

## Faith, Hope & Love Part40

### **1 John 4:18**

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves *torment*, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

Last week we followed the rabbit trail of our fear to see how far it goes and how big of an impact it has on our lives. But what was most telling is that we learned that the root of all things, which causes us to live in fear and abide in our *flesh*, is all our wrong belief about the pain we have experienced or are experiencing in our lives. Because we have misunderstood the issue of our pain, we have not made the proper connection between our pain and the love of God and His purposes for our pain. Instead we have reacted to our pain in fear, desperately wanting to avoid any further pain. And once fear gets its grip around our lives, we become ruled and dominated by it. Fear leads to our worship of the “if/then god,” from whom we are always trying to barter with to obtain his blessing. We errantly believe that if we do things right we will be blessed and if we “sin” then we will be thumped for being bad. This leads to the “good child/bad child” syndrome and the pinball dynamic we live in between our love for our own “goodness” and our inability to ever truly be good, for only God is good. This pinball dynamic leads to our being cloaked in shame which is carefully guarded by our pride, which produces all sorts of prideful expressions (condemnation, self-hate, justification, defensiveness, entitlement, and victimhood), which leads to a life of torment, because fear involves torment.

This torment looks like control, anxiety, worry, anger, malice, bitterness, wrath, and slander. And in our torment we raise our walls of self-protection and selfishness, which leads to deep loneliness (even when we are around people we love), and inevitable separation from God and others; which finally leads to all manner of dysfunctional coping mechanisms which we use to survive the difficulties of this life. And the ironic thing about following the pathway of fear is that it always results in more of the very thing we are trying to avoid—pain and more pain.

As we learned, the Lord desires us to live free from fear. Perfect love casts out fear therefore we must be perfected in His love if we are ever going to know this form of liberty and become a vessel of God's divine *agape* love to others. But we are never going to escape the trap of fear unless we let the Spirit renew our thoughts and we are willing to subjugate our emotions and even the automatic reactions in our body to the truth regarding this issue of pain. This is hard since before we can even get our minds around what we are thinking and feeling often our body is already way down the road with some huge reaction. Accordingly, we must come to **know** and **believe** that pain is not our mortal enemy, fear is. In fact, fear is the gate which leads to the dark pathway of abiding in the *flesh*. Pain is not our antagonist, fear is as fear wages war against our ability to walk by faith and truly believe. As such, pain is not something to avoid but something we can learn from if we are confident that every ounce of pain we endure is carefully prescribed by our Lord who is in control of all things all the time.

Pain is a tool of love which the Lord uses to draw us to Him and to help us put to death the things of the *flesh*. But since most of us misunderstand pain, we look back on our lives and quickly slide down the deep, dark rabbit hole of fear. Yet, "pain"

has been and is a perfect provision of the Father's love intended to: 1) cause us to seek Him out; 2) cause us to run to Him instead of to ourselves and to this world; and 3) cause us to allow Him to make us like His Son thereby fulfilling His promise to save us from ourselves. And He does all this so we might know His life in ours and fully experience—or be perfected in—His love.

### ***1 John 4:19***

We love, because He first loved us.

Immediately after we are told that the person who lives and abides in fear is not perfected in love, we are told that we love because He first loved us. This same thought was given to us in **1 John 4:10**, “In this is now love, not that we loved God, **but that He loved us** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” First, I want to note that “we love” is a parsed verb which means it can be understood in both the *present active indicative* and in the *present active subjunctive*. What this means is that if we now love with God's *agape* love, it is only because He first loved us, and that is a statement of fact (the *indicative*). Furthermore, even the possibility that we will now love with God's *agape* love (the *subjunctive*), is only because He first loved us. If He had not loved us, we would not know how to love.

