

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0448 -- Nov. 28, 2004 – 1 John 4:18-19 – Fear versus Love

Greek Text 4:18 phobos ouk estin en te agape all he teleia agape exo ballei ton phobon hoti ho phobos kolasin echei ho de phoboumenos ou teteleiotai en te agape.

Translation 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

First, let's look at the context so we can understand **fear** and **love** in John's context. Notice that **fear** and **love**ⁱ are diametrically opposed to one another in John. This should not be surprising. John is always speaking in antithetical terms. John is saying that if a Christian **has been made perfect in love** as v. 17 intimates, then he will not have **fear** at the judgment seat of Christ. Remember, the judgment seat of Christ is a judgment for believers, a judgment to evaluate believers' works, whether done in the Spirit or in the flesh.

This judgment has to do with works, but don't confuse this judgment of works with how one is saved. This judgment is not an evaluation of everyone's works to determine whether they are saved or not. Salvation has never been and will never be by human works. However, we should not conclude that salvation is apart from work. No one can be saved apart from work. The thing is, salvation is not based on our work, but salvation is based on Christ's work on the cross. Someone has to do the work; however, your work is no good. It has been rightly said that salvation is not *by* good works but *for* good works (Eph. 2:8-10 READ).

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship [*Greek poem*], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

That is, good works follow salvation. But even the good works we do after salvation are really done by the Spirit of God in us as we abide in Him (Gal. 5:22-23).

So, we really can take no credit for any good produced. Therefore, it might be rightly said that all good is a product of God and all evil is a product of Satan and the human flesh. That is a radical idea in our day. We might ask, “What about all the good the environmentalists are doing picking up cans off the side of the road and hugging trees? Isn’t that good?” Only if the environmentalists’ concerns are rooted in God’s word. There is a biblical view of the environment and man’s relationship to it; but when the environmental agenda has slipped to saving beached whales over unborn babies, we might be off the map. That is a really foolish perspective. The biblical perspective is that this is God’s creation and man was created in God’s image to take care of God’s creation. We ought to be environmentalists, but in the biblical conception of the environment and not some radical humanistic endeavor. We have to remember that because of the fall of man, the environment is under sin, too. It cries out awaiting the day of re-creation (Rom. 8:26ff). No amount of money or human effort is going to fix the environment. God has already revealed what is going to happen to this present environment. The environment has gotten so bad and so corrupt that, according to God’s perspective, it has to be totally burned up and replaced with a new environment (i.e., the new heavens and new earth; 2 Peter 3). But what if the modern environmentalists are environmentally friendly because their worldview thinks of the heavens and earth as an eternal Kingdom of Man? What if they are trying to preserve the environment because they think this is man’s eternal habitation and hope? I would say they need their thinking changed because that is an absolutely evil and anti-God agenda. And that is what we mean when we say to the unbeliever that he needs to repent. The unbeliever needs a change of mind about reality. They are way out in left field. But that is exactly where the Bible says unbelievers will eventually end up if they reject their knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18-25). The Bible says that they know God and His righteous demands, and yet they suppress this knowledge; and the result is that their thinking becomes futile, vain imaginations, professing to be wise, they become fools. This is why they start saving beached whales over unborn babies. Stupidity, but that is the way God has designed it. Reject me and you destroy your own mind. It does not hurt God any if you reject Him. You are only inflicting self-damage, what we call soul-suicide.

So, from this we can conclude that good and evil are not terms that are defined by man; they are terms defined by God through His character. Good and evil are absolute categories. The flesh of man is born evil. True, he often produces what may appear good, but we mean that his produce is never good in the sense that it has merit with God. If he could gain merit with God, then it could be said that if he need only build enough merit with God to earn his salvation. But this overlooks the fact that all men produce evil as well (again, a category defined by the character of God). And because God is just, He cannot overlook evil. He

cannot compromise Himself. If he compromised His character, He would no longer be God.

