

# Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

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## 1 John 4:17-21`

17 Ahava has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Yom HaDin; because as He is, so are we in the olam-hazeh.<sup>1</sup>

18 There is no fear in ahava; but perfect ahava casts out fear, because fear involves punishment. But he who fears punishment has not been made perfect in ahava.

19 We love Him because He first loved us.<sup>2</sup>

20 If someone says, I love יהוה, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love יהוה whom he has not seen?

21 And this mitzvah we have from Him: that he who loves יהוה must love his Yisraelite brother also.<sup>3</sup>

In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

Verse 17 tells us how to have something everybody wants to have. And verse 18 tells us how to get rid of something everybody wants to get rid of.

### **Confidence Before YHWH**

In verse 17 John tells us how to have confidence or boldness on the day of judgment. And in verse 18 he tells us how to cast fear out of our lives. These are simply positive and negative ways of saying the same thing: getting rid of fear is the negative way of saying become confident.

So the main point of the text is clear: John wants to help us enjoy confidence before YHWH. He does not want us to be paralyzed or depressed by fear of judgment. Nothing would make John happier (1:4) than to produce a generation of Christians who were utterly confident that YHWH would accept them on the judgment day.

### **Taking the Day of Judgment Seriously**

I hope we all take the day of judgment as seriously as John does. I sometimes wonder if we have abandoned real belief in YHWH's judgment and in the torment of hell which our YHWH Yahshua spoke of so vividly and so often. The word "hell" (*gehenna*) is used 12 times in the New Testament—11 of them on the lips of Yahshua. And besides that, he spoke of judgment and "the day of judgment" just as John does in 1 John 4:17. For example, Yahshua said to his disciples in Matthew 10:14f.,

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<sup>1</sup> Torah guardians.

<sup>2</sup> Quite an understatement.

<sup>3</sup> Efrayim and Judah must learn to love and be one in Yahshua, but not in their own programs of restoration without King Yahshua.

And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

The YHWH has warned us so clearly: it is appointed unto man once to die and after that comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27). He has spoken vividly of the horror of hell,

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of YHWH with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. (Mark 9:47-48)

### **Do We Really Believe in the Horrors of Hell?**

One of the reasons I say I wonder if we really believe this is the public zeal with which so many Christians warn against the possibility of a nuclear holocaust and how earnestly they work to avert it. And I ask, "Does the coming holocaust of divine wrath at the final judgment startle us as deeply and mobilize us dramatically?"

The nuclear holocaust is only a possibility; but the holocaust of divine wrath is a biblical certainty. The nuclear holocaust would only snuff out life that is temporary and earthly; but the holocaust of divine wrath will snuff out eternal life and will bring a misery to unbelievers that is worse than any disease caused by nuclear radiation.

So I hope we all take the day of judgment as seriously as John did. I hope that when your heart recoils at the tragedy of a possible nuclear holocaust, you will let that legitimate concern overflow the limits of earthly considerations and take in the tragedy of eternal divine judgment as well. I hope that when you feel an impulse to save the world from the bomb, you will enlarge your heart to long for the eternal salvation of your neighbor and the millions of unreached peoples of the world.

### **Approaching the Day of Judgment with Confidence**

According to 1 John 4:17-18 there is a way to approach the day of judgment with fearless confidence. No one who is willing to follow John's teaching needs to be frightened at the approach of death. None of us who accepts this teaching will have to approach the judgment seat of YHWH with our fingers crossed, wondering if we are going to make it. John wrote this book to give us "confidence for the day of judgment" and to "cast out fear."

How does it happen?

### **Three Clauses in Verse 17**

Notice, there are three clauses in verse 17:

1. 17a, "In this is love perfected with us,"
2. 17b, "that we may have confidence for the day of judgment,"
3. 17c, "because as he is so are we in this world."

It says that the result of having love perfected with us (17a) is confidence for the day of judgment (17b); and it says that the reason perfected love gives confidence is that it shows that we are like Christ (17c).

Let's take them one at a time.

## 1. What Is Perfected Love?

17a) What is perfected love? "In this is love perfected with us." What does "this" refer to? The words just before it say, "YHWH is love, and he who abides in love abides in YHWH, and YHWH abides in him. In this is love perfected with us." So I would take the "this" to refer to our abiding in love or abiding in YHWH and YHWH's abiding in us—when you abide in love, love is perfected in you.

