

FREE FROM THE FEAR OF JUDGMENT

David Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899-1981)

"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." -1

John 4:18

THE Christian should be free from the fear of judgment. The natural man should fear it; the Christian should be free from such fear. Is there anything that is more glorious about the Gospel than just that? But there are people who dispute this. There are poor Christian people who believe that it is their duty to be miserable. There are those who say that it is presumptuous for people in this life and world, who know the darkness of their own heart and who know something of the justice and righteousness and holiness of God...to be free from that fear. In the words of Milton, they "scorn delights and live laborious days," afraid to say they have the joy of the Lord or the assurance of salvation.

Yet surely, it is unscriptural to do so. It is the universal teaching of Scripture that we should be delivered from this fear of the Day of Judgment. Take Hebrews 2:15, where we are told that one of the main purposes of our Lord's coming and one of the main effects of His death upon the cross and of His resurrection is to deliver "them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." It is not death but what comes after it that frightens me. But, says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that was the whole purpose of Christ's coming—that He might deliver us from this torment of death that holds us captive. Or take 2 Peter 3:12, "*Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.*" This is the very Day of which I am speaking, and this is the teaching that is to be found everywhere.

"Ye," says the Apostle Paul in Romans, "*have not received the spirit of*

bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father... [We] ourselves also," he goes on to say, *"which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for"—that is it—"waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body"* (Rom 8: 15, 23-24). This is everywhere in Scripture, so that to assume that this is something to which the Christian is not entitled and to consider it as a kind of presumption is to be thoroughly unscriptural.

But the Apostle John has a particular argument to drive this point home. He says that love and fear are utterly incompatible: *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear."*

Now this is something that can be easily elaborated upon. Love and fear are indeed opposites: the spirit of fear is the antithesisⁱ to the true spirit of love. Think of the endless illustrations that come rushing into the mind...Take, for instance, the example given by our Lord Himself when He was sending out His disciples to preach and to cast out devils. He warned them they would certainly be in danger. There would be many people who would dislike them, but this was His advice: *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt 10:28). The way to get rid of this fear, says our Lord to these people, is, in a sense, to have this greater fear, which ultimately is the love of God: the greater drives out the lesser.

That, then, is the first proposition, and John then goes on to say that because Christians are those in whom love has been made perfect, it follows of necessity that they should not dwell in a fearful condition. This is so because of the love of God that is in their hearts. If men and women are fearful, it means they are afraid of punishment; and there is something defective in their whole conception of love. They are not loving and abiding in this state of love. So John argues that the Christian must

be entirely free. Do you see the steps? Love and fear are incompatible: love drives out fear. Love comes into the heart of the Christian and drives out fear, so we have no right to be fearful in this sense.

But what about the argument and the exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews about approaching God "*with reverence and godly fear*"? What about the statement that "*our God is a consuming fire*"? (Heb 12:28-29). What about the statement that "*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*" (1Jo1:5)? How do you reconcile these things? Surely, the answer is provided by the quotations themselves. What John is here speaking about is a cravenⁱⁱ fear, which is a very different thing from reverence and holy awe. There is, I suggest, always a sense of reverence in connection with love...if men and women love God, there is a sense of awe, holiness about it—there is true reverence in it. "*Reverence and godly fear*" is a very different thing from this "*fear [that] hath torment,*" a fear that cringes and trembles. That is the thing that perfect love drives out. So the natural man should have fear of the Day of Judgment, and the Christian should be free from that fear.

How then...does the Christian become free? There are two main answers to this. The first is that Christians realize the love of God that comes to them in Jesus Christ and the work of Christ for them. John has been elaborating on that from verse 9 in this particular chapter. To quote it once more: "*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.*" That is the great thing!

The first way to get rid of this fear is to understand the doctrine of justificationⁱⁱⁱ by faith only. That is why the Protestant Fathers emphasized it, and that is why only an utterly superficial idea of Christianity dislikes this doctrine. The first way for us to get rid of this fear of the Day of Judgment is to realize what God has done for us in the Person and the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let me put this practically. As I contemplate myself standing before God on the Day of Judgment, I know perfectly well I am a sinner. I have offended God, have broken His Law, and have forgotten Him. I have not loved Him with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. I have been guilty of sins against His people and against myself. I am a sinner. How can I stand there? There is only one way in which I can stand: that is to know and believe that He sent forth His Son to bear my sins in His own body on the tree. Hiding in Christ—nothing else can give me peace at that point. I may say that I have done a lot of good, but what is the value of good to counteract the evil I have done? There is only one thing, and it is Christ. I am hiding in Him.

