

1 John 4:7–21

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] You may or may not be familiar with something called mind mapping.

It's a creative and nonlinear way of either taking notes on a talk or perhaps just consolidating your own thoughts around an idea that you want to explore.

Mind mapping wasn't around when I was educated. I wish it had been. My note taking was of a conventional sort. Eight and a half by eleven piece of paper.

College ruled. In other words, with lines. And it would sit on my desk in an upright position. Whether or not I had brought a pen to class.

My note taking was sequential by nature. Line by line. A detail of the natural progression of the logic of what was being taught in front of me.

[1 : 13] Mind mapping is different. Imagine taking an eight and a half by eleven piece of paper. But it's not lined. It's just computer paper. And rather than putting it in front of you vertically, you put it in the landscape orientation.

Then somebody begins to speak. I begin listening for what might be the main theme. The central idea. Once I come across it, I put it down.

Guess where? In the middle of the page. And not necessarily by just writing a word. But like an iPhone app. By drawing a symbol.

An image. And then as the movement goes. Or as my mind listens to what's happening. Other thoughts begin to flow naturally out of that main idea.

So that by the time a preacher is done with a 30, 35 minute message. I might have made a full circle of notes on a page. Everything, however, in relationship to the central thrust of what was being put forward.

[2 : 27] From what I understand, the memory or the retention benefit for those who do mind mapping, rather than the way I was raised, is as much as 10 to 15 percent more retention.

Wow, I wish I had had that. It's the difference between a C and a D. You laugh. I'm quite serious. I mention it now because I think it would help us as we come to this portion of 1 John.

For years, 1 John and the non-linear structure of the book has puzzled people. Making sense of the book through some preconceived sequential logic has almost been indecipherable for common readers and high-flying commentators alike.

And nowhere is that more in evidence than the verses we have before us. It's actually what kept me from preaching 1 John for the better part of 56 years. Why, Pastor, have you never gone through 1 John?

Because I don't know what John is doing. He seems to be going in circles. So take advantage of his way. The central idea of the text that was read for you today is as clear as counting from 1 to 10.

[3 : 54] Or in this case, 22. 22 times the word love. There's your main idea. There's your iconic symbol.

A heart. A heart. In the middle of your page. Or at least mark it in your mind. Because when someone asks you this afternoon, What was the sermon about today?

Oh, it was about love. That was the main thing. Here it is. 22 times in the brief spaces of these verses.

Everything here flows out of love. Now we normally think that 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter in the scriptures. But here's one that rivals it.

In the Johannine discourse. Chapter 4, verses 7 to 21. Love. Any particular kind of love. Notice where John's movement begins and ends.

[4 : 54] Can I show it to you? Look at verse 7 and 8. And then look again at verse 21. Here it is. Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God.

And knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God. Because God is love. And where does he end? When it's all finished. Verse 21. And this commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother. The iconic symbol of love which governs the whole. Is a particular kind of love.

Namely, he's connecting our love of God with our love for one another. Both in the beginning and the end. Your love for one another is an implication of God as love.

And those who love God love one another. It's all there. And it's good to ask why. Why this central theme that connects our love of God and our love with one another at this point in this letter.

[6 : 01] If you were here last week. You'll recall that the opening seven verses of chapter four. We're telling the church how to discern and assess all the teachings that were coming before them from the pulpit.

And that they were to be aware that not everything that came forth actually represented the teachings of God or of Christ.

And so he wanted them to know what are people saying to you about Jesus? And what are they saying to you about what the apostles teach?

In other words, there had been a relational rupture in the church. A split of sorts. Where variant teachings began to emerge.

And one church of John perhaps. Holding to the apostolic thought on who is Jesus and what does it mean. Well that had all been challenged.

[7 : 07] And someone had set their shingle up across the street and said no, no, no. Let me tell you about Jesus that I can construct. And a love that matters to the mind that I have.

And because there was that in play, there was a relational breach, a rupture, a divorce, a separation, a complete movement within the family of God into two different camps.

At least two different camps. At that moment, and for that reason, he talks about love. Because what happens when relational rupture occurs?

