

1 John 4 17-18 Aug 30

¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

I mentioned a few weeks ago that I needed to revisit this text. I realized that, while I knew that there was a **proper** fear of God and an **improper** fear of God, I could not clearly explain the difference.

I hope this week to improve upon that.

I want to hone in on the phrase, "**perfect love casts out fear.**"

But before I do that, I want to ask the question, "**Do you love Christ?**"

Do you love Christ?

Remember how we answered the question, "**do we love each other?**" And remember we talked about the difference between a **biblical** definition and a **worldly** definition?

Well this morning we will look at a biblical definition of **loving Christ**. And while it **involves** our emotion, it is not **driven** by emotion. Again when we hear the question, "**Do you love Christ?**", don't we immediately ask ourselves, "What is my **intention** toward Christ?" "What is my **attitude** toward Christ?" But just like in our definition of loving each other, what we will see is that the proof is not in what we **feel** but in what **we do** because of what we feel and think.

Now the context lets us know what kind of love the text is talking about. In verse 17 we see that our **confidence** comes as a result of us being **like Christ**. So this statement of perfect love is not talking about **God's love for us**, but **our love** for God. This is very important. It is not **God's love for us** that casts out fear. If it were that, we would **never** have fear because He **always** has perfect love for us. The passage presupposes a perfect love from God. And it is needed to have the effect it has. But the focus is mostly on **our end**.

This text is talking about the fear that we experience because we do not have mature or perfect love.

Now, in our last study we looked at a continuum between **fear** and **confidence**, **fear** and **boldness** in judgment. We talked about that all of us are somewhere between the two when we talk of the judgment of God.

If that is true, that means there also must be degrees of the **maturity** or **perfection** of love. And what we learn here is that **if we loved God perfectly** and **we loved people perfectly** we would have **perfect assurance and boldness** in the face of judgment. I think that is dealing safely with the text.

This may be part of the answer to the question that we have been wrestling with, regarding **assurance of our salvation**. We have expressed frustration that our assurance **fluctuates**. We say that we **should** have assurance. We say that we **can** have it. But it seems to **ebb and flow** based on our experience. When we are **living by faith** we are more confident than when we are **failing** to live by faith. And that is frustrating to us.

Suppose that our experience of assurance fluctuates with our degree of love for God. If we **love perfectly**, we experience **no fear at all** of judgment. But to the degree that our love is not mature, that it is not the driving force in our lives, we **wonder** about our salvation. We are **commanded** to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Do we do that? Well one thing is for sure. We do not do it **perfectly**. But as we grow in that love for God, as it takes over our lives, we cannot deny the effect it has in how we spend our time and money. We cannot deny the effect it has in our relationships. And we conclude that we must be believers because there is no other explanation for it. But when we give way to our flesh, to our sight, to our strong compulsions and perceptions, our confidence wanes. Because there is competing evidence against our love for God. And we should stop here to clarify something.

Ultimately what claims did Christ make about love? If there were no other people on earth, how would we know if we love Him? Here is one of the clearest and it is repeated in scripture often and in many different ways.

John 14:15-21 (NKJV)

Jn 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. 19 "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. 20 At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

Twice in this text Jesus couples love with obedience. Do you remember the enthusiasm of the crowd toward Christ in John? They were chasing Him everywhere. They wanted to make Him King. They had all kind of **emotion**. But as soon as Christ started laying out the **cost of following Him**, they lost interest. While they liked the **idea** of Christ, they did not love **Christ** at all.

I'd like to use an illustration here of the difference between the reality of love and the emotional intensity of flesh.

When I was a young man, I had my radar finely tuned to pick up any interest a pretty girl would pay to me. And I pursued many of those relationships with **intense interest** and **emotion**. It was the fodder of many songs that used the word love. But it was wasted effort. I often clearly represented the interests of Jon. But I did not represent the interests of Christ. It is so very difficult for us to use the word "**love**" in our paragraphs and be clear about the difference of what the **Bible** is talking about and what the **world** talks about. It is hard to discern the difference between **life commitment** and intense **selfish** interest.

