

There is No Fear in Love! – 1 John 4:17-21

INTRODUCTION – Fear is a phobia that entered every man's soul the moment Adam, man's first parent, sinned against God his Creator. Before there was sin, there was no fear. After sin entered, fear became present in every aspect of life. Man fears his future, that he might not have enough and die of starvation. He fears the loss of loved ones and all the things he has built his life around. He fears losing his job, because struggling to make ends meet means losing income and leaving so many bills unpaid. He fears that his home might be broken into, and he secures it with what he can afford. He fears to grow old because he does not know where he will end up after death. He fears punishment because he knows he has done many bad things in life. Fear grips his heart, mind, and soul like a man about to fall into the abyss, holding on to a rope with one hand. He fears falling asleep, just in case he doesn't wake up. He fears waking up, for the life he leads hangs in the balance, being held by powerful men and women who do not care whether he lives or dies. He knows he is totally helpless to make a difference. He feels that his miserable and hopeless life is at the mercy of total despotic strangers who have so much uncontrollable power, who are hurting and ruining the lives of millions without an ounce of compassion in all the decisions they make.

How can anyone not be afraid of such an out-of-control world?

Yet for every child of God, God assures them there is no fear in love.

What kind of fear is God referring to?

The fear God speaks of that must not be found in every believer's heart and mind is not reverential fear. Reverential fear is not the fear that entered Adam's heart when he sinned against God. Reverential fear was always in man's heart before sin. Reverential fear is to fear God with awe and respect in worship. This fear was lost when man fell into sin. This fear has been replaced by all sorts of sinful and carnal fears that have crippled every man's life, as described above. After experiencing salvation in Christ, reverential fear will return, but it is not as pure as what Adam and Eve experienced before they fell into sin.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. This fear of the LORD is a mixture of reverential fear and fear of God's punishment when sin is committed. Hence, as long as believers remain in this earthen vessel, they need this fear of the LORD to keep them in holiness. With the fear of the LORD in them, they will truly repent the moment they sin. They worship and praise the LORD in reverential fear. Until they receive glorified bodies at Christ's return, every child of God needs both aspects of fear to help them live right, according to Holy Scripture.

Which aspect of God's fear in the believer's life does 1 John 4:17-21 refer to?

Based on the text, the fear God refers to is not the good kind. It is the kind to be gotten rid of in every believer's life. It is the fear that hinders and does not help the believer live right in Christ. It is the fear of not knowing whether one is saved or not.

The earlier verses in 1 John 4 talk about salvation. **1 John 4:7-16** "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. **8** He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. **9** In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. **10** Herein is love, not

that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. **12** No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. **13** Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world. **15** Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. **16** And 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.” [Emphasis added]

In other words, God wants us to be sure of our salvation through His love, which the Holy Ghost has shed abroad in the hearts of every believer (cf. Romans 5:5). If the believer is truly born again in Christ, the manifestation of God’s love will be clearly evident to the believer first and then to the ones who receive his love for them in Christ. Through this experience, all professing believers need not fear for their salvation, especially in these last days of great apostasy.

I. The First Removal of Fear -- Likeness – 4:17 – “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.” – Is the believer a mirror image of God? Which aspect of God’s attributes should the believer mirror? Verse 17 teaches that every believer needs to mirror God’s attribute of love. The believer’s love must be made perfect, i.e. complete, so he can have boldness on the day of judgment. God’s love made complete in a believer is more than a one-step process.

The first step is receiving God’s love. Receiving God’s love is not a matter of choice, as if the believer can choose not to have God’s love. The moment the sinner receives Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, and Jesus Christ sees the sincerity of his acceptance, Christ will baptise him with the Holy Spirit. The moment the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer, God’s love is shed abroad, i.e. enters his heart, mind, and soul. Receiving God’s love is, therefore, the Word of God in Christ. It is part of the first experiences of being born again in Christ. The believer will feel God’s love within him. He will love God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind. This feeling was impossible to experience before salvation. But after salvation, it is impossible not to experience God’s love. The Bible describes this love for God as “first love” in every believer’s life. It is “first” because he never experienced it before. This is his first time experiencing God’s love through the forgiveness of all his sins in Christ.

