Love Dissolves Fear

Second in the January 2020 series “Do not Fear”

# Scripture: 1 John 4:7-18, John 14:15-27

# Key Thought: In our relationship with God and with others, love dispels fear.

# Intro:

When we think of the phrase, “fear of God,” two different connotations come to mind. One is the proper idea of reverence and respect for God, the kind of attitude and feeling that causes us to desire to draw near to God and be devoted to God. This kind of fear of God includes a healthy respect for the power of God. It also includes due concern for the fact that one day we will give an account before the judge of all the earth. This is not the kind of fear that the Apostle John is talking about in the key verse for today, “Perfect love casts out fear.” It goes without saying that dwelling in the perfect love of God and seeking to return that love to God and others will only increase our devotion to God, our respect, reverence and adoration for God.

But the second connotation of the phrase “fear of God” is not as healthy. It is the one that helps us understand today’s verse. This kind of “fear of God” might be the kind of fright that overtakes us when we consider that we are ill prepared to meet God and do not want to end our rebellious acts either. The gravity of our spiritual situation hits us. Usually we take evasive action and get busy. We get involved in something, so we don’t have to think about it. This kind of fear of God might also be the much more subtle but very unsettling lack of confidence the many have when they think about whether they are worthy of God’s acceptance. Perhaps they worry about whether God could really forgive what they have done. Perhaps they have some self-esteem issues anyway and just feel unworthy. Maybe they feel like they don’t measure up to other people’s performance standards. Then all these inadequacies result in a fear that God will reject them. Such fear might also be based on either ignorance or serious doubts about Jesus and his words. Such fears are very real for many people. And I think the readers to when John was writing this first letter must have been such people. So he wrote to them, “Perfect love casts out fear!”

This morning I would like us to dig into this passage with a view to understand this verse and allow the message that John is sending to relieve our fears today.

# Uncertainty in relationships creates fear.

Let’s begin by considering the situation in human relationships. Let me suggest that when there is uncertainty in our relationships with others, then fear is created around that relationship.

## Uncertainty in our relationships with others

For example: there might be all sorts of reasons why a person might become worried whether their spouse will continue to love them. Sometimes the reasons are subjective, based on our own feelings about ourselves and other times they are objective based on perceived changes in our spouse's behavior. But whatever the reason, such doubts always cause fear, a nagging anxiety that the future might not be what we are hoping. It doesn't really matter whether the reasons behind the fear are real or not, just the existence of uncertainty in our minds creates the fear. And the effect upon our bodies, our peace of mind and eventually our relationship itself is very real.

Think about the relationship with your boss at work. Let’s suppose that another employee starts a rumor that the boss said something derogatory about you. Now you start to worry. You know the person that said it is noted for starting trouble and you don’t think the boss would have said such a thing, but even so, a certain amount of uncertainty enters into your work relationship with the boss, and you become fearful until this is cleared up. Uncertainty creates fear.

## Uncertainty in our relationship with God

The same is true in our relationship with God. Uncertainty about our spiritual commitment, wavering in our critical faith choices, lead to fearful uncertainty about giving an account to God. And we worry about our eternal destiny,

Yesterday I got a message on my iPhone from the daughter of a dear friend from our first church. We were very close to her family. Nicole was a close friend of our daughter and we used to joke with her parents that we had a joint parenting arrangement. We parented their daughter when she was at our house and they parented ours and she was at their house, which was often. Her dad sang bass in our men’s quartet at church. Nicole was asking me to call; her dad is being put on hospice today, and he wanted to talk to me. I called her back and had the privilege of talking with an old friend whom I hadn’t talked to in years. He thanked me for being a leader in his life, and I thanked him for teaching me to play golf, which was not easy to do. I was really bad; but he had great patience. He mentioned that he was getting ready to move on to the next life and so I encouraged him to keep at peace with God, having confessed his sins (1 John 1:9) and then remembering that those who trust in Jesus have an inheritance prepared for them than does not fade away (1 Peter 1:3,4). Then I prayed with him. It was a precious call. After I hung up. I broke into tears.

As my friend, Greg, said in that call, “We are all headed there sometime.” Since that is so, the last thing we need is uncertainty and fear about our relationship with God. But one of the purposes of the book of first John is to put our fears at rest.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.1 John 5:13 NIV

# God reached out to us with love we can trust through Jesus.

So how do we get rid of our uncertainty when our time comes to face the next life? How do we have the right kind of fear of God – respect, reverence, devotion and honor, without any cringe factor?

