

Faith, Hope & Love Part39

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves *torment*, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

I would like us to continue a bit further with our talk on fear. It seems we are starting to get in touch with, and realize how much, fear impacts, infects, and cripples our ability to walk by faith in the Spirit of God. Fear restricts our ability to love; and we know according to **1 John 4:7-8** that the person who does not now love and continues to not now love, does not know God, for God is love. That is a harrowing statement and one we cannot overlook. Alternatively, he who now loves and continues to love is born of God and knows God. Therefore, our goal should be to be perfected in His love. Love is the fruit of a person who abides in Christ whereas fear is the root of one who abides in their *flesh*, no matter how religious their *flesh* may be. And since perfect love casts out fear, the presence of fear in our lives, especially in such a dominating and overwhelming way, is more than a cause for grave concern.

Accordingly, we have yet to truly engage fear in a way that we can conquer this enemy of faith. As we know, to conquer any evil in our lives, any wrong belief and unbelief, we have to be willing to go back to the basics. How quickly we lose sight of the basics; it seems to be the bane of humanity. I know that each of you are very familiar with what I am going to say, but I need to say it because familiarity tends

to breed complacency and complacency, when it comes to the battle that is always waging between the Spirit and our *flesh*, leads to certain death.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Fear is a spiritual enemy—a mighty fortress—that has raised its ugly head up against the true knowledge of God. And this fortress is thick, it is dug in, and it seems to be permanently attached to our souls; hence, we need to get back to taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ while willing to punish all disobedience. This is a practice and a battle strategy that has proven success in all of our lives; at least when we practice it. We must once again take each thought captive and analyze it to determine its source. If it is from the enemy, from our *flesh*, or from the world, it will be rooted in fear. We therefore need to be willing to reject it and subject our heart, mind, soul, and our body to the truth that we know from the Word of God. We must decide that we are only going to indulge ourselves in thoughts and emotions that derive from the truth and are in accordance with the truth. It is how we “punish all disobedience;” we simply

refuse to dwell on those things that enslave us to fear.

And this idea of “punishing all disobedience” goes beyond just our thoughts; it also applies to the desires and lusts in our physical bodies that have been nurtured and mentored by fear. Some of you are very well aware of what I am talking about. You may know the truth, you may have identified your fear, and you may even believe that you actually “believe” the truth, but your body fights you tooth and nail. And more often than not, your body wins the battle and you become “disqualified” so to speak in your fight against fear. You may want to stand for truth and walk in truth, but your body seems to not let you. Thus, you must even “punish” the disobedience in your body. Paul addressed this in his letter to the Corinthians.

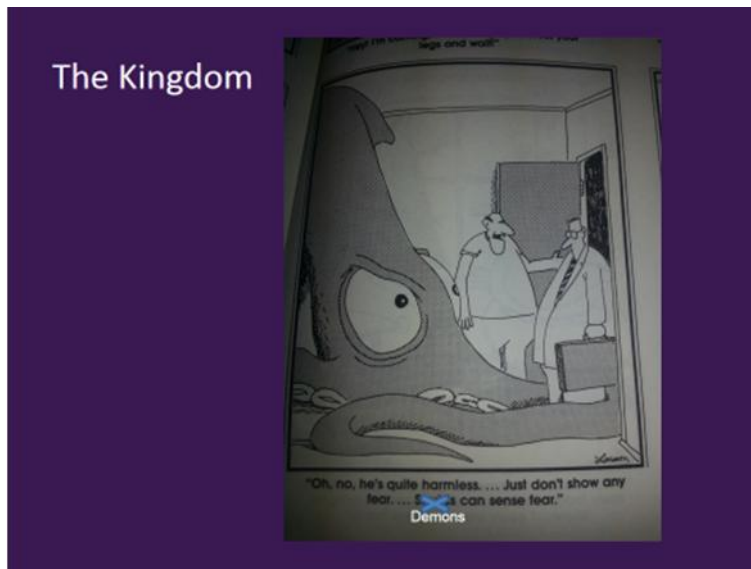
1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

When it comes to “punishing all disobedience” we must be willing to discipline our body until we force it into subjection to the Spirit of God, or else we will be disqualified and fear will continue to rule and reign over our lives. The good news is that our body is actually easily retrained if we are willing to put in the effort. Are

you willing to go this far in your fight against sin? Paul says that he trained his body in the same manner as an athlete. This means he forced his body to obey his spirit even when he did not feel like it, even when he felt like taking it easy and just cruising along. Have you approached your battle with fear in this same way or have you become complacent? An athlete works hard at their sport, they are committed, and they live a lifestyle that is conducive to their training and their competition. This is how we should live. We are at war and we need to live continually in such a way that we are putting down this enemy and training our body so we can be capable and agile in this fight.

