

(1 John #26) the Love That Casts Out Fear

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores how perfect love, as described in 1 John, casts out fear and provides confidence for believers facing judgment.

Duration: 37:54

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 13:34-35, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 4:17-18

Topics: "Fear"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on 1 John chapter 4 verses 17 and 18. He emphasizes that our love is made perfect through our relationship with God. He explains that because God is love, there is no fear in love, and perfect love casts out fear. The preacher also discusses the concept of judgment and how God's love allows sinners to live on and saints who are sinning to continue living. He concludes by challenging the listeners to examine their own lives and see if their love for God and His people is being perfected.

Transcript

We have been moving progressively through the first epistle written by John, and we have come to chapter 4 in the passage that begins with verse 17. I want to read now verses 17 and 18 only, though perhaps we shall be saying a word also about the closing verses of that chapter. 1 John chapter 4 verses 17 and 18 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because feareth torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. Now, you will notice that in this particular section of the epistle, the Apostle John has been employing a principle which operates in many, many other places here.

If you are studying this epistle, you will find this a useful key. First of all, John gives you a kind of germ thought, a miniature thought or concept, then he leaves it. He just says it in principle, as it were, or in germ or in embryo, and he leaves it there.

But then he goes on and he takes it up again and he adds to it. And this really is the pattern of John's epistle. He'll take up the thought, say just a little about it, he'll move on, he'll say more, and then he'll take up the strains again, and he will add to what he said before, and the whole epistle presents a spiral that is always moving upwards and upwards to the great climactic chapter in chapter 5. Now, you have that

principle here.

In verse 12, John presented two germinal thoughts. Here they are. No man hath seen God at any time.

The next two, here they are. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us. Now that's the first thought.

The one coming before that, we have seen before. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us. And then the second.

And his love is perfected in us. Now, we've not met that before. His love is perfected in us.

Now, in verses 13 to 16, we've all read it in this way. In verses 13 to 16, John takes up the first of those two. If we love one another, God dwells in us.

Just think of it. Whilst we Christian people, redeemed by the blood of Christ and born of his Spirit, show our love for one another, God goes on dwelling within us. Not just among us, but within us.

He carries on the business of the divine indwelling. And, of course, this is heaven upon earth. It is to have God consciously, consistently, constantly dwelling within us, sharing with us his grace and his resources, and making us like himself.

Now, he enlarges upon that in verses 13 to 16. Now, with our text this morning, he takes up the second. The second is this.

His love is perfected in us. Those of you who read Wesley profusely, or who are familiar with his writings, will know that perfect love was one of the great themes of John Wesley's preaching. And it was equally so one of the great themes of Charles Wesley's hymnology, the perfection of love.

Here, at any rate, is one man in the course of history who saw the significance of Christian love. It's not everybody who has. It's not every Christian who has.

But here it is in the epistle of John. God expects his love to come to full bloom, to come to maturity, to come to fullness. The word is to come to perfection.

Even in your heart, Christian, and mine. And that, of course, is a very challenging thing. Now, there are two main things I want us to note here this morning.

John deals with two things. First, the perfection of love in terms of our subjective composure. Put in a nutshell, it means this.

If the love of God, or, perhaps better, insofar as the love of God is perfected and comes to maturity within us, we cease to be worried and harassed by fear. Even fear of the day of judgment. Because perfect love casts out fear.

Now, the second thought brought out in the last few verses of the chapter concerns the perfection of the same love in terms of its objective endeavors. And I'll tell you now what that means, because I'm not going to deal with it at length, since we've already been dealing with that. But John brings it in here for a very good reason.

He doesn't want us to get away from the fact that the perfection of God's love always means love in two directions. Upward to God our Father, outward to men and women who are our brothers and sisters in

Christ. And he puts it very bluntly.

He says, if we say that we love God whom we've never seen, then, he says, we ought to love our brothers whom we have seen. We can't say that we love God whom we've never seen, unless we can show it by our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ in the first place, whom we daily see, in their needs, in their troubles, in their problems. So, perfect love, says John, as he clinches this argument, perfect love means love in two directions, all the time.

