

Victory Over Fear

Commentary for June 16, 2012 — A Biblical Reflection (1975) by Ernest L. Martin

We all admire those who have courage. The courageous treat the ordinary fears of life with respect but they are not overcome with them. But people who have deeply entrenched fears are in a very unhappy state. **"Fear has torment"** (1 John 4:18). No one should want to be frightened out of his wits. To be terrorized with fears is itself a frightful experience. But those of courage are able to deal effectively with the fears that seem to constantly affect us of the human race. We all need to muster the confidence and stout-heartedness to conquer fear.

A Proper Fear and Correction

There is, however, a type of fear which is good for man to have. When a woman cooks at the stove, she should be careful not to touch the electric grill else she get burned. The man who uses a chain saw must be prudent or he could injure himself seriously. Actually, having such "fears" are ways of showing love to self and to others. Those "fears" are healthy because there is no intimidation or terrorism being subjected upon man in those fears. Also, if a child "fears" to have chastisement by a parent, this can be proper because the parents love the child and will correct him to teach him not to run into the road and be maimed or killed.

The Bible says that even God chastens His children in like manner (Hebrews 12:5–11) and we ought to respect Him in reverence for His parental care. The **"fear of God"** results in our preservation and salvation. This type of fear does not (or should not) result in one being terror stricken. It is merely a veneration, a respect, an awe for the All-Powerful One who created us, sustains us, saves us. God is a loving parent who teaches us to be aware of the physical and spiritual dangers which lurk around us. He wishes us to respect Him and His ways so that we will not wander into the positions of pain, panic, or alarm. In this case, such a "fear" is both healthy and desirable for our overall happiness and security.

Fear Tactics in Religion

There are other types of fears, however, which should be vanquished from our minds. No one should ever be subjected to an overpowering dread or horror which can be used by men to sustain political or religious organizations. The use of fear tactics involving religious matters is especially bad. To intimidate people with threats and curses if they do not subscribe to the religious beliefs of others is barbaric and non-Christian. There are actually religious organizations which teach their members that they will suffer a horrifying tribulation, be taken over by demons, be cursed financially, get cancer and die a miserable death, and assuredly go to hell fire even if they leave the particular religious organization.

Though all things are possible, is it right for religious leaders to threaten people with such menacing prospects just because they join another Christian denomination? The whole procedure is unkind, unloving, and wrong. Indeed, it is contrary to the word of God. Even if

someone in the Christian *ekklesia* becomes disorderly and one has to withdraw fellowship to him, the Bible commands the Christian to **“count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”** (2 Thessalonians 3: 15). No one in his right mind would terrorize or intimidate his own brother in an effort to admonish him. Christian instruction must be motivated by love, concern, and respect for all people.

There are on the other hand, many **“preachers of righteousness”** who tell their congregations to read books like *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* or *Hitler’s Ovens* so that they will forever keep in their minds what can happen to those who fall away from their denomination. Some who are subject to such admonishment can be driven to mental anguish with those prospects. Mothers lay awake at night in fear for their children who may not be “converted.” Even grown men cower into subservience if physical punishment is graphically portrayed before them.

Though God does chastise, the attributes of God which dominate His character are those of mercy, faith, and love. This is what God glories in.

“But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am YHWH which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says YHWH.”

• **Jeremiah 9:24**

God does set rules for the Christian to obey and if they are broken He chastises — but He does it as a loving parent. Our own physical children should not go around with hysterical or terror-stricken fear of the punishment they may receive of us parents for broken rules. After all, good rules are to be obeyed because they are given in love and are in force for the children’s wellbeing and safety. Why do religious leaders teach that God is unlike a loving parent? Instead, some are prone to strike panic into the hearts of their congregations. They feel they will lose control of the people unless they preach the vengeance of God on anyone who questions their authority or dares to leave their denomination. Those who accept their threats become wedded to the organization by such fear. Their personal initiative can leave them.

The religious group assumes a paternalistic control over them. They must conform to the opinions of men who are their religious “authorities.” What this does is to breed spiritual childishness, defeatism, discouragement, dependence upon men, and it creates an unhealthy fear. It does not allow a man to have a real personal, one-on-one relationship with God. It is an environment which primarily promotes a dependence upon men, not God!

Love as a Disguise

Some ministers use the teaching of love as a disguise for fear. They say they are warning people not to question their authority because they love them and do not want to see them get cancer, go through the tribulation, or go to hell fire. This is a misuse of the love of the Bible and is not a true display of that virtue. Always examine the fruits of such preaching in the lives of the people and see if it results in an inner joy, peace, faith, and love. Real love always instills happiness and encouragement to the individual, not a frightening experience to scare him into submission to denominational beliefs.

