

Perfect love casts out fear

Pastor Tim Melton

Fear is one of the most powerful human emotions. What are you afraid of? Maybe you are afraid of heights, or dogs or storms. Maybe you are afraid of snakes, insects or enclosed places. Maybe you are afraid of flying, or needles, or other people's opinions. We are all afraid of something.

What are you most afraid of? What are you most afraid of during this time of crisis?

Are you afraid that you or your family will get the virus? Or maybe you are afraid of what will happen to you financially? Or maybe you are afraid of what will happen with the schools, or travel, or a friend's situation? Maybe you are afraid of the unknown future, or how much our society might suffer because of the crisis? There are many types of fear that may come to the surface during these days, but regardless of who you are it is very likely that some form of fear has come to mind in recent days.

Today we will look at 1 John 4:18. It says this: *"Perfect love casts out fear."*

In our present situation, to be freed of fear sounds great, but we cannot really understand the meaning of this verse until we look at the verses around it, so let's take a moment and read 1 John 4:15-19:

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, 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 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."

In the original language, this word "confess" was a legal term. It meant to "say the same," to agree with or to consent. It was used when a man agreed with the statement of another, such as conceding or confessing guilt before a judge or admitting to a guilty plea found by a jury. It came to be used in scripture in a similar manner. To confess sin was to "say the same" about our sin as God does. It was to agree with God about our sin and our guilt. It was also used to confess Jesus as the Son of God. It is agreeing with God that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

This confession was “saying the same” about our sin and about Jesus at the heart level. It was a true confession that flowed out of a true belief that we were sinful and that Jesus was Lord and Savior.

When one confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord, God comes to live in her and she in God. God is love. When He comes to live in us, He brings His love with Him. That is how love is perfected in us. It is a work of God. To know God is to know His love. One who says that he or she knows God, but does not know love, is a liar. An increasing measure of love is proof that we belong to God. As our love matures and is perfected it also serves as our confidence that we belong to God and that we will be granted grace when we stand before God in judgment.

God’s love now abides in us. We no longer have to be afraid of judgment. Yes, we are guilty, but because we have confessed and turned from our sin and put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Now, when God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ. We are now covered by the love of God. Verse 18-19 tells us this:

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”

God is love. We have been granted the love of God when He came to dwell within us. Now that love is to be perfected in us. It is to be matured in us. It is to be understood and experienced in a greater way. We are to fear or be in awe of God and His holiness and His authority over us, but as children of God we should not fear His wrath or judgment. Even the discipline, that He may need to bring against us at times, is an expression of love.

We could think of it as a child who has a good parent. A parent who selflessly loves and serves his or her children. A parent who has earned the trust of their children, so much so that the children have confidence that even when they get in trouble, that the parent’s reaction will be a just and loving response, regardless of how stern it may need to be.

On the contrary, we find parents who relate selfishly with their children. They punish them with impatience, neglect, humiliation, disgust, anger, intimidation, wrath and judgment. The children never know how the parents are going to respond and they have little confidence that the parent’s response will be motivated by love. The result is that the children live in fear. That is not the heavenly Father who we serve.

God’s *“Perfect love casts out fear.”* This word for cast out is the same word that is used when Jesus drove the moneylenders out of the temple, and when Jesus cast out the demons from those who were possessed. It is forceful. It is violent. It will not be denied. It is dominant. That is what perfect love does to fear. When we allow God to continually perfect our understanding of His love for us, fear is driven more and more from our hearts and our minds.

Some of us struggle with this because we think that God is a disciplinarian who is strict and waits anxiously to punish our next sin. That understanding of God is not from the Bible. Maybe that is from your experience with your strict earthly father, or incorrect legalistic teachings that you have heard

about God, but the God of the Bible relates to His children out of love. Yes, He is holy. Yes, he disciplines His children, but not from a heart of judgment or condemnation. All who are in Christ have been forgiven. Because of this, God deals with them through love. We must submit to Him, but we need not fear that He will bring us harm. *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1).

Let’s consider some examples from the scriptures. Jesus was the holy Son of God, but His holiness did not drive sinners away. When we look at the scriptures, those who realized they were sinners were often drawn to Jesus. When fear and judgment would have been justified, love cast it out.

We see it in the story where the woman was caught in adultery. In front of a whole crowd of people she was brought and thrown down at Jesus’ feet. The law said that she should be stoned to death for her sin, but love won out. Jesus declared that whoever was without sin could throw the first stone. In a few minutes everyone had walked away. Jesus, kneeling down near the woman, then asked:

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir’, she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you’, Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

The law said death and Christ said love. **The fear of judgment was cast out by love.**

We see the same with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, who had climbed up a tree so he could see over the crowd to see Jesus. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, He could have condemned him for his greed and dishonesty, but instead Jesus wanted to go home with Zacchaeus. While some judged Jesus’ decision to spend time with this sinful man, Jesus’ love brought Zacchaeus to faith and repentance. Once again, **the fear of judgment was cast out by love.**

We see it in the story of the woman with the issue of blood. Because of her ongoing problem with bleeding, she was ceremonially unclean. At the risk of touching many people in the crowd and making all of them ceremonially unclean, she snuck through the crowd and touched the hem of Jesus’s garment. She was healed, and Jesus, feeling that power had gone out of him, turned and asked who had touched Him. Once again, we find a moment of fear versus love. Luke 8:47-48 describes the scene in this way:

“And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.’”

