

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ **In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.** ¹⁸ **There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.**

¹⁹ **We love because he first loved us.** ²⁰ **If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.** ²¹ **And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.** (NIV 84)

Theme: We love because he first loved us!

On the night of June 5th two convicted murderers from New York, Richard Matt and David Sweat escaped from prison. Matt was shot dead in a shootout a few days ago but as of last night Sweat was still at large—hiding in the woods and getting supplies from cabins. He is on the run; afraid because of what happened to his accomplice—he is running for his life. He’s afraid because he knows he is guilty and now he is simply hoping not to get caught because if he is he will face even more punishment than they were already facing. But what would if, whenever they get caught—and they will get caught—it’s only a matter of time, the judge decides to acquit them—not only for their escape from prison; but also for the murders? That is what we see today by the love of Christ.

The reason why most people feel guilty is because they are guilty; but there is no reason to feel guilty if you are innocent. If you haven’t done anything wrong then you don’t have any reason to be afraid. But the problem is that we are all guilty, we should all be shaking in our boots. Sure, there is no one here—to my knowledge at least, who has committed murder, or escaped from prison. I could go on listing crime after crime and chances are that none of you are guilty of any of those crimes. But we are still guilty, as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7, **There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.** John makes the same point earlier in this first letter, **If we**

claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

We are all guilty; because we have been conceived and born into sin we are all guilty. Even the good that we think we do is tainted by sin as Isaiah points out in chapter 64, **All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.** We are all guilty and we all deserve punishment—and not just a slap on the wrist, life-in-prison, or even the death penalty. We deserve something much worse—eternal damnation, suffering with the devil in hell forever.

And yet we don’t have to be afraid because Christ took our spot. On the cross Jesus took our sins upon himself, becoming guilty of each and every sin we have every committed. As Isaiah says in chapter 53, **He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** Then he gave us his perfect life, making us pure and holy in the eyes of the Lord. On behalf of his Son, God has declared each and every one of us not guilty. On the cross Jesus paid the price for our sins, becoming a sinner in our place and suffering the eternal punishment that we deserved.

John put it this way in our text for today, **perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.** Jesus shows us what true love is—his love is perfect because he is perfect. While we were still sinners he died for us. Love was the Lord’s conscious act of suffering and dying for us. And because of this act of love we have nothing to fear—he paid for our sins and gives us the gift of eternal life.

And so there is no fear of punishment. He had paid the price for us already. As John says **perfect love drives out fear.** Christ’s love and mercy, which led him to suffer and die in our place drives away every fear of punishment that may have had.

Sure we are all guilty, we have all committed so many sins day after day that we can’t keep track of them all. And God knows each and every one of them, even the ones that we do not realize. And yet he declares us not guilty on account of Christ. By his mercy and grace he remembers our sins no more.

There will come a day, called the Last Day, or Judgment Day, will Jesus will return to this earth. And on the Last Day he will judge the

world. It will be a great and dreadful day for many as their sins are exposed and they are sentenced to an eternity of suffering. But John says, **we will have confidence on the day of judgment.** How can we horrible, miserable sinners be confident before our righteous judge who knows everything we have done? Because everything we have done has been paid for by Christ. That great and dreadful day of judgment holds no terror for us. Because of Christ we know where we stand before God. We are confident and sure that when we die we'll be in heaven and on the Last Day our bodies will join our souls in heaven!

That is the result of God's love for us. His act of love that led him to suffer and die on the cross only to rise again leads us to show love to others. Verse 19, the theme for our sermon today, is also the theme verse of our VBS this week: **We love because he first loved us.** When we were sinners, when we were living in the uncircumcision of our sinful nature, Christ died for us. That is love. And it is this love that leads us to show love to others. The love we show to others indicates our love for God. If we love God then we'll love others since God commands us to love all people. What does your attitude toward others indicate? Is the word "hate" a common part of your vocabulary? If someone doesn't do what we like, or says some mean things about it, or mistreats us in some way the feelings of anger and hatred rise up in our hearts. And we may be led to do the same thing to them as they have done to us—yes our hatred can at times boil over to our words and actions. Taking someone's words and actions in the kindest possible way doesn't come naturally to us. Instead, we usually take them in the worst possible way. Or when someone sins against us our first reaction is to get even; and if they ask for forgiveness we often refuse because we just can't get over what they have done to us. And we know what John says in verse 20, **If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.** When we talk about how guilty we are, often our hatred and lack of love for others is on top of that list. Yes, it is our love for others that that indicates our love for God. But what exactly is love? Love here is not society's view of love—an emotion that swells up inside of you. It's not a conscious and

deliberate decision from the mind rather than an emotional reaction from the heart. When John says that God is love or God loved us first, he is not saying that Jesus had some emotional attachment to us; rather he is saying that the Lord showed us love; he treated us with love; he suffered and died for us.

So then think about verse 19 for a second. We love because he first loved us. This is not saying that we have an emotional connection with everyone. But rather that we have a care and concern for everyone; that we do nice things for others—taking care of those in need; and that we treat them with love and respect and try to do what is best for them; that we take their words and actions in the kindest possible way. It is putting the wants and needs of others in front of your own wants and needs—the love of God is a selfless act that leads us to be selfless in our dealings with others. And sometimes love means that we have to tell someone the truth—love isn't being okay with the sins of others, or looking the other way when they rebel against the Lord. Sometimes we must speak the truth in love by pointing out someone's sins and warning them where those unrepentant sins are leading.

But who should we show love to? We love because Christ loved us. And who were we when Christ loved us? His enemies—sinners who could do nothing but go against his will, who neither knew him nor cared about him. And yet from before the beginning of the world God chose you to be his own, to be saved through faith in his son. And that son suffered and died for and forgave the sins of the entire world—despite who we were and what we'd do.

In the same way we show love to all people. No matter who they are and what they might do to us. Loving with the love of Christ means that we show selfless love to all people. That means forgiving freely those who sin against us—not holding their sins over their heads but releasing them of any wrongdoing and not bringing it up down the road in order to manipulate them into doing something for you.

When we look at what it means to love as Christ loved us we realize that we fall woefully short. As sinners we cannot love as Christ loved, we fail each and every day. We are selfish, uncaring, hold grudges, and on and on. Like fugitives on the run, we should be afraid of what we have done and the punishment that we deserve.

And yet, we aren't and we don't have to be, because of the love of Christ. When your sins and lack of love weigh you down, when your

guilty overwhelms you fear not. Just look at the love of Christ, the love that freely forgave your sins by suffering and dying in your place. It is this love of Christ that releases you from your sin and leads you to show love to all people. We love because he first loved us. Amen.