

Grace Group Guide

1 John 4:15-21

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. 1 John 4:18

The Greek word for fear in this verse is “phobos;” you probably recognize it for its similarity to our English word, “phobia.” If I look up synonyms for the word “phobia,” I get words like dread, terror, horror, fright, paranoia, etc.

I don't know what kind of fear or phobias you have, but I have a couple. Big snakes. Big hairy spiders. High, rushing water. Those are things that I fear on a daily basis. I have for as long as I can remember. I also remember a time where I feared judgment. Not just any judgement, but God's judgement. **Luke 12:4-5.**

Though it was not a new concept to me, I remember being eight years old, sitting in the balcony at First Baptist Church on Main Street and being vividly confronted with the reality that one day I'd stand before a Holy God. It was a revival message that got my attention and very quickly trumped all my other fears.

Twenty five years have passed since then and as I've gone on knowing the Lord, that fear of judgement is but an afterthought. Not because I've gotten wiser or holier or less prone to sin and wandering, (although as a whole I believe those things to be slightly true), but because as I've gone on knowing the Lord, His love has been working in and through my life. As I step back and see the work that the Lord has been doing, I'm greatly encouraged. Even in the last couple of months while we've been working through 1 John, I've seen the Lord dealing with my heart in relation to my care and concern for others.

What are your thoughts concerning judgement, regarding your own personal life? What does The Bible say about it? Should believers still fear the day of judgement? Can we become too confident regarding that day?

In **“The Love of God,”** Martyn Lloyd-Jones said *“Not to be concerned about loving the brethren, not to be concerned as to whether I am dwelling in love or not, is to misunderstand the whole purpose of my salvation, and therefore it is to flout God's love. If this is not the greatest concern of my life, then I am a mere beginner in the Christian life. At the beginning, of course, we have a very great concern about forgiveness; we are very concerned about certain particular sins which may have been evident in our lives before our conversion. But we must not stop at that. The hallmark of the saints is their great, increasing concern about the element of love in their lives.”*

I fear (pun intended) that many of us would read that statement and step back to say that we don't have that great concern for people. It's easy for us to stand smugly by our seats on Sunday morning and sing “Oh, How I Love Jesus,” but then walk daily in the absence of love. THAT should give us, according to John, a reason for concern.

Steven Cole notes *“that you cannot draw near to God in love and run from Him out of fear of judgment at the same time. God wants His children to know that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The phrase, “perfect love,” as we've seen, means, love that has reached its*

goal, or love that is expressed in action. If you still fear God's judgment, at the very least, you are not practicing biblical love for others as you should be doing. That's what John means when he says, "the one who fears is not perfected in love." All of us, at one point in life, should have experienced the fear of God's judgment. But as you grow in grace and godliness, that fear is replaced by God's love. The 18th century commentator, Bengel, gives the proper course of growth in the spiritual life: "neither love nor fear, fear without love, both fear and love, love without fear". Most unbelievers have neither the fear of God nor the love of God in their lives. Often such lack of fear stems from ignorance. Children are often unafraid of danger because they are not aware of the severity of the danger. Concerning people in their natural state, Paul states (Ro 3:18, citing Ps. 36:1), "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Unbelievers are a heartbeat away from eternity in the lake of fire, but they don't fear God!

I'm reminded of a song put out by the Texas-based band, Leeland, back in the mid 2000's called "Tears of the Saints," that says

"There are schools full of hatred
Even churches have forsaken
Love and mercy
May we see this generation
In its state of desperation
For Your glory
This is an emergency!
Sinner, reach out your hands!
Children in Christ you stand!"

I remember being moved to tears by that song more than 10 years ago. As I look at those lyrics now and consider what has transpired in the church, the country and the world since then, I'm even more aware of the need for the Children of Christ to stand and come alongside this broken world and share the love of God. It is a transforming love that sets our souls on fire and our hearts at ease and the world needs to know about it. But how will they know if we don't tell them? Like Steven Cole mentioned, many are a heartbeat away from eternity in hell and they don't even know it. THAT is an emergency.

In light of that truth, consider this question: **Does loving someone (biblically) require liking or trusting him? Why/why not? What is the difference?**

*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
And the best of all preachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs. -Edgar Guest*