

# 1 John 4:18 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

**1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love:**

**Greek** - phobos ouk estin (3PAI) en te agape all e teleia agaphe exo ballei (3SPAI) ton phobon hoti o phobos kolasin echei (3SPAI) o de phoboumenos (PA/MP) ou teteleiotai (3SRPI) en te agape .

**Amplified** - There is no fear in love [dread does not exist], but full-grown (complete, perfect) love turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror! For fear brings with it the thought of punishment, and [so] he who is afraid has not reached the full maturity of love [is not yet grown into love's complete perfection].

**Wuest** - Fear does not exist in the sphere of the aforementioned (1Jn 4:15-17-**note**) love. Certainly, this aforementioned, completed love throws fear outside, because this fear has a penalty, and the one who fears has not been brought to completion in the sphere of this love, and is not in that state at present. ([Word Studies from the Greek New Testament](#))

**NLT** - Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.

**Smalley** - There is no fear in love. Rather, complete love drives away fear; for fear has to do with punishment. And the person who is afraid is still incomplete in love. (Word Biblical Commentary)

- **is no:** Lu 1:74,75 Ro 8:15 2Ti 1:7 Heb 12:28
- **fear:** Job 15:21 Ps 73:19 88:15,16 119:120 Jas 2:19
- **He that:** 1Jn 4:12
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LOVE PROTECTS FROM FEAR

**Steven Cole** summarizes this passage - If we fear the day of judgment, it is evidence that we have not loved others as God intends. ([1 John 4:17-21 Facing the Judgment with Confidence](#))

**Henry Alford** on **there is no fear** - Confidence in (or as understood, as to) that terrible day (1Jn 4:17-**note**) presupposes the absence of **fear**: and this casting out of fear is the very work of love, which in its perfect state cannot coexist with fear.

**John Stott** - The same truth is now stated negatively. The love that spells confidence banishes fear. There is no fear (i.e. no servile fear) in love. That is, 'there is no room for fear in love' (NEB). The two are as incompatible as oil and water. We can love and reverence God simultaneously (cf. Heb. 5:7-**note**), but we cannot approach him in love and hide from him in fear at the same time (cf. Ro 8:14-15-**note**; 2Ti 1:7-**note**). ([The Letters of John Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

**No fear** - John use the negative particle (ou) which signifies **absolutely NO FEAR**. **Vincent** says of this **fear** "It has no existence. The **fear** is not that spoken of in 1Pe 1:17-**note**; Heb 12:28-**note**; godly fear; filial reverence: not slavish fear, as Ro 8:15- **note**.

**In love** - Literally "the love" referring to that perfected love of which John has been speaking.

## LOVE IS VICTORIOUS OVER FEAR!

**Fear** ([5401](#))(**phobos**) describes that which causes terror or dread. Phobos is first in the Greek sentence for emphasis. Godly fear is good, profitable fear (Pr 1:8, 2Cor 7:1-**note**, 1Pe 1:17-**note**) but here John is speaking not of a holy fear of displeasing our Father, but a fear that is "slavish" as a slave fears their master or a criminal fears the bar of justice! **Wuest** says that "The divine love produced in the heart of the yielded saint includes the former but not the latter."

Jesus speaking about the final judgment declared "I say to you, My friends, **do not be afraid** of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. "But I will warn you whom to fear: **fear** (command) the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into **hell** (Gehenna); yes, I tell you, **fear** (command) Him!" (Luke 12:4-5)

**Spurgeon** - If a man is conscious that he intends no harm to anyone, that he wishes good to all mankind, that he loves his God, and loves his fellowmen for God's sake, what has he to fear? He becomes the bravest of the brave, and often finds himself safe and unharmed in places where others dare not go. When a man loves with a perfect love, he escapes from bondage.

**Paul** writes we "have not received a spirit of slavery leading to **fear** again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Ro 8:15-**note**)

Paul reminds Timothy that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and discipline." (2Ti 1:7-**note**)

**Ryrie** explains why there is **no fear in love** - **Love** prompts us to seek others; **fear** causes us to shrink from others. **Fear** brings its own punishment to the one who has not perfected (completed) his **love**.

