

The Fearlessness of Assurance

1 John 4:17-18 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.

It is a good time to be in the pharmaceutical business, if you trade in tranquilisers, anti-depressants and other drugs related to stress. We are a civilisation that is almost eaten alive by worry, anxiety, and stress – or to use the old word – fear.

People live in almost constant fear. The more convenient we have made our lives, the more complicated we have made them. The more complicated we have made them, the more uncertainties and possibilities of danger we've introduced. Our world has far more threats, dangers, and possible sources of harm to us and our loved ones than possibly any other has ever faced. And as we think about these uncertainties, as we try to make ends meet in a complicated society, we fear. And we are a people suffering from panic attacks, stomach ulcers, heart palpitations, nervous tics, muscle cramps, insomnia, nervous breakdowns, to name just a few.

I saw 'we' loosely referring to us as a society. But if I saw 'we' and 'us' referring to the church, the picture should be very different. Christians have every potential to not be caught up in this life of anxiety and fear. Christians have in fact, an obligation to not be fearful, and to witness to others of the glory of God by their lives which are not fear-filled.

The root of this kind of confident living is bound up in our assurance of salvation, which is what the broader context of these verses deals with.

We have seen the signs of assurance of salvation. In verses 12 through 16 we saw three signs that we abide in Him and He in us – that we love God's body, possess God's Spirit and confess God's Son. When we have these things, we can know and believe the love God has for us. There is both a believing and knowing – a trusting and experiencing of God's love for us.

This state of knowing God's love, being assured that we are His and He is ours, John also refers to as perfected love. We saw that in verse 12. When John says perfect love, he is using a word which is translated perfect, but also means complete, mature, accomplished, finished.

Perfect= complete/ mature. c.f John 4:34 Jesus said to them, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work"*

What he means by this is to say that assurance of salvation is a place where your knowledge and experience of God's love has matured. God's love has reached its target, so to speak. There is now in you a happy, mature resting in God, knowing and believing that He is yours and you are his.

John is now going to describe some of the experience of that assurance. This mature experience of love is something that happens within us. "Love has been perfected **among** us" He is going to show us that this perfect, or completed love, this assurance of salvation has two very important effects. These are two sides of the same coin.

This passage gives us two **effects** of completed love, or assurance. Positively, assurance gives us confidence for the future. Negatively, assurance refuses fear about the future.

I. Mature Love Gives Confidence for the Rest of Our Lives

"Love has been perfected among us in this"

Not everyone agrees on what the words *in this* refer to. Is John saying love is perfected *in this* – as in what just came before in verse 16? Love reaches its perfection when we love one another and God abides in us? Or is John saying – love reaches its perfection *in this* – as in what follows? I think the context, especially verse 18, suggests that John means to say, Love is perfected in this – in the following thing. And what is that thing?

"that we may have boldness in the day of judgment;"

Mature love, which experiences assurance and rests in it, has the experience of boldness in the day of judgement. Our attitude towards the coming day of judgement is the test of our assurance of salvation.

Boldness = confidence, frankness, openness.

Why would John give the final day of judgement as the ultimate fruit of assurance of salvation, or matured love? The answer is, because the day of judgement will reveal if you are accepted by God or not. The day of judgement will reveal who is saved and who isn't. And since assurance is all about experiencing, in the present the sense, that you *are* saved, assurance of salvation gives you confidence for that future day when such will be tested.

It's rather like an upcoming audit or tax return. If you know you have done everything right, and you know you have all the paperwork to prove it, you approach the result of the audit or the tax return with confidence. You know in the present what that future result will be.

Now this is no small thing to be confident about the final day of judgement. Without a doubt, the day of judgement will be the most fearful day in human history.

Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Books will be opened. One of those books will certainly be God's Word. The others may be full records of the lives of those judged. As comparisons are made, it becomes abundantly clear that this person has broken God's Law again and again, and has no atonement, paid no penalty, received no remission for his sins, and he is cast eternally into the lake of fire.

I cannot imagine a more serious, and more terrifying event than the Great White Throne Judgement. We believe that believers are judged separately at the Judgement Seat of Christ. But regardless of whether it is one judgement or two, there will be no day in your existence as serious as your day of judgement - not your final exams, not your graduation, not your promotion, not your wedding, not the birth of your children, not their weddings, not even the day of your death will be as serious and significant as this event.

Let me put it this way: if there is one event in your life that could be a source of fear – it is the ever-approaching day of judgement.