## God is Love; Jesus is the good Shepherd

One place to begin is in our view of God. What is your dominant picture of God? In today’s world we talk about framing the situation. It’s the leader’s job to describe the situation in such a way that it guides the thinking of the organization. That is framing the situation. It is vitally important how we frame our picture of God. In 1 John, the Apostle desires to reframe our thinking about God with a single repeated defining sentence.

“God is love.” 1 John 4:8,16

Commentator William Barclay recognized the importance of this reframing of our thinking.

So long as we regard God as the Judge, the King, the Lawgiver, there can be nothing in our heart but fear for in face of such a God he can expect nothing but punishment. But once we know God's true nature, fear is swallowed up in love. The fear that remains is the fear of grieving his love for us. William Barclay p. 98

It goes with the key verse we all learned in childhood,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 NIV

Put your name in the verse and make it a personal truth.

J. I. Packer put it this way:

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it – that he knows me. I am graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind. All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him because he first knew me and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters. This is momentous knowledge! (from Knowing God)

Think about the image that Jesus gave us of God as he described himself as the Good Shepherd.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:14-15 NIV

The image of the shepherd who cared so much for the sheep that he would lay down his life for the sheep translates for us into an image of a God who loves us so much that he sacrifices his only Son for us. If that is so as the Bible says,

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Rom 8:32 NIV

With this context, John writes hoping to reframe our thinking,

“God is love.” 1 John 4:8,16

## The Holy Spirit is relationship with us

But if it were only up to us to change our thinking and somehow naturally convince ourselves to be more positive about our eternal chances and more sanguine about our view of God, it would be no use. We are just not that good at changing our habits of thought. We all know how hard it is for us to change a single bad habit.

But the good news from God is that he has sent to us a supernatural Ally, his Holy Spirit to work with us and powerfully enable us to change how we think about God and to give us assurances and confidence when that Day arrives for us. As John writes:

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: 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. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.1 John 4:13-16NIV

The Holy Spirit living in us helps us understand God’s love for us. He helps us to understand how utterly reliable the love of God is, how unchangeably affectionate toward humankind God is. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the demonstrations of love that we read about in the ministry and the parables of Jesus. Most of all, the Holy Spirit helps us to know that God loves us personally! The Holy Spirit helps us to recognize and give thanks for God’s many blessings in our lives. This is true both in the good times when we easily forget how much we are dependent upon God’s love and goodness, and in the not-so-good times when we are tempted to doubt God’s love.

But as the Holy Spirit helps us, the expression, “God is love” from 1 John becomes way more than an intellectual definition concerning God. It becomes a personal experience of God’s care and concern for us.

# “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

When we come to understand God’s love for us and seek to return God’s love for us through our acts of prayer and devotion, and through our acts of love to others, then we are living in love as John describes.

We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19 NIV

When our relationship with God is one of strong mature love, communicating daily, seeking to obey his commands, desiring to know him better, wanting to spend time to that end, desiring to please God with our thoughts and actions, then we feel secure and assured in our relationship with God, not afraid. God's love for us and our heart's returning that love to God has cast out fear.

John wrote: “In this world, we are like Jesus.” 1 John 4:17. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains:

it is preferable to understand the words to mean that just as Jesus "abides" in the love of the Father (John 15:10), an abiding that already marked his earthly existence and gave him "confidence" before God in the face of temptation, trial, and death, so "in this world" we also may abide in the father's love and share in that same confidence. P. 346

 When we have a close relationship with someone else, spending time with them, communicating frequently on a deep level, being accountable to each other, and maintaining that relationship for a time, we feel secure rather than fearful. Love has cast out fear. So it is with our heavenly Father. Walking in love for God dissolves our fear of our fear of approaching God, our fear of rejection, and our fear of judgment.

But God’s goal is not just that we get comfortable. God’s goal is not just that we feel good, but John writes that God’s goal is that God’s love is made complete in us (1 John 4:17). This happens when God’s loves other people through us. When God’s love flows through us to others, then God’s goals are accomplished. God’s love has reached its objectives.

# Conclusion

Remember the words of Paul when he writes,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:35-39 NIV