**As we grow in the love of God,  
we cease to be fearful of what He will do.**

**Vincent** on **perfect love** - Not perfected, as 1Jn 4:17, but **perfect** as the result of having

been perfected. Compare Heb. 5:14-**note**; James. 1:4-**note**; James 3:2.

**Cole** notes "that you cannot draw near to God in love and run from Him out of fear of judgment at the same time. God wants His children to know that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1-**note**). The phrase, "perfect love," as we've seen, means, love that has reached its goal, or love that is expressed in action. If you still fear God's judgment, at the very least, you are not practicing biblical love for others as you should be doing. That's what John means when he says, "the one who fears is not perfected in love." All of us, at one point in life, should have experienced the fear of God's judgment. But as you grow in grace and godliness, that fear is replaced by God's love. The 18th century commentator, Bengel, gives the proper course of growth in the spiritual life: "neither love nor fear, fear without love, both fear and love, love without fear". Most unbelievers have neither the fear of God or the love of God in their lives. Often such lack of fear stems from ignorance. Children are often unafraid of danger because they are not aware of the severity of the danger. Concerning people in their natural state, Paul states (Ro 3:18-**note**, citing Ps. 36:1), "**There is no fear of God before their eyes.**" **Unbelievers are a heartbeat away from eternity in the lake of fire, but they don't fear God!** Then, as the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and judgment (Jn 16:8), they become terrified of God's wrath and their guilt before Him. At this point, it is "**fear without love.**" God often uses this to drive them to the Cross, where, still trembling, they experience both **fear and love**. Then, as they grow assured of His grace and see His love working itself out in their lives, they cast out fear and grow into **love without fear**. John Newton aptly put it, "**'Twas grace that caused my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved**" ("Amazing Grace," stanza 2). So John's point is that as God's love grows in your life, it casts out the fear of judgment that existed before. God's love flowing through you is evidence that you are born of God and that evidence removes the fear of God's judgment. ([1 John 4:17-21 Facing the Judgment with Confidence](#))

As we mature in our love for God (and others), we come to comprehend that we have nothing to fear, for our Father has everything under control. We trust those you love, and faith and love will give us victory over fear.

### **Related Resources:**

- [How to Handle Fear Part 1](#)
- [How to Handle Fear Part 2](#)
- [How to Handle Fear Part 3](#)
- [How to Handle Fear Part 4](#)
- [What does "perfect love casts out fear" mean?](#)

**Perfect** ([5046](#))(**teleios** from **telos** = an end, a purpose, an aim, a goal) means complete, mature, fully developed, full grown, brought to its end, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, in good working order. Teleios signifies consummate soundness, includes the idea of being whole. Gnostics used teleios of one fully initiated into their mysteries.

**Love** ([26](#))(**agape**) is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the

highest good of the one loved. While agape is not primarily a feeling, it is certainly not without feeling. It might be called "caring commitment." While it is a command to love one another, and it is thus a "duty," it is also and predominantly a delight. Agape is an attitude manifest by actions, caring, committed actions. Agape often involves sacrifice, even as epitomized by Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the Cross.

**Nothing in all creation—present or future—  
can come between us and God's love!**

**Vincent** observes that **casts out** is "a strong expression: turneth out of doors. Fear is cast out of the sphere of the fellowship of love. See the phrase in Jn 6:37; 9:34, 35; 12:31; 15:6."

**Love** is in a sense personified as the agent which enters our heart and mind, searches for **fear**, lays hold of it and **casts it out**.

**Casts out** (906)(**ballo**) means to thrust out (often conveys a sense of doing so intensely), to hurl and is used figuratively with "perfect love" personified as throwing out fear. The present tense signifies this is the continual effect of **perfect love**.

**Because (hoti)** is a **term of explanation**. Stop and ask "What is John explaining?" In context he is giving us the reason why perfect love cannot coexist with fear.

**Fear involves punishment** - Clearly this refers to ungodly fear as a condemned criminal has before the sentencing judge and in context refers in fact to the fear of certain **punishment**.

