

THE ROOT OF FEAR HAS BEEN PULLED UP

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If you don't know what fear is, you're not a normal human being. The world is reeling with it today. And there are more fears: terrorists in Pakistan, etc. What Luke says (21:25, 26) is so true right now: "Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth."

You can't escape this anxiety unless you live on the planet Mars. But you can escape the fear, by observing the Sabbath. The Sabbath day is a day free from fear. It's a day of heaven, come down to earth. God's presence is in the Sabbath day. He Himself set it apart, sanctified it, blessed it. In the Sabbath you draw nearer Sabbath after Sabbath, to Him. Because His presence is in the Sabbath, your heart becomes filled with peace and the fear is expelled.

You may say, "Oh, that's only for one day; soon as the sun goes down at the end of the Sabbath, here comes all the fear again as we read, listen, or view the daily news!"

No, that's not true; the peace of the Sabbath calms you and remains with you by faith as you go through the new week, on, until the next Sabbath. The commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day . . ." You start remembering the next Sabbath as soon as the sun goes down Sabbath evening. And because of the joy of Sabbath-keeping you can

sing, “Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. There is a river, the streams of which shall make glad the city of God” (Ps. 46:3-5).

What makes bad news bad is the presence of fear. Fear is the most powerful negative emotion known to man and animals. From our earliest conscious moment, this nameless dread of the unknown oppresses us. Animals are constantly on guard against their natural enemies. All through life, even to our dying moments, we live constantly on the threshold of fear. Happy and secure one moment, we can be in terror the next.

Fear with its concomitant anxiety is the substratum of human existence in all ages. Fear too deep for us to understand can make us sick, gnawing at the vitals of the soul until even one’s physical organs weaken and become susceptible to disease. Years may go by before we can see or feel the disease, but at last the weakened organs break down, and doctors must go to work to try to repair the damage that fear has caused.

This universal fact of human nature is recognized in one of the most joyful statements of good news to be found. Christ delivers us from the bad news of fear: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Hebrews 2:14, 15, NIV.

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Galatians 6:14. The good news of that cross will be a never-ending joy.

be his manufactured threat of God's eternal condemnation of all who dare stand up for truth.

This threat of starvation and of economic and social ostracism will terrify multitudes who have never learned agape by kneeling with Jesus in His Gethsemane. But there will be a "remnant" who face this terror-inducing threat with holy clamness. They are described first of all as those who "names are. . . written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Verse 8. Fellowship with Christ in His capacity as the crucified Lamb is the secret of their fearlessness. They are also identified as "they that keep the commandments of God." Revelation 14:12. True keeping of the commandments is the experience of *agape*, for "love [*agape*] is the fulfilling of the law." Romans 13:10.

3. John adds another insight as to how love conquers fear: "Herein is our love [*agape*] 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. Without such love, it is inevitable that one should cringe in terror when confronted with ultimate judgment. With it, he walks fearlessly into God's presence, past all the holy angels, utterly unashamed and unafraid. We are like Marines who have fought side by side in the direst, most dangerous battles, unfazed by their perils. Our faith-participation "with Christ" in His atonement has uprooted fear from our souls, because the self-centered motivation is uprooted. Thus there is nothing left in the soul that the presence of judgment can burn in condemnation.

So long as we know that fear of death, just so long are we "held in slavery." Generally speaking, the more one enjoys life and the healthier he or she is in mind and body, the greater his abhorrence of death.

Death is not simply like going to sleep. Sleep is welcome rest, but death can be terrifying. It is the conscious devastating dissolution of all that makes the individual a person. This means that every threat to our uniqueness or worth as a person has overtones of that ultimate threat, "fear of death," from which Christ came to deliver us. Anything that diminishes our personhood is an aspect of that "fear of death" that humans know "all their lives." The constant sense of insecurity that plagues many humans in one form or another is what Hebrews is talking about.

Don't let anyone kid you into thinking you don't have to face this problem. If you're human, you will have to come to terms with it. Even kings and presidents know it. When a United States president was faced with the prospect of losing the presidency in disgrace, he almost came unglued. So would any intelligent person in similar circumstances, unless, of course, he has fully appropriated the "good news" we are talking about. Whether one is a teenager or in his nineties, the diminishing of one's sense of self-worth is an annihilating experiencing, and all degrees of it are an approach to that ultimate diminishment—death.

How *Agape*-Love Frees Us From the Slavery of
Fear

Since the sacrifice of Christ is a perfect demonstration of *agape*, it is the perfect cure for the slavery of fear. “There is no fear in love [*agape*]; but perfect love casteth our fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love [*agape*].” 1 John 4:8. The reason this is true is that *agape* confronts ultimate fear and vanquishes it, and, in the process, all lesser fears are overcome.

Three realities underscore this truth:

1. When He became man, Christ became our personal representative or substitute, more so than any lawyer represents a client in a criminal court case. The Bible says that because of Adam’s sin we all die. See 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12. Thus we inherited from Adam, not only death, but the slavery to the fear of death. The whole human race was “in Adam.” This is evident from the fact that without Adam we wouldn’t exist. But the “good news” immediately asserts, “Even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:22. Christ’s victory over death and the fear of death becomes our victory by virtue of this corporate oneness with Him that He has effected for all. (Remember, God is no respecter of persons—all share in these benefits unless they choose not to.)