When I was a young man I had little knowledge of truly loving someone. I picked more flowers, I wrote more songs, I was more demonstrative of my strong feelings, but there was no maturity, no perfection.

Getting married was probably the biggest step toward love. At that point I said that, before God, my allegiance is toward my wife. And I am committed to a relationship with her until one of us dies. And there are sometimes that I do things that cause Carla to want to provide me with that release. But none the less marriage began to be a **useful** love, a **useful** investment of my life in another person's life. In that relationship I think it is true that my fleshly motivations grow smaller and my spiritual ones grow greater. Jesus begins to teach us what it is to die for another in marriage. I don't pretend to be good at it. But I am way better at it than I was 40 years ago.

There are really two points I am trying to make. **First**, emotional zeal is not the proper measurement of love. I had plenty of that, but it did not deliver the mail. And second, when love **grows**, it becomes more functional, more beneficial, more effective.

We also see the same thing when people come to Christ.

In youth ministry and in church ministry many of us have seen people with incredible zeal. They talked of how much they just loved God. We have had college kids at the house that loved God so much. But they couldn't seem to get themselves out of bed on a Sunday morning, so great was their love for God. People would come to Christ with great emotion, but this emotion did not drive them to **find out** and **do** what their Lord wanted from them. They were driven to no effort to learn what the Lord wanted and to submit their lives to His scrutiny. This does not fit Jesus' definition of love. Love for Jesus demands finding out what He wants and doing it. If we define love that way we gain a lot more clarity in our lives. Anything else might be **intense** interest, maybe intense **appreciation**,

but it is not intense **love**. I am not trying to say that those things are bad. They are wonderful as far as they go. But Love drives deeper **relationship** and deeper **obedience**. If something is not driving us to actively know what Christ wants and driving us to do actively obey what we find out, whatever we call it, it is not the love that Christ defines in scriptures.

Like in my illustration, love is not best discerned by emotional intensity. It is best discerned by what it drives us **to do**. My love for my wife caused me to be a **Carla specialist**. I believe I know her better than anyone on the planet knows her. And I think I probably know how to meet her needs better than anyone. I could be wrong about that. But that is what love drives me to do. **Devotional** intensity is far more important than **emotional** intensity.

When we love Christ it drives us to **know Him** more **deeply**. The emotional intensity may not be what it once was, but the depth and maturity of it should continue to grow until we **thoroughly know Him** and what **He wants from us** and we spend all our efforts to **do that** which pleases Him. We become a Jesus expert. **Devotional** intensity is far more important than **emotional** intensity. We need not worry so much about drumming up emotion for Christ if our life is one of **devotion** to Christ.

So **do you love Christ?** Well are you driven to know what Christ wants from you and do it?

To the degree that you seek to discover what Christ **wants you to do** and then **you do it**, you love Christ.

To the degree that **you do not seek to discover what Christ wants you to do** and you **do not do it**, you do not love Christ.

Frankly I would like this definition a little more blurry, a little more undefinable, a little more emotional and intentional. But Christ lays it down in a way that it removes all our nonsense. If we love Christ, we obey Christ.

It is very interesting when we look at Rev 2 where the angel delivers a message to Ephesus. He talks about their faults and says this:

Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ **Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.**

⁵ **Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.**

The Ephesians had left their first love. They had good theology. And they even protected the theology. And that was all very good. But look at the contrast between where they **were** and where they **are now**. They are to repent and **feel**

toward Christ as **warmly** as they felt toward him as they did at first. No, that is not what it says. Should they **intend good things toward Christ** like they **used to**? Should they be as **grateful** as they first were? No that is not what it says. No they should **do the first works**. Essentially they should **obey Christ** like they used to **obey Him**.

They are not called to return to the status when they were most thrilled about Christ or when they liked Christ the most or when they spoke of Christ most fondly. They are called to go back to the time where they were surrendered to doing that which Christ said without reservation. They are called to go back to the status of having Christ be Lord in a real observable kind of way. That is the first love He is appealing to.

So if there was a time when you were more zealous to discover what God wanted in every area of your life so you could do it, that is the love you should return to. We need not worry about if we were more emotional about God than we are now, any more than I should evaluate my marriage by the strength of emotion I have toward my wife.