What John is telling us is this: completed love, assurance of salvation gives you confidence for that day of days. And if you have confidence for the day of days, what ought that to mean about the rest of your life?

Do you see that what God wants to do here is show us that assurance of salvation is assurance over our greatest fear – separation from God for an eternity. And if we know what the outcome of that is going to be, then everything else is a smaller, minor matter that is already settled. In fact, that is exactly what the New Testament teaches.

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What Paul is saying is this: if you have in fact been reconciled to God, then your greatest problem has already been solved. If God has already done for you what He was most unlikely to do – give up His Son, what do you think He will refuse you now? If it is God who has justified you, what disqualifying charge will come against you? If it is Christ who died and rose and prays for you, then your judge is on your side! So what is it in the future that will come to you which will destroy this?

Think of the normal things which we find threatening – troubles, distresses, being persecuted, or going hungry or being destitute, or being in danger, or being killed? According to Paul, these things now come to us for His sake. We are more than conquerors because of the verdict on us. Death, life, angelic power, things present, things future, nor any other thing up or down in all creation can separate us from God in Christ.

The day of judgement ought to be the greatest fear in my life. If I do not fear that day, then there is nothing in my life now that I should fear. If I do fear that day, there is little now that I should not fear.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in Thy great day;
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

If that is so, then we have confidence for all of life. We have boldness for all of life.
If I do not fear the result of the AIDS test, then there is no reason to fear the common cold. If my house debt has been paid off, I needn't fear the R50 I owe my neighbour. If the biggest danger to our souls has been taken care of, what kind of confidence ought we to have for the rest of life?

God wants His children to know that boldness towards the day of judgement is possible. God has put this in the Word so that we may know that if we use His signs of life to verify that we are saved, then we can look to the Mount Everest of fear – the Day of Judgement – and be confident. And if we are confident towards that day, then everything else falls into its shadow.

God wants you to know that the reward of a mature Christian life that is abiding in God is confidence, a confidence about the future that keeps flowing into the present.

What kind of changes would happen in your life if you allowed this major fear, to dwarf the minor fears? What would happen if you meditated on the fact that final judgement is taken care of, therefore, how anxious should I be about crime, about disease, about the financial squeeze, about my children's struggles? In other words, if God is for me, what can be against me?

Now with so much hinging on a positive result for the day of judgement, how are you supposed to know that you will be judged favourably on the day of judgement?

“because as He is, so are we in this world.”

Our confidence in the day of judgement is because we are right now, on this side of eternity, as He already is. What does that mean? It means that right now, we are regarded as being in Him. We are counted as righteous as Christ. That's justification. And that position we have is being worked out into our lives here – we're seeing the fruits of Christ's character showing up in us and through us.

What that means is that the way Jesus would be received by God is the way you will be received by God. We are already on this side of eternity, resembling Him in His perfection. If we are resembling Him before we meet Him, then we will not be perfect strangers on that day of judgement.

When Christ's righteousness, and in particular, His love for His body, shows up in us, it is as if the future is being worked down into the present. That is how He is, that is how you will be perfectly, and because you are beginning to resemble Him, you can be sure you will be like Him when you see Him.

1 John 2:28 - 3:3 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. ²⁹ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. 3:1 ¶ Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Do you see why the whole book of 1 John is so critical to your whole life? You must find biblical assurance of salvation, because it affects everything. If you find the signs of life present, then you can say – as He is, so am I. He abides in me, and I in Him. Therefore I fully expect to be accepted in Him when I see Him! Well, then, nothing between now and that day of judgement will work against me. Let me live in boldness. Let me live in confidence.

Do you know what it is to live with the confidence that comes from knowing God is for you? Do you know what it is to take life with both hands – to have life, and to have it more abundantly? Do you sense what it is to be more than conquerors? It is the life of knowing and believing the love

God has for you, knowing the verdict of that great day, and living life now with joy, freedom, thanksgiving. Courage, Christians! Our Father assures us, and not for nought. He wants us confident, because there is much work to do, and it requires a confident, bold, assured people.

The opposite of this kind of confidence and boldness that comes from assurance is fear. So John's second key thought here is this:

II. Mature Love Has No Place for Fear

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.

There is no fear in love. Now we might want to stop here and point out that John is referring to a particular kind of fear. The *fear* is that spoken of in 1 Pet. 1:17; Heb. 12:28 is *godly* fear; *filial reverence*: not *slavish* fear, as Rom. 8:15. This kind of fear is compatible with love. But the kind of fear found here in verse 18 is not.

The fear meant here is the fear of dread. It is the fear that something will harm me, or cause me to suffer.