It gets explosive. Or it gets very quiet but divisive. One of the great things when we got married, decades ago now, we lived for the first four years over a garage, a two-car garage.

Our entire apartment was 20 by 24. I don't know what square footage that is because, you know, I didn't have mind mapping back then.

[8 : 15] But at any rate, it was small. Our kitchen was so small, you could not open. It didn't have an oven. Because an oven door wouldn't have been able to open. Four years, right there.

One of the greatest things for our early marriage. Because there was nowhere to go. I mean, if something happened, you couldn't hide in the living room because she was in the living room. And the bedroom was just a look, just like this.

We could vacuum the whole place with not even having to change outlets in the vacuum. And we didn't have to unwind all the court. Lisa, to this day, says, Small homes make for loving context.

Now, you know, come into my small space. We need a little separation. But we were touring the North Shore way up there, you know, way up there, where there were some big old places.

And it just looked like, wow, how do people actually get on in there? In other words, relationships can get quietly removed in large spaces. And working out love in the context of a church family, in this case, became important.

[9 : 33] John was writing to indicate that they must, in a day of relational rupture, be reminded to love one another, for love is from God. And that you can't talk to me about your love for God if you're not actually growing and making progress in your love for one another.

Those two things don't go together. Ruptures on one side, and everything's good with God on another side, is a disconnect, according to the text.

Let us love one another, for love is from God. Anyone who does not know God, or anyone who does not love, does not know God, because God is love.

And this is the commandment we have from Him. Whoever loves God, must also love his brother. There it is. The main thrust of what He wants to say, and, contextually, where it's coming from.

At this point, in the New Testament, church leadership had separated from one another and pulled congregants in different directions. It was nothing less than a complete falling out.

[10 : 51] You go your way, I'll go mine. And by way of principle, then, John calls the church, to love.

Well, where do we go? I mean, if it's good for churches, it's good for marriages. If it's good for marriages, it's good for neighborhoods. If it's good for neighborhoods, it's good for cities. Think about all the ways that this subject could apply.

Across the political spectrum, across the racial perspective, across the socioeconomic perspective, across the ecclesial perspective. It's all here. What does the city need?

It needs a disparate congregation like this. That's as wide as our country. Demonstrating a love for God by love for one another.

That's the mark. That's the beauty of the local church. Here it moves now.

[11:58] I'm going to show you my angles off the center of that page, that little heart icon. Verse 9, in this, all the way through verse 12, I've got something to say.

And then we're going to see in verse 13, by this, and I'm going to move you on your page around the circle. And then again, in verse 17, by this, so stay with me for just a moment.

Where do you go to learn what love is? In this, verse 9, that is, in Jesus, we perceive love. Let me read it to you.

In this, the love of God was made manifest among us. In other words, it was seen. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God, here it is, that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sin. Where do you go to get a portrait of love if love is what's required?

[13:07] You look at a picture of Jesus, a manifestation of Jesus. You look to Jesus. Who is the one who loves God and loves neighbor?

I mean, that's the whole message here. We're coming back to the very two core concepts in all of the Scripture. The most important commandments, love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

And there's a relationship between my love of my neighbor or my brother or anyone and my actual love of God. And where do you go to see that represented, to see it manifested, to see it?

You look at Jesus who was sent out of His context and not to a people who were loving Him. That's the strength of the verse.

He comes across the threshold of heaven like a bird-suited man descending onto earth to show you what God is like.

[14:13] And He flies into your sphere and He lands upon your life and you read Him in the biblical record and you say, this is love. This is God.

This is love. Jesus. That's where you go. In this, that is in Jesus, we perceive love.

love. It's important given our propensity to view love as merely some emotional connection.

No wonder we fall in and out of love. Because my emotions are going to change with the seasons and the winds. And so we begin to attach a meaning to love that actually isn't biblical.

It's not some internal, emotional vantage point on life. It's not some, it's not limited to a feeling. It's not this psychological sense of balance.

[15:20] It's actually a person. Jesus. Flesh and blood. love. Amen. I guess we're beginning to see that we need a corrective then on even what is love.

You know that my wife and I, wow, two illustrations from the Helm family in one sermon. If you're new here, that doesn't happen. So take good notes. You're learning more about me this week than you'll know the rest of the year.