Godward, churchward, toward God our Father, and towards those who are our brothers and our sisters in Christ. Now, what I want to occupy myself with for the time at our disposal this morning is this, the perfection of love in terms of our subjective composure. And let me read the words again.

In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because, as He is, so are we in this world. 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. Now, if we unravel the threads of thought in those words, we shall find that they deal with the following aspects of the main subject.

First of all, the blessedness of confidence in the face of judgment. That's the first thing I notice here. That we may have confidence in the face of judgment.

Now, let's divide it up a little, let's take one thread at a time. In the day of judgment. Now, Christian people, honestly, are we taking this seriously? Or do we not, contrary to the teaching of Scripture, think that there is no judgment whatsoever for us, only for the man who is outside of Jesus Christ? Now, that's not true.

We must all, says Paul in writing to the Corinthians, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. That we may receive according to the deeds we have done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be bad. Of course, the matter of being lost or being saved has been resolved by our acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not a matter of death or life, heaven or hell, but it's a matter of reward. It's a matter of privilege in the world to come. It's a matter of our capacity to enjoy the presence of God as His children.

But you and I have to face judgment, Christian. I think this is necessary for us to remember. Christian people, even though you live under the canopy of the cross, in the background is the vima, is the judgment seat of Christ.

And you and I have an appointment there and we shall give an answer for ourselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ goes further than that, really. He says, I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter.

Serious, isn't it? I know Christian people who take other aspects of Scripture very, very seriously. But who are not quite as careful about their words. And it betokens a heedlessness of the coming day when we shall stand before God and His Son and give account of the words we have uttered which have been false, not true.

God, says Paul, in Acts chapter 17, has fixed a day on which He will judge the world, the cosmos in righteousness, by a man whom He has appointed. And He has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead. You see, John began this epistle by saying that God is light.

Oh yes, John is the apostle of love. We mustn't forget that. He is certainly the one in the New Testament who loves to dwell upon the love of God for sinners and for His people.

He is the one who reclined on Jesus' bosom. He is the one who was very, perhaps emotional, but certainly not at the expense of his reason. But he knew something of the deepest feelings of a soul enraptured with his Lord.

He knew that. And so John speaks about the love of God, but that's not the sole truth about God. God is light.

And because God is light, there must be a judgment when God encounters sin. Now, because God is love, He doesn't judge our sins completely every day we sin. There are times in the New Testament and in the Old when God comes in summarily and takes a man or a woman's life away, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, because they deserve to die.

But God doesn't normally do that today. In love, He allows sinners to live on and saints who are sinning to live on and to enjoy their lives. How can He do that? Well, He can do that, you see, because He has appointed a day when the books will be resolved.

A just God is able, in the words of the King James Version, momentarily and temporarily to wink at our sins, as it were, or rather, better, to put them on one side for a moment, not to deal with them drastically in this world. On the score of the fact that there is a day that has been settled in the calendar of heaven when He will judge every false word we have uttered, as well as these. God is love, but God is light.

Now, against that ominous background of judgment, then notice what John says, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. Confidence for the day of judgment. Mark this.

It's not confidence based upon argument against the day of judgment. It's not confidence born out of ignorance of the coming day of judgment. Not that.

It's not the kind of confidence that the bird has when he hides his beak and his eyes under the sand, the ostrich. It's the confidence that a man has who knows that judgment is coming, and yet he is confident. And John says, you and I, Christian people, if we are really Christian, we may have a confidence of that order and of that quality.

Amazing prospect. It envisages those who are confessedly guilty, because every Christian is acknowledged as guilty. It envisages those who are confessedly unworthy of the least of God's benefits, for every Christian acknowledges that.

Nevertheless, having a confidence of soul, even in contemplation of the day of judgment, when we shall give answer for every wrong word we've uttered, as well as every false deed done in the body. And before we come to it, let me remind you that John has got a lot to say about this confidence. At the end of chapter 2, verse 28, I think it is, John spoke of confidence when Jesus Christ returns.

