

Session 3

December 18, 2022

LOVE IN PLACE OF FEAR

1 John 3:13-18; 4:14-18

In 1989 a group of entrepreneurs launched a clothing line touting a new, edgy, American lifestyle. The product name quickly spread from its southern California birthplace across the nation, making the *No Fear* logo a common sight from coast to coast. But while the product line was promoting a certain bravado (in taking on things like extreme sports), is courage really the opposite of fear? While Old Testament heroes like Joshua might love a *No Fear* t-shirt (see Josh. 1: 6-9), the New Testament seems to take a step back from confrontation, countering fear and doubt with things like confidence and contentment. These characteristics are the result of knowing to whom we belong...and resting in Him. In this week's lesson, John shows us how God's love works to cast out fear.

No love (3:13-15). The key idea in these verses is *contrast*. The first chapters of Genesis are filled with contrasts: innocence versus guilt; fellowship versus fear; paradise versus a cursed earth; and love versus hate. In the preceding verses, John reminded his readers of the contrast between Cain and Abel (see Gen. 4) and the hatred that drove Cain to murder his brother. For this reason, verse 13 makes good sense. If the first son of the first family so hated his own brother for doing the right thing (Gen. 4:7) why would the world not hate us for the very same reason? The mark of every believer is love for one another (John 13:35). So distinctive is this love, that its absence demonstrates one's lost state! (v. 14). John's "Cain and Abel" illustration continues in verse 15. To possess hatred toward a brother is to harbor the same volatile emotion that led Cain to slay his brother. For reflection: *Read Matt. 5:21-28. How does Jesus use this same line of reasoning? What do the passages have in common?*

Christ's love (3:16-18). The key idea in these verses is *demonstration*. For many of us, John 3:16 was the first verse we memorized as children. It begins with "For God so loved the world..." And so began our spiritual journey. We learned about the love of God because it was demonstrated to us by giving us Christ. And Christ demonstrated His love by laying down His life for us. And now we are to demonstrate that same love by making our own type of sacrifice. And that is a key lesson here: love must be demonstrated...and that demonstration always *costs* something. It cost God separation from His Son (see Matt. 27:46). It cost Christ His life. It costs us (at the very least) compassion. How does love really abide in someone who sees a brother in need and is not moved to meet that need? It can't. The conclusion is stated in verse 18: love is never demonstrated by words alone, but by actions that back them up. For reflection: *Think about verse 18. Why does love (a good thing) need to be demonstrated to be legitimate, while hatred (a bad thing) only needs to be thought about to be condemned? How do you explain this?*

God's love (4:14-18). The key idea in these verses is *confidence*. Godly love is only godly because it comes from God. That may sound obvious, but it's something to wrestle with. Any love we have as born-again-believers, we have only because we are born again. I used to think that godly love flowed downhill, from God, through Christ, to us. I still believe that, but I've added a dimension. Verses 15 and 16 remind us that God's love brings us into communion with Him. He loves us, but because we abide in His love, we abide in Him, and He in us. What does that mean?

It means that because He loves us, *we can truly love Him back*. Our focal passage stopped just a bit too soon! Because verse 19 sums it up nicely: “We love Him because He first loved us.” For reflection: *Consider verse 19 again. Why is this the case? Does this mean that lost people can’t love God? Why or why not?*