



## **Letters of Love**

**#13 Fear**

**July 1, 2018**

**Courage Church, Detroit, MI**

**scriptures:** 1 John 4:17-21, 2 Timothy 2:7, Matthew 5:3, John 15:1-6, Luke 8:17, Luke 12:1-7, 1 John 1:8, James 5:16, Proverbs 19:18

So, in our series through the letters of John, today will be the last sermon in 1 John chapter 4...

Now, there is obviously an overarching theme to this book... and that theme is OBVIOUSLY LOVE. John just keeps going back to it, over and over. He goes back to it today. But interwoven throughout this overarching theme of love, are many sub points that are pivotal to our walk with God... like how to spot antichrists and know the difference between sound teaching and bad doctrine.

John shows us the power of the tongue, and the ways that our words create worlds for ourselves and for others... he shows us what it means to KNOW God... what to do with our guilt, and who to lean on when we sin.

And today he addresses another issue, and that is FEAR. But like with everything that John does, he shows us how love is the only thing that really can overcome FEAR... but at the same time, he shows us that Fear is one thing that, if we let it, can really cost us our love.

And the way that I see it, if John has used ALL of these beautiful words that we have read in this letter so far to show us just how important LOVE IS... then I think it is worth listening, when he shows us something that has the potential to derail it.

So lets look at this, 1 John 4:17-21

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no

fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

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Dawn and I did a lot of car shopping this week.

And we were at this car dealership in Dearborn, it will not be named, to protect the guilty... but there was a car that we asked to see there... and usually, when you ask to see a car, the dealer says "no problem, let me go get the keys"

but this dealer said "no problem, let me go get the jumper cables."

and then he disappeared for about 15 minutes, and then came up with this battery charging box with jumper cables on it, and he popped the hood, hooked up the charger, and let it sit for another few minutes before turning on the car.

How many of you know... that we did *not* have confidence in that car?

in fact, we didn't have any confidence in that entire car lot. We left shortly after, and I seriously doubt that we will ever go back there.

Confidence is a very important thing, when moving forward with something that you are doing. Whatever it may be, from buying a car, to going on a mission trip, to going to a specific school or working at a job... whatever it may be...

you always want to know "Am I doing the RIGHT thing?"

but look closely at how John starts this passage:

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have **confidence** for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

John wants to make sure that we have confidence for the day of judgment... And I want you to really read this closely... I want you to see how this is worded... He is NOT saying that when the day comes and you stand before God you will be confident about it THEN... Because the truth is, that WHEN THE DAY COMES AND YOU STAND BEFORE GOD, Jesus will be standing there WITH YOU... This is not about confidence, THEN... coming...

This is about confidence NOW... He wants you to live your life NOW, not worried about THEN.

He doesn't want us to feel like Dawn and I felt when we were at the car dealership, thinking... "okay... if this car had to be jumped ON THE LOT, then of course it is not going to start when it is parked outside of our house..."

No... confidence would be knowing that every time I go outside and I turn that key, the car is going to turn on.

That is what John wants to make sure we have, in regards to the day of judgment... the coming day when everyone gives an account before God.

In other words... it is VERY IMPORTANT TO JOHN THAT YOU DO NOT SPEND YOUR LIFE WORRYING ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON THAT DAY.

this totally seems counter intuitive to the way that most Christians live... because for most of us, its one of the things that we think of the most...

are we going to make it? are we okay? am I okay? How can I be sure that I am okay? and maybe I am okay right now, but what if I slip on a banana peel and I scream 100 curse words as I fall to the ground... do I have to start all over again with God after that? Because I really don't want to miss out on Heaven.

But at the heart of that is an incredibly destructive spirit called fear.

and there is nothing in the world that will cause you to NOT be who you are destined to be, faster or more destructively than fear.

and let me clear this up right now so that there is no confusion, when I say “fear” I AM talking about the spirit of fear, as Paul writes about in 2 Timothy 2:7 when he says “God has not given us a spirit of fear” - I am talking about FEAR as John writes about here...

Fear can be a good thing or a bad thing in the Bible. It is the Greek word “*phobos*” and in some instances it means “reverence for ones husband” - which is how we apply it when we talk about having the Fear of God in us, or when we say that we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling... we work out of own salvation, out of reverence for Christ, to whom we belong... the church is the bride of Christ... he is the groom... so we make decisions based on the question “is this what Jesus would have me to do?”

if you try to work out your own salvation without REVERENCE FOR CHRIST, then you will very quickly find yourself in a very bad place, probably not even knowing it. *Phobos* can be a very good, important thing.

but fear also in some instances means exactly what you and I think of when we think of fear... it means “dread or terror” and that is how John uses it here, and that is the definition behind the spirit of fear that Paul writes about.

