

Serving in Love without Fear

Christian Liberty

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First John 4 beginning at verse 13 on page 1,902.

13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

The word of the Lord.

May we pray.

Lord, please help me in spite of my natural nervousness and other things and my age. I pray that you would help me to recall the things you have taught me that I may teach them to others in a way that leads people to come to the Lord Jesus Christ whom to know is eternal life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now I want us to focus today again on Christian Liberty. I have been using a document that is not inspired by God, it's a creation of human beings who are finite, fallen, and fallible, but I think that it's a useful guide to study scripture, and that's *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Only the Bible is God's word, and only the Bible binds our consciences, only the Bible is true and completely reliable, but doctrinal statements are useful. The Southern Baptists have *The Baptist Faith and Message*. The Anglicans or Episcopalians have *The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*. Older Baptists have

The London Baptist Confession of Faith. And Lutherans have various documents.

And what we're saying is that this document, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, is useful as we study the Bible to look at it topically, and that's what we've been doing now and for several weeks as we study Christian liberty. I want us to think about a particular phrase there which is why I selected 1 John, and it says as it regards "the liberty that Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel," that it consists in "our yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind."

I am not ashamed of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* because we need some kind of thing to say what do we believe.

People who say, "We have no creed but Christ," are some of the most creed-bound people you will ever meet because they have an unwritten creed that they will impose on you. I want a written creed, I want a written document so I can discuss and say, "Well, this is what I believe the Bible teaches. Let's look at it in light of God's word." Is it right in everything it teaches, that is *The Westminster Confession of Faith*? No, I don't believe that it is, but it's still a useful guide. So, let's think about this phrase or actually the several clauses that we yield obedience not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and willing mind.

Now our text is taken there in verse 18 of 1 John 4 where he says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." I want to think about fear for a moment.

What does the word "fear" mean? You have to understand that words that are used in the Bible are sometimes used in different ways. For example, hold your hand there and turn with me if you would, to the book of Ephesians 5, Ephesians 5, and as we look there on page 1,823, Ephesians 5:21. Ephesians 5:21, page 1,823, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The word translated "reverence" is the same Greek word that we have here as fear. Fear and reverence are used interchangeably, and so we have to say, first of all, my obligation to you, my obligation to my wife, Sandy, is to submit to you and to submit to her out of fear of Christ.

Again, what does it mean in its context? In its context, we have a Greek word here that we get phobia from. In its context, it simply means to show someone respect. Out of respect for the Lord Jesus Christ, out of respect for God, I submit to my wife, and it's important that husbands submit to their

wives. A man who doesn't submit to his wife is showing that he doesn't respect Christ. Let that sink in.

Now he goes down further at the end of this chapter in verse 31, Ephesians 5:31, he says, however, having compared the relationship between a husband and wife to Christ and the church, he says in verse 33:

“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself.” In other words, the fundamental driving force for a man in marriage is the love that Christ had to the church. And what does that mean? Christ's love for the church means that he was willing, not to give up golfing or fishing or hunting, or all the things that people complain about, but he was willing to **give himself up**. He abandoned himself. He laid down his life with all his rights, privileges, and prerogatives, he left the glory of heaven and came to this earth to be born of a woman, to be born under the law in order to redeem you and me from the curse of the law (Galatians 4:4-5; Philippians 2:5-8). So, the way a man shows his fear of Christ or respect for Christ is to love his wife in that same self-denying way.

Now notice the duty of the wife, and it says here the wife must respect her husband. That's that same Greek word from which we get phobia. She must fear her husband. Now, if you think about a good marriage, this is not a good marriage if you think of that word “fear” as, “Oh, no, he's coming home! Oh, my, what am I going to face?”

That's the kind of fear that people face in a terrible marriage. It's the fear that my mother had when my father would stay at the country club drinking bootleg whiskey and memorizing every card that was played in a poker game, and he would come home as a very angry man. And that's why my mother prayed, “Lord, change him or kill him.” That's not the kind of fear that's in view here. The kind of fear here is showing respect. Showing respect, that's what's important.