Both of these verses are a powerful statement which reflects on the importance of the pain we have experienced at the hand of our Father. He loved us and did what was absolutely necessary to get us. If you think back on your life, the extent to which He sought you out was more than extreme. Yes, every cut and every

wound has been intentional and can be understood as an expression of His great love for you. And with “He first loved us” being in the *aorist active indicative*, it is a banner which can fly high over our entire lives. From beginning to end He has loved us and that is a statement of fact. There has never been a time when He did not love us. This means that when you were going through the worst kind of pain due to whatever reason: parents, bad people, spouse, sibling, sickness, injury, or just life in general, it was the Lord busy at work in your soul; it was His great love for you. Accordingly, it was purposeful and not random, trivial, nor was it malicious.

And if you are struggling with this concept, please keep in mind that you cannot actually refer to Jesus as the Lord, at least not with any integrity, if you are not willing to ascribe to Him control and mastery over all things—not some, but all things; every little detail. We have been through this over and over again and the Bible is very clear on this issue. Jesus is the Lord and there is no other. It is the enemy and our own fear which has convinced us to filter our view of God, His power, sovereignty, and even His love, through our perspective of our circumstances. If things are going well, we believe God is good and full of love toward us. But if things are difficult and painful, we start to obsess not on His love, but on our troubles and all the reasons why we don’t have what we want and how He is not who we hoped He would be. This is the leaven—the lie which corrupts our thinking and our belief.

Once again, we must go back to the question about whether or not our goal for this life is the same as His. In ***Romans 8:28-29***, the Spirit is clear that the Father’s goal is that we might be conformed into the image of His Son. Thus, He works all things for this good—according to this purpose. This goal frames His use of pain in

our lives. I would like us read a little further in **Romans 8:35-39**, which we read a couple of weeks ago, but I want us to focus specifically on **8:36** so you can see how all this ties together. As we do, please keep in mind all that we studied in **Psalm 33** regarding God's promise to deliver our soul from death, which **Romans 8:5-8** clearly explains is what we now experience when we choose to walk by the *flesh* and not by the Spirit of God.

### **Romans 8:35-38**

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "**For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we {have always been} considered as sheep to be slaughtered.**" But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. {Quoting **Psalm 44:22**}.

God's purpose in our pain is to provide us opportunity after opportunity, by the Spirit, to put to death the *flesh*. For if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (**Romans 8:13**), and that is a fixed promise. In effect, pain brings to light the issues in our soul that must be mortified. Pain causes all sorts of hidden and unknown things to bubble up to the surface so they can be killed. And the Spirit within us is always calling us to turn to Him and only to Him for our provision for all things in this life. The reason God has to use pain is that left to ourselves we are so arrogant and defiled with darkness we would not know our true need for God. In fact, most people who claim they know God don't live as if

they truly need Him for 100% of their life. They live as if they need Him for the really big things (when things seem out of control), but they tend to act as if they can manage everything else. It is sad and tragic.

Thus, for His sake, for our sake, for the sake of His accomplishing this beautiful purpose of making us like Him, we are “being put to death all day long.” And since “put to death” is rendered in the *present passive indicative*, we know that God is the one doing it; He is orchestrating the whole affair. The use of the *passive* voice is entirely consistent with our belief that Jesus is the Lord, the One who causes all these things to happen in our life for the purpose of our turning to Him. Being in the *present* tense, we can be confident that He is doing it—putting us to death—in our now (this explains so much of what happens in our lives). And being in the *indicative* we know that it is a statement of fact. Jesus confirms this reality in **Matthew 9:49** when He says that everyone will be salted with fire. One way or another, the fire is a must and it either proves you to be a true Son of God or just a religious man or woman who is essentially tasteless and is good for nothing than to be thrown in the road to be trod upon.

We have to find a way to let this truth be present in our minds always. All the pain He allows and directs in our life is for this purpose: that we might choose to die to our *flesh*, get out of the way, and come to know the glory of His life in ours, It's how the *Design Point* of **Galatians 2:20** is actually realized. In fact, the truth is that we have always been considered by God as sheep to be slaughtered, this is nothing new. This is the privilege of those truly chosen by **Jehovah Mekoddishkem**. Like the sheep on the altar, putting to death our *flesh* is our sin offering—part of those spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God mentioned in **1 Peter 2:5**.