He's coming back again. I hope there is no one here this morning who doesn't know that. The Lord Jesus is coming back again.

And if you've never heard it before, let me tell you this morning. And says, John, if we obey his commandments, we shall have confidence before him at his coming. We shall not be cowards.

We shall not want to run away. But we shall be able to open up and talk freely with him as with a friend, the beloved of our souls. Then he speaks again of confidence in chapter 3, verses 21 and 22.

This is a confidence in prayer. Now, actually, these are different sides, different aspects of the same thing. The Christian is meant to have confidence, you see.

Confidence as he considers the Lord Jesus returning as king. Confidence as he comes to the Lord Jesus and to the Father through him now in prayer. And the basis of our confidence is, this is John, because we keep his commandments and we do the things that please him.

He's talking, of course, of a Christian who's walking in the light. To use his phrase in chapter 1, a Christian who's really going on with God. A Christian who's growing up, a Christian who's living as he ought to live.

And he says, this is it. When we come in prayer, we know that he hears us and we know that we have what we ask of him because we not only keep his commandments but we're set on pleasing him. My good friend, this is the key to answered prayer, you know.

It's to have a heart that is absolutely set on pleasing him. But now, says John, as we contemplate coming right there before the judgment seat and the judge arraigned in his glory, we may still have confidence. This is not a kind of cocksure-ness, this is not arrogance, this is not blase self-righteousness coming to its own.

That's not what John has got in mind. What then has he got in mind? Well, let's move to the basis of such confidence as he tells us about it. Look at the second part of verse 17.

We may have confidence for the day of judgment because... because... A little word because is so important, isn't it? Don't let's miss it, it's a key here. Because... because... as he is, so are we in this world. Now, let's agree right at the beginning that these are not the easiest words in the New Testament to expound.

Those of you who have tried it will know for yourselves. Therefore, let me indicate that I humbly suggest the following understanding of the text, indicating at the same time that I am not the only one who takes this point of view. I think I have got it from a number of sources in one way or another.

Now, let's divide the words up. As he is, says John, so are we in this world. As he is, what's he referring to? I think that what John wants to do here is this.

He wants to focus our attention upon Jesus Christ in his present session with God. As he is now. What does he mean? How is Jesus Christ now? What is his condition? What is his position? Where is he and what's he doing? What is his state of mind and state of spirit? Well, now the New Testament answers us.

John has already answered this question earlier on in his epistle. We have an advocate with the Father. He's with the Father.

So, Jesus is with the Father. But that's not some total of the answer to the question. He's not only with the Father, but he's seated at the Father's right hand.

Jesus, then, is not only with the Father, he's seated at the Father's right hand. He's in heaven. He's on the throne of heaven.

Neither does that complete the New Testament reply. He is crowned with glory and honor. But is he agitated? Has he got any fears? Has he got any doubts about the future of his kingdom and the bringing home of his people? Not in the least.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it like this. He is seated there, waiting till all his enemies be made his footstool. Now, please notice.

He's seated there. He's not marshalling his troops and getting agitated in case something is going to go wrong in this sector or that sector. He's seated down with calm, peace, and composure, because he knows the victory is his.

He's died on the cross. He's risen again. He's ascended at the seat of power.

All power is given unto me, he says, in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go ye. He knows his power.

He knows his capacity. He knows his ability to save to the uttermost. He knows that death has no longer dominion over him.

He's Lord of life, and he's Lord of death. That's him as he is. Now, my friends, that's the first place to focus your mind.

It's on Jesus Christ. But this takes our breath away. As he is, so are we in this world.

Well, that doesn't make sense, surely, because we are so different. Well, yes, but you see, John is talking about love becoming perfected. And as love becomes perfected, so we may be as he is.

What John wants to say is this. We share in the victory of our Lord. We share in the resurrection as well as in the death of our Lord.