### YHWH's Abiding in Us and Our Abiding in Love

What this means you can see from the connection in 4:12. The same two ideas are both here: YHWH's abiding in us and love being perfected in us. "No man has ever seen YHWH; if we love one another, YHWH abides in us and his love is perfected in us." In other words perfected love refers to YHWH's love in us coming to completion or coming into action as we love each other. "If we love one another . . . his love is perfected in us." So "perfected love" is the love of YHWH expressing itself in our love to each other.

### Not Flawless Perfection

It is very important that we understand this, because it is different from what most people think of when they hear the word "perfected." Most people, when they say something has been perfected, mean that it was changed from a state of flawed imperfection into a state of flawless perfection. But the Greek word that John uses (*teleioo*) does not usually mean that in the New Testament. In the New Testament the word generally means finished, or completed, or accomplished. When something, like a trip or an assignment, attains its goal, it is said to be "perfected."

### Other Uses of the Word for "Perfected"

For example the same word is used in John 4:34 where Yahshua says, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." The word "accomplish" here is the same word which in 1 John 4:12 and 17 is translated "perfected." It does not mean that Yahshua took the flawed work of YHWH and made it flawless. It means that he took an assignment of YHWH and turned it into action and so completed it (see John 5:36).

In John 19:28 it says that Yahshua said, "I thirst" in order to "fulfill" the Scriptures. The word translated "fulfill" is the same as the one translated "perfected" in 1 John 4:12 and 17. It does not mean take a flawed Scripture and make it flawlessly perfect. It means take a Scripture promise and put it into action and so complete it.

James 2:22 is a very important parallel. "You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works." The word behind "completed" is the same as the word behind "perfected" in our text. How do works perfect faith? Not by making it flawless faith but by making it active faith. In other words faith is imperfect until it reaches its goal in good works. Then we can speak of it as "perfected" faith—not because it is flawless and beyond the need for improvement, but because it has attained the goal of action.

A journey can be complete or finished even if it is not a flawless journey. That is the way Paul uses the word for "perfect" in Acts 20:24—"If only I might accomplish my course and the ministry which I have received from the YHWH Yahshua!" He did not mean that he expected to have a flawless

ministry. He meant that he fully expected to finish putting into action what the YHWH had assigned him to do—even if it was not "perfect" in our usual sense of our word.

## **YHWH's Love Reaching Its Appointed Goal**

Now we come back to 1 John 4:12. It says, "If we love one another, YHWH abides in us, and his love is perfected in us." Following the normal usage of the word, we would take this to mean NOT that our love for each other is a flawless expression of YHWH's love, but that it is YHWH's love being put into action—YHWH's love reaching its appointed goal in practical human love. Perfected love is not just an incomplete idea or emotion or potential in the heart. It is completed, accomplished, put into action—and in that sense "perfected."

So the meaning of the first clause of 1 John 4:17 would go like this: "In this, that is in your love for each other, YHWH's love is put into action and so reaches its appointed goal. It does not remain at the imperfect stage of mere talk, but reaches the stage of action."

So in these verses perfected love is not flawless love. Perfected love is when you don't just talk about the need to share Christ, you do it. It's when you don't just talk about the hungry, you feed them. It's when you don't just talk about floundering new believers, you disciple them. And so on.

## **2. How Is Confidence Gained for the Day of Judgment?**

17b) Now the second clause of the verse says that the result of having love perfected with us is that we have confidence for the day of judgment. "In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment."

### **By Putting YHWH's Love into Action for Others**

In view of what we have seen now about perfected love, how is it that we gain confidence for the day of judgment? Answer: by putting YHWH's love into action for other people. We don't gain confidence because we are sinlessly perfect in the way we love. That would contradict 1:7-10 ("If we say we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves") and we have seen that it is not what the word "perfected" means. We don't gain confidence by being sinlessly perfect. We gain confidence by putting our money where our mouth is.

### **Love Not in Word or Speech but in Deed and Truth**

The flow of thought is very much like 3:18-19. "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." That is the same as saying, "Little children, let the love of YHWH be perfected in you. Let the rubber hit the road. Complete your talk with your walk."