She feared that certain condemnation was to come, but instead Jesus loved her. **The fear of judgment was cast out by love.**

Now let’s be clear about one thing. Those who have not turned from their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ . . . should fear God, greatly. They are still under the condemnation and judgment of God. Romans 3:23 instructs us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 6:23 tells that the wages of sin is death. Jesus Christ laid down His life on the cross and died in our place for our sins. All who put their faith in Jesus Christ are forgiven, because Jesus has already endured the wrath of God on their

behalf. For those who refuse to trust in Jesus, they will need to stand before God in judgment and pay for their own sins. In John 3:18, Jesus clearly told us that, ***“Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*** They should be afraid. On that day of judgment all opportunities to turn to Christ will be finished. God will not relate to them with love and mercy, but with complete judgment and condemnation.

As God’s love is perfected in us we grow to trust Him more and more in all situations, with all concerns. As we read in 2 Timothy 1:7, ***“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*** As we trust in the love and power of God fear is driven from us. If God can take care of death, life’s greatest fear, how much more will He be faithful to be with us in all lesser fears? Even in these difficult days we can trust in God’s love to somehow bring about His will for His glory. Whether our fear is about health, money or the unknown future, we can join with the psalmist in Psalm 56:11, who declared, ***“In God I trust, I shall not be afraid.”*** As we stand firmly in His love it frees us to love others.

This passage ends with 1 John 4:19 with these words, ***“We love because He first loved us.”*** That is where God’s perfecting love drives us. We have put our faith in Jesus Christ and God has now come to live in us. God is love and is constantly perfecting love in us. The natural result for every believer who is walking submitted to God will be to love others in an increasing manner. There is no other option. We love because He first loved us.

1 John 4:7-12 says it so clearly with these words:

“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. 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.”

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God’s greatest expression of love to us. That is what we celebrate on Easter, but that love was never intended to stop with us. God is our source of a God-sized love that truly wants what is ultimately best for others. His love will be perfected in us as we love others. We cannot live an isolated Christian life and experience a mature God-type of love. It reminds me of the Dead Sea in Israel. It is below sea level. Because of that, water runs into the Dead Sea, but no water flows out of the Dead Sea. Because of this the Dead Sea has no life. Nothing lives in it. God’s love is similar. It will only be perfected in us as it flows in through Christ and out as we serve others. One who hoards God’s love for his own benefit and does not love others will find nothing more than a stagnant Christian life. In the worst case it may even be evidence that a person does not belong to God at all (1 John 4:8).

Those are the two messages for today: The first is that perfect love casts out fear. The second is that for God’s love to be perfected in us we must love others.

The Coronavirus appears to have begun in China, where the word for crisis is made up of two characters: One means “danger” and the other means “opportunity.” That is an accurate description of the situation that lies before us. The danger of this crisis is real. Many have become sick and many have died. At the same time this is an opportunity for the people of God to show the love of God.

There have been various plagues throughout the centuries that presented Christians with opportunities to display the love of Jesus Christ in a way that had not been possible during normal times. May we follow the example of those who have gone before us. May we pray and give and love in such a way that God would bring salvation to many and spiritual awakening to Spain.

With this in mind, let me give you some ideas of how we can prepare ourselves to love others:

- Continue to nurture the love of God in your life through prayer and Bible reading.
- Ask God to give you a heart of compassion and the willingness to serve.
- Create margin in your life. Manage your time, your finances and your life in such a way that you can be prepared to be used by God at any time.
- Ask God to put particular people on your heart to call or in your path to serve.
- Live in a way that displays the love of God. This is with your family as well as with those outside your home. The things we say. The way we treat people. The way we serve people. What we post on Instagram or Facebook. Are we prepared to be a conduit that the Holy Spirit can pour through, or is our way of living pointing people away from the love of God?

This is the beautiful truth of Easter. For those of us who have confessed Jesus as the Son of God, God has come to abide. We have received the love of God. May this love now be perfected in our hearts so that we may love the world around us. Truly His perfect love casts out fear.

Discussion Questions:

1. What from this sermon was most meaningful to you?
2. What do you think are the most common fears that people experience right now?
3. These verses speak of love being perfected in us. How has God’s love grown more mature in your understanding and in your life since becoming a follower of Christ?
4. How would you put the phrase “Perfect love casts out fear” in your own words?
5. We love because God first loved us. How might we express this love for others in the present situation?
6. What do you think God wants you to remember from this lesson?
7. What do you think God wants you to do about that?
8. How can we pray for you?