
Love vs. Fear

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever.” (Psalm 111:10)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (I John 4:18)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Our spiritual journey begins from a selfish motivation. Once convinced of reality of judgment our strong desire for self preservation prompts us to a life of obedience.

The growth of spiritual maturity leads us from a selfish point of view to a selfless point of view. The apostle Paul was once a self righteous Pharisee who gloried in his own record of achievement. He ultimately was transformed into a man who abandoned any thought of righteousness for himself and even wished himself accursed from Christ so that his brethren might be saved. (Romans 9:3)

Fear and love do not peacefully co-exist. They are antithetical and antagonistic to one another. Love is stronger. Therefore, if allowed to mature it will progressively dominate our lives. Perfect love casts out fear. Ultimately we aim at

being as selfless and fearless as Christ. Surely God would not condemn us for being like Jesus so we attain a new boldness and confidence.

“Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” (I John 4:17)

The Holy Spirit plays a distinctive role in this process of transformation. The cringing slave mentality is superseded by the Spirit of adoption which emboldens us to cry out “Abba, Father.” The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The same power which produces the fruit of love in our lives was operating to produce the same results in the life of Jesus.

The manner by which perfect love casts out fear can therefore be accurately illustrated in the life of Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath from the Jewish Point of View

It was commanded by God:

“Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.” (Deuteronomy 5:12-14)

The people were responsible for enforcing the sabbath law:

“Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you. Every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death for who-soever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among the people.”

An inspired example of what to do with sabbath breakers came when a man was found gathering sticks upon the sabbath. He was placed in ward until the mind of the Lord was revealed. The answer came:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, the man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp . . .” (Numbers 15:35)

When God poured out His wrath upon the Children of Israel in the wilderness, it was in direct association with sabbath violations. In Ezekiel 20:12-25 the “profaning of the sabbath” is

specifically mentioned four times. Here is but one example:

“. . . they profaned my sabbaths. Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness” (Ezekiel 20:21) etc.

National oppression by the heathen was also predicted if Israel violated the sabbath.

“And I will scatter you among the heathen . . . and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land . . . because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it.” (Leviticus 26:33-35)

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity they became extremely cautious about sabbath observation.

“And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt . . .” (Nehemiah 10:31)

The noble desire of the Jewish people to “remember the sabbath day” was on its way to a pendulous extreme. Consider this quotation from *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*:

“During the period between Ezra and the Christian era the scribes formulated innumerable legal restrictions for the conduct of life under the law. Two whole treatises in the Talmud are devoted to the details of sabbath observance. One of these, the Shabbath, enumerates the following 39 principal classes of prohibited actions: sowing, plowing, reaping, gathering into sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning it, making a warp of it, making two cords, weaving two threads, separating two threads, making a knot, untying a knot, sewing two stitches, tearing to sew two stitches, catching a deer, killing, skinning, salting it preparing its hide, scraping off its hair, cutting it up, writing two letters, blotting out for the purpose of writing two letters, building, pulling down, extinguishing, lighting a fire, beating with a hammer, and carrying from one property to another. Each of these chief enactments was further discussed and elaborated, so that actually there were several hundred things a conscientious, law-abiding Jew could not do on the sabbath. For example, the prohibition about tying a knot was much too general, and so it became necessary to state what kinds of knots were prohibited and what

kind not. It was accordingly laid down that allowable knots were those that could be untied with one hand. A woman could tie up her undergarment, and the strings of her cap, those of her girdle, the straps of her shoes and sandals, of skins of wine and oil, of a pot with meat. She could tie a pail over the well with a girdle, but not with a rope. The prohibition regarding writing on the sabbath was further defined as follows: 'He who writes two letters with his right or his left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, as also if they are written with different ink or of different languages, is guilty. He even who should from forgetfulness write two letters is guilty, whether he has written them with ink or with paint, red chalk, India-rubber, vitriol, or anything which makes permanent marks. Also he who writes on two walls which form an angle, or on the two tablets of his account-book, so that they can be read together, is guilty. He who writes upon his body is guilty. If any one writes with dark fluid, with fruit juice, or in the dust on the road, in sand, or in anything in which writing does not remain, he is free. If any one writes with the wrong hand, with the foot, with the mouth, with the elbow; also if any one writes upon a letter of another piece of writing, or covers other writing' Shabbath xii. 3-5" p. 736

