

Nathan Austin - Spirit of Fear

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I want to start by reading Second Timothy, Chapter 1, Verses 5 through 8. I remember your genuine faith. For you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord, and don't be ashamed of me either, even though I'm in prison for Him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the good news.

I've been thinking about these scriptures, brethren, a great deal in the last few months and years. We live in an increasingly polarized world, and I'm making an effort to try to understand those with whom I have apparent differences. It's all too easy for us to dismiss those with a different perspective as crazy or blind or willfully ignorant or angry or short sighted, and no doubt that's probably true some of the time. Those are attributes of our human condition, right?

But one characteristic that has been highlighted for me as I've given it thought, is the spirit of fear. There are a couple reasons why we should be on guard against fear. But one of the most pertinent to our thoughts today is the impact that fear has on our flesh. We have enough challenges in that flesh already to just think clearly and make sound decisions on a good day. But fear short circuits our brain, and I think that's an apt analogy.

In an electrical system, a short circuit occurs when the electricity is supposed to follow a particular path. But when presented with the opportunity to take a shorter path, it will certainly do so often bypassing the intent of a system, and that's what our brain does when we have fear. Stress hormones are released, blood pressure, your heart rate increases, our breathing increases, the blood flows faster, the blood moves into your limbs and we are primed to flee. That is the classic fight or flight response.

Moreover, at the same time, parts of our brains shut down. One of the most important areas that shuts down is our decision making center. Those hormones that are released in response to stress, they can impair the higher functioning of the prefrontal cortex, which in turn disrupts our ability to intentionally adjust our mindset to regulate the fear response. We start to lose that conscious decision making process. Now, why does this happen?

It sounds bad to shut down a portion of our brain. However, this is a natural biological system that is designed for our safety. When a building catches fire, it's not a good time to think about your favorite knickknacks or the appropriate phone number to call for your insurance provider. The prime motivation should be get out of the house. The rest can wait.

However, fear can present a problem when we permit it to control us in circumstances where we ought to do some thinking and analysis and when we want to know better. Knowing we have fleshly weaknesses and recognizing what those are is the key to helping us fight them. Now I know I'm prone to distraction and impatience and knowing that does help me to be on the lookout for those reactions and helps me attempt to moderate them. The difference is between experiencing fear, which is normal and healthy, and cultivating the spirit of fear, which is an attitude that can creep in and influence our decision making to a surprising degree. Where might we see the effects

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of fear in our daily lives?

Well, one place. How about with other religions? Are there those who see all Muslims in a negative light due to the actions of a few extreme members? A small handful of Christians have done horrifying things in the name of belief and we would not wish to be judged on their behavior, right? Have we heard negative things about immigrants in recent years?

We've heard a lot of claims thrown around the public arena that are intentionally playing on our fears, and yet, no doubt many of you know some wonderful people who have immigrated to this country. There are a number within our own circles who have arrived from Poland, Moldova, Romania, and many of them are extremely upright, conscientious, diligent, hard workers contributing, right? But it's so easy to fall into this trap of judging an entire group by a few of the least favorable members. There can be a hundred good apples and one bad apple, but we jump straight to all apples are bad and this does not require cause.

We do it because we fear. Read with me Leviticus 19 verses 33 and 34 Leviticus 19 do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native born Israelites and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

God's will is quite the opposite of hating those who are different. Instead, his command is to show tolerance and love. Furthermore, Exodus 12:48 49 if there are foreigners living among you who want to celebrate the Lord's Passover, let all their males be circumcised. Only then may they celebrate the Passover with you like any native born Israelites. But no uncircumcised male may ever eat the Passover meal.

This instruction applies to everyone, whether a native born Israelite or a foreigner living among you. Foreigners could even participate in the Passover if they wished. Yes, there were restrictions, but they weren't hated, shunned, mistreated, feared, and it's not just those with different cultures or religions we fear. We fear those with different opinions, unable to have a polite conversation where we seek to understand their point of view.

And this is made worse by the current spirit of division throughout our world. It's supercharged by social media and monetization of what's called news. Do we really allow others to be different and do it their own way, or do we feel like everyone should do it our way because we know better? Think about the Pharisees. How did they react when faced with a different perspective than what they thought was right?

