

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR
That You May Know - I John Series - Week 10
Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is so good to see you guys here. It is wonderful to see you and it is a wonderful reminder of the gospel and the love of God. And I don't know about you but I think with the days between Sundays we need that reminder more than ever. And I find every day is feeling like a cycle of warfare is going on around us and inside of us. So I think what we are about to do in opening up God's Word is so important. Let's turn in our Bibles to I John Chapter 4 and we will be beginning in verse 7.

One of my favorite cartoon shows as a kid was the cartoon, 'Transformers.' That was my show. In 1984 I absolutely loved Transformers and GI Joe. And like any show that we love I have noticed they have a very similar theme every single episode. We expect the same thing every time. And for Transformers it was like this - Megatron, the big bad Decepticon, would have a plan to conquer the universe. He would have this plan and he would kind of take some ground, but then Optimus Prime and the Autobots would figure out a way to stop Megatron from conquering the earth. And there would be an act of bravery, or sacrifice, or strength that would get them through. And at the end of the day the conflict would ensue with Optimus Prime and the Autobots winning at least until the next show. That was the cycle of the show. And we kind of get that theme throughout a lot of shows we watch.

And as we are studying I John we realize we have only two teaching times left. This is the last full sermon of I John, and then next week Dan is going to be leading a kind of wrap up discussion of I John, and I am excited about what he is going to be doing with that. Then the next Sunday after that, which is the first Sunday in August, we will be starting a series on spiritual warfare. And I am super excited to start getting into that.

Now I am not sure if you have noticed this but there is a lot in I John that has to do with loving one another. I was going through my notes and the sermons I have preached as well as looking over Dan's sermons and it just felt like almost every sermon was like, '*Hey, we need to be people of love.*' '*We need to love one another.*' And there is this theme over and over again as John is going back to this idea of loving one another. Fourteen times in this tiny letter John mentions loving one another. Out of those fourteen times four of those are a command. John is saying, '*This is important.*'

Here is what I know. John is in his eighties. He has walked with Jesus for probably close to seven decades. And he has seen a lot. He has experienced a lot. He is toward the end of his life. He can look back and remember what it was like as a disciple, what it like as a pastor, and what it was like to be an elder. He has walked with Jesus in person, he has walked with Jesus in the Spirit, and now he is writing this letter to Christians and saying, '*Listen, there is one thing I know that makes a difference in this*

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world. There is something that will transform you. There is something that will make a difference in this world - and it is this one simple fact of loving one another.'

The world doesn't understand love. And we know that Jesus came out of love and for love and into love to show us how great His love is for us. One of the things we have to understand is that in order for us to be people of love we have to be captivated by God's love. And over and over John is sharing this idea, sharing these thoughts, and just like a hammer pounding in a nail hoping it goes into the board, fourteen times in this letter John is saying, '*Love one another, love one another, love one another, love one another.'*

And as we get to this last section we will see where John is still talking about loving one another. And today we will be in verses 7 through 21. We won't have time to dig into all of it, but there is one phrase in here that stands out above the rest. So let's read I John Chapter 3 and verses 7 through 21, and then we will find this one phrase that I think is so powerful.

"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." John is making the connection between love and God. It is two inseparable ideas. God is love and if you know God you will be a person of love. You cannot know God, you cannot believe in God, you can't be a follower of Jesus if there is no love in your heart.

"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. 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us."

"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he is 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 love abides in God, and God abides in him."

"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. 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. We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he

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has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

John begins and ends this section with this idea of loving one another. We are to love our brothers and sisters. And in the middle of this is this phrase which I think we need to camp at and just kind of mediate on it in order to understand it. This phrase says, **“Perfect love casts out fear.”** Wouldn’t that make a great statement on a coffee mug? **“Perfect love casts out fear,”** would also be great as a bumper sticker. We have heard this phrase before and probably thought it sounded great, but what does it mean? What is it calling us too?

There is a reality here that John is trying to get across because he knows the hardest thing for us to do as human beings is to love each other. It does not come easily. And I know this - based on the last five months of this year, the number one emotion I have seen from people around me, and even with my own self, is the emotion of fear. Fear is captivating. Fear takes territory in our hearts and in our souls, and if we do not confront it with the love of God it will captivate our minds, and it will motivate us to live lives that God does not want us to live. We need to confront the fear that seems to be taking over our lives. It is in our churches and in our nation and we need to confront it with the love of God.

So we are going to take this phrase, **“Perfect love casts our fear,”** and break it up into three sections and talk about each section individually. Let’s look first at ‘perfect love.’ What does John mean by ‘perfect love?’ He is not talking about love that is flawless. He is not saying, *‘Hey, if you want perfect love, you have to do it perfectly. You have to do it flawlessly. You have to love people flawlessly.’* That is not what he means.