This battle against fear is a constant battle; thankfully God has not left it up only to our ability to be disciplined in order to secure victory (although that is an important aspect when it comes to our physical bodies). We have also been given spiritual weapons that are divinely powerful for the purpose of destroying fortresses like fear. These weapons are specifically designed for this type of battle and they are critical for subjecting our heart, mind, and soul to the truth and enabling us to wage war against fear. **2 Corinthians 6:7-8** says, "We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense." **Ephesians 6:16-17** says that we have the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God) and the shield of faith as our weapons. With this combination of the Word, our Faith, and the Lord's righteousness which covers us and can be wielded in both our right hand and left, we can expect to be overwhelmingly victorious even over fear. We just have to be willing to brandish these weapons.



Besides, we know that fear is the enemy's only real ally in this war. It's as if they can smell fear and as soon as they get a whiff they send their flaming arrows of doubt and lies. I want you to understand that without fear the lies of the devil are powerless and are rendered meaningless. The enemy's lies gain power and strength through our fear. Essentially the lies provide a temptation for us to not trust the Lord and instead take matters into our own hands. But again, without fear there would be no temptation for we would be at rest trusting that Jesus is our Lord, that He is good, and that we don't belong here. It is only when we fear that we will not be cared for and will be hurt that the lies create an effective weapon of temptation.

Therefore, if we brandish our weapons; if we bet our lives on the truth of the Word of God, if we bet our lives on the Name, if we are willing to wield the truth like a weapon and a shield of defense against the lies of the enemy, and if we remain confident that through it all, no matter what we have done or do wrong,

that we are righteous, pure, and holy because of what Christ has done for us, then we will nullify the lies of the enemy. Those fiery darts will be extinguished and will miss their mark. These are the basics. We have learned these skills; and we need to get back to practicing them and helping one another stay focused on this fight.

The Lord promises us in **James 4:7** that if we always allow God to cause us to submit to Him and we live in such a way that, as a matter of lifestyle, we resist the devil, he—the devil—will flee from us and we will find relief from what seems like a relentless assault on our lives. That is a promise. And we can be confident of this because living in this manner (always letting God cause us to be submitted to Him and rejecting the devil as a matter of lifestyle) is indicative of our fulfilling the *Design Point*: it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. And we know that the devil is terrified of Christ in us. Thus, if you live in this way, you will experience the devil high tail it away from you because his Lord and Master dwells within you and that is a foe he cannot fight.

With that said, I would like to go through a little “Stevogram” to dissect the properties of **fear** and how it plays out in our lives and why we seem to be so unaware of the way it has ruled and dominated us. Perhaps this visual understanding will help you know how you can begin to take your thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ and in turn “punish all disobedience” and aggressively come against every thought, feeling and action that is not subjected to the truth of the Name.

Let’s start with what seems to be the foundational problem and the root of it all. It is our understanding of **pain**. We hate pain. Our entire life it seems we are always trying to find ways to avoid pain. Unfortunately, our perception of pain begins

before we have any idea regarding the reason for pain, whether good or bad. Thus, we grow up never really knowing how to assess and analyze pain, whether it is the pain of our past, the pain of our now, or the endless possibilities for future pain. Good parental discipline in love has always been an effective way to help children understand the need for pain, but our society has moved far away from that sort of instruction. Hence, we just react to pain because we don't like it—never have and probably never will—and this reaction seems to be imbedded into our body. This is why we need to punish our disobedient thoughts and train our body with the intensity of a professional athlete. Every athlete knows that pain is part of the deal of being an athlete. If you can't handle pain, you will not make it very far in competition. Hence, this is why we train and why God has been training us so diligently. If we don't learn why pain is necessary and has been necessary and don't gain an appreciation for what it can do in our lives, we will always strive to avoid it.