According to John, he who fears has not been made perfect in love. The fearful Christian, is in those moments of fear, not experiencing love because, as John shows here, love and fear are opposites. A mature love that knows and believes the love God has, cannot simultaneously be dreading the future. Two statements here make it clear these are opposites:

There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear.

Love does not contain any fear. Love does not retain or receive or admit any fear. Light chases out darkness, heat chases out cold, so love chases out fear.

How does it do this?

Well, John tells us. Fear involves torment. That means that fear has to do with punishment. Fear is what you experience when some kind of punishment, some kind of harm is coming your way. Fear itself is a form of punishment, but fear lives and breathes at the thought that something is coming your way that will harm you.

Fear, of course, is all about the future. We do not fear the past. We only fear how the past may still hurt us in the future. All fear is future based. We fear what may happen to us. We fear what may harm us. We fear what may come our way. We fear what may not happen.

The world is full of enemies. If we think that life is just a matter of chance, a matter of the law of averages, a matter of trying to stay on the good side of luck, then we are going to be afraid. But if we have come to a place of believing that God Himself is for me, and I know that because I am like Him in this world, then all fear goes out of the universe. Because if I really understand that God is for me, then I understand that nothing can harm me. I might be robbed, but it doesn't harm me. I might be slandered, but it doesn't harm me. I might be viciously injured, but it doesn't harm. The only thing that harms me is what harms me ultimately and finally. If God has guaranteed I will finally and ultimately be safe and blessed and enjoying Him forever, I am as safe here as if I were in heaven already.

When I lay hold of mature love, assurance of salvation, in those moments, fear is excluded; fear is driven out. Mature love is completely aware of God's goodwill towards me, and His inheritance toward me in Christ. At that point, fear of punishment or looming pain is excluded.

“Every atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian, every particle of air or every ray of the sun; so that he in the other world, when he comes to see it, shall sit and enjoy all this vast inheritance with surprising, amazing joy.”

Jonathan Edwards, in “The Works of Jonathan Edwards” (Yale ed.), 13:183

“Whatever the world does in the years ahead, and whatever happens among mankind, true Christians have no cause for worry. They are safe forever by a covenant of blood and are dearer to God than the apple of His eye. No night can be dark enough to put out their light, no fire hot enough to burn them, no flood severe enough to drown them on their journey. The winds and waves are their friends and the stars in their courses fight for them. God is at their right hand, and they shall not be moved...

[Christians] are redeemed from their past offences, kept in their present circumstances by the power of an all-powerful God, and their future is safe in His hands. God has promised to support them in the flood, protect them in the fire, feed them in famine, shield them against their enemies, hide them in His safe chambers until the indignation is past and receive them at last into eternal tabernacles.

If we are called upon to suffer, we may be perfectly sure that we shall be rewarded for every pain and blessed for every tear. Underneath will be the Everlasting Arms and within will be the deep assurance that all is well with our souls. Nothing can separate us from the love of God—not death, nor life, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature.” A.W. Tozer, *This World: Playground or Battleground?*

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

For us to fear, after God has given us signs of assurance, and promises to accompany assurance, is unbelief. My fear is unbelief, which in turn reflects on the promises and character of God.

Fear, which shows up in other things like anxiety, panic attacks, continual worry, is essentially fear that the future will harm me. Something in the future will torment me.

People who are very worried about the future are actually unsure of God's good pleasure towards them. They might not have thought about it. They might not have thought that at all. They might not have even suspected that there is a connection between how anxious you are, and your belief about God's sovereignty and goodwill towards you. But the truth is: our anxieties are based on what we believe to be true about the future. And if you do not believe God is for you, then the future is threatening. But if you believe God controls the future, and that God is for you, then that faith turns into matured love, assurance, which casts out fear.

Luke 12:31-32 ³¹ "But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. ³² ¶ "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

God wants confident saints. Fearful saints are unproductive saints. Fearful saints draw back. Fearful

saints never take risks for God. Fearful saints never attempt great things for God. Fearful saints do not do serious battle against Satan.

This kind of confidence comes from settling the verdict of the most fearful day – the day of judgement. If God is for you, then everything between now and then can be handled with confidence. It is yours, it belongs to you, it works together for your good, it is ordained by God to build you and not ultimately destroy you.

So look to see that you are as He is in this world. If so, then let your eyes of faith rest on that acceptance you have in God, now and on that final day. Let that sense of matured love cast out fears about the future. Instead, be strong, and of a good courage, be not dismayed, for He is with you.