It is one thing to have REVERENCE for Christ... and living your life out of that reverence... and its a different thing entirely to be TERRIFIED OF GOD... to dread God, to always be worried about what God is going to do to you.

I really want you to grasp this thought, because its huge, and it will change the way you live your life. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus begins by saying (Matthew 5:3): “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” - That one sentence SUMMARIZES THE ENTIRE GOSPEL.

Being poor in Spirit means that you realize, “my Spirit is poor... there is not enough in my Spiritual account that will ever earn me anything...”

it is an acknowledge that IF you were saved on account of something YOU DID, then you would surely not be saved. Jesus says that when you come to terms with the fact that you can not save yourself (or in other words: that you need Jesus), then... you get the Kingdom of Heaven.

Christians... people who are POOR IN SPIRIT, people who understand that they are saved by grace because of what Jesus Christ did... they should live their lives out of *reverence* for Christ!

You deeply respect... you honor... you are fully aware of the power of the cross in your life and in our world... and out of that, you also acknowledge the mission that has been given to you to show that same love to others that Jesus has shown to you.

That is a healthy fear, or reverence for God.

But if you are trying to earn your way to Heaven, you will certainly live your life terrified of God. Let me show you:

If you do NOT have Jesus living in your heart... then of course you will have a terror of God.

OR, in some ways this is even MORE DANGEROUS: if you claim to be a Christian but you don't understand the Gospel, then OF COURSE you will be terrified of God...

Hear this again, like a broken record: The Gospel means that you come to Jesus Broken, confident that He and He alone will save you. But you HAVE TO start there. With the fact that you NEED JESUS.

If you do NOT acknowledge your brokenness before God, and you for some reason believe that you have done something in your own goodness and your own merits that you think MIGHT get you saved... then yes, its

obvious you would have a fear like that BECAUSE you are going to live your life wondering: AM I DOING ENOUGH?

But if you are a Christian, if you are a person who understands it is only because of WHAT JESUS DID FOR YOU, then living your life in fear of the final judgment is actually really destructive to your faith because what you are doing is you are living your Christian walk out, the whole time you are wondering "Is what Jesus did FOR ME enough?"

And that will kill the love of Christ in your life... you can't live out a love that you are constantly questioning.

you do not need to live your life in fear of the final judgment.

John spends the majority of this epistle helping understand that God is LOVE... That Jesus IS OUR ADVOCATE... That God is our Father and that God is LIGHT... all things that should give us CONFIDENCE to know that He is not looking to destroy us. He Loves us.

Having "the fear of God" in you does not mean that you are fearful of what God will one day do to punish you. Living your life like that is a destructive, and worthless way to live.

that fear is debilitating to your faith. In fact, beyond that:

Fear in general is absolutely debilitating...

Nothing in the world will cause you to NOT be the person who you are called to be, quicker than fear. It could be fear of failure, which a lot of us struggle with, including myself...

I at times am slow to dive into something that I know God told me to do, because I am afraid that I am going to fall on my face...

but my job is faith... God brings the growth... God brings the success. My job is to step out into whatever it is that He tells me to do. BUT IF you and I buy into the lie that our worth is found in the results that we produce, we

will live anxious and fearful lives. OUR JOB IS PLANTING AND WATERING... God takes care of the results.

Some people are afraid of getting hurt... so they don't take any risks... they don't pursue that relationship, they don't follow that passion...

Fear is really good at reminding us of our past... and if we let it, it keeps us down... out of the fear that we may repeat it, here is an example:

I told you guys before, but a couple months ago I got in a car accident. I was driving our van, and I had all four of the kids in the back. I was taking them to school, and luckily Dawn was not in the van when we got hit because we got hit right where she would have been sitting. Every one of us walked away unhurt, but the van was totaled.

The very next day, I had to go to Grand Rapids for a conference. I was riding with Pastor Austin, and Pastor Austin is a good driver, but yet the entire time I was totally on edge. The highway slowed down, and I kept feeling like he was going to hit the car in front of him... like, over and over, but he was just driving normal. Fear probably made me a really horrible road trip companion.