From the time we are little bitty babies, the reaction which pain produces in our lives is **fear**. Pain hurts, we instantly want to do anything to avoid feeling pain. However, at a pretty early age we know we cannot avoid pain, as it is an absolute inevitable certainty of life, so we learn to fear it. Each of us have developed a different tolerance and acceptance of pain, but we all fear it; even the strongest of us. And some of us are actually dominated by it and fear drives all that we do. It is why we hold back in relationships, it is why we don't really go all the way with God, and it is why most people end up with a deep, deep loneliness in their soul. Here is how our subconscious works. If we are going to have to endure pain one way or another, we preemptively choose the type of pain we think we can handle and have learned to survive. This is why so many people, even when they are with someone,

are deeply alone. They have learned to survive hiding in their cage behind their walls of self-protection; and it somehow feels safer and more secure than the possibility of more pain coming from the hurts and disappointments caused by depending upon others.

And fear is actually the creator and the impetus of our spiritual idolatry in terms of the “**If/then god**,” which most of us have served with all devotion; and, to a large part, still serve. The “If/then god” is a fabrication of our religious *flesh*. It is the idea that “if” we do things right “then” this so called god will give us good things and take care of us, keep us safe from pain, and do the things which we want Him to do for us. And when you read the Bible, if you are not careful, it is easy to superimpose this false god on the true God of the Bible who looks nothing like the “If/then god.” Yet it seems that everyone, believer and unbeliever, operates according to this principle. They may call it a universal principle of goodness and blessing, karma, or some other spiritual or philosophical nomenclature, but it is the same false god. This is why people are flabbergasted when bad things happen to good people. They just don’t understand it and they get angry, resentful, and even come against the one true God. It is simply so far outside of their worldview why a good God would let bad things happen to good people. Just read the book of **Job**—the oldest book in the Bible—and you will discover that his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar believed and propagated this same heresy; it is an ancient heresy. The “If/then god” sits in the heart all people, again whether believer or unbeliever, who are ruled and controlled by fear.

Now before thinking that you don’t succumb to this form of idolatry, the fruit of the “If/then god” is the “**good child/bad child**” syndrome that we all have been

plagued by; and, in some areas of our life, still are. In fact, some of you are totally captive to this dynamic. We try to be good to get blessing from God; or said another way, we try and do good hoping He won't let us experience any more pain. But we always end up doing "bad" things because our *flesh* is inherently selfish and is bound to sin, death, failure, and wickedness. Such things are part and parcel of the *fleshly* nature. And so we are constantly in this pinball dynamic between our "goodness" (all our good intentions and good desires which we want God to give us credit for) and our badness. And when we are feeling really good about what we have done, we actually believe God owes us blessing and He owes us a life without pain. But when we are doing "bad" things, we hide from Him sure that He is going to thump us in His anger. This pinball dynamic is something we cannot escape; it is part of our *flesh*. If fear is our master, this sort of idolatry of the "If/then god" rules our life. And this idolatry produces one of the most hideous and disgusting fruits of our *flesh*, which God has gone to war over in our lives, and that is **shame** and the **pride** which surrounds our shame like vigilant guards protecting their master.

Shame is a killer. It produces so much darkness in our soul. Shame mocks the cross, it despises it even. Our shame boastfully declares that what Jesus did on the cross in dying for our sins was ineffective and impotent. It arrogantly pronounces that God the Father lied, Jesus lied, and the Holy Spirit lied when they declared we are righteous and holy and are free from condemnation and judgment. It scoffs at the precious blood which was poured out for our lives. Our shame proclaims that we could have done it better, we should have done it better, and next time we will try and do it better; in the meantime, we will just hang our head in defeat and embarrassment. Shame separates us from God and from people; after all, we don't

want them to know what we are really like—at least not until we get our act together.

As a result, we circle back around to the “good child/bad child” dynamic and try harder and harder to be good and cover up our bad. Our shame is a liar and when we are engulfed in shame we are a liar. And if anyone tries to address anything in our lives, our pride rises up its ugly head and fights in all sorts of ways. Sometimes it looks like: *condemnation* of self and others; *self-hate*, which includes self-harm, self-destruction, and self-loathing; *entitlement*, believing that everyone owes us and things are not fair unless they are working out the way we want them to work out; *justification*, where we have an excuse and a reason for everything; *defensiveness*, where we are misunderstood, misjudged, and unfairly treated; and, all of our favorite, *victimhood*, where we cannot take responsibility for anything or anyone and we are just victims of our circumstances, of God, and of all the awful people who do awful things to us.