Now when John is using the word over there in 1 John 4, he is not thinking of fear in the sense of respect, but he's thinking of fear in the kind of way that every single human being on this planet ought to be afraid of God unless they've repented of their sins and come to the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, what he's saying there in 1 John 4:18, page 1,902, “There is no fear in love—No fear in love because perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

So again, we use words in different contexts. That's true in our English language. There are a variety of definitions for English words, and it's

certainly true with Greek words and Hebrew words as well. So again, context drives our understanding of the meaning of words. So again, think about it, and I think about that phrase again in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* that we come as believers to yield obedience to God, not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and a willing mind.

Now there's another passage I'd like to look at in that regard, and that's found in Romans 8, Romans 8, where he says on page 1,757 and picking up in verse 14.

“Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” (Romans 8:14-15)

So, you see people who have received the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit, because the words mean the same thing, people who have received the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost are led by the Spirit and the Spirit leads us to obey God the Father, not out of slavish fear. You see, verse 15, “You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, you received the Spirit of sonship.”

Think about it. You're a child of God. Not everybody can say that (1 John 3:9-10). You're a child of God. And I have to use an illustration that, to me, probably sums up what this is teaching by personal example that I've observed more than anything else.

In the last days of Joe Norwood. I got to see the love of his son Joe D. for his father. It was a remarkable thing to witness. Joe D. did not fear his father in the sense of being afraid his father was going to whip him or punish him or beat him. Joe D. loved his father, and he said—I heard him say it—that he lost his best friend. Joe D's father, Joe Norwood was Joe D's best friend, and I observed Joe D. in action as he lovingly took care of his father as he was in the home.

I remember the last day that I saw Joe Norwood alive. It was on a Sunday afternoon and his face was bright even though he could barely communicate at all. He knew he was dying but his face shone because his son Joe D. lovingly, out of love for his father, out of devotion to his father, shaved his father. It was as perfect a shave as I've ever seen. It made me think of the old days when you went to the barber shop, and you got a shave and a haircut. He was cleanly shaven, and he had obviously had treatment on his face done by his son Joe D.—Love for the father.

Joe D. wasn't afraid of his father. He was not living in dread of his father's punishment. He was devoted to his father as his best friend. That's the kind of love that we're talking about in 1 John. That's the kind of love we're talking about in Romans 8.

It's a love that makes us want to do because we love the object of our love and want to please him, want to obey him, want to do what we ought to do out of pure love and not out of fear. And again, I think of this, "Yielding obedience unto him not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and willing mind, and we see there again in Romans 8:15, the next sentence:

"And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

And then 16, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

And then he speaks about the future glory of every child of God, and that's this as we look there in verse 18, "I consider that our present sufferings."

Do you suffer? All God's children suffer. So do those who are not the children of God, worldly people suffer, godly people suffer, everybody suffers, but for the believer, we know in whom we believe. We know we're going to go to heaven when we die. And he says:

"Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us," And then he talks about the agony of our world. If you don't think our world is groaning in travail, you don't read the news. He says in verse 19:

"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God," and remember that when the Bible uses certain words, it's including males and females. It's not gender specific.

Now there are words in Greek that are gender specific. There's the word *aner*, *andros* (ἀνήρ, ἀνδρός) that refers to a male, but the word *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος), from which we get the word anthropology, means a human being whether female or male.

And so, he's talking about women and men when he says that the world is waiting in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. What is that and when will it be? He says in verse 20:

"The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be

liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

Do you realize the world we’re in is in bondage to decay? Think about it. As I think about the decades that have passed in my own life, no matter what I try, there’s still a bit of the bondage of decay that I’m living with. And our world is that way. That’s why there are earthquakes. That’s why there are unseasonable rains in one place and droughts in another. It’s because our world is in a convulsion under the judgment of God because it is subject to decay.

And then he says it’s going to be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. The glorious freedom of the children of God. Verse 22:

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Now here again, you have to look at things in their context. The adoption of sons. When were you adopted into the family of God? You were adopted in the family of God before the foundation of the world, but it was manifested in this life, in this world when you became a Christian, but it won’t ultimately be manifested until the return of Christ, as we see here, because he’s referring to the redemption of our bodies.