Think about it, from the day you were born, even until now, you have been placed on that altar by God waiting for the fire and the knife, which you must be willing to press into. Honestly, it is surprising that we have not understood God's purposes for our pain and moved to embrace it. He has made it clear what He is doing; yet, because of our aversion to pain, we don't apply these verses to our lives and instead look for more comfortable things to believe. After all, it is hard; going through pain is a terrible feeling. And it is not something that we can get psyched up for and expect to be finished quickly. The death to our *flesh* is a process of going through each and every room in our soul and submitting ourselves to the love of God trusting that in every way He hurt us, He will also heal us (***Isaiah 30:26***).

Going back to ***Romans 8:35-39***, look at the promise that comes with this: "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." Once again the Spirit pulls our minds and emotions back to the fact that it is all love; and, because He loved us and continues to always love us over and over again (it is rendered in the *orist active participle*), we can live in the hope that we will overwhelmingly conquer tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword. In Him we can be truly indomitable regardless of the path the Lord sets in front of us. This is why Paul declares:

#### ***Philippians 4:11-14***

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him

who strengthens me.

Now let's tie this to this idea that we love or that we have the potential to love because He first loved us. We are told in **1 John 4:8, 16** that God is love. Love is therefore an aspect of the Lord's very personhood—His very nature. In other words, love comes with Him and can never be separated from Him since He is love. This is why the Lord's *agape* love is separate and distinct from all the "love" that can be mustered up in the realm of humanity. Men and women are simply not capable of producing God's *agape* love. It is a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) that is expressed in our lives as we walk in the Spirit and not in the *flesh*. This is critical. Within the realm of Christianity, people have greatly confused this issue of love. I say that because people are convinced that they love, just like they are convinced of their personal goodness; yet, it is Biblically clear that no one can love unless they die on that altar and have been busy putting to death the deeds of the *flesh*. There is no other way: you must die to live and you must live to love.

This death starts with the fruit, the dysfunctional coping mechanisms. These must be rejected no matter what form they come in, whether it is displayed in gross *fleshly* acts or in all manner of religious deeds. Then it moves up the chain to our self-protection and selfishness; then up further to the torment that is produced by our indulging in the fruits of our pride and shame. And pride and shame must go before we can ever dismantle the "good child/bad child" syndrome and remove from the throne our "if/then" god. Once we dethrone this poser, we have to face our fear and face our pain. Yet, we can overwhelmingly conquer our fear when we are willing to accept the reality that we have **always** been loved. This is the pathway



of death that is required if you are going to be able to love, not with a religious love, but with God's divine *agape* love that is like no other.

Obviously this takes us back to the *Design Point* of **Galatians 2:20**: I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. For us to love, we need God to have possession and control of our heart, mind, soul, and our body for then people will experience through us the One who is love. Therefore, to the extent that you have allowed the pain in your life to cause you to sacrifice your *flesh* instead of running down the pathway of fear, you will be able to love because He will dwell in you and occupy that part of your soul. But if you live abiding in your fear, living from your *flesh* (even your religious *flesh*), then you simply will not love.

Hence, the only reason we can love at all is because He was willing to love us from the start. This requires some serious reorienting of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. None of this naturally sits well with us, which is why Paul said that he learned these things, he learned to be content in all things and reconciled it all with the love of God. It did not come naturally. Paul went through great difficulty, suffered much pain; but after a while he learned that God always got him through and he (Paul) always somehow had the strength and means to accomplish each task the Lord required of him. Paul learned that no matter what ordeal he encountered, no matter what friend left and abandoned him, God was with Him and it was all for his good as each situation gave him the opportunity to let God transform him more and more into the image of his Savior.

