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“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” (I John 4:18).

## The Fearful Person

**Central Truth:** Love for God and people calms the fears of life.

**L160. Date:** December 1988. **Text:** I John 4:11-21. **Topic:** Fear

Is fear good or bad? Neither. It is neutral. The good or bad in fear is determined by what causes it and how we respond to it.

It is good to fear God. *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”* (Proverbs 9:10). It is bad to fear man or the circumstances of earth. *“The fear of man bringeth a snare”* (Proverbs 29:25). It is not a question of whether we fear, but of whom or what we fear and how we respond to it.

Fear is protective when we turn from it to trust God. Psalm 56:3 reacts, *“What time I am afraid. I will trust in thee.”* But fear can be painful if one does not turn to the Lord, *“because fear hath torment”* (I John 4:18). Do you turn to God in confident trust when you are afraid?

Fear is the consequence of human sin. Adam and Eve had no fear of God until they had disobeyed Him in eating the forbidden fruit in Eden. Adam testified after that, *“I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid”* (Genesis 3:10). Release from fear comes only when there is assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God.

Memorize I John 4:18 as you continue this study.

## I. DEFINITION OF FEAR

As used in the Bible, the term has two meanings. (1) Fear is the feeling of anxiety and agitation caused by the presence of real or imagined danger, evil, or pain. That secular meaning is called fear, dread, fright, alarm, dismay, terror, panic, etc. Just reading that list makes one uncomfortable. No wonder John wrote, *“Fear hath torment”* (I John 4:18).

(2) Fear is a feeling of reverence toward God. It is called reverence, awe, wonder, respect, veneration, and love in its spiritual meaning.

“*The fear of the LORD*” in Proverbs 9:10 is distinct from “*the fear of man*” in Proverbs 29:25. Never think of the fear of God in human terms. Our relationship to Him is that of a trusting child with his loving Father.

## II. FACETS OF FEAR

Human fear begins with a perception of danger, which may be signaled by a strange or unexpected noise, the sight of something that threatens, or the failure of a person or thing which one trusts. The emotions are excited.

A physical response follows the emotion of fear. The autonomic nervous system is aroused. That results in a rapid or unusually strong heartbeat, rapid or shallow breathing, sweating, muscular tension, dryness of the mouth, a change in voice quality and strength, and increased adrenaline in the blood stream to strengthen a person for fight or flight. In lesser cases, fear produces an inner tension and uneasiness. Man is not designed emotionally or physically to live constantly in fear without suffering harm.

## III. KINDS OF FEAR

**A. There is a paralyzing fear.** It makes a person incapable of doing what he should. Israel was filled with fear when she heard the report of the spies sent into Canaan (Numbers 13, 14). The people wept all night because they dared not begin the conquest of Canaan as God commanded (Numbers 14:1). Their fear paralyzed their obedience. What a tragic sin!

**B. There is a protective fear.** Not all fear is bad. It is wise to fear a poisonous serpent or a vicious animal. Fear is wrong when it becomes unreasoning and hinders a person in the duties of life or in his relationship with God.

**C. There is an illogical fear.** A person may fear when there is no basis for it. That indicates that he is not trusting God as he should. It is an illness which should be treated with Christian, Bible-based counseling.

## IV. SINFUL FEAR

**A. It is sinful to fear when there is nothing to fear.** Israel sinned against God when she was afraid to obey Him by entering Canaan (Numbers 14:9). The people feared because they did not believe God's promises. No

wonder God condemned the nation to wander forty years in the wilderness. Be warned!

**B. It is sinful to fear rather than to trust God.** Learn a lesson from David. He was oppressed daily by his enemies; they fought against him with the intention of destroying him. In that situation he testified, *“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee”* (Psalm 56:3). Meet your fear with this affirmation of faith: *“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation”* (Isaiah 12:2). Why fear when you can trust?

**C. It is sinful to fear because of guilt.** Guilt brought fear to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8-10) and to every sinner since then. Guilt creates such fear that *“the wicked flee when no man pursueth”* (Proverbs 28:1). Guilt warns of punishment. Punishment brings fear. Therefore, *“the sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?”* (Isaiah 33:14).