My body has not yet been redeemed. My body is subject to decay and death, and if you live long enough, you may be able to attend my funeral because my body has not yet experienced its redemption. But one day my body is going to experience its redemption. When will that be? It’s when the trumpet sounds and the archangel shouts and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

And so, he goes on here and he says in verse 24:

“In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Look at verse 26, “In the same way, the Spirit,” you see, the Holy Spirit is the key to understanding the age in which we live as Christians because God the Father sent the Holy Spirit in response to the prayers and suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ours is the age of the Holy Spirit. Everything that God does, he does through the Holy Spirit, and he says in verse 26:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” Several weeks ago, I preached on that, and I talked about the awakening that was occurring at that time in Kentucky, and I want to say that any move of God is a move that results in prayer. Any move of the Holy Spirit is a move that results in prayer and praise. If there’s no prayer and no praising, there’s no move of the Spirit of God because he leads us to pray.

And notice what he says in verse 27:

“He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

My longing is to see the churches of Christ throughout the world be praying churches. In many places, the churches of Christ are praying churches. That’s particularly in places where persecution takes place because “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the saints.” Would to God that the churches of greater Texarkana sought the Lord not with gimmicks, but with earnest Bible-based praying and love for each other, because that’s what he’s saying. And then he says in verse 28, God’s sovereignty, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

Turning back to 1 John, we see again what he’s saying. 1 John 4 and that’s page 1,903. He says this, “There is,” in verse 18:

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment.” I’m not afraid of God punishing me. Why? Because Jesus was punished in my place. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, God took my sins and your sins, and he put them on the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

That’s why Jesus cried out, quoting the words of the 22nd Psalm (Matthew 27:46), “My God, my God—Eli, Eli (אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי). My God, my God, Lama (לָמָּה), why have you forsaken me, Sabachthani (עֲזַבְתָּנִי)?” He says his words on the cross, Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Did God forsake Jesus on the cross? He did, and in another sense he did not.

What God the Father did was to take our sins, your sins and my sins, the sins you’ve committed in the past week, the sins that you have actually done with your body, that you’ve spoken with your mouth because people speak idle words all the time, the thoughts that you’ve entertained and there’s a

difference between a temptation that comes to us and a thought that's entertained.

It's like the old days when you would go to places to rent a movie and bring it home and play it on a VCR. Sometimes people, mischief-makers, would take films and put them in the wrong case, and a person would go and rent this film and bring it home to watch with his family and when they put it in suddenly, oh my gracious, it's some kind of XXX, whatever that is, pornography.

What do you do at that point? If you're a good parent, you, as fast as you possibly can jump up, and you run to that VCR, as you cover the screen with your body and push the eject button.

Let me use that illustration that I've used before to illustrate the difference between being tempted to sin and entertaining mental sin.

You and I are tempted every day, aren't we? Every day. Tempted to hate somebody. You're tempted to hold onto a grudge—and remember the greatest hindrance to our prayers being answered, in addition to unbelief and not expecting God to answer them, is holding on to a grudge (Mark 11:22-26). And so, what happens? When that temptation comes, it's like XXX porn being played on your VCR in front of your children. What have you got to do? You've got to hit the eject button.

How do you hit the eject button? You hit the eject button by saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, get out of my mind," because temptations come and the moment they come, we've got to hit the eject button and that is to reject it. But do you know what? Human nature being such as it is, even Christians, people who know the Lord, sometimes say, "Well, I'm curious. I've never seen anything like this. I think I'll let it play a little bit longer."

And I'm not speaking here only of things like pornography, but again, bitterness, resentment.

"But you don't know what he did to me! You don't know what she did to me!" That's entertaining the sin. That's mental sin. That is actual sin because we sin with our minds as well as with our mouths and our bodies.

So, there's a difference in entertaining a temptation and rejecting a temptation. The Lord Jesus Christ, the book of Hebrews tells us, was tempted in all the ways we've been tempted (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

Think of a temptation you've experienced. Don't think too long. And remember this, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as a true human being who

was both truly human and truly God, experienced all those temptations. Was Jesus tempted to hate people? What do you think when he was accused falsely, when he was put on trial, when he was betrayed, when his words were twisted, when they beat him, when they mocked him, and when they nailed him to a cross? What would you do? What would I do? “Got to kill them.” You want to know the biggest difference between the Old Testament and the New? It happens at Calvary in the year AD 30.

Just this morning I was reading the ninth chapter of the book of Esther. Wow! It’s a celebration of the Jews against their enemies where they go out and with permission of King Ahasuerus, they annihilate their enemies, and they celebrate it. It’s a great celebration. The Jewish feast of Purim, which means casting the lots, celebrates the vengeance of the Jewish people against those who hated them. And I’m reading that and I’m thinking, “Oh my!”

