**Lesson for August 22, 2021, “A Conquering Faith”
Background Scripture: 1 John 4 and 5**

Good morning. I hope you are well and feel blessed.

The most important observation about love in this passage comes from the declaration that God is love. By stating God is love, John teaches us that God’s love for us flows from His character. In the same way God is good and God does good, God is love and God does love. We are creatures that sometimes love. God never ceases to be loving, because if He did so, He would cease to exist. His nature of love demands His outpouring of love. We can take great comfort in this truth about God because it means even when we are at our worst, God continues to love us.
Since love comes from God and since our loving others evidences God’s love for us, John can boldly proclaim that love casts out fear. The love of God fills our chests with the courage we need to look forward to the kingdom still to come knowing we have a place at the table.
In 4:16, John repeats what He said in the preceding passage, "God is love." John is emphasizing the truth here that God abides in us and we abide in Him (see verse 13-16). I wonder why He makes this point 3 times. There is a true, deep sharing between us and the very heart of God. He now lives in us, dwells in us forever. We have His very Spirit in us, making us new people, never to be the same as before. There is truly an deep sharing between us and our heavenly Father.

Look at the verse 4:17 "In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence on the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world." It is in this indwelling of God is us, and our abiding in Him that our love grows to perfection. Perfect love will be our ability to perfectly receive and give love to God and all others around us. And in the perfecting of our love, John says we have confidence in the day of judgement. This echoes an earlier statement, "...abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming."(2:28). Our confidence comes from our trusting in His love and His work, receiving from Him and abiding in Him and not counting on ourselves to love perfectly by sheer will. The last part of verse 17 seems to refer back to our having a share in Christ's Spirit. Our lives on this earth now are like His because we live in Him.

John deals with fear in verse 18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love." God is love, John has told us twice. Speaking of perfect love, he says that perfected love casts out fear. Love and fear cannot exist together. John says the reason fear is cast out by love is because fear "has to do with punishment." God is love. That is who He is. And God desires to see His love perfected in His children. But when we are fearing God, we think that He is double minded about us. The fear that John speaks of has to do with punishment. If we think we might get punished, at best we will approach Him with fear. Perhaps we will rather want to flee. Think of when you were a child, and your parents called you to come. You would approach them with fear if you thought they were going to punish you.

We often find ourselves fearing. When we fear God's punishment, it could very well be because we despair of a recurring sin we cannot seem to get rid of, or we can't imagine He can forgive and heal some of the things we have done.

John says that the reason perfect love casts out fear is that fear has to do with punishment. God is not interested in punishing the sinner, only in condemning the sin. God is against sin and He will see it destroyed. It is just because of His passionate love for us that He is so adamantly opposed to sin. Sin is against us, sin twists, distorts, and destroys the life God created and gives to us and all our relationships. He will have us filled with His life, with Himself. It is hard to wrap our minds around such love. This is the love the Father shows us in sending Jesus to takes our sins and goes through the death and separation from God that sin brings, then conquers death and destroys sin, so we can live new lives in Him.

What John is saying here takes us back to the beginning of this letter. John says that the message he is proclaiming to his readers and to us is "that God is light and in him is no darkness at all."(1:5b) God is love, through and through. We do not need to fear a "God behind God" and He is committed to perfecting His love in us in such a way that all our fear is cast out.

In the last three verses of this section, John deals again with our loving one another. The first point he makes, which echoes what he said in the preceding section (3:10), is that we love because "he first loved us." We could not know love or participate in loving except that God loved us. All of our loving is a response in the power of the Spirit to the great love with which He loves us. We are all receivers of this love of God, we are all created in His love, redeemed in His love. We are all in need of knowing this love and being made more and more able to receive it. When we hate others, we are not yet able to see them as those, like us, who are in need of God's transforming grace.

John ends this section with the commandment that "he who loves God should love his brother also." How are we to do this? The truth is that all of us still experience times of anger, dislike, and yes, even hate towards others, even our sisters and brothers in Christ. John wants to enable his readers know that God is love, that this means, He is loving them and making them His children. He wants them to see that God's intention is for us to fully participate in the giving and receiving of loving God and others. Out of hope in God's character and work, seen in Jesus and from time to time in their lives, John encourages them to abide in Him, to confess their sins, and live in His love and forgiveness. So we hand God our hate and anger, confessing our need for forgiveness and for His Spirit to transform our feelings and perfect our love. He is the one who will change us, so we hand over each day all that we are, our fears and frustrations as well as our faith, allowing Him to do His loving will in us.

All Christians receive the Holy Spirit as living proof of God's presence in our lives.  The Holy Spirit gives us power to love and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and assures that we are truly connected to our Heavenly Father and not being deceived.
Perfect love does not mean we love perfectly; rather, perfect love is the goal we always keep before us in the person of Jesus.  Jesus loves flawlessly because He accepts us with all our imperfections and mistakes, and regardless of our background.  He loves us.

Society teaches us to love conditionally.  Some people live in fear of rejection from those who claim to love them.  This is not real love.  One of the most remarkable attributes of God is His ability to love unconditionally and completely.  No matter what we face in life, God's love is everlasting, and nothing can separate us from His love!  Not only do we have God's promise of love but also the promise of eternal life.  With this kind of reassurance, what keeps us from loving others?
 Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen.

Next week’s lesson August 29, 2021, “Hope Eternal”
Background Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:10

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Commentary, Study of 1 John by the Trinity Study Center, and The Present Word Lesson.