**Vincent** on **involves punishment** - **Involves** is **present tense**. The punishment is present. Fear by anticipating punishment has it even now. The phrase **involves punishment** (see on Jn 16:22) indicates that the punishment is inherent in the fear. Fear carries its own punishment. Augustine, commenting on the expulsion of fear by love, says: "As in sewing, we see the thread passed through by the needle. The needle is first pushed in, but the thread cannot be introduced until the needle is brought out. So fear first occupies the mind, but does not remain permanently, because it entered for the purpose of introducing love." The words **because fear involves punishment** are parenthetical.

**Barclay** - **Fear** is the characteristic emotion of someone who expects to be punished. So long as we regard God as the Judge, the King, the Law-giver, there can be nothing in our heart but **fear** for in face of such a God we can expect nothing but punishment. But once we know God's true nature, **fear** is swallowed up in love. The **fear** that remains is the **fear** of grieving His love for us. ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Spurgeon** - There is a loving, holy fear, which is never cast out. Filial fear grows as love grows. That sacred dread, that solemn awe of God, we must ever cultivate; but we are not afraid of him. Dear heart, God is your best Friend, your choicest love. "Yea, mine own God is he," you can say; and you have no fear of him now. You long to approach him. Though he is a consuming fire, you know that he will only consume what you want to have consumed; and will purify you, and make your gold to shine more brightly because the consumable

alloy is gone from it. He will not consume you, but only that which would work for your hurt if it were left within you. Refining fire, go through my heart! Consume as thou wilt! I long to have sin consumed, that I may be like my God. Say you not so, my brethren?

**Spurgeon** - John! John! John! This is a very strong expression. Did we not always understand that John was full of affection? Yes, but he was not one of those oily, sugary sort of people who cannot speak the truth. There is no real love in that kind of man; he has only the mere pretense of love. John speaks sharply because he loves ardently. True love hates that which is unlovely. It is inevitable that a man, who is full of love, should feel intense indignation against that which is contrary to love. Hence the apostle says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

**For a Christian,  
judgment is not future;  
it is past.**

**Punishment** ([2851](#))(**kolasis** from **kolazo** = to punish) means correction, punishment, penalty, torment, retribution (everlasting punishment in Mt 25:46, punishment in general in 1Jn 4:18) "Painful disquietude" (Mounce).

**Vincent** on **punishment** - *Torment* (KJV) is a faulty translation. The word (**kolasis**) means punishment, penalty. It occurs in the NT only here and Mt. 25:46. The kindred verb, **kolazo** to punish, is found Acts 4:21; 2Pe 2:9-**note**.

**BDAG** summarized - 1. infliction of suffering or pain in chastisement, punishment so literally undergo punishment; long-continued torture *ibid*. Of the martyrdom of Jesus. The smelling of the odor arising from sacrifices by polytheists ironically described as punishment, injury (2) Transcendent retribution. Eternal punishment.

**TDNT** - This word, meaning "punishment," is used for divine punishment in 2 Macc. 4:38; 4 Macc. 8:9. In the NT it occurs in Mt. 25:46: Those who fail the practical ethical task will go away to eternal punishment. The only other instance is in 1 Jn. 4:18, which says that fear is its own punishment (cf. 3:18). This fear is driven out by love, which is free from every fear.

**Vine** - *Kolasis* (κόλασις , (2851)), akin to *kolazō* (PUNISH, No. 1), punishment, is used in Matt. 25:46, "(eternal) punishment," and 1 John 4:18, "(fear hath) punishment," R.V. (A.V., "torment"), which there describes a process, not merely an effect; this kind of fear is expelled by perfect love; where God's love is being perfected in us, it gives no room for the fear of meeting with His reprobation; the punishment referred to is the immediate consequence of the sense of sin, not a holy awe but a slavish fear, the negation of the enjoyment of love.

**Abbott-Smith** - Synonym - **timoria**, requital. Aristotle distinguishes between **kolasis** as that which, being disciplinary, has reference to the sufferer, and *timoria* as that which, being penal, has reference to the satisfaction of him who inflicts.

See Bishop Trench's lengthy discussion of *timoria* and *kolasis* - [Punishment - Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament](#)

The only other use of **kolasis** is by Jesus when He returns and dictates the fate of unbelievers - "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mt 25:46)

**Kolasis** - 7x in Septuagint - Jer 18:20; Ezek 14:3-4, 7; 18:30; 43:11; 44:12. Several of the uses translate mikshol which means stumbling block. **Thayer** - "correction, punishment, penalty,' and brings with it or has connected with it the thought of punishment."

