

No Fear In Love

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[0 : 00] Let's start back then to the passage that we read, the first letter of John in chapter 4. And we can read again at verse 16.

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.

Particularly the words in verse 18. There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear. We were meditating this morning somewhat on the Apostle John as we saw him with Peter speaking to the risen Jesus in John 21.

[1 : 28] And we had seen various of the things that had taken place there and also the words that had been expressed to John that had been misinterpreted about the way in which he would die.

And the letter that we have here and the second letter and the third letter the second and the third are more personal letters and very short. But this letter is a general letter that John writes probably to all the churches that were in Asia Minor at that time.

That is modern day Turkey. Probably written from Patmos although again there is a fair amount of argument about that where it was written from.

But it is more likely that it was written from Patmos. It may have been written from Ephesus. In John's old age. And again some argue that it was written before Revelation.

Some argue after. We don't know. It is as simple as that. We just don't know the answer to that question. But it was probably written when John certainly was towards his old age.

[2 : 45] And the things that he speaks of in the course of his letter make it very clear to us of the Christian experience which he has undergone. And again we saw this morning that we were aware that of all the disciples John is the only one who lives to an old age and dies a natural death.

All the others die as martyrs. And we had seen that in the gospel of John. We had seen the foretelling of Peter's death by the Lord himself as to how he would die.

And that that gospel was written considerably after Peter's death. And very probably the letters are written around the same time.

Now the purpose of the letters was very, very clear. We see it in the beginning even of this chapter. We see it throughout the letter. But we see it at the beginning of the chapter.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit. But test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. And at this particular point in time and it seems that this was the reason for the writing of the gospel of John as well there were those even in the church itself particularly in Ephesus and in various other places who were maintaining the point of view that Jesus was not divine.

[4 : 14] that Jesus was not the Son of God but that he had come as a prophet from God but they questioned and challenged his divinity.

Now I'm not going to go into that in detail. This was the beginning of what was called Gnosticism and it was a man called Serinthus who started this particularly in Ephesus and John is writing against this.

And you can see that from the beginning of the letter if you go back to chapter 1 at the beginning you can see that he tells right at the very word at the beginning of this in a very similar way to the way that he opens the gospel he says that which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked on and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

And he is making very clear his personal experience of having been with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is also making clear his personal experience of the divinity of Christ that Christ truly was the Son of God.

And again I'm not going to go into that just now either. There is plenty in the gospel of John from the beginning of the gospel as there is in this letter as well to make that point very clear.

[5 : 43] But what John is stressing all the time and continues to stress right through this chapter is the love that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit has for his people.

And that is why we are told to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of Antichrist. Now we hear an awful lot about Antichrist nowadays and what exactly that means.

But if you look at the letter of John the same person who wrote the Revelation you see very clearly that he says this is what you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

And makes it clear here that Antichrist is not a particular person that is going to come but it is indeed a belief or a set of beliefs that people have against the Christ.

[7 : 00] That is what Antichrist means. There are many who dispute that and maintain from the book of Revelation that Antichrist is a particular person who will come at a certain time to lead a major persecution against the Church of Christ.

And it is very interesting that if you go back through theological tomes over the centuries you find that in different eras the Antichrist is interpreted in different ways.

If you look particularly at Puritan works and the works of theologians 16th and 17th century even up into the late 18th century you find that the Antichrist is referred to particularly and identified as the Pope as the Roman Catholic Church and so on.

Whereas if you look at modern theologians and their interpretations nowadays you find that very often the Antichrist is seen as appearing through the Muslim world.

But again these are just different viewpoints. It is the spirit of Antichrist the spirit that is against the Church that one has to be careful of not individual people.

[8 : 13] But we are told in verse 4 little children you are from God and you have overcome this spirit which is for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

So that if you have the spirit of Jesus Christ then Antichrist is no problem for you. And this is the theme on which he continues before he switches a little bit more to focus then on beloved let us love one another for love is from God.

Now he has already discoursed on this a little bit at the beginning of chapter 3. See what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God and so we are.

And here he begins to open out again the qualities that we will that we possess as believers through this particular love.

And I want to try and open out a little bit more this evening what this love actually involves. English is rather poor in this sense it is only one word for love whereas the Greek in the Greek there are four words for love and each one has a particular different emphasis.