We share in the ascension of our Savior. And as he seated at his Father's right hand, all his people of all the ages were represented in him. In other words, he's our high priest.

He's our representative. My good friend, this is something which is exceedingly precious. When Jesus Christ ascended on high and led a host of captives, he ascended and took his place at the Father's right hand, not simply as God the Son, but as the God-man.

As the mediator of a new covenant. As the high priest of his people. As the one who represented us first in death, then in resurrection, now in ascension and in glory.

And he's entered in. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews uses a word which is most graphic. He speaks of Jesus as the forerunner who has for us entered.

The forerunner was very often the person who jumped off the boat when it came into the key, took the anchor and fastened it to a rock on the side of the key. And he jumped on, waiting for the others to join. And as sure as he has anchored the boat to the rock, so may all the others on the ship come ashore.

He has entered the heavenly place as the anchor of our souls. He has gripped the solid rock of the eternal throne as the forerunner of all his people. Because we are joined to him by faith and love of God and of our fellows and obedience to his word, we may have the same kind of composure even in the midst of this life of sin and of death and temptation as he has in the heavenlies.

Hallelujah. As he is there, so we may be here. Paul indicates the kind of thing that is involved here in the end of Romans chapter 8. He says, who can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Do you remember that remarkable challenge to principalities and powers? And then he goes all around the world.

Life and death, principalities, powers that now are or will come or whatever they are. He says, none of them can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Because if God be for us, who can be against us? Therefore as he is in his peace and calm composure and certainty of victory, right there on the throne in him, so if we are joined to him, and this is the key, if we are really joined to him, if we are his people, if we believe in him as the one who died for our sins, as the son of God, if we love him and therefore love his father and love his people, if we are submissive to him, therefore obey his commandments, and therefore are really, fervently joined to him, this is what we may have.

Oh, I meet many people in the world of today, right here in this great city, who have little peace, little peace, whose minds and hearts are torn asunder by fears of one kind or another, and I have a real sympathy for such. Do you know, this is the germinal truth that contains the answer to our problems. If you and I can see ourselves as really linked with Jesus Christ, he is the head, we are the body, he is the savior, we are the saved, he is the bridegroom, we are the bride.

If you can see yourself as bound to him and in him, then in Paul's delightful phrase, you may be sure of this, we are not only accepted in the beloved now, but we shall be then. If his righteousness and blood covers us now, my friend, it will cover us then. The basis, then, of this confidence lies not in ourselves, not in anything we've done or hope to do, but rather in the fact that we are intimately related to him who's done everything that needs to be done, that a sinner be accepted at the judgment day and beyond the judgment day in the heavenly paradise and home.

Now, we may have confidence in the day of judgment because, as I hymn my love very much before I turn from it, from this theme, I guess many of you know this, before the throne of God above I have a strong, a perfect plea. A great high priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me, my name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upwards I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.

Behold him there, the risen lamb, my perfect, spotless righteousness, the great unchangeable I am, the king of glory and of grace. One with himself I cannot die. My soul is purchased with his blood.

My life is hid with Christ on high, with Christ my Savior and my God. Peace in contemplation even of judgment, because he has been judged bearing our sins, and beyond the judgment he bore he's been accepted and welcomed and honored and crowned as our representative. Now the last thought this morning is this, the banishment of fear before the bliss of such confidence.

There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment or with torment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. Love and fear are incompatible.

Love begets confidence, fear begets doubt. We know that, don't we? Love and fear are quite incompatible, and they can't long live together. One's got to go out.

And John tells us here that real love, as it is perfected, takes fear by the scruff of the neck and kicks it out by the back door. Perfect love casts out fear. It won't have it.

Because we love God, we believe him. Because we love the Lord Jesus, we trust him. Because we love God's people, we are one of them, and the promises that relate to them relate to us.

Because of our love, we believe, we hope, we trust. There is no fear in love. Love has to do with punishment.

I'm sorry, fear has to do with punishment. Fear is very intimately related to punishment. Sometimes fear is the first fruit of punishment.