The second step in God’s love is to show it through words and actions. God first loved the world. Then He demonstrated His love by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for the world’s sins. He sacrificed His only begotten Son as a human sacrifice; Jesus took on flesh and blood to save sinners of flesh and blood. It was an unconditional sacrifice because there was no reason for God to sacrifice His Son, since all sinners are evil, wicked and totally idolatrous. All sinners treat God very badly. They insult Him repeatedly through their sinful existence, in every generation and in every country. Atheists deny His existence, even when God showed forth His existence throughout His grand creation, speaking a language day and night that all can understand, that He exists. Sinful men scorn Him and reject His message. Some believe in God but make Him into their own image. These images are gleaned from God’s creation. God’s creation is the face of God, even though man knew that God is Spirit. God is so great that nothing

in His creation can represent Him correctly. Yet, sinful man never stopped. They kept mocking Him and making idols of Him for millennia. Believers must love as God loves them. They must love unconditionally and sacrificially, remembering God's example of love when He sacrificed Christ while they were still His idolatrous enemies.

The "day of judgment" refers to the day after death, when God will judge everyone in Christ, without exception. At this judgment, the dead are either cast into hell or enter safely into the arms of Jesus Christ. There, everyone will remain until the judgment of all judgments, which the Bible describes as the Great White Throne Judgment, where every human being will be judged before God in their resurrected bodies. The Bible describes two resurrections: the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation. **John 5:28-29** "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, **29** And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." The constituents of the resurrected bodies of those who experience the resurrection of life are the same as Christ's since Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits of all who receive Him as their Lord and Saviour. **1 Corinthians 15:41-44** "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory. **42** So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: **43** It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: **44** It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." However, the constituents of the resurrected bodies of those who experience the resurrection of damnation are not revealed.

Those who are resurrected unto life will enter the New Heaven and New Earth in their glorified bodies. There they will remain for eternity in the presence of God the Father and God the Son. **Revelation 20:11-12** describe the judgment of believers at the Great White Throne, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that 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, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." **Revelation 21:1-4** describes the believers entering the New Heaven and New Earth: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. **2** And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. **4** And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Those who are resurrected unto damnation will be cast into the Lake of Fire and be punished eternally with Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet. **Revelation 20:13-15** describe the judgment of unbelievers at the Great White Throne, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. **14** And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the

second death. **15** And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

As a Christian, are you a mirror image of God?

- II. The Second Removal of Fear -- Peace – 4:18 – “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.” – When a believer lives his Christian life in God’s love, i.e. constrained by God’s love in all he does, as well as in the knowledge that God will always love him for Christ’s sake, he has nothing to fear regarding the certainty of his salvation. He knows he has experienced God’s saving grace in Christ because God can love unconditionally and sacrificially.

What happens when he sins? Isn’t he afraid that he is not saved?

He isn’t afraid that he is not saved when he sins because he repents almost immediately. He knows God’s love for him is unconditional and that, because of Christ’s finished work on Calvary’s cross, the believer’s sin never negates or diminishes Christ’s work, which God fully and eternally accepted by raising Jesus Christ from the dead with the glorified body. His salvation is anchored not on feelings or his actions but on Christ’s perfect life and sacrifice. God’s love in him is more than a feeling; it is a conviction founded on God’s truth in Christ. So, he doesn’t fear losing his salvation, which rests entirely on God’s love.

When the believer’s salvation is based on what he knows in God’s Word, he is not shaken by a life that still succumbs to sin. His inward desire for perfection and holiness within and without assures him of the sincerity of his love for God. He is not tormented by his sin, and no guilt chastises his heart, robbing him of God’s peace and afflicting him with self-condemnation. Such a self-condemnation is the torment borne by those who have not perfected God’s love in their lives. They cannot forgive themselves because they have not trusted in Jesus Christ’s offering as their substitute, and as all-sufficient to take away their sins forever. They may have sought God’s forgiveness. But the forgiveness they sought is more in the head than in their heart. If it is from the heart where God’s love dwells, then they ought to experience the peace of God that passeth all understanding after they have repented of their sin against God. Only in Christ, and through God’s love, can all sinners’ sins be washed from their lives.