Well, do you know what happens on the cross of Calvary in the year AD 30? The Lord Jesus Christ said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). That is the great turning point in the history of redemption. The law speaks death, the law speaks condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:6-9), the law speaks, “Avenge me on my enemies!” But the Lord Jesus says, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

So, there is a profound difference in our attitude towards our enemies in the Old Testament and in the New because in the Old Testament, as in the New, people recognize they have enemies. I have enemies. You have enemies? There are people who have prayed against me over the years. Wow! Can you imagine praying against somebody? Wow! You have enemies, the difference in the Old Testament is we’re going to give gifts, we’re going to share food, we’re going to celebrate because, like Vlad the Impaler, we have impaled Haman and his ten sons on poles just like Vlad the Impaler (Esther 9:6-10). Wow! Ancient horrible method of execution! Celebrating it, dancing, celebrating, making music, the feast of Purim. Wow! (Esther 8:16-17; 9:17-31)

But the feast of Calvary is the feast when the temple’s veil was ripped from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). And do you know the ripping of that temple veil from top to bottom says that my God is satisfied, it says that my sins have been taken away, it says that the opening into the Holy of Holies has finally been made for Gentiles as well as Jews, for women as well as men, for descendants of Levi as well as the other tribes, for those who are directly descended from Aaron to all the rest (Hebrews 9:11-14; 10:9-22).

You and I, male and female alike, have equal boldness of access into the very presence of God without fear of rejection, without fear of condemnation, because the Lord Jesus died and ripped the veil of the temple. And that's why I say if the temple is ever rebuilt, it won't be the temple of God because the way into the Holy of Holies has now been made clear and open (Hebrews 10:19ff.). God isn't going to allow it to be sealed up again. You and I can come with boldness, with boldness to the throne of grace to find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

And so again he says in 1 John 4:18:

“Perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” Once you know that you're going to go to heaven, once you know that, nothing else really matters. Think about it. Think about it.

To cite my wife's experience, my wife has always been a lovely lady, always giving of herself to others, but because of how she was raised, she was raised with a great deal of fear. When the thunderstorm came, her mother gathered her and her sister to go into a closet. Living with fear. It was conditioned, just like one of Pavlov's dogs. She was conditioned to fear, to fear in this world.

But when my wife was run over by that log truck on October 10, 1988, and went into a coma, she came back from someplace, and my evidence that she came back from heaven is that she had no fear anymore.

She was completely fear-free because she'd seen the glory of heaven. She'd experienced something of the Majesty of God. She never saw God. She never saw the Lord Jesus Christ. She just was in a place of worship, and she could sing, which is something she always wanted to do but never felt that her voice was good enough, she could sing, and she was in a happy place. And how sad she was when she had come back home to me and our five children and my mother.

But you see, this illustrates profoundly there's no fear in love. She lost all her fear that day. When she returned from wherever she was, she was in the ICU of Christus St. Frances Cabrini Hospital in Alexandria. But her self, her soul, her spirit was somewhere else, and when she returned, she had no fear.

You see, fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. I want to commend to you the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are full of fear today, there's no way to be rid of it. You can open up a bottle of booze and drown your fears and sorrows and wake up with a splitting

headache and your fears and sorrows are even greater. Or you can use something that is more socially acceptable, various prescription drugs. But I'm going to tell you this: Fear that governs our whole human race (Hebrews 2:14-15)—there's only one cure for it, and that cure is to come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ because once you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, and you open your heart to him for him to lead you, he will never leave you, he will never forsake you and you can walk in this life free of fear.

And that means that when you obey God, you're no longer obeying him because, "Oh, no, God's liable to smite me if I don't do this or do that." But you obey God the same way that Joe D. Norwood showed love to his own daddy in his father's dying days. And that freedom from fear—wow! What a wonderful thing! I wish that everyone hearing this knew that fear being gone and gone forever.

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would bless this message, that you would grant that everyone who hears it would come to you, would know you and love you and be free of fear for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord, because to know you is to know freedom from fear in the sense of terror, of punishment, and not to know you is to be left with a sense of growing fear as the world marches on to the climax of the ages, the return of Christ. Hear our prayer, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.