So, the idea here in John 4:17-18 has nothing to do with the Great White Throne Judgment for unbelievers that comes at the consummation of the Messianic Age, the 1,000-year Kingdom on earth. Rather, this judgment has to do with the Judgment Seat of Christ which is for believers only. It is a time when believers' works will pass through "fire." For those works which have the quality of gold, silver, and precious stone there will be reward; but for those works which are of wood, hay, and straw there will be loss (1 Cor. 3:12-15). The Judgment Seat of Christ is not just a day of celebration. Turn with me to another New Testament passage on the Judgment Seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11. Last week I took you to 1 Cor. 3:12-15, today to 2 Cor. 5:9-11, both passages on the judgment seat of Christ

⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

There is no purgatory in this, no Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. That doctrine is never mentioned in the New Testament canon. What is mentioned is the Judgment Seat of Christ where each one of us will be paid back for our deeds while in the body, according to what we have done, whether good or evil. Notice v. 11 mentions the fear of the Lord. Paul was fearful (the Greek word is *phobos*, from which we get "phobia"). Paul did not have *claustrophobia* (fear of tight spaces) or *arachnophobia* (fear of spiders); but he did have *kuriosphobia* (fear of the Lord). Let's talk a little bit about **fear** in the Bible. The Bible has a lot to say about **fear**. I studied a lot of the references to **fear** in the Bible, and I found that the one common association in every reference is that fear is always related to "the ability to inflict punishment or harm." John mentions "punishment" implicitly in 1 John 4:18. People **fear** others who have the ability to inflict punishment or harm. Sometimes, the context is emphasizing the mere ability or power of a person and other times the willingness to punish. In this context, both are in view. Let's look at some of the biblical teaching on fear. There are four situations in which **fear** is mentioned in the Bible.

UNBELIEVERS BOTH FEAR AND DO NOT FEAR GOD

First, unbelievers fear God because their deeds are evil. Turn to John 3:20.

¹⁹ "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for **fear** that his deeds will be exposed."

Here we see that everyone who does evil hides from the Light. The Light is God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. If someone is hiding from the Light, then they obviously know God exists. No one is without knowledge of God. We do not have to prove God exists; everyone already knows God exists. Further, people do not **fear** someone that doesn't both exist and have the ability to inflict punishment. Unbelievers therefore, fear God because their deeds are evil and they do not want them to be exposed to the God of light, Who is their judge.

The Bible is very ingenious in its use of dark and light. But guess what, this same rule applies to believers too. Notice in v. 20, John says "everyone" period. He does not say "everyone not born of God." He could be referring to anyone whose does evil. And believers still do evil. Let me give you an example. Genuine Christians who have not gone to church in years for **fear** that their deeds will be exposed. They are in such rebellion that they even say that when they go to church people judge them. This is normally not the case. This is a lie, much of the time. They are being judged, but it is because they are judging themselves. They feel convicted. And they do not like conviction, so they stop going to church or they only go on Easter and Christmas. There are lots of genuine Christians running around the world hiding out from God, or, at least they think they are hiding from God; but no one can hide from God. They are fearful and they do deeds that are of the darkness and they do them in the darkness (at night). These Christians have re-engineered their view of God. They don't understand the essence of God. They understand that God is light (1 John 1:5), but they don't understand that God is omnipresent and that God is love. If they did, they wouldn't run from God. I mean, where are you going to run from God? And since God is love, they don't have to run from God anyway. He loves them. But they don't want to come to the light lest their deeds be exposed and that is why people don't come to church; it's self-convicting. That's why people get drunk in the dark. Have you ever seen people out getting drunk at nine in the morning (Acts 2:12-15)? No, these people do their evil deeds in the dark because they **fear**. Unbelievers and carnal believers share a lot in common. They do the same things (avoid church) and they do them at night (lie, cheat, break the law, get drunk).

Second, not only do unbelievers fear God but they also do not fear God at the same time.

Turn to Rom. 3:18.

“There is no **fear** of God before their eyes.”ⁱⁱ

This is speaking of all unbelievers. How can unbelievers both fear God and not fear God at the same time? If God really didn't exist, then there is no reason to fear God. But they do fear God. So, unbelievers live a contradiction. They fear God lest their deeds be exposed (John 3:20) and at the same time they live as if there is no God (Rom. 3:18). All unbelievers are both *rational* and *irrational* at the same time. There is both fear of God and no fear of God at the same time. This remark here in Rom. 3:18 is a description of *practical atheism*. These people live as if there is no God but internally, they know very well that there is a God. Interestingly, believers who are living carnally are also living a contradiction. They are both irrational and rational at the same time. The only way to avoid living a contradiction (i.e., irrationality-rationality dialectic) is to be a Christian who is abiding (walking by the Spirit).

BELIEVERS ARE SUPPOSED TO FEAR AND NOT FEAR THE LORD

On the other hand, believers are supposed to fear the Lord. Turn to Prov. 1:7 and 29.

