

Perfect love casts out fear

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18

The other night I woke up in the wee hours of the morning and clearly heard in my spirit, "Perfect love casts out fear!" Obviously this is a familiar verse, but since it was so clearly spoken I know that God wanted to reveal a deeper level of truth to me. As I lay in my bed pondering what the Lord had just spoken, I became aware of areas of ongoing fear in my life. Then I heard it again; "Perfect love casts out fear!" At that moment, I began to experience a new awareness of the Father's perfect love toward me. Yes, I have experienced His love before, but this was at a deeper level, it was fresh, crisp and refreshing.

We have all been subject to the imperfect love that comes from our earthly parents, our spouse, our friends; also, we have shown imperfect love to those around us.

Imperfect love can fail us, disappoint us, abandon us, and even punish us, but God's perfect love never fails us in any way.

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son." Hebrews 12:5-6

Most of the world has experienced being punished for the mistakes they have made at one time or another. Because this is so commonplace, it is easy to read many of life's trials as punishment from God for being imperfect or for falling short, even making mistakes.

One of the differences between discipline and punishment is that discipline teaches us how to learn from our mistakes, but punishment makes us suffer for those same mistakes. Our sufferings are not because God is punishing us! I hope you realize this is truly a lie of the enemy that has caused many to be trapped in despair, fear and a sense of failure.

Discipline flows out of a motive of love, protection, respect and honor. Punishment often comes from self-serving motives of anger, resentment and control. God's discipline is both pure and perfect in love.

If you have been gripped by fear of punishment, begin to ask the Holy Spirit to remove the root of fear and punishment from your heart, mind and body. This fearful reaction to our shortcomings can leave us in a state of absolute spiritual paralysis. Have you ever experienced harsh punishment? This can set up an emotional "default reaction" inside that causes you to believe that every time you make a mistake, or stumble even momentarily, you will be punished. Punishment invokes fear; fear sets up a chain reaction of self-survival and we begin to protect ourselves from God. Yet! God's discipline leads us lovingly out of our mistakes to the very place he had intended for us to be. His discipline is fully redemptive, treating us as beloved children as he corrects us with respect, kindness, love and integrity.

We need to remember this in our parenting as well. Punishment almost always brings shame and a crushing sense of failing to please the one in authority, but discipline brings forth a sense of protection, covering, love and respect.

One controls, and the other one guides.

If I could only fulfill two or three of God's attributes of love I would feel I have made an impact in my walk with the Lord through my imperfect love, but I long to have perfect love like God.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails." 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

I am amazed at how often I find myself falling into the momentary false belief that somehow God will let me down or not come to my rescue because of my imperfect love. Most of us have experienced this at times. Perfect love cannot, and will not, fail us! But, there are times we seem to demand that love perform certain actions, if not we feel betrayed. However, just like a good parent, God will not give us something that will cause us harm, no matter how badly we want it. We cannot separate love and discipline, because discipline flows out of love.

I have gone through a few years of trials that have been profoundly difficult, yet, very refining. These trials have brought to light areas in my life that needed the Lord's discipline. There were areas that needed alignment with God's desires, so I would be able to move forward in the responsibilities God has for me. Perfect love allowed me to experience deep pain in order to build character, maturity, and dependency on the Lord.

Though we can only offer the Lord our imperfect love, still He responds with His perfect love with promises such as Psalm 91:14-16: "Because he loves me, says the Lord; I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

He is such an amazing Father: so kind, so loving! He loves to honor us, rescue us, deliver us, and satisfy us. I can truly say that most of the stress in my life comes from my own independence (sin), worry, unbelief and lack of trust, not God's unfaithfulness. He is always faithful even when I am not! There are times I demand that things happen, "Now!" By His grace they do not! If only we could walk with Him in perfect love and rest, and have the confidence and trust in His promises, life would be so different.

Let the comfort and refreshing of His perfect love, align your hearts, renew your minds, and refresh your souls. Allow perfect love to cast out all fear!

May God richly bless you!

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