Something so routine... something so day to day like riding in the passenger seat of a car, was causing me anxiety, because fear was reminding me of what happened, and was convincing me that it is going to happen again.

Even now, when I pull up to the corner where I was hit, which happens every day because it was the street that I LIVE ON... every time I am there I get a sick feeling in my gut if I am trying to do anything besides turn right. Sometimes, I turn right and go all the way around to avoid the straight or left turn.

But hear me on this... we have to diagnose this for what it is, or we will never get better...

I had an experience that taught me that I should be afraid on that corner.

I was never afraid of that corner before that moment. But now I am.

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When babies are first born, they have two fears. They naturally are fearful of falling, and they naturally are afraid of loud noises. That is it. They aren't afraid of the dark or afraid of spiders or afraid of monsters in their closet. They aren't afraid of getting into a car accident or being attacked while being somewhere in a large group.

The only natural fears that are innate in all babies are falling, and loud noises. Both are fears that can be overcome with experience, yet what happens with 100% of people is life experiences cause us to have more fears, not less.

Every other thing that people come to fear, they had to learn to fear. They had to see something that caused them to believe that there was a reason to be afraid. They had to have an experience that they were afraid to relive or came close to having something happen that they fear may happen if they try again.

Let me explain this to you. John says "fear has to do with punishment" - another translation is "torment" - fear has to do with torment. It has to do with the things that haunt you... its the things that weigh on you and remind you of your past... and remind you what happened on that street corner when you were trying to go straight to avoid traffic, and got T-Boned by a speeding car with all of your kids in the van.

Fear is a tool of the Devil that has the potential to get you to quit before you even start.

Fear is the reason that we don't take certain parts of the Bible seriously, like when it says to invite the homeless poor into our home... because its our home... and what will that do to our home? And what if he takes something from our home? and what if our home smells bad after he is in it?

Fear ROBBS US of the LOVE we were created to live out.



Fear is enough to make the PRIEST AND THE LEVITE cross to the other side of the road when there was a man badly beat up, bloody, and left for dead on the side of the road... because blood and death = unclean.

And Priest and Levite = clean... Holy jobs... and if, when trying to help the man they happen to come in contact with his blood, according to the Levitical law, it would make them unclean. It would make them no longer able to hold their position...

How can someone who is unclean be a priest?

Fear Debilitates.

Fear of losing your job... or the fear driven by self preservation...

what if the robbers who jumped the man were waiting behind the trees to jump the next person too.

Fear.

Fear Debilitates us. It causes us to not be who we are destined to be.

And this issue that John is specifically addressing... the fear of the day of judgment...

how debilitating is it to be a Christian who every day wakes up and wonders if you are still a Christian?

I feel like something that makes the Devil really happy, is when he can convince us that we are too screwed up to help anybody else... or we are so afraid of sinning while we are out in "the world" that we never go out, and we never try and reach anyone... and we keep ourselves safe in our controlled environments like church services...

Let me say this clearly... I want people to come to church. I don't think that people come to church enough... It is challenging building a community, if people aren't committed to each other, and committed to take the time to

be together and to grow together... I believe whole hearted that the church is the body of Christ and it is the only thing that will change the world. It is God's redemptive plan for mankind to come to Him...

But more than even a place to gather, THE CHURCH IS A MISSION.

and if you are hiding behind church so that you don't have to be do anything for anyone else... if you are hiding behind church to avoid being the church and being the people on mission that God calls us to...

fear has robbed you of your purpose.

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there is a healthy fear... a thankful reverence that says "I need Jesus Christ... and without Him I am nothing..." there is a healthy fear... a thankful reverence that comes to Jesus and says "have mercy on me Lord, a sinner."

But then there is an unhealthy, terrified fear... that believes that God is out to get us, and that every time we make a mistake we have to start the whole thing over again... and again... its debilitating... it keeps us inside because we are afraid of what will happen when we go outside.

Fear has to do with punishment.

Watch this, and you will understand:

The word used for "punishment" is the Greek word "*kolasis*" - its a word that only gets used twice in the Bible, here, and in Matthew 25 when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats, so it is judgment language. It is obviously, clearly, judgment language.

and the idea behind what John is saying here, is this: We are fearful because we are afraid of the outcome. We are afraid what will happen in the end. But John doesn't want that for us. He wants us to have confidence that he is not selling us a used car that isn't going to start... IT WILL DO

WHAT IT WAS CREATED TO DO... likewise... GOD WILL DO WHAT GOD PROMISED HE WOULD DO.