It is interesting that some (Calvin, Luther, Bengel, Augustine) interpret **kolasis** merely as pain or torment, rather than **punishment**. But torment (as the KJV translates it) does not fit the context which places **the day of judgment** (1Jn 4:17-**note**) before our mind. As **Alford** says "Fear, by anticipating punishment, has it even now; bears about a foretaste of it and so partakes of it."

**Henry Morris on fear involves punishment** - The denial of God and rejection of Christ because of the fear of men will, indeed, lead to torment, because "the fearful (deilos = of persons showing fear in a shameful way)... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8KJV).

**Wuest** sees this as related more not to loss of life but loss of reward - Thus, the saint who has experienced the fulness of this divine love in his earthly life, will have no fear of correction or penalty (loss of reward) at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The saint who approaches that tribunal (**Judgment Seat of Christ**) in a spirit of fear is the saint who has not experienced the fulness of this love, and for the reason that he did not maintain a Spirit-filled life during his earthly sojourn. ([Word Studies from the Greek New Testament](#))

**Stott** - Once assured that we are 'like him' (1Jn 4:17-**note**) God's beloved children, we cease to be afraid of him. It is evident, therefore, that the one who fears is not made perfect in love. ([The Letters of John - Tyndale New Testament Commentary](#))

**Perfect** ([5048](#))(**teleioo** related to **teleios** from **telos** = an end, a purpose, an aim, a goal, consummate soundness, idea of being whole) means to accomplish or bring to an end or to the intended goal (telos). It means to be complete, mature, fully developed, full grown, wanting nothing necessary to completeness. **Teleioo** does not mean simply to terminate something but to carry it out to the full finish which is picked up in the translation "**perfected**". **Teleioo** signifies the attainment of consummate soundness and includes the idea of being made whole. Interestingly the Gnostics used **teleios** of one fully initiated into their mysteries and that may have been why Paul used teleios in this epistle. **Teleioo** is in the **perfect tense** signifying this person is still not in the state of perfected love.

**Bengel** - "Men's condition is varied; without fear and love; with fear without love; with fear and love; without fear with love"

**John Piper** - David Livingstone's Challenge - In 1857 when David Livingstone was home from Africa giving a challenge to the students at the University of Cambridge, he tried to

convince them that a life of love in the service of others is no ultimate sacrifice. In doing so he gave a beautiful illustration of 1 John 4:17-18 (without realizing it, I suppose). He said, "Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter?" Notice the sequence of thought. He says that his labors of love on behalf of the lost have been healthful ACTIVITY. He has the consciousness of DOING GOOD. This is "love perfected"—love in deed and truth, love reaching its goal, love completed in action. And what was the result for David Livingstone? PEACE OF MIND and A BRIGHT HOPE OF A GLORIOUS DESTINY HEREAFTER! Or to use the words of John: confidence for the day of judgment and a mind without fear. **A Chief Reason Why Many Have Little Confidence** - Brothers and sisters, one of the main reasons why so many professing Christians have little confidence with God and little boldness with men is that their lives are not devoted in love to the salvation of the lost and to the glory of God, but instead are devoted (often by sheer default) to providing earthly security and comfort for themselves and their families. When we try to say that we are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, and yet we do not devote our lives to the eternal good of other people, there is a deep contradiction within that gnaws away at our souls and dissolves our confidence and leaves us feeling weak and inauthentic. John wants us to discover the secret of David Livingstone—that a life poured out in the labors of love for the eternal good of other people yields a sure consciousness of doing good, a deep peace of mind and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter! ([1 John 4:17-19: Perfect Love Casts Out Fear](#))

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**Paranoia In Reverse** (Read: 1 John 4:1-6,17-19) - There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. —1 John 4:18 - I remember watching television news reports in 1991 as the nonviolent revolution took place in the streets of Moscow. Russians who had grown up in totalitarianism suddenly declared, "We will act as if we are free," taking to the streets and staring down tanks. The contrast between the faces of the leaders inside and the masses outside showed who was really afraid, and who was really free.