Fear brings torment. Torment shows love is not perfected.

With God’s love practised in his life, the believer casts out any fear of losing his salvation. The fear that afflicted all aspects of his life will slowly but surely be cast out when God’s love is applied accordingly. Whether in church, at home, at work, or in school (for students), he lives in God’s love for him and his corresponding love for God. The conscious awareness of God’s love for him, linked to the salvation he received from God, fills his life with joy and a deep sense of happiness and peace. This is even though he is surrounded by evil and wickedness, and even when his Christian life of witness for Christ is fraught with many adversities and persecutions, including sufferings for Christ of every type, such as the aches and pains of growing old. External circumstances will not rob him of the peace of God he experiences; fear and torment will rob hearts that do not possess God’s love and the hearts of those who fail to exercise it.

III. The Third Removal of Fear -- Love – 4:19-21 – “We love him, because he first loved us. **20** If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? **21** And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” – The believer’s ability to love with agape love is because God first loved him. This means that if God had not loved sinners by sending Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, sinners would not be able to experience agape love or love with God’s agape love in their hearts. Therefore, all who are born again must first experience God’s love so they can love others as evidence of God’s love in them. God is Spirit. Man cannot see God. How can they possibly love someone whom they cannot see? If we cannot see God and say that we love Him, it is like loving thin air, invisible to the naked eye and a figment of the imagination.

The feeling of loving God is transient and very subjective. In other words, how does one know that such a love is really present in one’s heart? If the person says he has God’s love in him, it is merely what he says and claims. Everyone knows that what someone says could be a lie or self-delusion unless proven by clear, tangible evidence. The Bible makes it clear that every believer **MUST** have this love and **KNOW**, without a shadow of doubt, that he has God’s love in him; otherwise, he is not a believer! The heart of every unbeliever is deceitful and desperately wicked. God has revealed in **Jeremiah 17:9**, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Therefore, a professing believer who goes to church regularly for worship and service and does all things Christian-like outwardly is deceiving himself if he does not know he has God’s love in him.

Thank God that He has provided a real and tangible way for all professing believers to know for certain that God’s love is in them, without opening their mouths and boasting that they have it.

Firstly, God states it negatively. If a man says he loves God but hates his brother, God charges that he is a liar. He is a self-deceiver. He definitely does not have God’s love if he hates his brother. The question then is: “What does it mean to hate one’s brother?” We must see hatred from a spiritual perspective. For example, Jonah hated the Assyrians, for he adamantly refused to go to Nineveh, their capital city, to warn them of God’s impending judgment; he wanted them to be destroyed by God. He did not want them to have the opportunity to hear God’s Word, in case they might repent of their sins, and God might not punish and destroy them. The Ninevites, from the king to the animals, repented. God’s wrath stayed, and the punishment did not fall on that generation of Ninevites who repented. We must understand hatred from an eternal perspective of hell. To “hate” someone from God’s perspective includes:

- *Not caring for their salvation* – Believers know that without believing in Christ, all sinners will die in sin and be cast into hell by God on the day of judgment. For a sinner to believe in Christ, the gospel of Christ must be shared with him. As believers, living a holy life is not enough. Indifference or deliberately not sharing the gospel with people we meet, especially those we see often, is to desire that they die in sin and be cast into hell. That is truly hatred;
- *Stumbling them by one’s sinful behaviour* – When believers call themselves Christians, they are basically saying to others to look at their lives; they will see Christ through their holy conduct. They will hear Christ when they listen to believers’ words, whose knowledge is

based on God's Word, which is Christ's words too. Therefore, sinful behaviour without repentance is a sure way to shame Christ. All who see Christians commit sin without repentance will not only hate the Christians but the Christ they represent. In this manner, the Christian hates the sinner by causing him to hate Christ;