But at any rate, you know, we run a marriage group here this year. We've got five of us couples in it. We've done it now for three years.

In our marriage group, we talk occasionally about the notion of how we can hold leverage over other people. What happens is, in our relationships with our spouses, just as it does in relationships in churches or at work or anywhere, you can become fixated into reading someone else's actions in a way that you think is detrimental to your own.

And what we really have within us is a stubbornness of heart, a callousness of soul that will refuse to treat others the way Jesus treated us. That's just the deal.

[16:42] I mean, that song we sang today, wow, we were all in on that song. I stand amazed at the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder, how could He love me, a sinner condemned unclean?

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful is my Savior's love for me.

We will look at Jesus and apply His love to our soul. But the question of the text and verses that need to be written are, where is that evidenced in the way I treat somebody else?

We'll take Jesus all the way to when I see His face. But don't put that other face in front of me that I actually got to look at by the morning light. We will grab hold of the gospel by way of a portrait and apply it to ourselves, but we will not look outside our window and display it to others.

Why? Well, because of our heart. Because of our heart. this is what He's saying here. Your motivation to love others will be called to an actual sense of what will that look like by looking at Jesus.

[18 : 26] This is why I said at the beginning of the year we're going to spend all year getting a vision of Christ. Because I said your vision of Jesus is the most important thing you get. And some may say, what a waste of time.

When are we going to get on to something? But my conviction is this. What you think about Jesus, believe about Jesus, look at concerning Jesus, should and eventually does have an impact on everything you do in life.

And the reason sometimes that we're not living and loving as we ought to is because in truth we spend very little time looking at Jesus. So here it is.

This is love. God sent His Son into the world. so that we might live through Him. This is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be appreciation for our sin.

Therefore, look at verse 11. Notice how a look at Jesus then begins to affect us. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God.

[19 : 30] If we love one another, God abides in us and love is perfected in us. Your motivation to love others comes through a self-conscious reflection on how God loved you. Why are we still unloving?

Love Him. Come on. Truth be told, from Sunday to Sunday, we give very few minutes to reflecting on the love of God in Christ.

And who are we to say that we will not forgive another when we are grabbing hold of God's forgiveness for all it's worth?

How can we love God and not look out our window and extend love to others? How can I recognize that He was sent by God at the time when I was not loving God and not extend love to others who are not loving me?

How can I acknowledge or embrace that He turned away the wrath of God for me and not even turn away my own anger or displeasure or wrath toward others?

[20 : 52] It's a logical disconnect. And I think that whole idea then love God love your neighbor as yourself I mean that just sounds so easy and you and I know how elusive it is but the only way to make progress is to realize this in this that is in Jesus you perceive what love is.

So start looking at them. Second how are you going to move forward then? Look again verse 13 by this that is by the spirit you possess love.

This is a very important point because you and I don't have the power within ourselves to do Jesus. We can't emulate it. We need actually his spirit because it's my spirit it's out of what's inside of me that's actually continuing to rupture or stubbornly resist what God wants from me.

So he says by this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he's given us of his spirit and we have seen and testified that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God abides in him and he in God so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us God is love and whoever abides in the love of God God abides in him the sense of abiding in him comes through the power of the spirit in other words if the main idea here is love and one facet of it is in this that is in Jesus you perceive love then these verses are turning to talk about!

something! You can't love without abiding in the spirit it's not in us we need God to take up residence and once done we need to abide in him the dilemma in my own life and perhaps in yours is you are more than willing to let Jesus in but he starts walking around in these interior rooms we got some doors shut in fact when he starts taking over a little more room we might say time for me to get out this is the dilemma of cleaning anything up in your house although you need to clean it up buy yourself a nice vase put it on your mantle!