[9 : 40] You will be familiar with some of them or at least perhaps the words that are derived from them we have the word phileos which means love of family and friends we use the word phileal love we use that in English quite a lot there is of course the word eros meaning sexual love and you will be familiar with the term erotic etc and so on and then there is a third one that perhaps we are not so familiar with the Greek word storki which means parental love the love that parents have for children but none of these are the word that is used here for love none of them the word that is used throughout this letter the word that Paul uses in 1st Corinthians 13 where he debates the same thing abideth these three faith, hope and love but the greatest of these is love the word that he uses is the word agape and the special meaning of agape is a sacrificial love a love which puts others before itself this is the word that we find in Ephesians 5 when you look at Ephesians 5 the great passage that used to be used so often in marriage ceremonies where it speaks about the love between a man and his wife and Paul says at the end that he is speaking of the love between Christ and his church that the word that is used all the time is this word agape that is sacrificial love love in which the other person is more important than the person who loves the object of love is more important sacrificial love this is the love that takes our Lord to the cross of Calvary this is the love that brought him in the covenant made between

Father, Son and Holy Spirit that he would come into the world to reclaim his own and this is the love that we see that is mentioned here from this verse onwards there is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear now if we think about that in terms of our own relationships it is perhaps over a period of time that perfect love that perfect love may exist in a relationship in marriage between man and woman and again I am not going to be sidetracked into other issues concerning that particular thing but if you look back at the beginning of your own relationship in marriage the love that you have now for your partner and again I use the word generally not in its modern sense the love that you have now for the person that you are with and have been with for many years is very different to the love that you had when you first fell in love if one can put in that way what happened when you fell in love maybe some of you remember very well it wasn't perhaps so long ago maybe others are struggling to remember what was it like when you fell in love for the first time you remember the emotions the feelings that you had and you remember perhaps in your teenage years falling in and out of love quite regularly why because that love was not this kind of love that love was an immature love that love was a love that did not come to fruition it was a love based probably on appearances more than anything else and how many times can you remember even in the early days of relationships you know when you first fell in love with someone and the moment they turned around and opened their mouth you fell out of love with them very quickly these are the kind of things that happen as we grow up in our teenage years but as you go on and eventually you fall in love when you come to the point of beginning to form a relationship that immature love begins to change and as it begins to change it is no longer based on outward appearances but it begins to form a relationship deeper and deeper with the character of the object of our love and as the years pass that love is deeper and deeper and deeper and it should be our marriage relationship should be mirrored on the kind of love that we see here agape love a love that puts the other person first a sacrificial love that's what the passage in Ephesians 5 is all about now that is not easy

I'm sure many of you will tell me afterwards that it's not easy in a married life to love the other person in that particular way but you notice that this is not just the love in a marriage relationship it's the love that every believer should have for every other believer and I can see you thinking now you're asking the impossible now there are some people that are impossible to love I shouldn't say that but you all know that that's the way it is because of our imperfections as human beings there are some people even although they are believers and brothers and sisters in Christ that we just find it impossible to love them because they're just so annoying that's the way it is that's the way human beings are but nevertheless we are commanded to love them and to love them with the same sacrificial love no wonder we fail in these commandments but we see here there is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear and then you begin to wonder well what is perfect love has anyone ever perfectly loved anyone else how do we define perfect love why would there be fear in love well John tells us why there is fear in love for he says immediately afterwards for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love why when there is fear in love it is usually because our trust has been broken something happens that causes our trust or our faith in that particular person to be shaken and then from then on it is very difficult to trust that particular person there is nothing easier to lose than someone's trust and there is nothing more difficult than to regain it that is a very hard lesson that we sometimes learn and it happens sometimes even in the best of marriages that we lose we make a mistake of some kind of other and we lose that person's trust and rebuilding trust and confidence is something that is extremely difficult to do but we are commanded here to lift our eyes from human relationships and to lift our eyes to a different kind of relationship to the relationship and the love that existed in heaven between father son and holy spirit before the world was ever created now you might say well how on earth do we do that that's really difficult to do how do we look at that and the only way we can look at it is the way that it is revealed to us in scripture we are told time and time again throughout the pages of scripture and our lord mentions it

Jesus mentions it himself several times John writes it in the famous verse in John 16 for God so loved the world and we are given then this idea of this covenant that was formed in heaven before the world was even created a covenant that was formed in love remember that there is a love between the father and the son and we often forget that that love extends to the holy spirit as well this is the love that we see in heaven from all eternity father son and holy spirit loving each other equally from all eternity and to the ends of all eternity it's what the theologians refer to as reciprocal love it is a love that goes back and forwards between father son and holy spirit continually flowing from one to the other never increasing and never decreasing it cannot increase because it is already complete and it cannot decrease because it is impossible because of the immutability of god god does not change god in three persons father son and holy spirit i am the lord i change not how many times do you see that in the old testament and this love that exists between father son and holy spirit never changes never increases never decreases it has no need to increase and it cannot possibly decrease and this is the same love that is extended to you and i as a believer in the lord jesus christ on the moment that you are adopted as a son or a daughter and brought in you are part of this covenantal love that in itself is quite amazing that the same love that would exist between father son and holy spirit is applied to you in this judicial act of adoption you see you perhaps don't get the full sense of the word adoption in english it's better in gaelic a little bit holding it close to your chest as if you were brought into the bosom of the father the son and the holy spirit and remember that adoption in scripture is a judicial act it's a judicial act it was something that had to take place in a court of law and even in scriptural times the adoption of children and it's quite a common thing took place through witnesses and through and through a judicial act it was done according to the law and you and I have been adopted as children of God in exactly the same way a judicial act had to take place it took place on the cross of calvary where God judges his son for the sins of each and every believer that's where that judicial act takes place that's where

