

Thursday Group

August 13<sup>th</sup> 2015

*Alive in Holy Fear or Dead in Dread*

Study 4

## *Peter, a Journey of Fear*

1 Peter 1:10-25

Apart from the God breaking open the true nature of His love for us in the cross we remain captive to the perverted and corrupting notions of love. We saw in the last study that guilt brings a reversed and perverse understanding of His love and so all love. In this reversed 'wisdom' love is seen as contractual instead of covenantal, sentimental instead of holy, partial instead of impartial, limited instead of unfailing. These corrupted ideas of love produce what the Bible calls "dead works." *How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Hebrews 9:14). We note that it is the conscience, fouled by guilt that has the person operating relationally in such a way that tangles corrupts and destroys true living. Every part of what it means to be human is changed by guilty fear. Inwardly all true images of God are twisted and outwardly we are driven to self-justify at every turn in every relationship. The crisis of conversion can be seen from one angle as the transition, by Father's gracious intervention, from the fear and dread of guilt and shame, into holy fear. This holy fear delivers us into our true, creational position of dependence within the Sonship of Christ. So holy fear then is the catalyst of true worship (service). By sharing in the sonship of Christ, alive to the Father with Him, freed from all the enemies as He Himself is free, we are now opened to all relationships, free from fear. So Paul could say, "I am free from all men", meaning that he was not directed by his fear of them or their fear of him: Meaning that he was now free to be with them apart from the clawing anxiety of approval seeking. *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more* (1 Corinthians 9:19). The freedom Paul spoke of gave him the will to relate. Peter too discovered that after being justified by grace the old grip of guilty fear gave way to holy fear.

The Apostle Peter made a giant transition from debilitating fear; from the fear that crippled all his relationships, but particularly fear that blinded his participation with Christ in the Kingdom of God. By comparing his activity and focus prior to conversion with his later writings we discover a very different man.

Peter had been a fearful man; driven to self-obsession, relationship-destroying competitiveness, flesh-driven ideas about Christ and His mission and a debilitating sense of insecurity. It seems, to our impatient minds, that the Lord should have rebuked him much more regularly. But trusting in the Father's grace to 'sort Peter out' Jesus waited for the time when he would 'turn'. *But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*" (Luke 22:32). To 'turn again' is often translated convert or conversion (see Luke 1:16, Acts 15:3). We are not told when Peter was converted. However, along with the other Disciples, the Spirit's outpouring at the day of Pentecost had fulfilled our Lord's promises in them. They received "*All that belonged to Christ*" (John 16:14). That is they knew personally the reality of how the Father loved the Son and how the Son knew and loved the Father. This happened through the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised, and resulted in the peace of holy fear. *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.* (John

14:26-27). The inner well-spring of living water they had seen in the man Jesus of Nazareth was now flooding them too (John 8:38). We can say that the 'living water' is the true comprehension and expression of God's love. It is not so much a new spirituality as a new and true humanity.

In Peter's letters this living water is clear and surging freely. In the first half of chapter one, Peter, as a man in whom the Gospel of God has raised the freedom of holy fear, sings us one long doxology. Like Paul and before him Christ these were men whose teaching was a 'new song' from new hearts now beating as they were created to beat, seeing what they needed to see, weaned from fear by the peace of Christ, open to all without fear. Gone was the fear that had caused him so much grief. Gone was his dread that God was not up to keeping His Messiah in the face of human opposition. Gone was the arrogant fear of trying to be significant enough to impress God. Gone was his terrible insecurity of not being an all-important favourite. Gone was the wobbly illusion that love means "Make much of me-ism." Gone was the dread that he could never live up to the expectations of Jesus. Gone was the dread of the presence of God when it was accompanied by experiences outside of his expectations (Discovered on one occasion in the bottom of his fishing boat, up to the eyeballs with flapping fish, Luke 5:8).

He had been captured by the new love seen in the cross which had previously appeared not just inexplicable but absurd. Now it had shown him the Father in a way that although he may never fully comprehend the actions of His presence he need not be afraid. Gone was the nerve-shattering fear of following his Lord to a pitiful death on an unnecessary cross (Death by sword in the Garden seemed honourable and do-able but not to be cursed on a cross).

He had once embraced the nervous exhaustion producing illusion that it was he who had bound himself to Christ. *Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."* (Mark 10:28). Now he saw it was all to do with the Father's electing love and love invading mercy (1 Peter 1:1-3, 13-21, 2 Peter 1:1-4).

He once embraced the notion that faith begins and ends with a full-blooded commitment to the Lord. But in this commitment he was thrown back onto his own resources at every turn. In the end it took him not to the Father but to a deadly denial and then disillusionment. *Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!"* (Matthew 26:24) and ultimately *(Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you")* (John 21:3). But now in his writings he speaks of a new fear, fear as a true son, a man redeemed by an imperishable gift (1 Peter 1:18-19), a man Fathered by God who shows no favouritism. *If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth* (1 Peter 1:17). So the object of his hope had been returned to the Father (1 Peter 1:21). Note his hope was not in facts about God or even what God had done but God Himself, the One who he enjoyed and revelled in (1 Peter 1:8), the Shepherd of his whole being, present and future (1 Peter 2:25).

The holy God had gotten hold of him in the cross. That which Peter had considered a big mistake, a monumental failure and a Messianic disaster; something he thought confirmed his worst and darkest fears about God; something which ended all his dreams, was suddenly filled with such a revelation of Holy Father's love, of Holy Son's grace and Holy Spirit's knowledge of God and men like Peter that he was brought to love without fear.

Could he fully comprehend the depth of grace which flooded him? Could he fully plumb the depths of mercy which opened all of the Father to him? Could he, when he cried, "Father! Dear Father!" fully comprehend the holiness of love that would never let him go?

Could he fully comprehend how his deeply unsettled heart had been transformed from terror and fear to love the Father? Could he get his brain around the grace of knowing the Father like the Lord? Could he comprehend what could fill up his old sinful futility with glory? Could he comprehend how his once self-obsessed mind could now fix its hope singularly on the grace that had come and would take him home to Christ? In part he could now answer yes to all these questions. But in truth, the Holy Father who had done all these things in Peter for the joy of it, was so far beyond him and greater than him and would always remain so, meant that Peter was brought to trembling and fear.

All his perishable hopes and dreams, especially the religious ones, had mercifully been immolated in imperishable blood. Suddenly His bleeding Saviour was not a reason to go back fishing but to stand in hope in the holy presence of the Father forever. His trembling was deep and no small emotional response. Only Holy Father loved him enough to empty him in a cross. Only Holy Father loved him enough to fill him through resurrection. Now Christ had become to Peter what His cross was. Here was the reality. The fear and awe which gripped Peter had nothing to do with some dread of Father's presence, some dread of his own inability. Now the one he thought he was serving he really had a heart to serve for now he loved him with joy inexpressible because the true glory of Christ now filled him (1 Peter 1:8). Now his fear was that he would ever be seduced away from the total satisfaction of the Father and the Son: That his heart would be slow to exult in the fearful wonder of the cross: That he would find himself "Going fishing" in the hope of finding God or himself. Was Peter's holy fear and true loving perfect? Did it remove him from the battle?

Peter knew he was still weak in his flesh, *For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he (Peter) used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision* (Galatians 2:12). But his weakness took him to grace through Paul, not into the dread of being judged as if on probation. He now knew that he had come to One who was the *Shepherd and guardian of his soul*. His days of wandering like a stubborn sheep were over. (1 Peter 2:25).

Now he was free to *Honour all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king* (1 Peter 2:17).