Obedience through Love

Christians should want to please God by being obedient to Him. But the obedience should come because we love Him not because we are terrorized by Him. Love is lasting, but fear can be very ephemeral. If children obey parents solely out of fear, you can rest assured they will not perform the teachings of the parents when they are adult and no longer need be afraid. Children ought to be taught to practice all their normal duties out of love and respect for the parents and because they simply wish to please them. If our children can realize that it is we who first loved them and that we continually love them, they can then respond with a proper obedience. Any reward we can give them (such as an inheritance) should not be given because of legal “rights,” but because we love them.

Likewise, the husband or wife should want to serve the family because of love — not from a sense of duty or from fear to disobey. Christians should also serve God not simply for the sake of duty or because we fear Him, but because we love Him.

It is God who promises us salvation. But what a sad thing if we claim salvation just because it is our “right” or that we have demonstrated so much “fear” of Him that we have not stepped out of line. But this is not God’s way. He gives salvation to us because He loves us, not because we deserve it (Ephesians 2:8–10). Christians ought to be told that love (not fear and, intimidation) is the only lasting virtue which we should export to others. Indeed, if we ourselves can adopt true Christian love, we will banish all fear from our personal lives.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.”

• **1 John 4:18**

We, as Christians, must instill love into the minds of all we come in contact with. Love is the opposite of fear — the kind of fear which terrorizes. Really, to frighten the wits out of someone is showing hate to them. There is of course a proper “fear” which instructs your brother to be prudent around chain saws or heavily travelled highways. Our heavenly Father also chastens us as a parent and we should respect that discipline. But God chastises from an attitude of parental love. Any Christian can admonish his brother to be careful in his life relative to the manner in which he uses it (especially if his brother shows a reckless abandon with life), but it is not within our jurisdiction to heap curses upon a person’s head simply because he has different religious beliefs. Let any recrimination come from God because no religious leader has authority to exercise such judgments on anyone.

The Christian legal position in God’s eyes has been greatly misunderstood even by Christians themselves. Many are still fearing the judgment seat of God, when they ought to realize that all our sins were fully wiped clean by the blood of Christ at the cross. The future judgment for Christians is to receive rewards, or a lack of them, not punishments (1 Corinthians 9:17–18). We do not have to worry about the day of judgment.

“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.”

• **1 John 4:17**

Our boldness that we have, through love, prepares us for God's judgment day. We can be fearless because we are reckoned by God as being **"as He is."** Christ became accepted of God the Father as a perfect example of righteousness, and John says **"so are we in this world."** God now looks on all Christians as He does His own son. The Father loves the Son, and He loves us. That is why **"there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love"** (1 John 4:18). The Christian who has love and practices mercy need have no fear of the day of judgment. God says: **"mercy triumphs over judgment"** (James 2:13, Revised Standard Version). God is a God of mercy and if we are also merciful, we can exult triumphantly over all forms of judgment — even the judgment of God. This is what the Bible teaches.

Though God does chasten us, and this can be a fearful thing (Hebrews 10:31), yet we need to know that He has perfected and sanctified us forever (Hebrews 10:14). Our salvation is secure in Christ. **"And this is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day"** (John 6:39). Paul said that Christ **"shall also confirm you unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (1 Corinthians 1:8). **"Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"** (Philippians 1:6). God guarantees His love to all (John 3:16). He does not wish to terrorize us. He has demonstrated His overpowering love for us through Christ. We no longer need fear death or the judgment of God.

"That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"

• *Hebrews 2:14–15*

Christian Courage

Christians should have the courage to stand firmly on their own two feet before God. They should let no man or religious organization intimidate them by threats and curses. We no longer need fear any man regarding spiritual matters, and we should have the boldness to look the judgment of God squarely in the eye with utter confidence that Christ will accept us **"as He is"** (1 John 4:17). And though none of us is yet perfect, we can know that our salvation is secure in Christ.

And especially, let us never as mere human beings step out of our bounds of authority and consign a person to the great tribulation, financial ruin, some dread disease, to the possession of demons, or to hell fire. Is this love? Is it mercy? Is it Christian? We have no authority to take the place of God and attempt to ascribe such judgments to our fellowmen. There is only one thing we owe men, and that is to love them (Romans 13:8). **"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"** (2 Timothy 1:7).

Love should replace all hate for the Christian! Fear has been defeated in Christ! Have courage! Christ conquered all things that are against us. God give us the mind to see this truth.

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