In marriage the question is, **how am I a meeting my wife's needs**? That is how I am loving her.

In my relationship with Christ the question is, **how am I obeying**? That is how I am loving Christ.

Our text says this.

But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

I think, based on what we have been looking at, that we can expand this principle to say that **to the degree that we have not had mature love toward Christ**, we **will fear**. To the degree that our love **matures toward Christ**, we are bold.

Think about it.

If love for Christ is **driving** you, it is driving you to **obey** Him. It is driving you to **please** Him. It is driving you to **want to be with Him**. If we were to live that way perfectly, we would be doing nothing to displease Him. Perfect love would drive out fear because there would be no conflicting evidence. Mature love leads to mature living, mature devotion, mature trust, mature faith. And the more we know this Christ and the more we conform to His will, the more we are certain that His love for us is so intense that no harm can befall us.

The opposite is also true. If we are **not** living according to love, if we are **not** loving God the way Christ described love, our lives are **not** obedient to Him. We are trying to live apart from Him like the double minded man in James. We are

trying to serve two masters. And in that state, fear of God is appropriate and useful.

For those of you with children, do you want your child to be **afraid of you** when they are brazenly defying you? I found **that** kind of fear particularly useful in raising children. We never wanted them to be afraid of us when they were living obediently. And we would prefer that they **obeyed** because they cherished the closeness of our relationship. But we all know that **love alone does not drive good behavior**. **Fear** is a proper incentive when the expectations for what is acceptable and what is not are clearly communicated and understood.

At the end of the day, you and I probably **want** the same thing. We want to see our name **written** in the book of life. If we saw that, we would know that there is **no reason to fear anything**. We need not fear the devil. We need not fear God. We need not even fear sin. And there is a temptation to think that our lives would **be better** if we never felt fear again. That would **not** be true. Because we **do not** have a perfect love toward God and a **non perfect** love will not drive us to **perfect** conformity to His will.

Only **perfect** love would perfectly drive out all fear. That is the goal. That is what we would like to attain toward God. That is what we would like our kids to attain toward us. We would like their every action is in conformity to our will because they love us so much. It would also be good that every action of ours be in conformity to Christ because we love Him so much. But until we reach that perfection of love, fear has a useful place.

Think of the song Amazing Grace:

Tw'as grace that taught my **heart to fear**

And grace my **fears relieved**

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed.

Look at this passage-

Romans 11:19-22 (NKJV)

¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

²⁰ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith.

Do not be haughty, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. ²² Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

This passage reflects what we have been saying this morning.

For everyone who is truly a believer in Christ, it is true that they are grafted in. But there is the element of uncertainty for the individuals involved. So there should be an element of fear of when we are relying just upon theology without personal evidence. Look at the appeal. Consider who this God is. Consider how harsh He can act and how Good He can act. Then adjust accordingly. Adapt your life to His goodness. Choose to submit to His will. That is a **proper use** of fear. Fear is a proper response when we see ourselves being haughty, like those in our text. We should be confident in what God will do **in** and **through** and **to** His children. But we should never be cocky because it was **us** He chose to do it through. Remember, it is not primarily about us.

Here is another passage addressed to believers.

Hebrews 3:12-14 (NKJV)

Heb 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Don't we wish this kind of warning was not called for? Don't we wish there was not even the question of us being false? But that is not the reality we live in. Caution is called for. We must live examined lives. And we must be active in our assumption that if **we** need help to stay the course, so will **everyone around us** need help. So we exhort one another daily. As it comes into our minds how a truth in scripture fits a person's life, we share it. And we keep **doing** that. Because we keep **needing** it. There is a danger of being proven false. If there was not, this passage would make no sense. But there is also evidence that proves we are **true**. This also must be true or the text would make no sense. We hold our confidence to the end. We cling to Christ until the end.

1 Peter 1:13-16 (NKJV)

1Pe 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"

1Pe 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; ¹⁸ (*why fear? What would inspire fear*) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like silver or gold*, from your aimless conduct

***received* by tradition from your fathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.²⁰ He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you²¹ who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**

Fear should come when we are straying away from the message and person of Christ. It should come from relying on anything but the salvation that comes from God. Fear should come when we do not show by our lives that we have faith in God.