Shame and its protector, pride, is from where most of our sick and horrible dysfunctions derive. And this should be no surprise since **Job 41:34** states that Lucifer, imaged as a mighty dragon, is king over all the sons of pride. This explains clearly why God says in **Proverbs 8:13** that He hates pride and **Proverbs 15:25** says that He will tear down the house of the proud. Pride goes before destruction (**Proverbs 16:18**) and when pride comes then comes dishonor (**Proverbs 11:2**), for a man’s pride will bring him low (**Proverbs 29:23**). After all, God is opposed to the proud (**James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5**). Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord (**Proverbs 16:5**); therefore, according to **Isaiah 2:17** the pride of man will be humbled. As it says in **Habakkuk 2:4**, “Behold, as for the proud one, his soul

is not right within him. Therefore if you can recognize within you condemnation, self-hate, justification, entitlement, defensiveness, and victimhood, then you can be assured you have been overrun by fear.

When we live covered in our pride, as we harbor and protect our shame, it is assured that we will live in **torment**—because fear involves torment (**1 John 4:18**). Our shame and pride produces the desperate need to control, as well as anxiety, worry, anger, malice bitterness, wrath, and slander. This constant torment steals away at our joy, our life, and our ability to just have any relationship at all. To whatever extent that you are enslaved to fear, such torment will always be a part of your life. For some of you, these things are present, but in the shadows, as you wrestle between your faith and fear. But some of you are overcome with these things and quite honestly are miserable to be around; it is hard. And I know that you know that people tend to tolerate you when you are acting out in these ways. That is not life; it is humiliating. But fear is the root of the problem which is why your attempts to be different and change have been stymied.

We have talked about this torment now for a couple of weeks. It is simply awful, but worst of all is what it produces in our lives. It is the evil that builds our walls of **self-protection** and encourages the **selfishness** of self-love. And as long as these walls are up and as long as we love our selfishness, we will not know what it is like to love and be loved. These protections keep people away and no matter how lonely we are and just want to be loved, we keep it from happening. Our pride however tells us that the problem lies with others; and if they would just do it right for us, or if God would just do it right for us, then things would be good. But we are the problem. I can look around the room and see these insurmountable walls that

we are trying so hard to maintain just because we are afraid of pain. We are afraid of experiencing the things we have tried so hard to forget. But in our attempt to limit and control pain we make it impossible to be a vessel of love. And what surprises me is how many people seem to be ok with that. We have to throw off this way of living, it leads to death and torment. We must desire to be perfected in the love of God so we can be a person who now loves and therefore is confident that we are born of God and know God. Besides, without that love, we do not even have assurance in the day of judgment (**1 John 4:17**); and that is a scary thought.

Our self-protection and the selfishness of self-love produces in our lives all manner of sick, twisted, dysfunctional, and evil coping mechanisms. These are our Asherah poles, our altars of sacrifice, our high places, and our demonic temples of worship that must be smashed, torn apart, burned up, and completely disposed of if we are going to be free from their control. It is to these coping mechanisms that our body becomes easily enslaved; and it is very hard to disengage, but it is possible. We can, like an athlete, discipline our body to reject these sources of comfort, security, and indulgence; but we must make the decision and go for it with all alacrity and dispatch. We must be violent in our efforts to cut ourselves off from these cheap replacements for true relationship comfort, and security.

Now this next piece is the lynch pin to living without fear. Despite what we have been through, we must be willing to reconsider this issue of pain. It is our distorted belief about pain that gave rise to our fear in the first place. We must know and be confident in the truth: for God to raise us from the dead and give us life, pain was necessary and the pain He caused us flowed from His fountains of love. Yes it hurt, and was even horrific, but we must come to believe and accept that it was good, it

was love, and it was the only thing strong enough to break the bonds of sin and death which held us in subjection to their will. This is where **faith** comes in. We must believe that Jesus is Lord; therefore, He was the cause behind all our pain. We must believe that He is good; therefore, even the pain we experienced was good, pleasing and perfect. It accomplished its goal; the only thing that could. After all, you have come to know and believe in Jesus even though you have never seen Him. Pain did its job; and for that you can be thankful. And, finally, you must believe it was all worth it because this is not your life; you don't belong here. Your true life is hidden with Christ in God. This is just a place for us to learn to trust our Lord and how, by faith, to be transformed into His image so we can fulfill the assignments He has given each of us. It is time to change your view of pain. Even now as you experience pain you can be confident that it flows from the hand of the Lord and even if you don't understand, it is good, pleasing, and perfect. Now, since this is an issue of faith, you have to believe it to be true, you have to bet your life on it.

