

1 John 4:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

This verse presents the paradox that defines Christian maturity: the inverse relationship between love and fear. The Greek word 'agape' (divine love) represents God's self-giving, covenant love demonstrated through Christ's sacrifice. 'Perfect love casteth out fear' employs the word 'ekstasis' in translation principle - meaning to drive out, expel, or displace completely. Fear (Greek 'phobos') here denotes a specific spiritual fear: the fear of judgment, rejection, or separation from God that characterizes those who have not fully apprehended God's character. John establishes that love and fear are fundamentally incompatible emotional states when the love is mature and established. The phrase 'There is no fear in love' is absolute - a categorical statement that where authentic agape exists, existential fear of divine judgment cannot coexist. This is not mere sentiment but theological reality: when we comprehend that God has loved us with infinite, self-sacrificial love (cf. John 3:16), fear of His judgment becomes irrational. The believer's fear gives way to 'perfect love' - which means love that has reached its completion, maturity, or full expression in our understanding and practice.

Historical Context

John writes this epistle in the late first century (approximately 90-95 AD) to combat early Gnostic heresies that denied Christ's incarnation and the reality of loving community. His audience comprised second or third-generation Christians facing persecution and existential anxiety about their standing with God. In this

context, John's emphasis that God is love (1 John 4:8) was revolutionary - it contradicted the capricious, wrathful deity concepts prevalent in Greco-Roman religious thinking. The Roman Empire under Domitian (81-96 AD) intensified persecution of Christians, creating genuine fear of execution, property loss, and family separation. Yet John argues that the Christian's understanding of Christ's redeeming love should enable transcendence of this fear. The epistle also addresses perfectionist anxieties - the fear that any sin disqualifies believers from God's love. John's theology of 1 John 1:8-9 (God's ongoing cleansing) combines with this passage to assure believers that love persists despite human failure. Early church fathers like Augustine interpreted this passage to mean that God's love expressed through Christ's atonement provides the foundation for believers to reorient their deepest emotions from fear to confident trust. The passage became foundational for understanding Christian psychology - that belief shapes emotions more than emotions shape belief.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What is the distinction between the fear of God (reverence) and the fear that love casts out (terror of judgment)?
2. How does understanding Christ's sacrificial love specifically address the existential fear of judgment and separation from God?
3. In what ways does 'perfect love' require maturity and development, suggesting that immature believers may not yet experience fear's departure?
4. How might John's audience under Domitian's persecution have found comfort in this verse despite their very real physical danger?

5. What does this passage suggest about the relationship between theological knowledge ('knowing') and emotional transformation ('feeling')?

Interlinear Text

φόβος	οὐ	ἔστιν	ἐν	τῇ	ἀγάπῃ	ἀλλ'	ἡ	τελεία	ἀγάπῃ
fear	no	There is	in	G3588	love	but	G3588	perfect	love
G5401	G3756	G2076	G1722		G26	G235		G5046	G26
ἔξω	βάλλει	τὸν	φόβος	ὅτι	ὁ	φόβος	κόλασιν	ἔχει	
out	casteth	G3588	fear	because	G3588	fear	torment	hath	
G1854	G906		G5401	G3754		G5401	G2851	G2192	
ὁ	δὲ	φοβούμενος	οὐ	τετελείωται	ἐν	τῇ	ἀγάπῃ		
G3588	G1161	He that feareth	no	is	in	G3588	love		
		G5399	G3756	G5048	G1722		G26		

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 1:7 (Love): For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Romans 8:15 (Parallel theme): For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

1 John 4:12 (Love): No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Hebrews 12:28 (Parallel theme): Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

James 2:19 (Parallel theme): Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Psalms 119:120 (Parallel theme): My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

Job 15:21 (Parallel theme): A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.

Psalms 73:19 (Parallel theme): How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.

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