The epistles of Peter frequently mention the word fear in relation to the Christian life. And it is normally when warning them not to sin.

This is quote by George MacDonald:

So hath God contrived and constituted things in His dispensations toward His own people that when their love decays and the exercises of it fail or become weak, fear should arise; for then they need it (fear) to restrain them from sin and to excite them to care for the good of their souls and so to save them up to watchfulness and diligence in religion: but God hath so ordered that when love rises and is in vigorous exercise, then fear should vanish and be driven away for then they need it not, having a higher and more excellent principle in exercise to restrain them from sin and stir them up from their duty.

There are no other principles which human nature is under the influence of that will ever make men conscientious but one of these two, fear or love: and therefore if one of these should not prevail as the other decayed, God's people when fallen into dead and carnal frames, when love is asleep would be lamentably exposed indeed. And therefore God has wisely ordained that these two opposite principles of love and fear should rise and fall like the two opposite scales of a balance; when one rises the other sinks.

Fear is cast out by the Spirit of God, no other way than by the prevailing of love; nor is it ever maintained by His Spirit but when love is asleep.

I hope we can see how dangerous it is when we only look at one passage of scripture instead of looking at the whole context of the Bible. It would be easy to read our 1 John passage this morning and place fear against love. Love is good. Fear is bad. But that is not the case. Love is a better motivation to serve God than fear is, but both are helpful. Both are useful.

Think of a sin you committed. What would you have done if your love toward God was mature? We would not have committed that sin.

But what would we have done if our fear of God was complete? What would have happened if we knew we risked God's judgment by committing that sin and were dreadfully afraid of offending our God? Well, if we feared God perfectly, we also would not have committed that sin. Even now it would be good for us to have an accurate fear of God. He is no one to trifle with. He is no one to play games **with sin** in His presence, and we are always in His presence.

Fear and love will produce good results in the Christian's life. Our bigger problem is apathy and complacency. The bigger problem in our lives is when what God says is **irrelevant** to any area of our lives. That should cause us to shake in our boots. But when we are in a faithless mindset, we don't care.

It is interesting how Jesus talked about fear of man.

Do we fear man? I would suggest that all of us have a desire to be **thought of well** and a desire to not **regarded badly**. And that desire sometimes shapes our behavior more than our relationship with Christ. Any time we do or say something around someone where their approval is more important to us than God's approval, that is fear of man. I don't know about you but I see that regularly in my life.

That is the core of peer pressure. Fear of man. Fear of how someone might regard us to the degree we want to impress them more than God.

Scripture tells us that fear of man is a snare. It is a trap that we fall into and it causes us to commit all kinds of sins to win approval or to not face disapproval. And look how Jesus tells us to think about it.

Matthew 10:28-31 (NKJV)

Mt 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Let's follow Christ's reasoning here.

He says "Do not live in the fear of what men can do to you." Well, they can really do bad stuff. They can snuff out our lives. That is all true. So why shouldn't we be afraid? Why should we not be afraid of the trends in our country? They seem very bad. Why should we not fear an economic collapse or a shortage of food? Why not? Those things could actually happen.

Christ gave two reasons.

1. Christ's disapproval can do worse to us.
2. Christ's love will do better for us.

Fear God more because avoiding **His** disapproval is way more important than avoiding **another person's** disapproval. He has more to fear. His threat is much greater to us than what a man can do to us.

So we start there.

But then we need to think about what **His love** can do **for us**. If we look at the animals, the vast majority of them are fed every day. And that is what God is like. He cares more about **us** than the sparrow He feeds every day.

Do you see the two elements again?

Fear is a good thing. And we should fear God. But if we **start** with fear we can move to **love**. We can be inspired by the good regard Christ holds for His children. We can be inspired to live faithfully because we **trust** Him, we trust His love for us, we trust He will care for us.

I think we have seen this morning that fear and love are not opposing forces. They are both in God's arsenal for inspiring in us obedience and faithfulness. And at the end of the day, either are good ways of getting there. But love is better. And the more we love God, the less we need to fear God's judgment. It only makes sense.