As faith matures in our life and we stand firm in it, **Hope** begins to emerge because we understand the purpose of pain. We begin to believe that we can actually be like Him. We become convinced that we don't have to wait until we are dead to be free from sin, fear, and all the evil that plagues our lives (**1 John 2:1; 3:9**). We can know this freedom in our now. This is what Hope is all about. Hope is about being able to say: I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me (**Galatians 2:20**). Hope is about the real-time practical fulfillment of Jesus prayer in **John 17:20** where He asked the Father that we—all true believers—may be one, completely unified, so

that way we may be one with Him and be found in His image, for then the world will believe that the Father sent the Son.

The thing about Hope is that it gives us a new perspective on everything. We begin to see every situation, every conflict, every trauma, every source of pain, every failure, every joy, every victory, and so on as an opportunity to learn and discover more about God. Failure for instance is no longer a reason to dive deep into shame; rather, it is an opportunity to take responsibility by learning what happened, why it happened, and what we can think, believe, or do differently so we don't repeat it again and again and again. It is an opportunity for discovery.

Furthermore, Hope assures us that the pain of death to our flesh is a good thing and that the fire and the knife are our friends. It comforts us with the knowledge that along with death to our *flesh* comes new life in the Spirit where the fruit of our life will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And against such things there is no law which controls us and tells us right from wrong (***Galatians 5:22-23***). Love is our only law and its expressions are beautifully free and can be judged by no one. When we live in Hope, pain is not our worry, pain is not our concern, and pain is not something we live to avoid. Rather, we embrace it as necessary and as love. Hope assures us that the pain we endure is not wasted and is not incidental, but is critical for us to find freedom.

Accordingly, with the failure and mistakes we make as we go through the process of death, we realize that such things are just an opportunity to train and to practice. We don't have to give failure so much weight and we don't have to live in defeat. Rather, a good athlete knows that they will fail over and over again as they practice; but they are also confident that as they train they will overcome and will before

long conquer. Their body will become disciplined as will their mind and their spirit; and they will be indomitable.

When we are willing to adjust our perspective of pain we will have victory despite what difficulties we go through in this life. As the Spirit says, "But in all these things {all our difficulties} we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Romans 8:37-39**). The love of God secures us, it stabilizes us, it surrounds us, and the love of God invades our lives and is experienced by others in and through us. The Love of God makes everything worth it. We are loved by the one who is love, and its fullness is ours for the taking.

Let your entire life be written over with the blood of His love. Let the cross of Christ cover everything within you. Let the cross of Christ cover your fear. Let the love of God, as expressed in the cross, redefine in your heart, mind, soul, and body, this issue of pain. Don't fear pain any longer, don't avoid it, but embrace it as the love of God as He is fulfilling His promise to give you the abundant life and make you like Him. This is your reality, this is your truth. He has cloaked you in righteousness by His blood. He has forgiven you of everything you have ever done or ever will do. Now let it go and stop holding on to your failure and shame. Let go of the pride; it is not necessary. He took care of everything. You don't need to live defending yourself; let His blood be your only defense.

You are free. Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty or freedom (**2 Corinthians 3:17**). This means you can be free from fear for

perfect love casts out fear. Believe this to be true and embrace your life of faith, hope, and love. Let's get back to the basics. Let your mind, even now, be renewed with the truth that "pain" is not your mortal enemy, but fear is. Pain is not your antagonist, fear is. Pain is not something to avoid, but something to embrace. For every ounce of pain is carefully prescribed by our Father—the one who takes care of every single sparrow on this earth; and you can be confident that you are more important than the sparrows (**Matthew 10:31**). Pain is a perfect provision for our lives. It is intended to cause us to run to Jesus, to run to death, to reject our *flesh*, so that way we might know His life and His love. Be ye transformed and take all your thoughts captive to these truths and be ready to quickly and severely punish all disobedience, whether that disobedience be found in your heart, mind, soul, or your strength. Let's return to the basics.

Let's Pray.