

# Perfect Love Casts out Fear

Chase Green

In the book of 1 John, John makes a compelling argument for the perfection of our Christian love. In it, we are taught both to love one another and to love God. While the fear of God is certainly extremely important (Ecc. 12:13; 1 Pet. 2:17; etc.), fear cannot be the only motivation for serving God. Love for Him must be equally motivating.

Liken this to a young child. As an infant, he quickly learns that his parents are the two people in this world that are there for his every need. When he is hungry, they are there for him. When he needs a new diaper, they are there to take care of this need. When he gets hurt, he can find solace in his mother or father. The love that this child begins to have for his parents is beyond words. Even though the child cannot verbally express it, the parents can see the child's love for them in the child's eyes.

As the child grows older, the loving father and mother introduce a new concept to the child's life — fear. You see, the child tries to insert a key into an electric outlet. The mother calmly and lovingly gives a gentle swat to the child's hand — not enough to physically hurt that much, but just enough to get his attention — and calmly but firmly says, "No." The child, perhaps confused, tries to insert the key a few more times, each time met with a gentle swat and a firm, "No." After three or four times, the child's eyes well up with tears and he begins to cry. But he has learned a valuable lesson — inserting things into the electric outlet has consequences! The child has successfully been taught to fear his parents. Subsequent lessons on fearing his parents continue for approximately ten to twelve more years.

But now the child is a teenager. He has been taught to fear his parents, but, sadly, the parents did not instill a proper love for them. As the threats of spankings continually wane as the child grows in stature (the spankings continue, but their effectiveness are waning, given the teenagers ability to withstand more and more pain), the parents are at a loss as to why the young teenager is becoming more and more obstinate. Again, the problem is that they had motivated him ONLY with fear, and forgot to teach him about love. This child learns to be a master manipulator, conniving his way out of trouble often, only to think that he has gotten away with it (but his Father above sees! Cf. Prov. 5:21). The child is headed down a path of heartbreak if he doesn't come to repentance.

You see, in this scenario, the young boy learned to fear consequences, but he never learned proper *LOVE* for his parents. Thus, he became all about avoiding consequences and could care less about pleasing his parents (and, ultimately, his Father in heaven). The answer to this problem is NOT to remove the discipline. Quite the contrary! The parents understood the importance of discipline, but they also needed to teach their child to please them because he loved them. To do this, they should have talked to him frequently about spiritual topics (Deu. 6:6-9), rewarded him for good behavior (rather than only punishing bad behavior — Deu. 28), spoken of the child as a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3), and been the personification of love as we see in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Thus, both godly fear AND love would have been developed in the child.

The same can be said about the children of God. We absolutely need to be motivated by a healthy fear of God! A person who fears going to Hell is going to have second thoughts about

transgressing God's commandments! A person who hears a "hellfire and brimstone" sermon will hopefully be motivated to obey the Gospel. But as the child of God grows, he needs to develop such an admiration of God, that he genuinely loves Him so much that he could not bear the thought of hurting God by sinning against Him.

This is the idea that John presents in 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." The verse immediately prior talks about having BOLDNESS in the day of judgment. The idea is that the Christian actually looks FORWARD to the day of judgment because he knows he's living faithfully and he loves God so much that he can't wait to see Him! He no longer fears the judgment day! Why? Because he is living his life in such a way that he knows will lead to eternal life (1 John 5:13). He is no longer motivated ONLY by fear.

He is like a young child who loves his parents so much that he rarely disobeys them, and when he does, his guilt is so heavy that he immediately seeks to repair the damage done. We as Christians must develop our love for God so much that we feel that we cannot bear to let Him down! Yes, we must be motivated by a fear of consequences of wrongdoing, but we must be equally motivated by the prospect of being rewarded for pleasing our Father in Heaven. Thus, rather than being like the master manipulator child who thinks he can get away with sin, we become like a child who loves his parents so much that he can't bear the thought of letting them down. Thus, the parents find that a child like this is rarely in need of punishment, for he learns to punish himself through his own guilt! He quickly makes amends with his parents, and continues to love them and honor them.

Let us be like this child. Let us be the children of God who love God so much that we cannot bear the thought of displeasing Him. And when we do make a mistake, let us be quick to acknowledge it, repent, and ask Him to forgive us for our trespasses. Let us love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).