

Living Without Fear



David Wilkerson June 11, 2007

“Blessed be the Lord God...for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us...as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies...to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

“The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:68–75).

God spoke this promise from the beginning of the world, swearing it by covenant to Abraham. Two awesome mercies are embedded in this promise: first, a Savior would come who would “save us from all our enemies.” Second, the Savior would enable us to “serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.”

All the prophets pointed to this word’s fulfillment in Christ. And these promises were fulfilled in Jesus’ victory at the cross. There the Lord defeated all principalities and powers of darkness, putting his foot on Satan’s head and crushing it. It was at Calvary the Messiah saved us from all our enemies.

What about the second element of this promise? It says Christ has made provision for us to live all our days without fear. What an amazing thought: we can spend the rest of our days on this earth without having to fear anything.

As I consider this second aspect of God’s promise, I have to admit: I have not arrived. Scripture shows that even the apostle Paul took a long time before coming to the place where he lived without fear. What about you? Have you reached such a place? We all have experienced the first part of the promise: Christ has brought victory in our lives over demonic enemies. But as for the second part — living without fear — I sense that few of us enjoy true freedom from fear.

Yet God would not have given us this covenant promise without showing us how to obtain it. Indeed, Scripture clearly outlines a pathway for every believer to be able to live and serve him without fear. God shows us how we can live without fear, in 1 John.

The apostle John sums it up in one verse: “Perfect love casteth out fear” (4:18). Moreover, the apostle says, “There is no fear in love...He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (same verse). In short, if we are living in fear, we can know we are ignorant of perfect love.

Let me point out that John isn’t saying, “Perfect love *for* God casts out all fear.” He isn’t speaking about unwavering love, or mature love in a Christian, as some interpreters suggest. That isn’t where perfect love begins for true believers.

Certainly, we love God, a fact that is beyond doubt. But consider what John says about perfect love earlier in the chapter: “*If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us*” (4:12, my italics). According to John, the first consideration of perfect love is unconditional love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A Christian can say that he loves God, that he is doing the Lord's will, that he's faithfully performing the work of the kingdom. Such a person may be a worshipper and a teacher of the Word. But if he holds a grudge, or speaks against another — if he shuts out anyone in the body of Christ — he walks in darkness, and a spirit of death is on him. All life, all good works, are out of order in this person. Consider what John says of him:

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now" (1 John 2:9). John says that such a person has every occasion of stumbling. He adds: "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (3:14–15).

If you're interested in living a life without fear, John says, there is a way to get there. Indeed, there is a perfect love that drives out all fear. And here is the first step we all must take: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). The first move is to deal with our relationships in the body of Christ.

According to John, here is where perfect love begins. Loving others is not something we "ought" to do but are commanded to do. John says in the previous chapter: "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (3:23). "This commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (4:21).

Simply put, we are to love others as Christ loved us. In this is love perfected. Yet, what is meant by love for others? It is more than forgiveness, much more. It is to forgive all transgressions of others toward us. It is to offer them fellowship. It is to esteem them as highly as we do other members of the body. And it is to make ourselves available to them in their time of need.

Moreover, loving others means never repeating any misjudgment or injury that has been made to us or our reputation. In short, it is to forgive and forget, to bury all of the past in the sea of forgetfulness, in which Christ has cast all our sins against him.

We know God sees the heart. So each of us must look inside and ask: "I've put my hurts under the blood, but have I truly forgiven those who committed them? Is 'love for others' a finished work in me? Or do I continue to be hounded by bitterness?"

John's second epistle gives us a warning.

Second John says that walking in truth is "the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9). What, exactly, is this doctrine? It is to fully obey God's command to love his body. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 10–11).

This is a heavy word from John. And embedded in it is a warning against giving ear to unloving gossip. Whether you spill such words or take them in — by phone, over coffee, even at church — the listener is just as guilty as the gossiper. And both are mocking the doctrine of Jesus Christ. God help us to see the awful consequences of listening to unloving speech, to bitterness, to details of another's behavior, of giving ear to anyone who dumps a one-sided story of anger and plants seeds of disunity.

Beloved, this matter of forgiving and loving others is a commandment. Yet, according to John, it is also a loving invitation into a life of freedom from fear. He says the Holy Spirit won't drive us to this truth, but will woo us, dealing with us gently: "His commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:3–4).

It may be hard to love and forgive others, especially those who have wounded us deeply. But John assures: "This is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (5:14–15).