[23 : 26] and guess what happens everything else in this room is going to have to change why because the beauty and the treasure of what it is you begin to realize that everything else around it no longer fits that's what happens with Jesus Jesus comes in you put him on the mantle you see

him for who he is and you have to abide there and to abide there means I gotta get out the vacuum to abide there means that's gotta go this has gotta go this thing don't even tell me why to go see you abide in the spirit but we don't always do that do we we grieve the spirit we say glad glad to have you but don't get too much work done in me because I plan on walking where I want to walk abiding in the spirit is the key to growing as a

Christian never make the mistake according to these verses that your conduct is connected to your confession did you notice that it's really interesting he talks in this section concerning the spirit in verse 13 and links it in verse 15 to what we confess about Jesus it's not just your conduct your conduct flows from your confession do you confess Jesus to be the son of God to have come in the flesh to be the one who takes away sins that confession can't move and because of that confession everything in my life has to change if you want to learn a thing or two about love you perceive it by looking at Jesus you possess it by believing and abiding in Jesus and then verse 17 to 20 you've got to get on a path that will perfect you in the ways of

Jesus notice how he turns here verse 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 the world there's 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 let me slow down for a moment because there's a lot there in this in Jesus we perceive love by this that is by the spirit you possess love now by this that is by following in the way of love you will be perfected in love how do you how do you be perfected in love you're going to wake up one morning and go whoop turned over a new leaf I'm going to be a Jesus person now no it's not going to happen you're going to have to be perfected in love how are you perfected in love by following in the way of love by putting something into practice

I mean that's what it is when you follow in the way of love you are perfected in love and it has evidently a future benefit namely according to the text confidence on the day of judgment what will make you confident to stand before God well you're a little more confident when you actually can realize I'm making progress in my walk with God so as you are putting something into practice where you're loving where yesterday you were not that will increase your confidence on the day of judgment whereas now not many of us want God to show up tomorrow imagine the fear that takes place when we're not living in love or walking in love or knowing his Lord or actually I mean fear comes in all the time when you know you're doing something wrong and someone else almost hints that they might be on to the fact of what it is you're doing as soon as that happens in a conversation somebody says now

I have a question for what's coming you're fearful did you did you the other day oh did I where where were you when oh fear fear comes because your conscience actually is at work indicating that you're on the wrong road whereas when you're actually following in the way of love ask whatever you want to ask do you see how that happens on a horizontal level person to person our confidence in our relationships with one another it's a result of the conduct and too often our conduct is actually undermining the connection that we have and so as an internal check [28 : 50] God has given us a wonderful gift called conscience if you're a parent and you're raising children don't let them take the building blocks out of the wall of conscience and if you're an adult and you've taken so many blocks out of conscience that you no longer are even calling your mind back to a fear based upon a conduct that's not following in the way of love then you've got a wall to rebuild don't walk over the wall of conscience when you climb over enough times guess what happens your life becomes a mess and when you get to a point where you say whatever game over I'm not rebuilding that wall and you think that somehow you're going to enter into a new arena of profitability it doesn't happen you've got to rebuild you've got to restore so too on a vertical level you want confidence with

God start loving your neighbor as yourself walk in love you'll gain confidence in your future and it's also a present help not just a future help present help when you begin to follow in the way of love you begin to cast out a fear which is the consequence of knowing that you're condemned let me put it as simply as I can our love of God is intimately related to our love of one another they can't you can't pull them apart if you want to know what that relationship looks like you perceive it when you look to Jesus if you want to know how you enter into it you possess it when the spirit of the living God is given access to your life if you want to know how it's perfected well you begin to follow in the way of it so what does this mean what does this mean for us in Jesus we perceive love by the spirit we possess love only by following in the way of love will we be perfected in love what it means for

me get my eyes back on

Jesus get my knees back on the ground asking for his spirit get off my knees and on my feet and begin following in the way of love racially politically economically maritally ecclesially all of it and as we do that we actually fulfill the commandment of God this is why in churches I'm not going to have you do it but this is why in churches it all comes back to getting back to the foot of the cross quit looking out the window ready to point out the other person's fault and start looking in the mirror and realizing

I got some blemishes that don't measure up and when I look at the portrait of Christ at Calvary I got to stay there our heavenly father we thank you for this love chapter and we pray that in a day when there's so much church division so much relational deterioration so many facets of our own personal life and history where we're unsatisfied I ask that you would just help us a little bit today to be reminded that our love for you is connected to our love for one another may we perceive it in Jesus possess it by your spirit and perfect it by following in your ways in his name we pray amen