I have no other hope as I contemplate the holiness of God and the holiness of heaven. My only hope is that there is a cloak of righteousness woven by the Son of God Himself that will cover me, that will cover the darkness of my sins and my sinful life, so that I shall stand clothed, robed, and perfected in my Lord and Savior. That is the first thing to realize—the love of God and what He has done for me. Justification by faith only!

The second thing, that which John has been emphasizing right through this passage, is to realize that I am a partaker of the divine nature, that God Himself has come to dwell in me, and that therefore I am like God. This is the very argument that we had at the end of the previous verse: "*Because as he is, so are we in this world*" (4:17). The second ground of my being able to stand with boldness is that as I contemplate the Day of Judgment I can say to myself, "Well, as the result of applying the various tests I find in that first epistle of John, I believe that in spite of my unworthiness I am a child of God. I want to know God better. I want to love Him more. This concerns me. I do love the brethren; I like to be with them. I like reading the Scriptures. I like praying. Those are not things that are true of the natural man, so I must be a child of God. He

has given me His own nature, or I would not be like that. I know something of this love of the brethren. So as I contemplate facing Him, I am a child of His! Can the Father reject His child? No! He has promised He will not do so.

So, you see, in addition to my justification, my sanctification^{iv} helps me. "*Herein is our love made perfect...because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.*" If we are still fearful, we are not made perfect in love. We must always take those two things together. If I do not always take justification and sanctification together, I shall be misleading myself. I shall fall into antinomianism.^v I shall say that if I am justified by Christ, it does not matter what I do. But John does not argue like that: it is a superficial argument. God knows I have tried it, and I know what an utter failure it is. No! Divide justification and sanctification at your peril; they are always together. Christ "*is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*" (1Co 1:30).

What is the relationship of these two? It is most important and interesting. I put it like this to you: There is the immediate and the mediate way of getting rid of the fear of the Day of Judgment; or if you prefer, there is a direct and an indirect way, and you need both. The immediate or the direct way is to understand the doctrine of justification by faith only. When I feel utterly condemned, hopeless, and sinful, there is only one thing to do: I can rely upon nothing but the work of Christ for me. I cannot rely upon my acts: they are the cause of my misery. "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God...*" (Rom 5:1). Thank God for that! So if you find yourself on your deathbed with the memory of an old sin, or if you have done something or thought something you know to be wrong and you do not have time to start living a better life, I say, just hide yourself in Christ! You are all right—you are justified by faith only.

But do remember the other side—the indirect or the mediate method, which works like this: If I am not living the Christian life, and love is not perfected in me, I will have a constant sense of condemnation and of fearfulness. I will spend the whole of my life in this world in condemnation. My whole life will be lived in misery, and I am not meant for that. I am meant to live a life of joy and of peace and happiness! I am meant to have boldness as I contemplate the Day of Judgment. So how do I do that? Here is the answer: Live a life of love; let love be perfected in you. Love the brethren, and as you do so, you will say to yourself, "In spite of what I am, I find that as He is, so am I in this world." You will find yourself loving someone who is hateful, and you will draw the correct deduction and will say, "It must be that Christ is in me." You will come to the Day of Judgment without fear or trembling. So sanctification indirectly, mediately, will act with the justification that does it directly and immediately, and that is the prescription that is prescribed by the Apostle at this particular point.

Let us be clear as to the position here. We will not be perfect in this world, but as we dwell in Christ and as we manifest this love, we will know that we are in God and God in us. We will realize that we have nothing but Him, that though we are still imperfect, "*He which hath begun a good work in [us] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Phi 1:6). He will perfect us; and so at the end, He will "*present [us] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*" (Jude 24). The more I am like Christ, the less I will fear the Day of Judgment, and the greater will be my boldness as I think of it and as I contemplate it.

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David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Perhaps the greatest expository preacher of the 20th century; successor to G. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel,

London, England, 1938-68; born in Wales.

ⁱ Antithesis – direct opposite.

ⁱⁱ Craven – cowardly.

ⁱⁱⁱ Justification: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." (Spurgeon's Catechism, Q. 32; available from Chapel Library)

^{iv} sanctification — "Sanctification is the work of God's Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness." (Spurgeon's Catechism, Q. 34; available from Chapel Library)

^v antinomianism — the belief of those who reject God's Moral Law or any external laws on individual behavior.