

# “Perfect?” The Love that Throws Fear Out

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## 1 John 4:7-21

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for that love is from God, and whoever lives this love has been begotten from God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love has not known God, because God is love.

<sup>9</sup> In this God's love was made manifest in us, that God sent his unique Son into the world, in order that we might live through him.

<sup>10</sup> In this is that love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atonement for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God is abiding in us and his love in us is brought to completion.

<sup>13</sup> In this we know that we are abiding in him and he himself in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and we testify that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is that Son of God, God is abiding in them, and they in God.

<sup>16</sup> So we have come to **know** and to **trust** the **love** (*agapé*) that **God** has lodged in us. **God is love**, and whoever **abides in that love is abiding in God**, and **God is abiding in them**.

<sup>17</sup> In this **the love** has been **brought to completion** with **us**, so that we may have **boldness** in the day of judgment, because **as he is so also are we in this world**.

<sup>18</sup> **No fear** (*phobos*) exists in this **love**, but rather this **complete love throws fear outside**. For the **fear** has to do with **punishment**, and the one who is **fearful** has not experienced completion in this love.

<sup>19</sup> **We love** (*agapan*) because he himself **first loved us**. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, **"I love God,"** and hates their brother or sister, they are a liar; for anyone who does not **love** their sister or brother whom they have seen cannot **love God** whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> And we have this commandment from him that the **one who loves God also loves their brother or sister**.

## John 16:33

<sup>33</sup> "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

## John 20:21

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

## John 15:9-12

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. <sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

## Romans 5:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been declared right on the basis of faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Messiah, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we even boast in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces tested character, and testing produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and this hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. <sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time the Messiah died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person -- though perhaps for the good person someone would even dare to die -- <sup>8</sup> but God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, the Messiah died for us.

## Romans 8:15-16

<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a Spirit who declares us to be God's children, in whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself is bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

## Ephesians 3:18-19

<sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of the Messiah that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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## Fearless Love in a Fear-filled World

"Fearless?" We live as vulnerable physical creatures in a dangerous world. Death is part of being human. In our bodies, in our circumstance, we're often beset by anxieties. We all struggle.

1 John 4:18a (ESV) "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear!*" It's strange to say! In common experience, love and fear/anxiety can be close companions. "Love" often means someone/thing has become deeply important to me. I need it/them. My "love" creates fear that I might lose the beloved. Love is deep emotional vulnerability. I hover, protect, worry!

What does John mean? Many in his day advised keeping distance from emotional ties as the way to life without fear. But he stresses love! Maybe I don't have "*perfect love*." A new fear! John challenges us, but not to perfectionism. He calls us to participation in God's life/love.

## Trusting a Love that has Happened

John says "God is love." God has lodged/invested that love that is himself in us. We come to know and trust that love and thus bring it to completion (perfect, *teleios*). God reaches out to us in love. As we participate, that love is completed. We're fearful, vulnerable creatures. God acts first. We learn God's love. We trust it. God's eternal life is shared with us. We abide in it.

How did God act in love first: Jesus! God sent his Son, his unique self, for us that we may have life (v 9), to deal with our sin (v 10), as Savior for the world (v 14). God's love was embodied, enacted, freely given. Jesus revealed the deepest nature of God and reality. God gives himself. Then God welcomes us fearful creatures to experience, learn, know that love – embodied, passionate, vulnerable, life-giving love of God in Jesus. We learn to trust it/him. We discover that we are sharing in God's eternal life even in a dangerous world as we share his Spirit.

The Fearlessness is not a timid withdrawal to a protected space, but boldness, a confidence in that God we see in Jesus. It never seeks suffering. It empathizes and helps sufferers. It grieves loss and death, but sees all within the experience of God's active love that embraces all of life.

## How do I learn Fearless Love?

John knows that this complete love that throws fear out, must be active like God's love (v 11, 19).

First are practices that open our lives to the Love God has given us: "*know*," "*trust*," "*abide*."

We meditate on Jesus' life, death, resurrection and all it means, how it embodies God's unbreakable love. We practice self-examination to seek ways to embody that love ourselves.

We practice gratitude, prayer, times of solitude and rest, turning off our anxieties. We abide!

Simultaneously, we actively practice loving others. This also is abiding in God's love. We practice seeing others, really listening to them, learning their world. We practice hospitality, inviting others into our life, building friendship. We seek reconciliation and forgiveness in broken relationships. We seek justice for those wronged. We bear each other's burdens. We create a welcoming community in which we strengthen each other for bold and fearless love in God.