Word and the sects. Here, therefore, it is taught in brief that one must cling to faith against these assaults. Consequently, he who has a true knowledge of God abides in Christ, and God abides in him” (AE 30:30). (TLSB)

“We know and rely.” John champions faith as the heart that trusts Jesus, at one with the head that knows who this Lover is, at one with the hand that acts with Jesus’ love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:17 *perfected with us.* Like Christ. The fact that we are like Christ in love is a sign that God, who is love, lives in us; therefore we may have confidence on the Day of Judgment that we are saved. (CSB)

What the world considers love is actually selfish and self-centered, but all true love is from God. “Love” of sinful pleasures is misplaced affection, which corrupts what is good. E.g., it is natural to want to have a spouse and a family. But to steal someone else’s spouse or family would be a perversion of a God-given desire. (TLSB)

Love has reached its perfection with us in this, that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment, for as He is, so are we in this world. This is said of the love that is with us, that dwells in us. It is our love, which has its origin in God. This love has reached its end and purpose, which enables us to face Judgment Day with confidence. By this everyone can test himself whether he really possesses this love, as he considers in what frame of mind he approaches Judgment Day. Whoever has this God-born love is not frightened at the thought of Judgment Day. He approaches this with fearless confidence. He enters the presence of the great Judge unafraid. (Stoekhardt)

as he is so also are we. A sinner can know God only through faith in Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

4:18 *no fear in love.* There is no fear of God’s judgment because genuine love confirms salvation. (CSB)

Love is the work and will of God and the fruit of faith in God for the salvation of every human. In this, there is no fear. (TLSB)

perfect love – Jesus is God’s perfect love that has come to seek and to save, not to condemn. In Christ, God’s love reaches its goal, i.e., love is perfected in us when we believe in Jesus and no longer fear that God might still be angry with us because of our sin. (TLSB)

By perfected love the Apostle does not mean to suggest that a Christian in this life can reach a state of perfection, in which he no longer offends against love. Rather he means that love has become the habitus, the character, the way of life in a Christian. Where the love of God has come to dwell in the heart, it casts out fear. The more a Christian gives room to this love, the more will be overcome fear. (Stoekhardt)

Confidence based on God's love excludes fear (v 18). Love and fear are opposites. It is the threat of punishment which causes fear. If punishment is removed, so is the cause of fear. Our Lord took our punishment upon himself, removing the threat from us. If one continues to fear, he or she does not fully believe that Jesus bore the punishment of our sins, and God's love has not yet been made complete in him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

The traditional translations can be misunderstood. "Love has been perfected among us in this" (NKJV). John says, "God's love has reached its goal in us" (GWT). This side of the grave our love comes flawed. We cannot trust our own hearts, only Jesus! Our faith-filled bold confidence today, anticipating that Judgment Day, rises only out of God's love. (See 1 Jn 4:9–11.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

If God's love walks arm in arm with us (μετὰ ἡμῶν), even as his love is ever with Jesus, the coming judgment brings no fear to us (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and Jude* [Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1996] 512–13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

To fear God's punishment is a natural human response. Even St. Paul suffered moments of uncertainty as reflected in his words to the Philippians (3:10). He hoped it was possible for him to be saved. God made him sure of his salvation, enabling him also to write these words to Timothy: "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 7–8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

has to do with punishment – One experiences dread with the expectation of real consequences for what one has done wrong. In this life, believers are not free from sensations of guilt. They may hear that their sins are forgiven, yet still have the sensation of guilt, for each believer has a sinner alongside the saint within him. (TLSB)

has been perfected in love – As long as a person gives himself up to fear of God's punishment, he is not relying on His Son completely for his salvation. Cf Lk 12:7, 32; Jn 12:15; Rv 1:17-18. (Hope so) (TLSB)

We must remember that the Apostle at this place does not say how Christians, terrified about their sins, should meet the thought of Judgment Day. Only by faith in Christ, which apprehends the merits of Christ, can one stand before the Judge. That is here presupposed. From such faith necessarily flows love. That faith in Christ quiets our heart against sin, we have read earlier in this epistle. Yet, what the Apostle writes here is meant to test our faith. Are we terrified by the thought of Judgment? We ought not to be. Our love is an evidence of faith. (Stoeckhardt)

4:19 All love comes ultimately from God; genuine love is never self-generated by his creatures. (CSB)

All love comes from God, who is love for us and to us. We are able to love one another only because we have received love from Jesus, who loved us first. "Our love for God, even though it is small, cannot possibly be separated from faith. For we come to the Father through Christ. When forgiveness of sins has been received, then we are truly certain that we have a God (Exodus 20:3), that is, that God cares for us. We call upon Him, we give Him thanks, we fear Him, we love Him as 1 John 4:19 teaches.... We love Him because He gave His Son for us and forgave us our sins. In this way John shows that faith comes first and love follows" (Ap. V 20). (TLSB)

John uses *agapē* throughout the text to indicate God's unconditional love. It conveys God's acceptance of us just as we are. But God's love does not leave us just as we are. It transforms us so that "we love because he first loved us" (v 19). Love of others is the tangible fruit of remaining in God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

"So it is clear that we require good works. In fact, we add that it is impossible to separate faith from love for God, be it ever so small. For through Christ we come to the Father; and having received the forgiveness of sins, we become sure that we have a gracious God who cares about us, we call upon him, fear, and love him. So John teaches in his first epistle (4:19); 'We love,' he says, 'because he first loved us,' that is, because he gave his Son for us and forgave us our sins. So he indicates that faith precedes while love follows" (Ap IV 141). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:20 *whom he has seen* – No one can see God (v. 12). The real, tangible way to show love for God is by loving one's brother. (TLSB)

God's love toward us is first. Such love is perfected as it makes its abode in us, so that we love God again. But this love necessarily from God to the brother. (Stoeckhardt)

4:21 *this commandment*. The Apostle says that this is a definite command of God that one who would continue in the love of God should also love his brother. That is final in this matter and cuts off all further argument. (Stoeckhardt)

Love for our Father and love for his children, our brothers and sisters, are the twin tablets of the one command, "Love!" Jesus joins Deut 6:4 and Lev 19:18 (Mt 22:37–40). So his "new command" (Jn 13:34), that night he gives his love. By this rule Jesus lived! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

4:7–21 As long as we remain in fellowship with the Father through faith, we love one another and have no fear of Judgment Day. Whenever we do not treat our brother with love as Jesus has loved us, we fear God's punishment. Because He sent His Son to take away our sins, we gain confidence to stand before God without fear. • Heavenly Father, I have not always loved my fellow Christians as I should. Forgive me and work Your love in me to cast out my fear of punishment. Amen. (TLSB)