Were they able to agree to disagree? Were they able to meet and continue to discuss it? Or did they immediately become threatened and enter fight or flight mode and choose to fight, physically attacking or plotting against those who oppose them? So are we really aware of how we fear the other in our spiritual lives? Do we recognize when we feel that fear?

Have you ever seen brethren that refused to shake hands or perhaps even speak because they held different views? Has it ever happened that brethren have opted to meet elsewhere or ask others to leave because they were forced to confront difficult and uncomfortable questions? Are there divisions among Bible students because of divisions in interpretation of Scripture? Now, I'm not talking of fundamental differences of belief about things like the ransom or the Trinity. These things are clearly they clearly differentiate between between two very different views of our Father the Creator, Someone who believes that God equals Jesus, or someone who goes through

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linguistic contortions to try to explain how three things can be the same and yet not okay?

These are barriers to fruitful collective discussion. But are there well loved details of Bible student belief that hang on a large scaffolding of logic with its foundation built on one or two not particularly clear scriptures? I'm actually not thinking of anything particular, brethren, nor would I bring it up now if I had one in mind. This is not supposed to be an argument about an actual point of theology, but rather an argument about our heart, attitude, and our reaction to those we see of as the others. If you can't tolerate someone disagreeing about the interpretation of a couple of maybe vague and unclear scriptures, that sounds like fear to me.

Are there other instigators of fear? Do we fear things that make us embarrassed or make us Feel small. A very common source of fear today is the fear of missing out. It's normal for us to fear being alone, to fear danger, to fear loss, to fear embarrassment, to fear our own shortcomings and not being enough, and sometimes we fear change.

Fear in these cases is a response to being put in any condition we don't like that's uncomfortable, and if we're really embarrassed by our fear or overcome by it, it can even erupt as anger. Let's take a look at several biblical examples of poor decision making based upon fear. Genesis 3, verse 4, and the serpent said unto the woman, you shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired, to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat, and the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. Now, it doesn't actually say anywhere in there that Eve is afraid, but I would suggest there's a version of fear in there. We hear it often in conversation today. I would suggest that's the fear of missing out.

I don't know what that is. I want to know what that is. True, it's not tre dire. It's not fear in the traditional sense, but it does fit with our theme from this perspective of our reasoning pathways being short circuited, doing to the way we look at the world, and I think Adam even follows it up with his own fear.

Perhaps a fear of missing out, perhaps of not experiencing what Eve experienced. Maybe he feared being alone. We don't know a lot of the details of his thought process, but I really do believe they were not thinking clearly at this time, and that can be a response to or an irrational response of the type that fear can cause. Genesis chapter 20.

Abraham, Genesis 20. Starting with verse 2 to 3 and then 9 through 11, Abraham introduced his wife Sarah by saying, she is my sister. So King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace. But that night God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him, you are a dead man, for that woman you have taken is already married. Verse 9.

Then Abimelech called for Abraham. What have you done to us? He demanded, what crime have I committed that deserves treatment like this, Making me and my kingdom guilty of this great sin? No one should ever do what you have done. Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?

Abraham replied, I thought, this is a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her. Abraham's afraid they would kill him to get his wife. If any of you think that you are immune to lapses in judgment caused by fear, think again. There are not many in the Bible we recognize as

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being more faithful than Abraham.

But even he fell victim to fear for his life, despite a lot of faith in God. Moses. Exodus 32, verses 1, 2 and 4. When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. Come on, they said.

Make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt. So Aaron said, take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters and bring them to me. Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down and molded it into the shape of a calf, and when the people saw it, they exclaimed, o Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

So the Israelites said to themselves, we don't know what happened to Moses. In other words, they were afraid that he was lost or had left them, and in their fear and short sightedness, they immediately turned to idols. Numbers 13, verses 27, 28 and 30 to 33. The spies visiting out Canaan.

This was their report to Moses. We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country, a land flowing with milk and honey. Here's the kind of fruit it produces. But the people living there are powerful and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak.