In fact if we look again at verse 12 it says this: **“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.”** Okay? So we know that perfection, or this idea of perfect love has nothing to do with flawlessness. It carries this idea in the Greek word of meaning of something carried to completion, something that the end goal has been accomplished. And so what John is saying is perfect love, if we are going to label something as perfect love, perfect love is love which is received from God and then poured out on others. That is perfect love.

See, it is one thing to receive love, it is one thing to understand love, and it is one thing to abide in the love that God gives us. It is one thing to understand it, to know it, and to believe it, and it is one thing to have it poured out on us through Jesus. So if we accept the love of God and feel so loved by filling our minds with all that He has done for us, but it stops with us, then love is not perfect. Love has to keep going. Love has to keep moving. That is the way God intended His love and His Spirit to work in all of our lives. What He wants us to do is to understand it, receive it, know it, believe it and then live it out.

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I am not an electrician, but I have done enough electrical work to know something about it. We did an addition onto our house many years ago. And I am one of these dangerous people who can go to Lowe's and buy some things and do some basic electrical work which is scary. But I know this - when I turn on a light switch and nothing happens, I know that something is wrong. We know that when we turn on that switch something is supposed to happen. From what I understand if the refrigerator is on and there are other places where I can plug in a lamp and it works then there is power coming to the house. So if the light switch isn't working then I have to go check the fuse box. I have one of those handy little instruments that I can touch the wires with to make sure there is current coming through it. And I know that if the light switch doesn't work then there is something blocking the power from reaching its end goal and turning on the light.

And what I think John is trying to say here is there is a conduit of God's love we receive, but if we allow fear to captivate us it will block the flow of electrical love that is supposed to flow out of us to other people. Fear stops it. And John talks over and over again about how much God loves us, and how He is the propitiation for our sins. The song we sang this morning talked about how Jesus received the wrath of God for us. What can transform our hearts and our minds is when we understand the love of God more and more and more. And the more we understand God's love the more it will change our own understanding of how we need to love other people.

Two times in this passage it mentions how God loves us. In verse 19 it says, "***We love because He first loved us.***" I think most of us have a definition of love, or how we measure love, and it is rooted in our experience as human beings within our family and friend structures. And what happens is we measure love by how we have received love from other human beings. But here is what we know - no matter how great our family is, no matter how good our parents are, there are always flaws. There are always inconsistencies or conditions to love.

And even as a parent myself I look back and I wish I would have loved my children better. I know I am flawed in the way that I truly love other people. And I don't want my wife or my children to measure God's love by the way I have loved them, because I am inconsistent and I am conditional by nature. Do you know why? It is because I have received inconsistent and conditional love in my own life. And what John is telling us is that God has a type of love that can only be received by Him and it is so good and so real it is almost unbelievable. It is almost unbelievable.

In fact I love what John says here in verse 16: "***So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.***" There is a huge difference between coming to know the love of God and coming to believe the love of God. For so many of us it has stopped with knowledge, and it has not turned to belief. We need to understand that He loved us first before we did anything. He didn't tell us to clean up our lives, work on our addictions, or fix this part of us, and then He would receive us.

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The Bible tells us that while we were still sinners, while we are His enemies, Christ loved us. There is nothing we can do to earn His love. There are no conditions but belief. I think one of the confrontations we have to bring into our own hearts is to try and comprehend how limited our understanding of love is. And here is the proof - if our love for our spouse, our children, our neighbors and our friends is limited and conditional and inconsistent, we need to trace the problem back. And usually we will find that the problem is we don't really believe God's love for us. We have not really received God's love in the way that He wants us to receive it. We haven't really understood it the way He wants me to understand it.

The gospel transforms our lives. And when we understand that God's love is so great then we will have to share it with others. Perfect love is love that is received and poured out. That is perfect love. It is that something that you are showing other people. It is when people look at your life and say: *'This person is a person of love.'*

Recently our neighbors got into a fight with one another. People have just been on edge right now. They are frustrated and most people are just not in a good mood. And so our neighbors got into this fight. In the last few days the neighbor on the other side of my next door neighbor has been blaring rock music from 7a to 9p just to drive the other neighbor crazy. But the overflow of sound is coming into my back yard, my oasis, as well. My little patio where I have my Jesus time has been interrupted. And I could tell you what I wanted to do about that, but I have to preach on love. I have to preach about living this love out.