The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the **fear** of the LORD.

What does the fear of the LORD mean here? It is obviously a positive thing for someone to **fear** the Lord, in a sense, because it results in knowledge. Unbelievers deliberately choose not to fear the Lord in this positive sense. In this context and other like it “**fear** of the Lord” means to have a “reverential awe” or “respect” for God. How do we get a “reverential awe” for God? We have to gain a deep understanding of the essence of God. This is a good kind of **fear**, the kind of **fear** Christians are supposed to have. We are supposed to be in awe of God. Proverbs 1:7 says “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*” The beginning of knowledge is not the public school system or the university. The beginning of knowledge is the *fear of the Lord*. This means having a reverential awe for who and what God is, that is, God's essence. The essence of God refers to His character or attributes. Let's mention 15 of them now because when God is rightly understood it creates a *fear of the Lord*.

- God is **sovereign**. He controls, but is not held responsible, for all that comes to pass.
- God is **righteous**. His moral character is the absolute standard for what is right and wrong everywhere in the universe all the time.
- God is **just**. His attitude toward evil is uncompromising regardless of who might be involved.
- God is **love**. He unconditionally gives Himself to those whom He loves.
- God is **omniscient**. He has total knowledge of all things actual and possible—even the what ifs of history.
- God is **omnipotent**. He can do anything compatible with His character.
- God is **omnipresent**. He is completely present at every point in space.
- God is **immutable**. His character never changes. His character is perfectly stable.
- God is **eternal**. He has always existed. He does not have a beginning or end.

There are other attributes of God that I don't mention frequently and that few Christians really study. Let me give you a few.

- The **providence** of God. God is actively governing the world.
- The **transcendence** of God. God is distinct from His creation; the creation is not an extension of His being but was made *out of nothing*.
- God is **immanent** in His creation, meaning He is not standing aloof of His creation but is involved in sustaining His creation continually.
- The **aseity** of God, that God is self-contained and self-sustaining and a necessary Being, He needs nothing outside of Himself. He is complete in and of Himself.
- The **simplicity** of God. God's attributes cannot be separated one from the other but are enmeshed one in another. And finally,
- The **impassibility** of God. God can never be hurt or undergo suffering, but He does have emotions and He does choose when to respond to us and our needs.

He is a personal God, actively engaging in the lives of His creatures. Understanding these kinds of deep things about the character of God produce a **fear** of God. This is a good kind of **fear**. Indeed, it is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). But the kind of **fear** John is talking about in our context of 1 John 4:18 is not a good kind of **fear**. It is a **fear** that is antithetical to **love**. This is the kind of **fear** John warns against!

Carnal believers fear the Lord because of their bankrupt spiritual condition, their failure to abide, their failure to love, their failure to advance spiritually. Turn to our main text today, 1 John 4:17-18.

¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no **fear** in love;

but perfect love casts out **fear**, because **fear** involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

Carnal believers **fear** the sudden appearance of the Lord and the judgment seat of Christ, as well as loss of reward. Therefore, our ambition ought to be like Paul's in 2 Cor. 5:9, to "always be pleasing to the Lord." The answer for this kind of fear is here in this verse. He must have love perfected in him. When he does this, **perfect love...casts out fear** (Greek *phobos*). He is not ashamed at His sudden appearance, of being without any good works. **Fear** is something that causes you "to take flight, to run off, to be in terror, to be intimidated." But the one who exhibits **perfect love casts out** these responses. **Perfect love** does not refer to sinlessness (1 John 1:8; 2:1), but to a matured **love** that has reached its goal or objective (2:5; 4:12). God's love to us through His Son has reached its goal in us when we become channels for that love to one another. This **casts out fear**. A Christian who is in **fear** of the Rapture and subsequent Judgment Seat of Christ is in bad spiritual condition. Therefore, since we are children of light, we ought to walk in the light. As long as we walk in the light, openly and frankly, not having anything to hide, we have **confidence**. But as long as we walk in the darkness, secretly and deceitfully, hiding our evil deeds, we have **fear**. You all know what I am talking about. Everyone here has sinned secretly and deceitfully and a sense of fear comes over you because you don't want to get caught. That kind of **fear** will never leave you. You can suppress it over many years so that you don't think about it much anymore. But there is still that looming **fear** of being caught or found out until things are made right. The only way to get rid of that kind of **fear** is to right the situation and have love perfected in you.

