The Problem of Fear [1 John 4:18]

Introduction

All of us battle against fear. It is one of Satan's main weapons. In Acts 4:29-30 we read the prayer of the church for boldness in view of Peter and John's problems with the authorities. This is a key prayer for the Majority World. The word 'boldness' (parresia) means confidence. The opposite of confidence and boldness is fear. What delivers us from fear is love.

How can we discern if fear is creeping in? Often there is a realisation that we **know** what the will of God is and we are very reluctant to do it.

- There may be a slow build up of resistence to God's will for fear of the consequences.
- There may be an eagerness, desire and longing to do God's will coupled with a tremendous dread that you will never be able to do it.
- The whole atmosphere in the Majority World can often generate in our hearts a spirit of fear and timidity. Control by the Evil One is achieved through fear and intimidation.

1 John 4:18 may be God's answer to this problem. It suggests three things:

1. **The Problem**: Fear is a Torture
2. **The Remedy**: "There is no fear in love."
3. **The Certainty**: "Perfect love ejects fear."

1. The Problem: Fear is a Torture

The Greek word means a torment, punishment or sense of restraint. It is punishment that is either retributive or disciplinary. So it is not fear of something. The fear itself is a torture. In life in the Majority World fear is often the dominating emotion in our hearts and minds.

We all know something about fear. We know the tyranny of fear and the imprisonment and restrictions that come from being bound by fear. What constitutes the essence of fear? What is the basis of fear? What underlies fear?

Fear is the sentinel of life – the self-protective instinct that gives warning of danger. However, this instinct is in a 'fallen' state and so fear may be an indication that all is not well in our relationship with God.

Three Basic Factors

a) An insufficiency in myself of which I am aware

b) An imagination that is actively anticipating trouble

c) An intention of which I am afraid

a) I am afraid because of an insufficiency in myself of which I am aware.

- The pathway of the will of God is going to be difficult:
  - It will be lonely.
  - Language learning and cultural acquistion are hard.
  - The demands of incarnational ministry seem impossibly high.
- You look at your own heart and your experience and find utter insufficiency – your inability to do God's will – true of Moses and most others since!

- You feel not only miserable, but tortured by fear – fear of failure. This feeling is similar to being in a sinking boat and knowing that you can't swim! You are tortured by your insufficiency or inability. This is very common among workers in the Muslim World.

b) I am afraid because my imagination is actively anticipating trouble

- We picture situations that may never happen.
- We endure in our imaginations a torture that we may never encounter. This is a bit like having an injection or going to the dentist. The pain we endure before the event is often far greater than the actual pain of the event.
- Our imaginations are active and our thoughts are busy magnifying problems. Soon fear begins to torture us. Once the event is over we sigh with relief and say, 'That wasn't nearly as bad as I had thought it would be!'
- We anticipate problems with police, authorities, security and all …ists.

c) I am afraid because of the intentions of others that I do not trust

- We find ourselves in the control of others and we are not sure of their intentions towards us. This may be similar to when you were at school and you were told to go and see the headmaster. You were not sure of his intentions towards you! The fact of this uncertainty made the time of waiting miserable as you anticipated the worst.
- Remember the emotions when a special friendship with someone of the opposite sex came into your life. Perhaps this was love? You know your own intentions but you are very uncertain of the intentions of the other person. Is this just a casual friendship or is it the fulfillment of all your dreams? The uncertainty is pure torture.

So there is a complexity in the tyranny of fear. Whatever is causing the fear, it hinders us from going farther in our relationship with God. It makes us extremely hesitant to do His will.

2. The Remedy: No Fear in Love

We read not only that fear is a tyranny and a torture. We also read: ***"There is no fear In love!"*** The Greek is very emphatic – 'Fear – there is none in love!' Why is there no fear in love?

a) With respect to our inabilities/insufficiencies there is the lavishness of the gift of God's love.

When you are being tortured in this way, ask yourself, *'Do I really think God is going to leave me to handle this situation alone?' 'Do I think God will fail to supply what I need?'* Imagine a girl from a very poor background marrying a very rich man who truly loves her. Would he expect her to continue to live on the edge of poverty and to dress in rags?

"God so loved …that He gave". He still loves us and He still gives. The one hallmark of true love is love's desire to give. That is the difference between lust and love. Lust takes and love gives. God gives to us lavishly. It is the assurance that He will always give abundantly that deals with the fear that is based on the insufficiency of which my soul is so aware. My insufficiency is met by God's lavish giving! Read 1 John 3:19-20.

b) With respect to our imaginings there is the limit of love's thinking.

God gives lavishly and there is no limit to His loving thoughts. Love is able to dream. Love has its hopes. Love has the ability to expand the imagination for this is how joys are multiplied.