If you study this word "*kolasis*" - it is actually a fascinating word. It comes from the word "*kolazō*" which literally means "to prune" as in, pruning a fruit tree.

When someone would of heard the word "*kolasis*" in the ancient world, depending on *when* in history it was... the first thing that they would likely think of would be some sort of a farmer pruning fruit... taking off the bad fruit in order to make room for the good fruit to grow.

And eventually, the word began being used as an image for judgment, because the concept was "being cut off" - because that was the process of getting rid of the fruit, you cut it off. And so in this judgment language, people have this inner fear in them that they are going to be *cut off*.

so by the time that John would have written it, that was a more common usage of the word *kolasis*... something being cut off.

But think about this line "fear has to do with *kolasis*..." - fear has to do with being cut off...

but the thought behind pruning is that you get rid of the bad SO THAT the good can come forth.

Think about this... pruning is for the sake of the whole. If you have an apple tree, early in the season you cut out the smaller apples so that there will be room for the larger, more healthy ones to grow... and suddenly you have a much better tree, that as a whole, BEARS MUCH MORE FRUIT.

now, turn your Bibles back to the Gospel of John, chapter 15...

Jesus says these words: (15:1-6)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **Already you are clean**

**because of the word that I have spoken to you.** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

This is saying the EXACT same thing. If the branch isn't bearing fruit, cut it off... But notice this line straight from the mouth of Jesus... to all of you who have ALREADY ACCEPTED HIM INTO YOUR HEARTS... YOU HAVE ALREADY REPENTED OF YOUR SINS... but yet you are tormented by your past and the possibility of what could happen in the future... Jesus says in verse 3:

**Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.**

Because of Jesus... you are clean. All you have to do is *abide*... because apart from Jesus, what does it say? You aren't even capable of bearing fruit. That is the Gospel... if you are going to be judged based on your own life and your own merits and your own goodness, then you are going to be cut off... because there will never be enough fruit.

But you AREN'T going to be judged that way... because Jesus gave His life for you... and IN HIM, AND ONLY IN HIM, will you bear any real fruit in our world.

But you ARE going to be TORMENTED in that way, even in this moment now, if you live your life hiding things that are supposed to be pruned to make room for something fruitful to come.

Let me help you with something... if you want your fear of punishment to go away, then repent.

You say to me "what?" where did that even come from? This whole series has been about love, and how we are supposed to love one another... YOU ARE RIGHT... EVEN THIS PASSAGE SAYS THAT...

it says “we love because He first loved us” and it says “you can’t say you love God who you CAN’T SEE if you don’t love your brother who you can SEE” - and we will come back to love again at the end...

that may seem like it came out of nowhere, but this is hugely important. If you have Jesus living in your heart, you do not need to live every day wondering about your Salvation... but you still need to repent.

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look, The Gospel is not an excuse to sin... the Gospel is that Jesus DIED FOR YOUR SINS...

But God IS the ultimate vinedresser. and He IS going to prune you... He is going to cut off all of the things that are blocking the good fruit from coming... and you can either repent of those things in your life now, and you can bring those things to light now, and God can prune those things now...

or you can bury those things... live your life in fear of punishment, and God will have to prune later. The Bible tells us that even in Heaven, our secrets will be broadcast. There is no hiding them. Jesus says it like this in Luke 8:17 - “For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”

So you can BRING IT TO LIGHT NOW... or God will have to bring it to light later... But at some point, there has to be a pruning. At some point, the garbage has to come off... at some point, everything comes to light. Prune now!!! Get rid of the stuff that is blocking you from your potential.

Think about it... if you prune the problem areas in your life NOW, how much room for growth does that leave? its an open canvas of hope!

In Luke 12 you get something really interesting.

Jesus is warning His disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees, because he says that they are hypocrites which literally means “stage actors” - they live

their lives as if they were putting on a show but yet the religion that they project is NOT an honest reflection of who they are...

and this is what Jesus says...

He says that NOTHING that we cover up will stay covered up... it will ALL be revealed... He says that even the things that we WHISPER will be proclaimed from the rooftops...

and then it actually goes into a passage about fear, and how people like *that*, who HIDE their sins, and cover things up... THEY DO HAVE A REASON TO FEAR THE DAY OF JUDGMENT... Because the way of Jesus is not a way of secrecy... it is a way of healing... You have heard me use this quote before, I don't know who said it, but "you are only as sick as your secrets"

Those are the things that will torment you.