God's judgment and God's wrath is poured out on the Lord Jesus Christ and it is through that judicial act and the shedding of blood the atonement that is made that you are then brought into this love this agape love this sacrificial love because of what has been done and what was laid down in an eternal covenant before the foundation of the world we often refer to it in simple terms as the covenant of grace and some people try and make it easy to understand by using an anagram for grace and saying gift received at Christ's expense and that's perhaps a good way of understanding it but yet you and I can never understand what went into that sacrificial act on the cross and it's only when you come to meditate in even deeper terms on yourself that you see how could you possibly be an object of God's love what have you and I ever done to deserve being loved by the

[23 : 42] Father the Son and the Holy Spirit and that is one of the most difficult questions for every believer to meditate on what have I done to deserve and the answer is nothing absolutely nothing Philip Yancey puts it this way in one of his books he says there is nothing that you can do to make God love you less or to make God love you more because the love that is already centered on you is eternal is perfect and is already complete and it was there before the foundation of the world you were loved and electing love before the world was even created trying to get your head around that thought is quite amazing you were loved in eternal love before the world was even created you were known to the father from all eternity and through the father to the son and the holy spirit until you were eventually born into this world and then eventually reborn and regenerated with the spirit of

God and perhaps there are some here who still have to be reborn with that spirit that would not be unusual that the world continues until he has brought in all his jewels and will continue until all believers have been brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ then he will come again to bring his church militant into the church triumphant and then to the church glorious this is what this is all about there is no fear in love and yet you and I every day we live in fear fear has to do with punishment for those who are believers perhaps the punishment of judgment has been taken away but there are many who are believers who still fear the judgment of God and who still fear that they might lose their faith and fear sometimes that because of the sins that they commit that God's judgment upon them and God's dealings with them here will lead to suffering and punishment that is quite a common view among many people and unfortunately it's very wrongly preached in some churches and some denominations as well the element of fear it is not because of anything that we do in this world that we are subject to the pains and all the other suffering that we may encounter in this world that comes because of the nature of sin because of the sinful nature of this world well that doesn't mean and doesn't eliminate the fact that many things that we do do have consequences everything that we do has a consequence either a positive or a negative consequence and sometimes much of our suffering is the consequence of things that we have done ourselves or things that we say ourselves in moments of anger or whatever and sometimes the believer is often perplexed when he cannot see the reason for his suffering but nevertheless he comes in thrust because there is no fear in love this is what this love is all about it's a love that trusts implicitly in the finished work of

Calvary the word implicitly it's an easy word to say well maybe not quite so easy but it's an easy relatively easy word to say but it's a very difficult word to understand to trust implicitly in something how many of you trust implicitly in our politicians so you don't need to laugh now you can laugh later but if you start to think about what you trust implicitly in maybe I shouldn't ask this but I will just so that you can reflect do you trust implicitly in your spouse or your wife or your husband do you trust implicitly in your children do the children trust implicitly in their parents it's interesting isn't it that you see from the very beginning that little children trust implicitly in their parents who do they run to hide behind their legs it's only as they grow older and they realize that their idols have feet of clay that they begin to lose that implicit trust but you see when you take that figure to the believer that you as a believer as a little child when you came to faith first of all you trusted implicitly as you grow in faith does your faith begin to waver does your trust begin to waver it should not it should be the exact opposite and yet all of us will confess that we have moments of difficulty with our faith and our trust you see this is where the immutability of God's love is not reflected in our ability to love we love because he first loved us that's what

John says in verse 19 we love because he first loved us and in many ways we are a pale reflection of that love how difficult it is and he goes on to explain if anyone says I love God and hates his brother and you notice that that is the brother in the sense of his brother in Christ he is a liar for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen now that's a very logical conclusion but one would argue that we have seen God in Christ Jesus himself that we have seen God in the presence of the Holy Spirit and therefore we have some idea of who it is that we are loving but yet how often we fail to keep this commandment this commandment we have from him whoever loves