And in those moments I have to decide what I am going to do when I am so aggravated. What I am going to do when I am so frustrated. What I am going to do when someone does something offensive or unjust to me. It is in those moments when our love is tested. We have to remember how we have been to God, how we have done so many things far worse than what my neighbor is doing right now. And God has always responded with kindness, grace, mercy, love and goodness because that is who He is. And when we understand that, when we receive it and believe it, that is when we can pour it out on others. That is perfect love.

The next word I want us to look at is 'fear.' We are going to skip over 'cast out' and look at 'fear' for a moment. ***"Perfect love casts out fear."*** Listen, we all know what fear is. We just have to be honest with ourselves about what kind of fear we are feeling in these moments. A lot of people fear death. A lot of people fear getting sick. A lot of people fear what is going to happen to the economy. A lot of people fear what is going to happen in the election. And it seems like every other article someone sends me to read is rooted in this idea of fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of something we can't control.

And when we think about the antidote for fear most of us think of courage, or we think of something that has to do with fighting back. But it is interesting that two times in Scripture God points out that the opposite of fear is love. It says in this passage in

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verse 18, ***“There is no fear in love.”*** We cannot be fearful and loving at the same time. They can’t co-exist. We can’t put them together and mix them up. Have you ever put a little oil in water? You can stir those around and around but that bubble of oil is not going to disseminate. It won’t get absorbed by the water. Water and oil are two distinct entities that can never become a compound.

Love and fear are the same way. They can never mix. So what John is saying is we need to evaluate our own hearts and ask ourselves where fear exists right now. What is fear motivating us to say? What is fear motivating us to do? What is fear motivating us to act like? And when we evaluate our fear, then we can begin to think clearly about it.

John says this in verse 17: ***“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.”*** What does John mean by the ***“day of judgment?”*** I have many people asking me things like this recently: *‘Ben, do you think this is it?’ ‘Do you think what is happening in our world, the chaos, the craziness, the pandemic, the locusts eating everything; are we in the end times?’* I have had so many questions from people, and I don’t know the answers. I simply do not know.

But when you think about the ***“day of judgment,”*** what is the emotion you feel? There is a question we would ask a lot of times when we would go out doing street evangelism when I was younger and it was this: *‘If you were to die tonight and stand before God and He asked you why should He let you into Heaven, what would you say?’* That is a good question. And that question freaked people out. *‘If you died and stood before God what would you feel?’*

John tells us that if we understand the gospel, if we understand Jesus’ death for us on the cross, His taking the punishment for our sins, not only paying the penalty but rising again from the dead, when we understand His love, His mercy and His grace then we can have confidence. We can have confidence for the ***“day of judgment.”***

Now confidence is an odd word, isn’t it? I did a study on that word and I think the best definition I have ever found on the word ‘confidence’ is from the Greek and it means ‘joyful courage.’ Confidence is joyful courage. And we can have confidence for the ***“day of judgment.”*** We don’t have to fear what is going to happen to us when we die. When we face God we don’t have to fear, and do you know why? It is because it says right here in verse 17, ***“Because as He is so also are we in this world.”***

When we by faith believe and trust in the love of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and accept His salvation for us, then we don’t have to fear judgment or condemnation anymore. We don’t have to fear what is going to happen to us because we have now been unified with Christ. There is a union we now have with Jesus. His righteousness is now our righteousness. We are now under His authority. We are under His blessing. His blessing, His position, His righteousness, everything that Jesus owns and controls we

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are under that. We are under it, we are unified with Him and we don't have to be afraid anymore.

When I was growing up I grew up in the church. My dad was a pastor the first ten years of my life. And I grew up in a world where most people were fearful of the return of Jesus, fearful of the rapture, or the second coming of God. And when I was in Junior High this would freak me out. I don't know if this ever happened to you or not, but sometimes I would come home thinking my mom would be there, and when she wasn't I was like, *'Where's mom? Did I miss the rapture?'* And I would think, *'Oh God, I am so sorry. Please forgive me. Can you give me a second chance?'*

Or I thought my parents would be home when they said they would be home and they would be out later, and I would think, *'Oh no, the rapture.'* Every time something bad took place I was sure the rapture had happened and I was left all alone on this earth to go through the seven year tribulation. And when that happened, in that moment of fear, the experience of thinking I had been left behind, I would immediately start reading my Bible and praying.

Now is reading your Bible and praying good? It absolutely is, but what was motivating me during those times? It was fear. How much of your good deeds, or your righteousness, or your reading the Bible and praying is rooted in fear? Maybe you know that God loves you, but you aren't sure if He likes you. You are just afraid that God cannot be that kind, He cannot be that loving, and He cannot be that good. One of the hardest realities we have to confront in our own hearts is fear, because when we are walking in fear we cannot have joy.

