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God's Love Drives Out Fear **1 John 4:13-21**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit draws us to Jesus is Proverbs 3:

We know that we are in him and he in us by this: he has given us from his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. And we have known and believed the love which God has in connection to us.

God is love, and the one who remains in this love remains in God and God remains in him. His love has reached its goal with us in this: we have courage in regard to Judgment Day because in this world just as Jesus is we also are. There is no fear in this love, but this goal-attaining love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears has not reached the goal of this love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God also loves his brother. (1 John 4:13-21)

This is the Word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

How scary that first day of school looked as little Johnnie thought about it the day before! But then Mommy said that she'd come with him. How much better he felt! A mother's love can drive away a child's fears whether that's about the first day of school, a trip to the dentist, or a banged up knee.

Even more than a mother's love, God's love drives out fear. That's the goal God's love works to achieve in you and me. His love drives out our fear. His love drives out fear so that we have courage to anticipate Judgment Day and so that we have courage to love our brothers and sisters. Through the word of God before us today may the Holy Spirit lead us to marvel at the unique greatness of God's love, so that as his love fills our hearts it drives out fear.

A. So that we have courage to anticipate Judgment Day

The text says, "... that we will have confidence on the day of judgment ..." (1 John 4:17 NIV11). Judgment Day does not conjure up the terror for modern man

that it once did. An ancient hymn says, “Day of wrath, O day of mourning! See fulfilled the Prophet’s warning Heav’n and earth in ashes burning. Oh, what fear man’s bosom rendeth When from heav’n the Judge descendeth On whose sentence all dependeth!” (“Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning” The Lutheran Hymnal 607:1, 2). But denying the reality of what’s coming will not stop it from happening. Maybe those who say there will be no Judgment Day don’t feel the fear right now, but that fear will burst out when the Judge rends the heavens and comes down.

What about you? So often like the world around us, we fail to think about Judgment Day. We’re busy with the here and now. And to be honest, the here and now is usually usually doesn’t feel that bad to us. Even when we complain, we still have enough good things in our lives that we’d rather continue with our present happiness than think about Judgment Day. That reluctance reveals a deep-down fear. Suppressing fear is not the same as driving it out. It’s still there ready to burst.

And what does your conscience tell you? Some have dulled their conscience. They imagine they aren’t all that bad. Their good effort should count for something. Besides, God can’t be all that strict, can he? Or so they tell themselves.

But you, dear Christian, have God’s commandments to sharpen your conscience. You know that he judges not only our actions and words but also the thoughts and attitudes, the wants and desires, the emotion, will, and feelings that go on deep inside of us. All is laid bare before him. Our fig leaf of so-called good efforts is stripped away. We stand exposed and naked in the filth of our sinfulness. Our conscience trembles in fear. What punishment will the Judge hand down?

Even now, how often don’t we wonder and worry: Is God happy enough with me? Do we feel pushed to do good so that God doesn’t get upset with us? Do we cringe at how critical he’ll be of our behavior? All that is driven by fear—fear of punishment. It’s that fear of Judgment Day, just toned down a bit. But that makes it all the more deceptive.

When we view our own selves through God’s holy Law, there ought to be nothing but complete and utter terror. I, a sinner, have broken the commands of the Almighty. I have failed to obey. I have rightly earned the punishment of death and hell where the fire is never extinguished and the maggot never dies. What punishment! What fear!

But God’s love drives out fear. It doesn’t dilute our fear so that we worry a little less and have some sort a sense of semi-security. It drives out fear. God’s love doesn’t give us a somewhat hopeful attitude that God might be lenient. It drives out fear. God’s love doesn’t numb our conscience so that we think that sin isn’t quite so bad and so don’t fear his punishment quite so much. No, God’s love drives out fear.

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18 NIV11), the text says. Yes, God’s love drives out fear. Fear has to do with

punishment, the punishment our sins have rightly earned for you and me. But what did God's love do for you? The text declares, "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14 NIV11). He sent his own dear Son to save us from the punishment our sins deserve.

How did the Son save you from that punishment? John told us a few verses before the text in 1 John 4:10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10 NIV84). The divine, almighty, eternal Son sacrificed himself to pay for your sin. His suffering and death count as your punishment. His blood redeems you. And since he is the Son of God, he did this work perfectly. There's no punishment left for you to suffer. He suffered it all for you. How that gives us courage to anticipate Judgment Day! His love drives out that fear of punishment.

Rather than standing before the Judge exposed and naked, your faith clothes you with the white robes of Jesus Christ. That's why John can write, "In this world we are like Jesus" (1 John 4:17 NIV11). Through Baptism you were clothed with Christ. As long as you continue in faith, God does not look on you as the naked sinner you were original born as. Rather he sees his own Son, Jesus Christ. How that drives out our fear! How that gives us courage to anticipate Judgment Day! God's love has clothed you with Christ! We stand before the Judge clothed with Jesus.

But what about those doubts? Could God really love someone like me? But that question totally misses how unique God's love is. Human love, even a mother's love, is attracted by something in the other person. A mother is drawn to the baby because it's her child, whether by birth or by adoption. A mother loves her own children, even if she doesn't like children in general. Their hers. And in other cases human love is even more dependent on something in the other person attracting us to them. Isn't that how we choose our friends and spouse? Something about them attracts us. How different God's love is!

How could God love me, sinner that I am? Because God's love does not depend on anything in me or you. It depends entirely on who God is. And this profound truth John expresses in those simply words, "God is love" (1 John 4:16 NIV11). That's who he is. That's why he sent his Son as the Savior of the world. The world has nothing to attract God's love. The world is very evil, corrupted by sin, because of each of us sinners who live in it. But "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (John 3:16), because that is who he is. God is love. Since God so loved this world, that means he loved you, sinner though you are. He sent his Son for you, because of who he is. Remain in his love. For his love drives out fear so that you have courage to anticipate Judgment Day. And that courageous love overflows in the way we treat others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

B. So that we have courage to love our brothers and sisters

The text says, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 NIV11). When we know and rely on the love God has for us, we love others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar” (1 John 4:20 NIV11), John writes. It’s easy to say you love God. It’s hard for someone else to disprove that, since we cannot see God. But when we love God, that love shows itself especially to those who are also God’s children through faith in Jesus. We’re family. And the opposite holds true as well. If we do not love God’s family, how can we really be loving God who gave his own dear Son to die for them? “For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister” (1 John 4: 20, 21 NIV11). For you see, when we love God, we want to obey his commands.

But even a brother or sister in Christ can leave us feeling hurt by what they have said or done or leave us feeling neglected by their indifference. How can I love them after the way they’ve treated me?

Remember God’s love. He loved you despite the way you treated him. He loved you and sent his Son as the sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world, including yours and mine. He did the same for the person whom you are struggling to love. So be bold and courageous in your love. For God’s love drives out not only the fears of Judgment Day but also that fear of putting ourselves out there, that fear that others might take advantage of our love, that fear that others might use our love against us. You have God himself at your side. Remember his love.

Be courageous in your love. Don’t be driven by the fear that if you don’t love them then God will stop loving you. That kind of fear-driven response fails to believe and trust the love that God has for us in Christ. Rather marvel at how much he loves you, not because of who you are but because of who he is. God is love. Marvel at the testimony recorded in the Scriptures that declare the Good News that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, your Savior. Marvel that through this testimony God gives you the Holy Spirit who produce in you the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of love. Yes, love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Love them because God first loved you. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.