But there are some directions in which love is unable to go. The limits are set by the character of the one loved and the character of our love. We say of someone, *"I wouldn't*

dream of thinking such a thing about her!" Both the character of that person and the character of my love and my regard for her set a limit beyond which my imagination cannot pass. So the character of God sets a limit beyond which our thinking about God should not go.

Think about the character of God! He is wise. He is all-powerful and He is committed to me! Let us not treat lightly God's love and His commitment to us.

c) The loveliness of love's planning

Why is it that we so often identify the will of God as something that is threatening and full of unpleasant things? Some people go so far as to believe that anything that will bring them joy and happiness probably isn't the will of God for them. They think that God's will is always hard, harsh and designed to make them unhappy!

Picture a pregnant mother. Her hands and her thoughts are busy day and night planning the prettiest nursery with the lovliest cot and the daintiest baby clothes. Everything that love can plan is planned in detail and with great care. This is the loveliness of love's planning. Or picture a bride dreaming of the lovely home she will create for her beloved husband and then going round to all her fiance's friends to ask what food he **does not** like so that when the honeymoon is over and they have their first day in their new home she can give him the **worst** meal of his life! She would never do such a thing! Yet we sometimes act as if we believe God is hard at work in just such a way!

All the planning of love is for the happinness of the loved one. Why do we fear God's intentions?

"We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God has ordained before that we should walk in them." [Eph 2:10]

If only we could catch a glimpse of the heart and mind of God! We would find the love of God planning with infinite care, exactness of detail, thoughtfulness and consideration everything designed for my happiness and God's glory. There is no fear in love. Love is the remedy for the tyranny of fear.

3. The Certainty: Perfect Love casts out Fear

Perfect love says to fear, "Out" and, so to speak, flings it out of the door. In Greek the word 'cast' is *'ballei'* from which we get ballistic. This means ejection with exceptional force.

There is a suggestion here of the growth of love. The word 'perfect' indicates completeness. The implication is that it is possible to have incomplete love and so to have a degree of fear. But there is a certainty that characterises perfect love. Love that is developed and mature will throw out fear. What are the characteristics of complete love?

- **The reality on which this love rests.**

  "We love Him because He first loved us." [I Jn. 4:19] The reality on which our love for Jesus rests is the absolute certainty of His love for us. Where do we have the guarantee, the assurance on which our reality can rest?

  "He who did not spare His only Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" [Rom. 8:32]

  The measure of the reality of the love of God is in the Cross. It is on that reality that my love rests.

  A Story

  A little girl of about 3 or 4 years old used to shrink away from being touched by her mother because her mother's hands were deeply scarred with burn marks. It hurt the mother to see her little daughter shrink away from her touch. When she thought her child was old enough, she took her in her arms and told her how she got the ugly scars

on her hands. When her daughter was a baby her cot has caught fire. The mother had put her hands into the flames to rescue her child. As a result her hands were scarred. After that the little girl was never again afraid of those hands. She loved them as they were a proof to her of her mother's love.

If ever you are tempted to doubt God's love for you, look at the Cross. It is the reality on which our love rests.

- **The intimacy in which love grows**

  Love is a growing thing. As with human love, so with our love for God there is an incompleteness and a growing to completeness. Between humans and between us and God there are depths of love and different degrees of love. What governs the depth of our love for God?

  "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, <u>we have fellowship with one another</u> and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." [1 Jn. 1:7]

  What is essential for a growing love through a deepening fellowship? It is to be 'in the light'. Human love can die. Often this is because there is a gap – a distance – that has developed spiritually, emotionally, intellectually or even physically between people. It is not easy to maintain and nurture love when there is a distance! Where there is distance there is no fellowship.

- **The authority by which love rules**

  "Perfect love casts out fear." There can be no questioning the authority of that love! Love exercises absolute dictatorship with regard to fear!

  As a father of small boys I sometimes pretended to be angry and that I wanted to fight. I clenched my fists and looked ferocious. What did they do? First they laughed and then they ran into my arms for a hug. Love casts out fear!

  What is the picture you have of God – a frowning face? A clenched fist? A wrathful God? Such a picture is not the God we have come to know in Jesus.

  Here is a lovely definition of holiness:

  "If you want to live the Christian life as we are meant to live it, get into the presence of God and then do whatever you like!"

  Summary

  We should be living in the love of the Father. Get there. Grow there and you will find that this verse will become true in your experience. The tyranny of fear will go. The remedy will be applied and the certainty will come.

  "There is no fear in love." If you are afraid and tense fearing that you will snap, let it all go in the knowledge of the love of God that is eternal and unchanging.