There are people who carry fears in their souls, which is a harbinger of the judgment that is to come and the punishment that is to come. But there are fears which are quite unnecessary for us to carry. And we carry them only because our love is not perfected.

We may have a weak love, but we do not see the wonder of the God who gave his Son that we should love him wholly. We do not see the greatness of the Christ who died and did everything for us that we should trust him utterly. And we do not recognize the glory of the indwelling spirit within us that we should rest in the love that he sheds abroad in our hearts and move with him.

As a matter of fact, I don't say this with confidence, but right at the beginning here it says, herein is love made perfect with us. Now a suggestion has been made, whether it is right, I don't know. What it means is this.

Herein is love made perfect that it carries us with it. And love comes and laps around our lives and says, come along and takes us by the hand and carries us forward. It is not this what the love of God does.

It finds us in the far country and it brings us back and it says, come on back, I loved you with an everlasting love. But love is perfected in that way when it wins us over and we rest in his love. And we refuse to doubt any of his words or promises.

And therefore, even though we may know that the day of judgment has something to say about our wrong deeds and words and actions, we are not speechless because Christ is our savior. His righteousness will answer for us then and his blood will cleanse us then. And even though shame may still be ours, we are still his.

How very important, therefore, that love should be perfected as far as we are concerned. And it is with this I want to conclude. May I ask you to apply a test this morning or two to your life? Is your love for God and his people in the process of being perfected? Let's put it like this.

Do you love someone this morning that you couldn't love twelve months ago? Now be as ruthless as that. Let's be honest. Do you love someone today whom twelve months ago you couldn't stand? Is your love being perfected? Are you able to take people in metaphorically within your arms and make them your own today that you couldn't a few years ago? Is your love growing? Or I'll put it in a different way.

Are there those who, out of love for them today, you would be prepared to give anything for them whereas a couple of months or years ago you'd go so far but not very far? We have seen the pattern of love here. The agape love of which John speaks. It's the love of God for the man or the woman who is down in the depths, for the most wretched and unworthy, the unworthiest.

And it's a love that seeks the highest for the unworthiest. It gives him eternal life, the life of the ages, the life of God. Heaven and all that that's involved for the unworthiest.

And the love that is prepared to pay the utmost price in order to procure that for the unworthiest. That's love. That's the pattern.

Now, the question is, are you and I growing towards that? How much are you prepared to give today to bring a soul to Jesus Christ? How much of your income? How much of your time? How much of your service? How much of your prayers? What use of your home? What use of your car? What use of your telephone? How far are you prepared to go because you love the souls of men more today than you did ten years ago? So, my friend, are you growing in love? Or are there weeds that are choking it and something needs radically to be dealt with? Let's come nearer as we really must conclude. What about the saints? How much will you do for the church to which you belong today? How much will you do for the saints? How far will you go? How involved are you? Do you lose a tear ever because the church is not riding the white horse of victory today? Does it worry you because people can't get on together sometimes in the body of Christ? Does it hurt you? Do you love the people of God so much that something of the great apostolic love lives on again in you? Nay, nay, not apostolic only, but the love of the Savior himself. Perfect love casts out fear.

Now, as that grows, as that matures, says John, your fears will go gratitude. One day will come when you'll be able to boot the whole wretched business out by the back door. It's all because of your relationship with him, with seated faith as your Savior, high priest and cunning conquering king.

Let us pray. Our heavenly Father, in these closing moments of our morning worship, we acknowledge that your word has found us out again. Preacher and people come under the dominion of it and the sway of it and the challenge of it and the conviction of it.

And we acknowledge that. We acknowledge our sins in this respect. And we humbly pray.

Oh, by thy word, our God, and by thy spirit, and by the chastisements of providence, and by every other means at thy disposal, teach us to love thee as we should. Oh, make me love thee more and more. And in loving thee, see that our love flows also toward those whom thou hast loved in Christ and whom thou dost love still.

Hear us and bring honor and glory to thy holy name through him who is our Savior. And through our lives. Amen.

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