And what will be the result in the next verse? The same as in 4:17. "By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us." In other words the way to have confidence before YHWH on the day of judgment is to love each other with the perfected love of YHWH—that is, love that doesn't just talk but turns into deeds. (See also Matthew 5:7; 6:14; 7:1; James 2:13.)

## **The Recurring Theme of the Book**

So this text is not teaching anything contrary to the thrust of the whole book—loving each other is the reassuring evidence that we are truly born of YHWH and bound for eternal life: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (3:14). Today's text simply stresses the same thing that 3:18-19 did, namely, that the love which can give us confidence before YHWH is not mere talk but love that has been perfected into action—"not in mere word or speech, but in deed and in truth."

### **3. Why Does Active Love Give Us Confidence?**

17c) The last clause of verse 17 says that the reason active (i.e., perfected) love gives confidence for the day of judgment is that it shows that we are like Yahshua. "In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world."

#### **Having the Spirit of Yahshua**

The assumption is that at the judgment day YHWH won't condemn people who are like his Son. Living a life of active love shows that we have the Spirit of Yahshua. It shows we belong to the family of YHWH. And that gives us confidence before YHWH. You can't live at odds with the character of Yahshua and then expect to have any confidence when you stand before his Father at the final judgment. But if the current of your life is like his, you can have confidence before his Father.

#### **Seen Throughout the Book**

We can see the same sequence of thought in 2:28f.

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him.

In other words, the way to be sure that you are born of him and that you will have confidence when he comes to judge the world is to abide in him (v. 28) and thus do right as he is righteous (v. 29). "As he is so are we in the world."

1 John 3:2-3 argues the same way:

Beloved, we are YHWH's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Notice the tremendous confidence of verse 2: we know we will be like him when he comes! That's boldness at the day of judgment! Now what is the proof of this confident hope? Verse 3: "Every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." The proof is the same as in 4:17, "As he is so are we in the world." We share his purity and so assure ourselves that we truly hope in him.

#### **Summary of Verse 17**

To sum up verse 17, we can paraphrase it like this: When you love each other with love that is more than just talk, when the love of YHWH reaches its practical goal of action in your life, you will experience a deep and unshakable confidence before YHWH. Much talk of love with few deeds of

love destroys assurance. We've all experienced this from time to time. Our conscience condemns us because we think of deeds of love and don't do them.

But if we put our money where our mouth is, or put our time where our tongue is, then we will have a deep sense of the reality of our own faith and will feel confident for the day of judgment, because then we are acting the way Yahshua acted.

### **The Same Thing at Stake in Verse 18**

Now for verse 18.

It seems to me that exactly the same thing is at stake in verse 18 as in verse 17—how to get rid of fear about the day of judgment. Verse 17 is positive: how to have confidence for the day of judgment. Verse 18 is negative: how not to have fear for the day of judgment. And both give the same answer: "perfect" or "perfected" love. Verse 18:

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

### **The Negative of Verse 17**

Let's look at the last part first: "He who fears is not perfected in love." This is the exact negative of verse 17. Verse 17 says that when love is perfected with us, we have confidence. Verse 18 says that when we are not perfected in love, we don't have confidence, we fear!

If we have been on the right track so far, we can say that a person "perfected in love" is not a person who loves flawlessly. He is a person who loves "in deed and truth and not just in words." In these verses perfection has to do with completion not flawlessness. "Perfect love" is love that does not die on the vine. It's love that comes to fruition. It's love that goes beyond desire and is completed (i.e., perfected) in a deed.

So the first part of the verse (18) says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment." In other words the reason there is no fear in love is that there is no threat of punishment for being a loving person. When you love someone with real practical deeds, you never hear a warning signal that says, "You're going to get punished for this." Fear is what you feel when you have done something that ought to be punished. But love is never threatened with punishment. So there is no fear in love.

On the contrary, when you love each other with "perfect love" (i.e., with the love of YHWH overflowing and being completed in action)—when you love each other like this, it casts out fear! The way to boldness, the way to confidence and fearlessness, is to walk love not just talk love. Love is perfected not when it is sinlessly flawless but when it passes from talk to walk.