God must also not should also but must also love his brother in Christ his brother and his sister in Christ that's what John is speaking against because of the amount of false teaching that was coming into the church and the way that the church was dividing divisions of opinion men in pride speaking and sticking to their own point of view rather than what scripture had to say and how much of that do we see even in our own day and even in our own church where people's pride and people's position is more important than the love that we show to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ people often ask why are there so many divisions in the church why does the church break down why has it divided over centuries not an easy question to ask some will say well on the points of principle but yet even on the points of principle should these things have led to divisions and separations and very often we find that behind it is simply men's own pride in their particular interpretation or their particular position what we really see when we look outside the church is how sin has affected human beings in general

[32 : 58] I hear so many people often questioning well this love that you talk about God's love how is how is it possible that God can love the world when you look at everything that's happening round about us it's an interesting question it's a very simple answer to it most if not all of the things that happen the evil things that happen the Sri Lanka bombings the wars that take place indeed many of our illnesses are due to man's inhumanity to man go through history and you will see how many wars were started for profit how many people were subjugated so that their lands could be exploited for the riches that they contained and our own British

Empire is no stranger to that oh yes people argue but we were civilized we brought we brought civilization to the savages so did you really some of the savages so called savages were far more civilized than many of us and we could argue these points for a long period of time but when you go back and you look at the history of the world virtually all of man's suffering is caused by man's inhumanity to man where does that come from it comes of course from the sin that is within us the sin that broke into the garden of Eden you see all you have to do is look at Adam and Eve Adam and Eve had no fear whatsoever of anything until they sinned until they were disobedient to God no fear but the moment that disobedience came and sin came they were afraid and hid themselves and you remember also that at the same time they were ashamed of their nakedness and that is what we see so often it is the effect of sin and yet it's only when you and I realize that we are sinners in need of a saviour that we can begin to see in any way what the atonement actually means people get really upset nowadays if you call them sinners and yet it is simply a word that refers to the human condition all human beings have sinned all human beings have inherited original sin from

Adam and the fall and perhaps that that is more acceptable to people nowadays but you can't get away from the fact that when you compare yourself to the holiness of God and that's the point of comparison that we're at to the holiness of God then you and I fall short every single day how can we spend eternity with God unless we are holy like him and that's exactly what the atonement on the cross does our sin is blotted out by the blood that was shed at Calvary our sins are written out disappeared blotted out is the term that scripture uses

I will no longer remember them that's what he says in Isaiah I will know I will make a new covenant Jeremiah tells us he will give us a new heart not a heart made of stone but a new heart and a new covenant is written it's not the old covenant of works it's not the old covenant of blood through the sacrificial system of the old testament but now a new covenant of grace which extends backwards to all believers and forwards to all those who will believe it covers the old testament saints as well as the new testament church and this is what John has in mind when he says here in verse 19 we love because he first loved us there are many passages in scripture on love and I'm sure that you will be very familiar with 1st Corinthians 13 and with Romans 8 and you remember how

Paul puts it that nothing can separate us nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus and yet as you and I come to meditate upon this what did we do to deserve God's love and yet as a believer this evening you are the beneficiary of every attribute involved in God's electing love all the blessings of the covenant of grace flow to you and you may find it difficult at times to believe that you are an object of God's love but that is why Christ came into the world to bind you in this relationship of eternal love and this is a love that is just beginning it is a love that is not yet fully mature it's a love that you won't see maturing completely until you are in glory and even then as

[39 : 41] John says behold what manner of love in the previous chapter we don't know what this is going to be like we only imagine we can only imagine in part from the revelations that were given throughout scripture of just the blessings that this love will bring us in heaven perhaps I can hear you saying well you know it's easy enough to say that you shouldn't fear as a Christian but after all we are human aren't we and we do tend to fear things but you remember what Jesus said whom should we fear Jesus says in Luke 12 he says fear him who hath power to cast you into hell that's who you have to fear everything else is built on thrust is built on agape love but that is the one we are to fear but if you are in

Christ then you are bound to Christ from now until eternity and nothing can break that love you may back slide you may be aware of your own sin you come to confess it daily but yet nothing can break that love that seals the covenant of grace that you have through the Lord Jesus Christ isn't that a wonderfully comforting thing this evening and yet I know that you and I will go away this evening and still we fear will still be there in part of our lives but if you and I as believers still fear at times what about those who are not believers who have not come to faith who are not part of this agape love this sacrificial love then you do have something to fear you have to fear what the

Lord Jesus said fear him who hath power to cast you into hell that's really what you have to fear let us pray our father in heaven we thank you for your word this evening we thank you for the love wherewith you loved us since before the foundation of the world and we thank you that you allow us to grow in love and to grow in knowledge and understanding of your love day by day we pray for any who have not yet experienced the pouring out of your love we pray that you would bless them that you would grant it be thy will that they would come to a saving knowledge of you this evening manifest yourself in love to them through the power of your spirit be with us now as we conclude our worship and power