Why bear the burden of fear? Confess your sin and trust God. *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength”* (Isaiah 26:3, 4). Remember Psalm 56:3.

## V. HOW TO HANDLE FEAR

Matthew 14:22-31 is an excellent case study on how to handle fear. It reports the fear of the disciples as they were in a boat, caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Consider these three principles as they explain how to handle fear.

**A. See things as they really are, not as they appear.** The disciples were in a severe storm at least three miles from the shore of the Sea of Galilee. All they could see was the raging water; all they could hear were the howling winds and their own cries of fear. They thought that they were alone. They did not know that Jesus was near, coming to them in the storm.

Do not focus on the storm when you are in trouble. Look at God's commands and promises instead. The disciples were obeying the clear command of Jesus when the storm struck (Matthew 14:22). His directions brought them into the storm. They had to trust Him to bring them through the storm. Do you see an application to your life?

**B. See Jesus in the midst of your fears.** He ordains your circumstances (verse 22). The best way is not always the easy way. He knows that. What you fear may be just what He ordains for your growth in

faith. Do not be dismayed. He watches over you in your circumstances and comes to you in the midst of them — even at three o'clock in the morning (verse 25).

The storm ceased when Jesus entered the boat with His disciples (Matthew 14:32). However, that is not always the case. He may or may not change your fearful circumstances, but He will change you. You will grow spiritually, and that is even better.

**C. See Jesus and calm your fears.** Hear His words in your storm, “*Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid*” (Matthew 14:27). God's “*fear not*” is recorded over one hundred times in the Bible. Multitudes of God's people testify, “*I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*” (Psalm 34:4). He is still in the business of calming storms and assuring hearts.

Be warned of the danger of fear. It weakens you (Leviticus 26:36; Luke 21:26). It leads to other sins (Matthew 26:69-75). It takes away your testimony (John 9:18-23). It causes injustice (John 19:12-16). It leads you away from God with tragic consequences following. Flee from fear, and trust God with all your heart.

## **VI. THE REMEDY FOR FEAR**

**A. Remember that God loves you** (I John 4:7-21). His love is a protective shield over you. Difficulties in life do not mean that God loves you any less. Trust Him in trouble.

**B. Remember that God lives in you** (I John 4:12-16). You are never alone in your trials. Whatever happens to you happens to the Christ who lives in you (Galatians 2:20). There is no demand made on you apart from His strength in you. Be of good courage.

**C. Express the love of God in you** (I John 4:18-21). The Holy Spirit broadcast his love in you when you came to personal faith in Christ (Romans 5:5). If you give your time and effort to helping people who are in trouble, you will soon forget about your own troubles.

**D. Fear God more than you fear any other person or thing.** Express often the assurance, “*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*” (Psalm 27:1). When you fear (reverence) God enough you will fear (dread) no other. The fear of God is the end of the fear of man.

**E. Cast your fears on the Lord.** “*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all*

*your care upon him; for he careth for you*” (I Peter 5:6, 7). Think about that statement: “*He careth for you.*” It means He cares for you watchfully and affectionately. Watching over you is not His duty; it is His delight. Glory!

When demolishing a penitentiary in British Columbia, Canada, workers discovered that though the gates were of steel and the windows barred, the outer walls were woodboard covered with clay and paper, painted to look as if the walls were thick metal. No one attempted to break through them because of their appearance. Just so, your fears can be prison walls for you. But they are strong only in appearance. You can move through them to freedom in Christ.

### **Questions**

1. What is the secular meaning of fear?
2. What is the sacred meaning of fear?
3. Why is a continuing state of fear harmful to us physically?
4. Why is such a state of fear harmful to us spiritually?
5. How is sin related to our fears?
6. What is the solution to fear in Isaiah 26:3, 4?
7. What does Matthew 14:22-31 teach us about our fears?
8. Why is fear dangerous to us?
9. What is the remedy for your fears?
10. How can you apply Psalm 56:3 to your life this week?