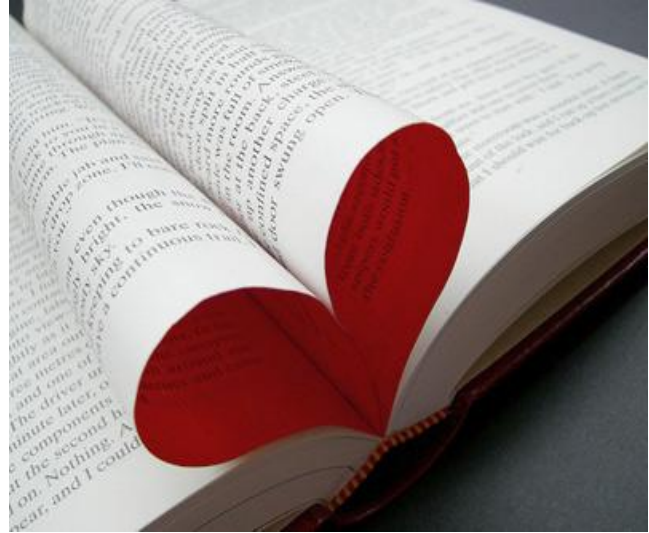


PERFECT LOVE

Dear Aebi: *Please explain 1 John 4:18. If we are afraid, does it mean we don't love God?*



"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment [punishment, NASB, NIV]. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" 1 Jn. 4:18, NKJV. No, being afraid is not an indication

that we don't love God. First, notice that the fear under consideration here is not fear of the dark, of a snake, of drowning, of riding in an airplane, or of any of the other earthly dangers that surround us. Fear in this passage refers to lack of boldness or confidence in the day of judgment, according to verse 17. John talks about our having confidence, meaning that we are confident that we will be accepted rather than condemned by Christ when he comes again to judge everyone to reward his faithful servants and to punish those who have rejected him (John 12:48).

John speaks of this confidence or boldness in 1 John 2:28; 3:21; and 4:17, but he also refers in many other places to the idea of the faithful Christian being assured of his receiving God's approval and having eternal life. The blood of Jesus cleanses all our sins (1 John 1:7); God will forgive and cleanse us (1:9); he that does the will of God lives forever (2:17); he has promised us eternal life (2:25); when Jesus returns we will be like him (3:2); God sent Jesus so we might live (4:9); our faith overcomes the world (5:4); if we have Christ we have eternal life (5:11-13). All of these are expressions of confidence that Christ will welcome us into eternal life if we believe in him, love him, and serve him. He will do this by virtue of the atonement he made for us (1 John 2:2), the propitiation for our sins that he accomplished on the cross.

Notice that it is perfect love that casts out fear. Perfect love is defined in 1 John 2:5 as keeping God's commandments and in 4:12 as loving our brothers in Christ. J.W. Roberts says perfect love "likely means that love has reached its true end or purpose in our lives: it has come to its desired development or maturity when we have full faith in the love of God. The result is that we may have confidence for the Day of Judgment" (The Letters of John, pp. 120-121).

When we mature in our faith in Christ, in his grace, in his atonement, we are his faithful servants, and we need not go around fearing lest he will condemn us. We know he will condemn us if we reject him and embrace the world and its idols, but we also know he will (by his grace and by the blood of the cross) accept us if we serve him. Therefore we serve him, because we love him, and we believe in him. We believe his promises, and we trust his grace; therefore we do not shudder in fear of being judged and rejected.

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