From this perspective the Jews saw Jesus as a blasphemous threat to national security. The High Priest stated it succinctly: ". . . it is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not . . ." (John 11:50) Thus they conscientiously sought to kill Jesus.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Jesus did not peacefully co-exist with Jewish legalism. He began His public ministry by driving animals out of the temple and overturning the tables of the money changers. (John 2:13-17) Later he came to the Pool of Bethesda where a multitude of sick and impotent people were gathered together. Upon that occasion he healed but one man and then asked him to carry around his bed on the sabbath day. (John 5:1ff) If His motive in so doing was merely human compassion He would have healed them all, but He healed only one. If His concern was concentrated upon the needs of the one man He healed, He would not have placed that man in jeopardy by asking him to carry his bed on the sabbath. Jesus was clearly in a confrontation with the interpretation of the Scriptures by the Jewish leaders and openly defied their traditions. John records

that they sought the more to kill Him. (John 5:18)

In Galilee Jesus again defied traditional sabbath understanding by eating grain from along the roadside and healing a man with a withered hand in the synagogue at Capernaum. Matthew records that they "held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him." (Matthew 12:14)

In another synagogue He was confronted by a woman who had been bowed together for eighteen long years. Surely a few more hours would have made little difference in such a chronic illness and Jesus could have avoided all controversy by simply waiting until sundown. Instead, however, He challenged the ruler of the synagogue and charged him with hypocrisy. Legalism is always inconsistent and these very men who expected this woman to wait would have shown more understanding and mercy to an ox or an ass. (Luke 13:11-17)

So also in the home of a chief Pharisee there was a certain man before Him which had dropsy. Jesus did not run from such a confrontation, He welcomed it. Light dispels darkness and perfect love casts out fear. Jesus not only made the man whole but in the process spoke in such a way that "they could not answer him again to these things." (Luke 14:6)

The recurring themes are evident in the way that Jesus dealt with sabbath controversy. First of all He focused attention upon His own identity. Jesus was God manifest in the flesh and as such He had authority even over the sabbath day. The incident at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5: presented an opportunity for Jesus to preach a sermon in defense of His own deity and then to regretfully observe that the Jews would not come unto Him that they might have life. As the Author of the Bible and the originator of the sabbath law He claimed the right to interpret it any way He wanted to.

In the second place Jesus made an appeal to mercy. Tithing was important, but mercy was more important. It was a "weightier" part of the law. (Matt. 23:23) Jesus correctly understood the law and the prophets and recommended to his enemies that they study again such passages as Hosea 6:6 ". . . I desired mercy and not sacrifice . . ." If they had only understood this they would not have condemned the guiltless. In every age men have made the mistake of elevating rules and rituals but neglecting the very attitude which these rules were intended to produce. The Pharisees would loose an ox or an ass to let them drink on

the sabbath, they would pull an animal out of the ditch on the sabbath, but in their warped and perverted way of looking at things they did not show mercy on people. In reality the sabbath day was made for man, not vice versa.

Jewish Legalism and Christian Legalism

We have already stated the principle that the Holy Spirit does not divide Christians. Those who divide Christians are "void of the Spirit" (Jude 19). Jesus and the apostles called believers to a life of separation. This divided families and communities. The division was sometimes dramatic. In Corinth, for example, the Christians met in a house which "joined hard to the synagogue." (Acts 18:7) You must remember, however, that the division was between those who believed in Jesus, and those who did not believe in Jesus.

Among those who believed in Jesus there were wide discrepancies of action and belief. The Jewish Christians continued to adhere to kosher foods and holidays. Their conscience would not allow them to do otherwise. Such a conclusion is unavoidable from such passages as Romans 14:1-23 and Acts 21:17-26.

Unity between Jewish Christians and Gentiles was realized by a remarkable strategem. Inasmuch as they were all descendants of Noah, they all were bound by what the Jews considered as the "Noachian Covenant." That is, abstinence from the pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood. (Acts 15:20)

The Jews, however, were not only bound to these general restrictions, but more specifically by a covenant which they had through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore the Jews continued to circumcise their children and to keep the Mosaic Law, but they did not bind this upon Gentile converts. (See again Acts 21:20-25)

Paul did withstand Peter to the face for refusing to eat with Gentile Christians, (Galatians 2:11-12) but he never demanded that the Jews abandon the law of Moses. Jewish Christians were free to circumcise their children and to keep the law, provided they understood that Jesus was their only hope of salvation. Paul circumcised Timothy with his own hands (Acts 16:3). He sheared his own head at Cenchrea (Acts 18:18). He purified himself and worshipped in the Temple (Acts 21:26). But he never lost sight of the fact that salvation was by grace, through faith, and not of works lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We need to love Christian legalists, not divide from them.