When we have learned to love and forgive, the Holy Spirit plucks the roots of unforgiveness from our hearts. And no trace of it remains; it is gone for good. Now we are able to pray for those we've forgiven, to think well of them, even to serve them. Finally, we see them as cleansed by the same blood that cleanses us, and as being one with us in Christ's body. That is the very heart of Jesus.

Still, once we settle this matter of loving others as Christ loved us, there is yet another part to be considered. You see, loving others is perfect love only in part.

The second part of perfect love is to know and believe the love that God has for us.

“We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 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” (1 John 4:16–17).

Note the last part of this passage. John tells us we are now living as the Lord lived: forgiving and loving our enemies. There is nothing left in us of revenge, of grudges, of racial prejudice — nothing to condemn us before the Judgment Day. And so now we must know and fully believe the love of God toward us.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Do you see what John is saying? Our love for God is a given. Perfect love also means knowing and believing God’s love *toward* us.

Moreover, John says, there must be no fear in this love, no doubting it. Why? If we doubt his love for us, we’ll live in torment: “Fear hath torment” (4:18). Believing in God’s love means knowing he is patient with our failures, day in and day out. He hears our every cry, bottles every tear, feels our anguish of heart, and is moved with compassion at our groanings.

This aspect of God’s love is vividly illustrated in Exodus, where the Lord sought to reveal his loving nature to his people. He told Moses, “I am going to deliver Israel,” and Scripture says: “They cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning” (Exodus 2:23–24). “The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt...for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them” (3:7–8).

Pharaoh had made it impossible for the enslaved Israelites to meet his brick-making quotas. So, how did the people respond to God’s promise to deliver them? “They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage” (Exodus 6:9).

I ask you: do you believe God sees your need and condition, just as he did with Israel? We often glibly say, “Christ is all,” and yet when we face a crisis — when one thing after another goes wrong, our prayers seem unanswered, and hope after hope is dashed — we descend into fear. Indeed, we succumb to fear whenever we waver in our trust in the Lord for all things. But the fact is, God never forsakes any child in their time of anguish, even when things seem absolutely hopeless.

Beloved, our faith isn’t really faith unless it is tested to the limit. When the Lord delivered Israel from Egypt, he told the people, “I brought you out of bondage in order to bring you to myself.” He then led them step by step into places so difficult that only miracles could save them. These were hard, overwhelming situations, yet it was meant for an eternal purpose: to build in them complete dependence on God for all resources.

God pledged he would do the impossible for them. He would make a way for them when there was no visible way for them to go. And the Lord performed all that he promised. His one desire was for his people to believe that he loved them, that he knew all they endured, that he heard their every cry. All he wanted was to hear them say in firm belief, “With my God, nothing is impossible.”

What is the evidence of faith? It is rest. It’s an attitude of heart that says, “Live or die, I am the Lord’s. He is faithful to me in all things, no matter how dark it may look.” The author of Hebrews refers to this attitude when he writes, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9).

What is the evidence that we haven’t yet entered into rest? It is fear. As John states, “He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). And James describes the consequences of not resting in God’s love toward us: “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:6–7).

We see the consequences of not resting in God’s love played out in the story of Joseph and his brothers.

In this story, Joseph serves as a type of Christ. His older brothers hated him because of his integrity, so when they met some traders headed to Egypt they sold Joseph into slavery. After many hard trials and years of suffering,

Joseph rose to become Pharaoh's right-hand man. Then he was given a vision of a seven-year, worldwide famine, and he advised Pharaoh to begin storing up mountains of corn. Pharaoh did this during the good years, and then the famine struck.

As food became scarce, Joseph's father, Jacob, sent his ten sons to Egypt to buy corn from Pharaoh. What follows is a familiar story of intrigue: Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. During their interactions, Joseph overheard them confess their sin, but they didn't think he understood them. They said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Genesis 42:21).

What was Joseph's reaction to their confession? "He turned himself about from them, and wept" (42:24). It becomes clear as the story unfolds that Joseph was reconciled in his heart to his brothers. Though they had wronged him terribly, Joseph yearned to reveal himself to his kinsmen, to fall on their necks, kiss them and reconcile them to himself.

This reflects God's heart toward us, according to Paul. He writes, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). "God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18). While we were sinners, God removed every barrier that kept us from being reconciled to him, through the sacrifice of his Son at the cross. Moreover, like Joseph he yearns to reveal his heart to his beloved ones.

Finally, Joseph could no longer restrain his love for his brothers. "He wept aloud...And (he) said unto his brethren, Come near to me...Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves...for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:2, 4-5). Joseph's love for his brothers had little to do with their confession. It wasn't the result of their prayers, or fasting, or any good works, or heartfelt promises to be his servants. It was all a matter of unearned love.

