

“PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR.”

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Scripture Texts: I John 4:13-21

Introduction.

The apostle John is called the apostle of love.

The word love occurs 57 times in his gospel, more than the other three gospels combined.

The word love occurs 46 times in his first letter, 27 of which are in chapter 4.

That makes this chapter the other love chapter in the Bible after the famous I Corinthians 13.

Twice John says God is love. Five times John says love one another. Those two themes go together.

After all John has said about love and God, he is not finished, he still has more to say. And when he is done he will not have said it all. God's love is unfathomable. That's why Paul prays for God's enabling grace

Ephesians 3:17-19 that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I John 4:17-18.

John has been talking about love over and over again.

He has talked about loving God and about God's love for us.

He has talked about how God first loved us.

He has talked about the proof of God's love in His taking action and sending His Son.

He has talked about loving others as the proof of our love for God.

He has talked about loving not just in words but in deeds.

For the second time in this chapter John has declared the incredibly good news that God is love.

But then in verses 17-18 something kind of strange happens. There is a shift of gears, change of direction. John who is the master of repetition uses two words he hasn't used before. He introduces a new topic, the topic of judgment and fear.

Why does he all of a sudden start talking about judgment and fear?

Some people believe they are the two basic emotions, love and fear.

All positive emotions flow from love, like happiness, contentment, peace, and joy. All negative emotions flow from fear, like anger, hate, anxiety and guilt.

They say you can't feel both of them at the same time. They are like opposite scales on a balance, as one goes up the other goes down.

So in some ways this is John's crescendo, his building up to a powerful point. This is the goal of all this love, here is the perfect purpose of God's great love manifested to us in Christ. That we can stand before God with confidence on the judgment day and we can do so with a complete absence of fear.

Verse 17 is what everyone wants to have (confidence, boldness on day of judgment).

Verse 18 is what everyone wants to get rid of (fear).

Day of Judgment.

Scripture states in the plainest and simplest of terms the reality of judgment.

Hebrews 9:27 Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.

It is a fixed day, a real day, a coming day. A day we will all face, believers and unbelievers.

Judgment and hell are terrible horrors everyone should tremble to even think about. It's so bad Jesus warned us with the strongest possible words:

Mark 9:47-48 If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

So in the face of this terrible reality, what hope and help do we have? How can we have confidence and no fear on that day?

How is this possible?

First, when the judge becomes our abba Father, fear flees and love enters in.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

God is for us and not against us.

“The Father's love for His children reaches its intended goal when it produces in them a feeling of security so powerful that they lose all fear of judgment. When our sense of being loved by God becomes so internally intense that we can only smile at the prospect of judgment day, His passion has fulfilled its purpose!” (Sam Storms).

Second, when the Son of God becomes our advocate, fear flees and love enters in.

I John 2:1-2 we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins.

There is a difference in a court room between a person who is guilty and a person who is innocent. There is a difference in God's court room between those who have Jesus as their lawyer and those who are representing themselves. Those who have Jesus are declared innocent.

But, it's better than that.

Third, fear flees and love enters in because as He is so also are we in this world.

This is a stunning statement with staggering implications. Not only is Jesus our lawyer, but as far as God is concerned we are like Jesus, we are as He is.

I John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

God looks at us through Christ-colored glasses. What does that mean? God looks at us and sees Jesus, sees Jesus' righteousness in us, sees us standing there in Jesus' robes of righteousness. God looks at us and sees Christ's perfect obedience. God looks at us and sees His perfect love for His Son and all who are in His Son.

That's staggering when you consider the magnitude to which the Father loves the Son.

We will stand before God as confidently as the Son does.

As we are conformed to Christ, so God will not deny His own image standing before Him.

I John 2:28-29 Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

Jesus is our only confidence to stand before a holy and righteous God. I will hide myself in Christ and His perfect righteousness, in spite of my unworthiness.

We look forward to judgment day confident that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Romans 8:1).

Fourth, God is not just for me, God dwells in me, abides in me by His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us. We are different because of Christ and His Spirit. We have a different standing before God.

Perfect love casts out fear.

What kind of perfect are we talking about here? This is not flawless perfection. The word perfect here means complete, mature, whole, having reached its goal.

What kind of fear are we talking about here?

Fear of public speaking, heights, flying, mice, small spaces? We aren't talking about earthly phobias.

We are also not talking about that kind of fear that is good, fear of the Lord, awe and reverence.

Think of it as the difference between being afraid of God, and having a good fear of the Lord.

Being afraid comes from guilt, dread, fear of punishment.

The fear that perfect love casts out is the fear of judgment, fear of punishment, fear of death. If we have fear, dread, doubt, torment, lack of peace and rest, then love has not been perfected in us.

John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The only person who need fear is the person who is not covered by the perfect love and perfect sacrifice and perfect blood of Jesus.

So why do we still experience fear?

Because love is not yet completely perfected in us. We still slip into fear. There are still moments when the things of this world are more desirable or attractive to us, times when visible idols are more real than the invisible God. Still times of unbelief, still times of wavering doubt, still times of anxiety and worry and stress.

There are times, frequent times, when we are not controlled by the perfect love of God for us in Christ, when we are not living and abiding in Him, when we are not walking by faith.

In other words the second stanza of Amazing Grace should not be treated as a once and for all event, but a daily need:

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed.

I John 4:19-21.

Our text ends repeating what John has emphasized earlier in this chapter. If we don't love others then we are liars about our love for God. If we don't love our brother who we can see then we don't love God who we can't see.

John's argument is that it is easier to love someone we can see, than to love someone we can't see.

How can we say we love God whom we can't see, when we don't love the very image of God standing before us in the form of another person? If we don't love the image of God, we lie when we say we love God.

“How shall the hater of a visible image of God pretend to love the unseen original, the invisible God himself?” (Matthew Henry).

This is how you know your love is maturing, growing, become complete, whole, increasingly Christ like, when we love others, even our enemies, as He loved us.

Gospel gratitude leads us to love others as we have been loved by God.

Love always flows in two directions according to the two great commandments. They are bookends. They are heads and tails. There must be both, love for God and love for others.

Implications and application.

If we want holy confidence and holy boldness before God and in the presence of God on that great and final day of judgment, then the way to increase that is to dwell in love, to abide in love, to cultivate this grace, to pray for this continually from God, to ask for this fruit of the Holy Spirit to be more manifest, for love to grow to maturity, be diligent in seeking this from God by the help of the Holy Spirit.

We have the practice in the CRC of making a special point of preparing to come to the Lord's Table. We draw attention to it so that we will give special attention to see if there be any sin in our hearts or any unresolved issues with others, to make reconciliation before receiving the Lord's Supper.

Is there anyone with whom I am harboring unforgiveness? Is there anyone from whom I am withholding love or forgiveness? Anyone I am not speaking to, anyone I am avoiding? Is there any bitterness, any critical spirit, any anger, hatred, ill will, vengeance?

Give a voice to your love, some tangible expression, some act, some word.

I John 3:18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

I John 4:11-12 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.