Unless we reorient our heart, mind, soul, and strength with this truth, we will never be able to escape the trap of fear and will always be bound to our *flesh*. I want you to know that it is possible to live free from fear; right now it may seem

impossible to you; but if you put to death the deeds of the body as it says in **Romans 8**, you will have victory and before long you will make the transition from fear into faith, hope, and love. James, Peter, and Paul seemed to have made this transition.

#### **James 1:2-4**

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James understood the opportunity pain afforded him—to be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. “To be perfect” is actually rendered in the *present active*. Hence it is possible to live this way in your now. To be “complete, lacking in nothing” is rendered in the *present passive participle*. In other words, God will give us in our now and continue to give us provision even in and through the trials and testing of our faith. Hence, James embraced the purpose of his suffering and even considered it to be joy when he encountered various trials. Peter said something very similar.

#### **1 Peter 4:1-2**

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered {and continues to suffer} in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Peter goes so far as to say we must not just understand the purpose of our pain but we must embrace it because of the freedom it will bring to us. If we are willing to suffer in our flesh, instead of run away from it in our fear, the result will be that we will cease from sin; it will be conquered by the Spirit. We will no longer have to give ourselves to its lusts and demands; instead, we will be free to live for the will of God. This is true freedom. This phrase “has ceased from sin” is rendered in the *perfect middle indicative*. The *perfect* tense means that it will be a done deal, there will be no returning to that old way of life. The *middle* voice means that you must dig down deep in your soul and make the choice to embrace His love instead of fear. And the *indicative* just means that is a statement of fact. In the areas of your life that you let this be your truth, you will cease from sin.

### ***Philippians 3:7-15***

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that

for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

At this stage of his life, Paul was ready to jettison everything that did not derive from Christ. None of it was worth him holding on to. He totally embraced the pain, counted everything as rubbish, in order that he might know Christ and: 1) the power of His resurrection (the power of grace through the Spirit of God to live a supernaturally enabled life free from the control of fear and sin; and 2) the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that he may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Yes, Paul embraced the fire and the knife. He finally believed that it was a great thing to be placed upon that altar like a sacrifice lamb; so he submitted to the process. Paul was willing to be crucified with Christ—to be conformed to His death by the mortification of his *flesh*—in order that he might attain to the resurrection from the dead. In other words, in order for Paul to live the supernatural life of an alien and stranger in this world, in order for him to live this life in the flesh by faith in the Son of God who loved him, he was willing to let go of his fear in exchange for knowing the love of God.

Paul wanted to live free. Sure He was not perfect yet, he knew that; but he pressed on and on and on that he may lay hold of that for which he was laid hold of by Christ Jesus—to be a true child of God and know the love in which he has always been loved. In other words, Paul was ready to die to each and every area of His life that was ruled by the *flesh*, regardless of the pain, in order that He might

come to **know** and **believe** the love which God has for him (**1 John 4:15**), by which he would become a vessel of love. Consider the manner in which Paul exhorted the Corinthians.

### ***2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 16-18***

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. **For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.** So death works in us, but life in you.

...Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This is the perspective shift on pain that we must adopt. Do not lose heart. Every bit of pain God has directed and allowed was so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in your body. It is so the *Design Point* can actually be realized in your

life. The *Design Point* is not a fiction, it is not something unattainable; it is the eternal or everlasting weight of glory far beyond all comparison. Can you imagine how glorious it will be when you can say: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me"? What a day that will be. We will be free from our fear and we will have come to **know** and **believe** the love which God has for us.

I know that death is scary, but we can be excited about these things knowing that even though our outer man is decaying, even though our *flesh* is being put to death, our inner man is being renewed day by day so that the life of Jesus may be expressed in and through our body. This is what we all want. It is the only way we are ever going to love with God's divine *agape* love. Let's press on. Let's forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead. It is time to let go of all the distorted understanding of our past and all the ways we have protected ourselves. Reconcile it all to the love of God. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling (to deliver your soul from death), what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (His life in ours), and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe (the ability for us to love as we have been loved). We love only because He first loved us.

Let's pray