The same is true of us with God. He loved us when we were yet sinners — before we repented, before we experienced godly sorrow, before we even believed in him. I ask you: how much more does God love us now that we have embraced his love and received his mercy?

This great love was expressed in the way Joseph treated his family once they were reconciled to him: "Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land" (47:11). Joseph fed and nourished the very brothers who had turned on him, supplying them with wagonload after wagonload of Egypt's greatest delicacies.

Yet even then, these men still lived in fear of Joseph. Seventeen years later, when their father died, Joseph and his brothers carried Jacob's body back to Canaan, where they buried him with great fanfare. While there, Joseph's brothers began whispering among themselves: "Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him" (50:15).

So they went to their brother, fell on their faces, and pled with him in fear: "Before our father died, he commanded us to come to you, confess our sin and ask for mercy. We beg you to forgive us, Joseph. We'll be your servants. You hold our lives in your hands."

How did Joseph react to this? "Joseph wept when they spake unto him" (Genesis 50:17). Through tears of grief, he spoke kindly to his brothers, assuring them, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" (50:19). I believe Joseph's tears tell us how wounded he was. His brothers' lingering fear had hurt him deeply. Think of what he must have thought: "I forgave my brothers seventeen years ago. Yet all this time they've been living in fear! They never knew my heart toward them. They never accepted my love."

Joseph's brothers didn't have any reason to fear him. Yet think of their mindset for all those years: they never enjoyed Joseph's provision, his gifts, his resources, his kindness and love. As a result, they were never at ease, never able to enjoy life, but instead always thought about their past sins — and always misjudged their brother's heart.

Joseph had delighted in them, demonstrating his love with hugs, kisses and tears of joy. He rejoiced that he could bless them and boasted over them to the worldly Egyptians. Through all of these things, Joseph was telling them, "We are reconciled. I'm not interested in what you did in the past. I only want to show you my heart toward you." Yet the brothers went year after year never trusting him. And so they were constantly anxious, joyless, burdened

down. They thought their every trial was God's way of paying them back for their sins.

Sadly, the same is true of many of God's people today. Like Joseph, God grieves over the sorrow and pain we bring upon ourselves by not resting in his love. Hebrews tells us that Christ in glory is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (see Hebrews 4:15). He has "fellow feelings" with us, sympathy pains, and hurts when we hurt. Tell me, beloved, what do you do with this great truth?

Here is what I believe was the deepest source of Joseph's tears. It wasn't that his brothers misjudged his character or abused his love. Rather, it was the following, which I've taken from an old church hymn: "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

If Joseph truly loved his brothers — if he genuinely delighted in them — we can know he was grieved by the needless pain they bore all those years. He thought of the debilitating fears they'd endured, the peace and joy they'd missed, all the guilt and condemnation, the years of being bound by chains of fear. And I believe Joseph wept because they hadn't come to him to work it out long before then. He had opened his door to them, but they never took access.

According to John, when our love is aligned with God's Word — when we embrace his love and care for us, and we love one another unconditionally — only then will we live without fear. We will have boldness on the day of judgment. And we'll be able to live in the here-and-now as Christ lived: without fear. When fear is driven out, something wonderful happens.

When all fear is gone, we are now in perfect love. Listen to these words sung by David: "Glory and honor are in his presence; strength and *gladness are in his place*" (1 Chronicles 16:27, my italics). The root word for "gladness" in the New Testament means "jumping for joy." God's heart leaps for joy over those enjoying the fullness of perfect love.

Right now, the world is drowning in fear. Humankind trembles over global warming, fear of terrorist attacks, nuclear warfare, a shaky economy, the AIDS plague, mass murders, the rise of Islam, political chaos, widespread addictions to drugs, alcohol and porn. I ask you: how can we make any impact for Christ if we are beset with the same spirit of fear that the world has? What kind of hope can we offer — indeed, what kind of gospel do we preach — if it doesn't change us and deliver us from fear?

God brought in the New Covenant to assure his church of his love and full pardon of sin...to bring us into the knowledge of his delight and gladness over us...all that we might know his heart of love for us and live all our days without fear. Consider:

"The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10). "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?...Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" (Psalm 27:1, 3).

It is long past time for God's people to give everything into his hands. I urge you, stop trying to think your way out of trouble. Instead, rest in the power of God's Word. Let the Lord put gladness in you now, today. Your glad heart will "shock and awe" all those who are fearful around you: "Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee" (Deuteronomy 28:37). ?

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