

INSTEAD OF FEAR ...

By

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“Perfect love castes out fear.” (1 John 4:18)

Ours is a planet in rebellion. Rioting on the capitol’s steps! Justice perverted in the courts! Crime all over the place! Citizens sleeping with guns under their pillows! Fear is becoming a way of life.

Such fear has no place among God’s people. “But for the fearful ... their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). Terror all around and we are not to fear? We have no guarantee of good health nor of national prosperity. In fact, Christ warned, “be on your guard; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake. Do not be anxious ... you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved” (Mark 13:9-13). Christ knew that we would face terrible world conditions, even the threat of death from His enemies. Yet He calmly commanded, “Fear them not” (Matt. 10:26, 28, 31). He “gave us not a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7).

“Perfect love casts out fear” (John 4:18). This is not a clever formula with a hidden mysterious key, but a simple fact. “Perfect” does not refer to perfection on the part of the lover, but true love that has a perfect object: Christ. Romantic lovers often fall upon bitter days, when they wonder what they ever saw in the other person to make them think their love could be perfect; But not so with Christ. The longer and better we know Him, the more perfect and more worthy of our love we find Him to be. There is no fear of His ever disappointing us, for “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye arc made full, who is the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:9, 10). Therefore, dispelling our fear is not a matter of our circumstances or our abilities or some clever formula, but simply of our love for Jesus Christ in the knowledge of our relation to Him as Lord.

There are two things that create fear for the Christian: the world, and one’s own inadequacy. For those who are not Christian there is also the terrible fear of death, judgment and punishment, but this does not apply to anyone who is truly in Christ, “for there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

The penalty (punishment) for the believer’s sin has been met in the death of Jesus, so that he has no fear of death and judgment, but rather looks to death as rest from the world’s troubles, and judgment as the fulfillment of hope when Christ returns to make His saints immortal. In this paper we will consider the fears common to believers.

NOT OF THE WORLD. The things happening in the world should not terrify the Christian because his life is “hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). He has been purchased by God through Christ “that he might deliver us out of this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). The Bible says that after our baptism into Christ we walk in a new life, with a new outlook upon the world. “... Even so reckon you also yourselves to be dead unto sin but alive unto God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:4, 11). The Christian is not dependent upon the world; he doesn’t look to it for guidance nor to supply his needs nor to fulfill his purpose. In fact, he seeks to be “not conformed to the world” but to live as a pilgrim and sojourner in a foreign land, because his citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

In contrast to our love for Christ, we are expressly told to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him . . . and the world passes away ...” (1 John 2:15,17). If we are truly aware of the transaction of redemption in which Jesus gave His life for ours, “the world has been crucified” unto us, and we have been crucified unto the world (Gal. 6:14). Our concern is not that men find satisfaction in the world, but that they, too, come to know Christ and find relief from the world and its fears.

There are many false prophets in the world today who try to link Christianity with some kind of world-salvation or world-Utopia. They follow in the error of the Jews who rejected Jesus because he did not support their kingdom plans. Instead of being crucified to the world, they want the world to be their glory. They hold that Christ’s purpose is fulfilled in saving a segment of society for some kind of political power. Such concepts run from the Zionist’s ambition to rule the world from Jerusalem to the recent idea of an Anglo-Israel world, the preposterous idea that all the white people constitute God’s Israel and make up His exclusive Kingdom. Proponents of this idea are chiefly concerned with saving the United States as a republic (they are a little late for that) as if Christ died only for the U.S.A. and not for all believers in the world. A significant earmark of all who hold to such Utopian concepts is the fact of their fear. Every change in the political scenery stirs them up to urge patriots throughout the nation to send in their donations and write to their congressmen to save the country as the last best hope of God. They forget that the “world passes away” and that it is God who judges nations, even our own.

Instead of fear of the world, we are told to look to Christ. The inspired writer of the Hebrew letter, after listing the sufferings of saints through the ages, then advises that we, in the same kind of world, must run the race of life, “looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2). Christ is on the seat of power, “the right hand of the throne.” It is to the shame of Christians and their preachers that we take our eyes off the Christ and stand terrorized by the world which is under His power.

The cesspool of moral degeneration, the relaxing of laws such as arose against abortion, and the disrespect for sacred things seem to leave the righteous exposed to the enemy’s power. But rebellion against Christ is but further proof of His reign. It is the tribulation which He warned would exist in the world because the world opposes His rule. Christians

have been delivered out of the world's darkness and God has "translated us into the Kingdom of His dear son" (Col. 1:13). We see the world in the throes of rebellion, but we are under the command of the triumphant King, who has already defeated Satan and will ultimately bring the world to judgment. And share His glory with all His chosen ones.

To love someone is to seek that person's welfare. "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, and not on the things that are upon the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). To look to the world is to cultivate fear. It is in looking to Christ that the fear is dispelled, for we seek that which is His desire, and we know that He has power to accomplish it and will do so"

CHRIST IS ABLE. The natural alternative to looking to the world is to look to self, but this only reminds us of our inadequacies and generates fear. Especially is this true when in so many churches there is competition for the "chief seats" and when one does not receive such honor, the temptation is to think that he is a kind of second-class Christian, unsuccessful, without the power God promised and unable to share in the victory of Christ. But this is a false fear. Christians need not be defeated by human weakness. Christ's "grace is sufficient" and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Like Paul, we are to glory in our weaknesses, "that the power of Christ may rest upon (us) ... for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Defeat comes when we look for man's approval of our strength and receive their honor and power, when we are afraid of displeasing men, or failing to receive their honor, of losing position in the church, the club or some other organization. Jesus teaches that such glory among men is of no value in fulfilling His purpose, and in fact, "that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Knowing this, we are relieved from any attempt to satisfy human agencies, to gain approval of any person or to live up to any systematized theology of any denomination. We need not look to Luther or to Alexander Campbell, nor to the church publishing house or the Bible College for the stamp of approval. We learn from these, to be sure, but they are not the object of our love and adoration. Thus we do not need to be careful to wear the labels as designated by men: fundamental, orthodox, restorationist, independent or Baptist, Methodist, Catholic or any other descriptive term to classify us. Christ is sufficient. Whatever He teaches is acceptable without first measuring it with any human classification such as whether it is Calvinism or Arminian. We are the purchase of Christ, and therefore free from men's bondage; free to believe all the Spirit teaches in the word, without fear of failure to measure up to doctrines as emphasized by men.

Someone will still answer, "But the thing I fear is that I fail to measure up to Christ's expectations." This is not fear. It is a fact. No one measures up, not even the apostle Paul, who confessed that he had not attained perfection (Phil. 3:12). No saint has attained the holiness for which we long. But our salvation is not grounded upon our attainment; it is the attainment of Christ by His death and not the product of our work. Whatever growth we have made toward holiness, it is not the ground of our salvation, but the fruit of it.

The more we grow into His likeness the more shameful our failures and traces of sin in our own eyes, but this is evidence that we share His view of sin, not a cause for anxiety.

Christ is Lord. He has already demonstrated His perfect love by dying for us and His perfect power by rising from the dead, “Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment.” “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:17, 19).

“Perfect love casts out fear.”

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