

Briefing Document: 1 John Lesson 74: Exhibiting Perfect Love

Wednesday, August 26, 2026

Executive Summary

This document summarizes the teachings from Lesson 74 on 1 John, focusing on the biblical concept of "perfect love." The central theme is that human beings are created in the image of God specifically for interpersonal relationships. This image is not physical but spiritual, involving self-consciousness and the capacity to reason, feel, and relate to others.

True "perfect love" is defined as a love that is complete and cannot be improved upon. It is a gift from God that is poured into the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit. The document outlines how love serves as evidence of a person's salvation, passing through three stages: proof of fellowship, evidence of being a child of God, and finally, a manifestation of God dwelling within the believer. Ultimately, the study concludes that because God is the essence of love, those who are born of Him must habitually practice a love of the will toward others.

The Image of God and Human Relationship

The study explains that man was created in God's image, which refers to immaterial and spiritual traits rather than physical ones. God designed humanity for personal relationships, providing specific capacities that separate humans from the rest of creation on Earth:

- **Self-consciousness:** The ability to understand oneself.
- **Abstract Thought:** The capacity to think beyond the immediate and physical.
- **Emotional and Moral Consciousness:** The ability to feel, reason, acquire wisdom, and appreciate beauty.

At the core of this design is the capacity to love and be loved. This reflects God's own nature, as the text notes that God has never existed in a lonely or solitary fashion. Instead, He has always existed in a "family-like reality" consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Defining Perfect Love

The term "perfect love" appears four times across three verses in 1 John 4. In this context, "perfect" does not mean "flawless" in a human sense, but rather "complete."

The Meaning of Completeness

The study uses the Greek concept of *teleo*^[1] to define perfection. This refers to carrying something out to its greatest extent.

- **Finished Work:** When Jesus said "It is finished" on the cross, he used a form of this word (*tetelestai*^[2]). It implies that the work is complete and cannot be improved or added to.
- **Fullness:** Perfect love is the experience of God's love in its total fullness. It is a legacy given to the children of God.

Love as a Choice

The type of love commanded in the New Testament is *agapao*^[^3]. This is described as:

- **A Love of the Will:** It is not based on "chewy, gooey" emotions or physical attraction.
- **Habitual:** It is a practiced, consistent way of treating others.
- **Self-Sacrificing:** It involves serving those who may be unlovable or unattractive, choosing to meet their needs regardless of their personal qualities.

Love as Evidence of Salvation

John's letter uses love as a "moral proof" to help believers determine if they are truly saved. The study highlights that John cycles through this theme three times, each with a deeper meaning:

Stage of Teaching	Reference	Purpose of Love
First Mention	1 John 2:7–11	Proof of true fellowship and walking in the light.
Second Mention	1 John 3:10–19	Evidence of "sonship" (being a child of God).
Third Mention	1 John 4:7–21	Manifestation of God dwelling (<i>indwelling</i>) within the believer.

The study emphasizes that "orthodox doctrine" (right beliefs) is not enough to prove salvation. True conversion must demonstrate itself through the habitual practice of love.

Six Reasons to Love

The document identifies several reasons why believers are commanded to love, with the primary reason being the very nature of God.

1. **The Essence of God:** Love is not just something God does; it is who He is. The text identifies three "L" words to describe God's nature: God is Light, God is Life, and God is Love.
2. **The Definition of Love:** The text clarifies that while "God is love," it is incorrect to say "love is God." Humans do not get to define love and then apply that definition to God. Instead, God defines love through His own character and actions.
3. **The Result of the New Birth:** Everyone who is "born of God" receives His "DNA." Because God is the source of love, those who are begotten of Him will naturally reflect His loving nature.
4. **The Gift of the Spirit:** As stated in *Romans 5:5*, "*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*" This is described as a floodgate being opened, providing a "thick," abundant love to the believer.

Conclusion and Applications

The study concludes that the fullness of God's love is available to all who are saved, but it is experienced most deeply through obedience. As *1 John 5:3* states, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."*

To experience the perfection of this love, a believer must move beyond emotional sentiment and commit to a love of the will, which serves as a tangible reflection of God's presence in their life.

Greek Vocabulary Guide

Greek Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Brief Definition
Telo ^[^1]	TEH-loh	To be complete or whole; to carry something out to the greatest extent.
Tetelestai ^[^2]	te-TEL-es-tie	A verb form meaning "It is finished" or "It is paid in full."
Agapao ^[^3]	ah-gah-PAH-oh	A divine, self-sacrificing love of the will; the highest type of love.
Phileo ^[^4]	fill-EH-oh	Brotherly love or affectionate friendship.

Scripture References (NKJV):

- *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* (2 Timothy 4:7)
- *...and His love has been perfected in us.* (1 John 4:12)
- *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.* (1 John 4:7-8)
- *Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.* (1 John 2:5)
- *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.* (1 John 3:10)

[^1]: See table: Greek Vocabulary Guide for definition and pronunciation. [^2]: See table: Greek Vocabulary Guide for definition and pronunciation. [^3]: See table: Greek Vocabulary Guide for definition and pronunciation. [^4]: See table: Greek Vocabulary Guide for definition and pronunciation.