One of the things I think is missing, and I am not trying to make any political statement here, but when people are wearing masks we miss people's smiles. And what I am noticing is there is joy missing today. How do we become people of joy? How do we become present where we are? How do we begin loving those around us? How do we love sacrificially? How do we love first? How do we do that? Well, we have to confront the fear in our lives, the fear that may be motivating us to live in a certain way. The fear that makes us question if God really likes us, if God really accepts us, if God will abandon us, or if God will punish us. So fear can motivate everything we do in life.

John says that perfect love casts out fear. So now let's look at the words 'casts out' next. We looked at perfect love and we looked at fear, so now let's look at this verb 'casts.' This word in the Greek simply means 'to throw aside.' It is the same word that we would use for a farmer who was scattering seeds, putting his hands in a bag and just throwing seeds from side to side. There is something about this verb that I think we need to understand because when it comes to fear many times we are passive in our nature against fear and we let fear dictate to us how we live, what we do, what we believe, and what we think.

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And so the train of fear leaves the station chugging down the track. We may be lying in bed and all of a sudden we start worrying about losing our house, losing our car, losing our job, or losing our family. All because there is a seed of fear that is taking over our minds and we are awake for hours wrestling with it.

One of the things that I think is powerful about this is the idea that love is more powerful than fear. John could not say, “*Perfect love casts our fear,*” if perfect love was not more powerful than the fear. It is not something like, ‘*Man, I just don’t know if I can believe that love is strong.*’ No, no, love is stronger than fear. And when we understand and believe the fullness of the gospel, fear cannot stand against it. Love wins every single time. Perfect love casts out fear.

When I was a kid and my dad was a pastor in Virginia, once a year they would get this big pile of mulch to do landscaping around the church. I mean it would be just this massive pile of mulch. And me and all of the other elementary kids would of course play on that pile of mulch. We loved to play ‘King of the Hill.’ Have you ever played that game when you were a kid? The whole idea is someone is going to get to the top of the hill and then others are going to try and take him out so they can become the king of the hill.

And there were about seven or eight boys in this church about my age and we are just pulling, dragging, kicking, and punching as we tried to become the king of the hill. It was the greatest thing ever. And my brother who was two years older than me, and who has always been taller, broader, bigger than me always made me look like the runt of the litter when I was standing by him. So once my brother got on the top of the hill it didn’t matter what we did. It didn’t matter how much we pulled, how much we punched, how much we kicked, it didn’t matter because my brother was going to win that fight because he was just bigger than us.

And I think about that feeling of ‘*I can try, but it is just not going to happen.*’ And I think many times we think fear is more powerful because once that thought of fear creeps into our thinking, we let it win. So we need to understand that the love of God is more powerful because perfect love casts out fear. Not only do we need to understand that perfect love is more powerful than fear, but we also need to understand that many times we are passive and not offensive in our dealing with fear. We let fear grow like weeds in the garden.

If you have a garden at home, or if you have a flower bed, you will see weeds growing and you know you have to do something. So you go over there and you pull up the weeds and throw them away. Right? If I sat in my house just rocking in my chair looking and worrying about the weeds growing in my garden what would you think of me? ‘*Dude, buy some weed killer or pull out those weeds yourself. You are more powerful than those weeds and you can attack and get rid of those weeds.*’

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Why do we let fear control us? Why do we let fear take root? It is because many times it has become so comfortable that it feels foreign to us to get motivated out of love and into letting love be perfected in our hearts. But John is saying he wants us to be people of love. Let us of Life Fellowship be people of love. Let's love one another, mask or no mask. Let's love one another whether the pandemic grows or doesn't grow, whether there is school or not school, whether there is currency problems or not, whether someone gets elected and someone else doesn't get elected.

We have one responsibility in this world and that is to love people and to tell them about Jesus. If we let the voices of Facebook and social media and the news dictate to us what we should be feeling versus the Spirit of God and the Word of God we will fail in the mission of God. Let's be people that perfect love is living out, casting out fear, and not being controlled by the news cycle of the day. There is something bigger, something greater that God is doing.

I have a couple of questions and then we are done. Number one - have you been a conduit of God's love? Has the power stream of love hit you and then the wires disconnected in your own heart? Or have you received it and it is flowing out of you to others?

Number two - where does fear seem to be winning in your life? Is it winning in your pocketbook? Is it winning in your relationships? Is it winning in your faith? Where is fear winning in your life? It doesn't have to win.

Number three - what do you need to believe about God's love to overpower your fear? Again, the first step for us in battling fear is believing that there is a reality of His love that we have not yet received. What is it that you really don't believe? God is waiting for us to live lives that reflect His love to this world.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.