So real is this experienced oneness with Christ that Paul is able to say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20. Faith is the glue that cements us to Christ’s experience, as it were; something more intimate than sympathy or even

As surely as day follows night, this new motivation expels the root of fear. When faith identifies with Christ, one never again feels alone and bereft, for we have participated by faith in Christ’s death-grapple with the enemy in that awful hour on Calvary. Christ has built the bridge that spans the chasm of eternal death, now we cross over it “in Him.”

How *Agape* Alone Can Meet the Final Test

Bible prophecy tells us that fear and terror will constitute the final test of “the mark of the beast.” So exquisite will be Satan’s perfected method of temptation that he will sweep into his ranks all who at that time remain susceptible to terror imposed by the slavery of fear. “He causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” Revelation 13:16, 17.

Modern society, uprooted from its attachment to the land and agriculture, huddled in vulnerable megalopolises, utterly dependent for survival on economic integration, with peoples’ minds conditioned by clever mass media presentations that major in horror movies and political herding—all will combine to make death the most fear-inducing threat that man has ever known. And we can be sure that the author of the mark of the beast will also concoct a terror-inspiring spiritual fear induced by his fiendish counterfeits of a false christ and a false holy spirit. Included in that final test will

and “for every man” felt the unspeakable horror of its direct essence, yet He conquered it totally.

The True Dimension of Christ’s Love for Us

With the deepest reverence, we might say that Christ figuratively went to hell and came back. The apostle Peter at Pentecost seems to have recognized that this was the true nature of His sacrifice: “God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” Acts 2:24, KJV. The King James Version renders Peter’s quotation from the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 16:10 as follows: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” “Hell” (Hebrews *sheol*) here means the grave. When Christ “poured out his soul unto death” (Isaiah 53:12), He felt that His Father had “forsaken” Him forever.

There is no need for any of us to try to duplicate Christ’s sacrifice, for it would be impossible to do. He was the infinite Son of God, and we are mere creatures whose sacrifice (if we could make it) would be meaningless. We can never be co-saviours of ourselves. But we can appreciate His sacrifice for us. This burns out of our souls our petty little self-centered motivations. Amazed and awed by the love that led Jesus to His cross, we “pour contempt” on our efforts to avoid eternal death for fear of its punishment and to win Paradise because of its rewards. Suddenly an entirely new motivation grips our souls—the passion to honor and glorify the One who redeemed us at such infinite cost.

empathy unites us to Him, and His death to sin and fear becomes our death to sin and fear. This identification is also revealed in Paul’s expression, “If one died for all, then were all dead.” 2 Corinthians 5:14. In this sense, all died with Him, and by faith we experience His death and victory over our enemy. Faith is what enables us to feel how Jesus felt when He went through the cross experience. Faith actually enters into His love, and this is how fear is expelled from our hearts.

The Bible does not teach that Christ’s substitution for us excuses us from understanding and appreciating what He went through for us. He asked His drowsy disciples to “watch with me one hour” and was disappointed that they had so little interest in His experience, that they were like children in the most fateful hour of earth’s history, the climax of their Master’s agony. See Matthew 26:40. The most closely we can identify with Him in that “hour” when He conquered fear, the more complete will be our release from fear. Every person truly crucified with Christ scorns fear.

Since Satan is the author of fear and employs terror as one of his most effective weapons to try to force our compliance with his will, it is obvious that he wants to hide from us a discovery of the truth of Christ’s cross. It was there that Satan was “cast down.” Revelation 12:10. One of his prime lies is that it is impossible for us to understand what happened when Christ died for us. He wants us to be content with an inadequate understanding of this means. It is true that as finite humans we can never fully appreciate the sacrifice of Christ. But to be

content now not to grow in our understanding and appreciation of it is a cop-out. Our intelligent identification with Christ in His death makes possible our sharing in His conquest of fear and death.

Not only does Christ hunger for our closer fellowship with Him, He is disappointed when we make little effort to appreciate what it cost Him to redeem us. How would you feel if you had risked your life to save a loved one, and then he flippantly thanks you with the superficial appreciation appropriate for picking up a nickel he had dropped? One of the reasons many are to a large extent still in slavery to fear is that they understand and appreciate Christ's sacrifice on the cross all too little!

2. Our personal faith in Christ makes possible our sharing with Him His victory over fear. We all know how we tend to identify with an actor in a movie or a drama. Many people go so far in identifying that they weep unashamedly in sympathy with the actor or actress in difficulty. There is nothing redemptive in sharing such experiences vicariously, but when "we see Jesus" in His sacrificial agonies for us, there is redemption. Identification with Him brings healing to the soul. The agenda for Christ's battle to conquer fear and death is outlined as follows:

"We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain

of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . . Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; 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 2:9-11, 14, 15.

If we were to "taste" our own death ourselves, the poison of it would do us in forever, for there is no hope of a resurrection after "the second death." See Revelation 2:11; 20:14. Such a final death involves a horror of utter condemnation that is totally destructive to human personality. Since human beings are finite creatures, in no way can they endure total destruction for an infinite duration. To hold such a view is a contradiction of terms. It is the consciousness of being condemned in judgment and shut out from light and life forever that is the real pain of the second death.

Jesus "tasted" this death "for every man" as He hung on the cross in the darkness. Himself the Blessed One, He was "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Galatians 3:13. The feeling of being forsaken by His Father was like drinking a cup of sorrow that was unsweetened by the tiniest taste of hope.

Although Jesus feared death (see Hebrews 5:7), it is not right to say that He ever yielded to this fear. He faced the fear of eternal separation from God,