Legalism - The Personification of Egotism and Self-righteousness

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” (Romans 10:3)

The self-righteous person is afraid to relinquish his claim to fame by being wrong. If he can be proven to be wrong he will endeavor to redeem his righteous reputation by being humble. Regardless of what happens he must always salvage something of his righteous self esteem. He emotionally avoids the childlike humility of utter trust because of his own strong self image. Fiery serpents may be dangerous to some of the weaker brethren, but somehow the self-righteous person thinks he can figure out a way to be safe by occasionally taking his eyes off Jesus and displaying some of his own ingenuity and strategy. Perfect love casts out this fear.

The self-righteous feel so familiar with the Scriptures that they invariably believe that those who disagree with them are utterly naive and ignorant. Being right, however, is only a part of the story. Once you are right it is important to be vindicated for your rightness. This is the stimulus which leads such a person to pray in public to be seen of men, or perhaps to bestow a gift for the purpose of public acclaim. Once infected with the disease of legalism it is of paramount importance to have the praise and approval of men. This is one reason why the field of legalism is strewn with ugly weeds of argumentation. Perfect love casts out this fear.

Those who trust in the righteousness of Christ can afford to be wrong on some doctrinal issues, but those who trust in themselves find a special comfort in being right about everything. They will discuss fables, endless genealogies, and a wide variety of other issues which minister questions rather than godly edifying. They have neither the desire nor the time to get involved with the fatherless and widows for they have been called to the ministry of vain jangling and striving about words to no profit. Doting over a question, or striving about a word seems to fill a special vacuum in their lives for it affords the blessed opportunity to be justified before men.

It is worthy of note that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus came as a direct result of casting self-righteousness on the garbage heap where it belonged.

All of our righteousness is like filthy rags. All of our religious pedigrees are like the proverbial fig leaves that have never been sufficient to cover for man's corrupted nature. When we stand like the self-righteous Pharisee and thank God for our doctrinal purity and religious integrity we insure a journey to our house unjustified. The secret to salvation is not our righteousness, but His. When we come to the wedding feast in a garment of our own making we are destined for outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Paul put it like this:

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Philippians 3:7-8)

If salvation is achieved by abandoning our own righteousness for His, and it is, then the irreligious may have some advantage over those who have achieved some record of personal merit and achievement. Jesus put it like this to the religious leaders of His day.

"The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." (Matthew 21:31)

Every way of man is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 21:2) but men with no convictions are much easier to change than those who have forged out their faith by diligent study and personal pride. This is not to say that a great company of priests could not become obedient to the faith — because they did. This is not to say that a Saul of Tarsus could not become an apostle, because he did. It is simply to observe that a thief on a cross has absolutely no choice but grace: and the rest of us have probably got a bag full of tricks yet to be tried before we cave in and admit our utter destitution and failure.

Paul the Pattern

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (I Timothy 1:16)

When dealing with the hide bound traditions and hard headed obstinance of legalistic people we are apt to despair until we think again of Paul. He was the champion legalist of his generation. He was a super Pharisee who out stripped his fellows in splitting theological hairs. He was the most zealous opponent of the followers of Jesus and even had letters of authority to harass them all the way to Damascus. But he still became a Christian. He came to the place where he was willing to throw all of his righteousness on the garbage heap that he might gain Christ.

He reminds Timothy that though he was the chief of sinners he still could be saved. As a matter of fact Jesus extended His longsuffering to Paul as an encouragement to the rest of us. If a legalist like Paul can be saved, anybody can be saved! If the love of Christ can develop enough strength to cast out the legalistic fears of the "Pharisee of Pharisees" he can do it for anybody!

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." (I John 4:18)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Three

1. Is fear good or bad?
2. Did Jesus ever fear God? (Heb. 5)
3. Did Jesus change the sabbath or just correctly interpret what God had always wanted?
4. Why were the Jews so legalistic about the sabbath? Can you understand their point of view?
5. Were there any dangers in the approach of Jesus to the sabbath?
6. Can you understand why concerned Bible believing people would have opposed Jesus?
7. Is there any distinction between love and perfect love?
8. Where do we receive the love which casts out fear?
9. What fear is cast out?
10. Is it possible to be too merciful?