

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON FEAR
LESSON FOUR: LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

by Sandy Harber

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." I John 4:18

In my search for a Biblical remedy for fear I found John's assertion that "perfect love casteth out fear." This "fear" is the Greek "phobos," from which we get the English word "phobia." Of the 84 occurrences of the word "fear" in the New Testament 76 are translated from the Greek "phobos" (noun) or "phobeo" (verb). These terms cover alarm, terror, to be sore afraid, or exceedingly fearful. It is that bad type of fear that we want to eradicate from our lives.

Perfect love, John says, casts out this unwanted type of fear. The Greek word translated "casteth" means "to throw" more or less violently or intensely. The term denotes a "deliberate hurl" as opposed to a different Greek word which carries with it the idea of sudden motion: "to fling with a quick toss." Thus "perfect love" is used deliberately to violently or intensely throw fear out of our lives.

So, what is "love?" The Greek word "agape" indicates a social or moral type of love, as opposed to sexual love (not found in the New Testament) or brotherly love ("phileo"). Agape love is the highest type of love. It is an unselfish love, a serving love. It is the type of love that God has for us. In verse 15 of this passage John tells us that God is love. Not that He possesses love but that He personifies love. Love is Who He is. And, He imparts that part of Himself to His children through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Love is an identifying characteristic of the believer "every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (verse 7).

Back to the original language for a definition of "perfect": "teleios," which means "completeness." It is akin to "teleo," which Jesus cried from the cross before He died: "It is finished" (John 19:30). The work of redemption, planned before the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8), was completed. The perfecting of agape love in the life of a believer, that is, the bringing to maturity this type of love, is a life-long process. It is part and parcel of learning to be more like Jesus. Perfect love is the end of that process. Likewise, successfully throwing fear out of our lives is a process. As we grow more like Jesus our faith and trust in God matures and our fears diminish.

In the context of this passage John is addressing the subject of fear on the Day of Judgment (verse 17). It was understood in the Old Testament that sin brought fear (Genesis 3:10). Guilt over our sins brings fear of God's judgment. However, the believer does not need to fear judgment because his sins were judged at the cross (Hebrews 10:10-12). If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior you are right to fear God's judgment. God demonstrated His love for mankind by giving His Son to be the sacrifice for sin (verses 9-10). Rejecting His sacrifice (ignoring Him or delaying making a decision to accept Him is the same as actively rejecting Him) condemns you (John 3:18, 36).

There is no fear in God. But to be in a place where fear cannot abide, you must first belong to God. Conquering fear begins with salvation (deliverance from the penalty, power, and presence of sin). Then your journey of perfecting your love begins. As you grow more like Jesus (the Personification of love) the grip of fear in your life will lessen.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." I John 4:10