Watching the newsreels from Red Square on Finnish television, I came up with a new definition of faith: paranoia in reverse. A truly paranoid person organizes his or her life around a common perspective of fear. Anything that happens feeds that fear.

Faith works in reverse. A faithful person organizes his or her life around a common perspective of trust, not fear. Despite the apparent chaos of the present moment, God does reign. Regardless of how I may feel, I truly matter to a God of love.

What could happen if we in God's kingdom truly acted as if the words of the apostle John were literally true: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4-note). What if we really started living as if the most-repeated prayer in Christendom has actually been answered—that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven? By Philip Yancey ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Far, far above thy thought  
His counsel shall appear,  
When fully He the work hath wrought  
That caused thy needless fear.

—Gerhardt

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**Feeding your **faith** helps starve your **fears**.**

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**Two Kinds of Fear** - Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! —Psalm 34:9 Perfect love casts out fear. —1 John 4:18 - I felt fear when I thought of going home. Because of my carelessness, our lovely console TV had fallen out of the trunk of my car and was badly marred. No, I wasn't afraid that my wife would yell at me or hit me. What I feared was the look of disappointment I would see in her face. Yet home was the place I wanted to be.

My fear was the kind of fear we should feel in relation to God. This is the mature fear advocated in Psalm 34:9 and many other Scripture passages. It is the fear of disappointing the Lord because we love Him so much, and because we so much appreciate His love for us.

The fear of punishment is an immature fear. This is the fear that is cast out by the "perfect love" mentioned in 1John 4:18. This kind of fear isn't entirely bad, though. It's often a factor in causing a person to believe in Christ, and it may also keep a Christian from serious sin. But as we grow in our faith, we will obey God because we love Him so much that we don't want to disappoint Him. Pleasing Him will be our supreme desire.

Lord, deliver us from an immature fear of punishment by developing in us a deep awareness of Your love and a profound desire to please You. By Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O may our love grow more and more  
As we get close to God  
So that we fear displeasing Him  
More than we fear His rod.

—Sper

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**The highest motive for obeying God  
is the desire to please Him.**

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**Give Voice To Your Love** - In 1990 a TV documentary on the US Civil War attracted huge audiences. One program featured a letter by a soldier killed at the battle of Bull Run. Sullivan Ballou realized the peril he faced in the looming clash, so he wrote a poignant letter to his wife. In part he said, "If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much



I loved you, nor that when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name.”

Men, more than women, often find it difficult to express deep emotions. They may squelch the impulse to put their tenderest feelings into words.

This Father’s Day, many men will receive expressions of love, but they may have trouble voicing their love in return. Yet nothing is more masculine than to express love to our loved ones. That’s true not only for fathers but for all of us. We can bestow no gift more precious to those who are wrapped up with us in the bundle of life.

“There is no fear in love,” wrote the apostle John, “but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). So let us boldly declare our love, not only for our loved ones but for the One who gave His life for us.

This Father’s Day, emulate that courageous fallen Civil War hero and give voice to your love. By Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

For Fathers:

Jot a note to someone you love,

and express your love in your message.

Set aside a day for your children this week.

**You can never express your love too often.**

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**Perfect Love** - A wise man once wrote, “**When love comes, fear goes.**” I know so many Christians who are tormented by feelings of self-doubt, worthlessness, and sinfulness. They think they must do something to make God love them more. Yet the apostle John said that “as [Jesus] is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). In other words, we share the same confidence that Jesus has in knowing that the Father loves us with perfect love. Because Jesus accomplished our redemption on the cross, all judgment for sin is behind Him and us, and the sin question is forever settled. We now face no condemnation.

This removes fear. For as John wrote, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear” (v.18). The “fear” of which John spoke is fear of judgment. But we have nothing to fear, for “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Fear is driven out by God’s “perfect love.” We’re forgiven for all our sins, held fast by God’s love, and destined to enjoy eternal fellowship with Him, not because of anything we have done but because He has done everything for us. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10). That’s perfect love! By David H. Roper

**We won't fear God's judgment when we know His forgiving love.**