- *Teaching them doctrinal errors from the Bible* – Teaching a doctrinal error is one of the best ways to hate someone. If the error pertains to salvation, such as the prosperity gospel of the Charismatics, the poor sinner is hated by being deceived. If the error pertains to Christian conduct, causing the sinner to live a sinful life while thinking that he is living his life pleasing to God, the poor sinner is hated;
- *Sharing with them a false gospel* – This is the worst kind of hatred for any sinner. Paul certainly was right to curse such preachers and teachers who teach another gospel to deceive sinners into thinking they are going to heaven, but in reality, they are still heading toward hell. When they die, they will tragically find out to their eternal horror that they have been deceived. But by then they cannot do anything about it but spend eternity in hell. Preachers of the false gospel are great haters of sinners;
- *Do not tell them they are wrong or have sinned* – All Christians are like sentinels guarding the holy lives of everyone, especially their fellow believers. They are one another's keepers of the faith they all claim to believe. Protecting the holy Name of Christ that every believer carries everywhere they go and in everything they do is every believer's mutual, God-given duty. To keep silent and let the sin remain is hatred for the brethren and for Christ. To keep silent when we must speak up makes us partakers of their sin. Not caring for one another's holy witness is hatred;
- *Pleasing man rather than God* – When a believer chooses a loved one rather than God by taking his side, resulting in disobedience, he is hating the loved one. For example, attending the wedding of a professing believer to an unbeliever. This demonstrates a tacit approval of the wedding of an unequally yoked relationship that brings great shame to the Holy Name of Christ. Such a sinful compromise is hatred for all the people he pleased while sinning against God in the process. This is hatred of brethren in action;
- *Condoning their sin* – When sin is made known but covered up based on relationships and mutual favours, it is hatred. E.g., when God's work and service are dealt with based on relationships such as "I-scratch-your-back-and-you-scratch-mine", rather than on right and wrong according to the Holy Scriptures. The cover-up of these hypocrites includes people in power and in high places who sin with impunity. They make themselves untouchable by surrounding themselves with yes-men. Such evil men are also commonly found in churches and Christian organisations who sin with great arrogance. They claim to believe in the one living and true God, but in their hearts, they mock Him by their sinful lives and hardened hearts.

These are some ways "hatred" is committed by professing believers that we must recognise and avoid. Not doing the above is not enough. The believer who possesses God's love must proactively love his brethren by actively showing love. He loves all people alike. When he shows

love, he seeks no reciprocal actions. He loves in action by sacrificing his time, resources and strength. For example, he sacrifices time that could have been used for something personal to prepare his lesson to teach God's Word so that God's children may grow in the grace and knowledge of God in Christ. He gives of his substance to help God's people in need, secretly, so that "the left hand does not know what the right hand is giving". He spends his energy doing God's work so God's people may enjoy their Christian life. God's love also means that when the believer sins and hurts others, he repents sincerely and does whatever he possibly can to mend the image of Christ that has been tarnished. Believers must love and care for others' spiritual well-being at all times.

APPLICATION – One of the best passages from God's Word to summarise the above topic is Matthew 22:37-40: "Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.**" The believer's ability to show God's love in his life to all people whom God sent is a crucial truth that has been quietly put on the back burner, to the hurt of many. When those who profess to be believers do not show God's love to others, the frightening reality is that they might not be born again in Christ, regardless of their church attendance, Christian service, and knowledge of the Bible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is the likeness of God that 1 John 4:17 speaks of the same as the likeness of Christ? Does the likeness of God imply that the image of God in a believer's life, which was lost when man fell into sin, has now been restored? Explain your answer.
2. If I am becoming more like God, does that mean that I am god-like, thus making me a god? If so, did I become a god the moment I was born again, or is it a process that takes place after salvation and further sanctification in God's truth? If so, how long would that process take? Explain your answer.
3. Is it spiritually healthy to keep questioning our salvation, after we repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour again and again? Explain your answer.
4. Is it possible for the truly born-again believer to experience torment in his soul because he is fearful that he has no salvation? Is the fear of death the same as fear of no salvation? Explain your answers.
5. If Person A hates his brother, can Person B who knows of it confidently say that A does not love God? Explain your answer.