John says this, (we read it a few weeks ago): 1 John 1:8 - "if we confess our sins He is Faithful and Just to forgive us of our sins" - *that is*, between us and God. We confess to God, God forgives us. But then James says this in James 5:16, that we confess to each other... FOR HEALING. So that we aren't carrying around this disease called guilt and this disease called "denial" pretending we are okay when we know deep deep deep down that we are NOT ok.

there is a middle ground to live in... where you aren't pretending like you don't sin at all... but you also aren't living your life as if God wants to smite you because you sinned.. and that middle ground is confession, and repentance, and it is there that we prune off the bad and make room for the good, so that we can live the most productive, fruitful lives now, shining the light of Jesus and living the love of Jesus in our world now, as we work to reconcile people back to God.

But John wants Christians to know that they do NOT need to fear.

Because we have an advocate.

It doesn't mean that there won't be a pruning... it doesn't mean that we won't have to have some awkward moments when we confess something we did wrong... and it doesn't mean that we won't have to face discipline sometimes...

But discipline and *torment* are two very different things.

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I try and reread the book of Proverbs every month, I know a lot of people do that because there are 31 Proverbs and so its really easy to read one per day, for whatever day of the month that it is. The thing that is so great about that is, you will read the same thing 12 times in a year and every time something new will stick out to you. Try it, you will be shocked at how loaded it all is.

And usually, it will just so happen to fit perfectly with your life at that time. That seems to happen to me a lot.

But a little over a week ago I had one of those moments, I was reading Proverbs 19 on June 19th... and a verse stuck out to me that had NEVER stuck out to me before, in all of the hundreds of times that I have likely read it.

It was verse 18, and what it says is:

“Discipline your son, for there is hope;”

then it ends by saying “do not set your heart upon putting him to death.”

and this really stood out to me... that the reason we discipline, is because there is hope...

and I realized that a world without discipline would be a world without hope.

Because it would be a world that thinks that it doesn't NEED discipline. And a world that thinks that it doesn't need discipline would be a world that thinks that it doesn't need Jesus.

But the writer of Proverbs tells us that even though your son may fall... Because THERE IS HOPE FOR HIM, you discipline him, and it shows him that there is a better way.

But something in us has gotten this idea that God wants to punish us - he wants to torment us, He wants to make us pay... WHEN JESUS ALREADY PAID.

yes, sometimes we are disciplined... because God loves us... because there is HOPE FOR US... God who is our Father... who John tells us directly in this letter that God is our Father... WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN NOW!!! and God, just like this Proverb says, He does not set His heart upon putting us to death."

He didn't create us to destroy us. He has a plan for us. He wants to use us to change the world... But the Devil knows that if he can debilitate you with fear... you will never be who God created you to be.

But notice this as we close... Look at the very beginning line again. This is very interesting: "by this is love perfected WITH US"

The goal here... John's big goal in this section, is to show us how we partner with God TO PERFECT LOVE in our world.

Read it again: "by this is love perfected WITH US"

it doesn't say "for us" and it doesn't say "in us" - it says WITH us. Which makes the last line: "as he is so also are we" make so much sense. John says that love is perfected IN THE WORLD, when YOU partner WITH God by living your life in this world in the way that Jesus lived when he walked in His.

We are in this thing together, on a mission to perfect love in our world. Perfect love casts out fear. If we can perfect our love... we can cast out fear... IF WE CAN TRULY UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE FOR US... we can remove the road block that is preventing us from being who we are supposed to be to the rest of the world.



Another way you could say it is “love that is complete”

Love that is complete CASTS OUT FEAR.

When, and ONLY WHEN you can get over the part of religion that has caused you anxiety and fear... ONLY THEN will you be able to be who you are supposed to be, in showing other people Jesus.

Listen... if the entire Gospel is ONLY about getting into Heaven... then the moment you hear it, you may as well die... because then you won't have to worry about screwing up anything else.

But the Gospel is NOT ONLY about getting into Heaven. The Gospel is ABOUT BRINGING HEAVEN TO EARTH NOW. So for the sake of love, cast off fear... get it out of your system... and BOLDLY take the Gospel to the places that it hasn't been... Boldly share the LOVE of Christ with the people who haven't heard it...

BOLDLY LIVE THE LOVE OF CHRIST to the people who aren't always easy to love... because they are the people that we exist for. And if we are afraid of them, we will never reach them. And if we are afraid of failure, we won't do anything.

But God has called you to something big. So lets walk faithfully in it.