A critical observation of these four situations of **fearing God** is that if you are an unbeliever, you are living a contradiction. You both fear God and do not fear God. You fear God lest your deeds be exposed, and yet you continue to live as if there is no God. To live this contradiction, you reduce the irrational to the rational. You are in a real heap of trouble. Your only escape from living this lie is to believe in the Creator-Redeemer for your eternal salvation. You are obviously living a life of sin and you are hiding from God. But you know deep down that you cannot hide from God. The answer is laid before you, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

However, it is equally important to point out that if you are a carnal believer here today, you, too, are living a contradiction. If you are carnal, you fear God lest your deeds be exposed and yet you continue to live as if there is no God. You both fear God in a bad sense and do not fear God in the good sense. You are in a real heap of trouble, too. If you are a genuine child of God, then you will undergo chastisement in the present (Heb. 12)

and loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3). The only way to avoid living a contradiction, I repeat, the *only* way to avoid living a contradiction (and being both irrational and rational at the same time) is to be a Christian who is abiding (walking by the Spirit). Only the Christian who is walking by the Spirit, who is abiding in Christ and His word is not living a lie. Everyone else is living a lie.ⁱⁱⁱ

The reason **perfect love casts out fear** is **because fear involves punishment**. The Greek word here for **punishment** probably refers to chastisement. Those whom the Lord loves, He chastises. If the child of God is experiencing **fear** as he anticipates the judgment seat of Christ, then this **fear** can be interpreted as **punishment** which God is inflicting to awaken the Christian to his need to correct his behavior. Even though this **fear** may be unpleasant, when it constitutes chastisement, what do you expect? All chastisement is unpleasant, but all chastisement is also a sign of God's love. If the Christian responds positively to this punishment of **fear**, then the chastisement has been effective and the result will be fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11).

i We are not to fear the world (Matt. 10:28; 1 Pt. 3:14) or the things in the world (Matt. 14:26; Rev. 2:10) but the Creator of the world (Prov. 1:7; Luke 1:50; 12:5; Rev. 11:18; 14:7). But we are also to serve Him without fear (Luke 1:74; 12:7). Those whose deeds are evil hate the light and do not come to the Light for fear that their deeds will be exposed (John 3:20). The Pharisees always feared men (John 12:42). Believers often feared men (John 20:19). Unbelievers live as if God does not exist (practical atheism). There is no fear of God before their eyes (Rom. 3:18). When we live by the Spirit we do not fear (Rom. 8:15). Believers are taught to both fear and not fear (Rom. 11:20; 1 Pt. 2:17). We are to speak the word of God without fear (Phil. 1:14). Unbelievers fear death. We are to conduct ourselves in fear during our time on earth. When we are in the presence of God, we will fear Him (Rev. 19:5).

ii Quotation of Ps. 36:1

iii Many people think that **love** and **hate** are opposites (either you love me or you hate me). This is true to an extent. Both **love** and **hate** are internal conditions of the heart that have external expressions. For example, if we have a heart full of genuine Christian **love** then God put it there and we express this by both physically and spiritually helping our Christian brothers and sisters. However, if we have a heart full of **hate** then it is Satan who put it there and we express this through **fear**. Let me give you an example of Christian **fear** working itself out in a negative way.

For example, families either create environments of **love** or **fear**. **Love** creates the environment for which true openness and freedom can express itself. Let me illustrate this by using a story I once heard from Dr. Robert Lightner. Dr. Lightner once told me a story about one of his four girls. She had just recently got her driving license and she was backing out of the driveway one day and backed right into her father's car, making a dent in the fender. Now, what do you think the daughter's response was? Was it one of **fear**? Or **love**? Well, that depends on the home environment. If the home was an environment of **fear** then she would quite naturally try to hide what she did, either by not telling him or by trying to cover it up somehow when asked about the dent. But what if the home was an environment of **love**? What would be her natural response? It would be to tell her father, to be open about what happened. In this case, the daughter did tell her father openly and he handled the situation by using it as a teaching tool. He taught her about the grace of God and demonstrated what grace is to his daughter. Now, is your home a home of openness, a home of **love**, or is your home a home of secrets, a home of **fear**? A loving home has discipline, instruction,

nurturing and correction. A home of **fear** has abuse, very little instruction, and harsh legalistic standards.

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