But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. Let's go at once to take the land, he said. We can certainly conquer it. But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. We can't go up against them.

They are stronger than we are. So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites. The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there.

The descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that's what they thought too. So here is another instance of fear for their lives. Despite how much evidence that God was on their side, surely they knew that Their God was the one God, and He could deliver them through anything.

But that was their reasonable selves. In their fear, they could not see this, no matter how obvious it should have been. 2 Samuel 11 so the next morning David verses 14 through 17 by the way. 2nd Samuel 11, 14, 17 so the next morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest, then pull back so that he will be killed.

So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy's strongest men were fighting, and when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.

I'm sure many of you recognize this from the story of David. He was unable to bury the results of his sin, so he panicked. Rather than accept the consequences of that sin, which were going to come sooner or later, he compounded them by intentionally putting Uriah, a man who fought with David and trusted in David, to death. Though he sought to hide this sin from the people, he could never hide it from God, and in the end, he had to pay for both sins, recognizing the consequences

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of his fear.

The fear did nothing to actually resolve his problem, but it just made things worse by giving into this impulse to deny it and avoid try to avoid that original failure. Luke 22, verses 56 through 62 this is Peter denying Jesus. A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally, she said, this man was one of Jesus's followers. But Peter denied it.

Woman, he said, I don't even know him. After a while, someone else looked at him and said, you must be one of them. No, man, I'm not. Peter retorted. About an hour later, someone else insisted, this must be one of them because he is a Galilean too.

But Peter said, man, I don't know what you are talking about, and immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. At that moment, the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord's words flashed through Peter's mind. Before the rooster crows, tomorrow morning you will deny three times that you even know me.

And Peter left the courtyard weeping bitterly. This is a particularly sad example, and I think maybe it illustrates the consequences of fear better than all the other examples. Peter was literally told he would do this. No doubt he didn't even believe it at the time. But he was warned, and even with forewarning, he was unable to recognize the fear that was overtaking him until it was too late.

If even Peter, so closely devoted to Jesus, who was forewarned of this temptation of his flesh to deny Jesus, could still fall prey to that fleshly fear, then at the very least we owe it to ourselves to recognize the power of this fear, to actively work against it, and I would say to forgive ourselves for our failures, because we, we know we're not going to beat it 100% of the time. Once we accept that fear is a fleshly response, then what we need to be vigilant about, our next step is to strategize. How do we fight back? Well, first we have a fear of actual danger, which is not necessarily a bad fear. It's normal and healthy to not flirt with danger.

In fact, we read of Jesus being tempted to cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple, and his response, which I'm sure is familiar to all of us, is, it is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Next, and more importantly, we look at the fear of discomfort. This includes things like the fear of missing out, the fear of being alone, of not being enough, of embarrassment. Now these are fears that can be reduced through the building up of your self worth and self confidence and a focus on what is really important.

And as a hint, it's not the latest episode of whatever is popular on TV right now. Remember, these fears are not of God. The primary text we read at the beginning, 2nd Timothy 1:7. For God has not given us a sphere of fear and timidity, but of power and love and self discipline. Recall Paul's statement in Philippians 4:13.

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength, and again Paul addresses this concept in Galatians 2, verse 20. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

The only way to work on these fears is practice, practice and practice, practice, putting on the spirit of love and self discipline and constantly working to remind yourselves of the trust we put in our Father and the strength we have through his Spirit. The third type of fear centers around the fear of the other. In some ways this can be the most difficult to recognize. This fear is like a chameleon. It

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camouflages itself as a very reasonable difference in opinion.

Everyone is permitted their own views and no one is forcing you to agree with me. But the deceptive part is when it doesn't end there, we surround ourselves with only those that agree with us, and the more they agree, the better, and when we see or hear something that doesn't comply, or rather doesn't completely align with our little echo chamber, then we share a meaningful look with our friends, and maybe we roll our eyes. There they go again, and we avoid talking to them, and we certainly don't invite them to come visit or perhaps to speak in our class.

Now, this fear is really difficult to cope with, as difficult to cope with as it is to recognize, because it requires you to make a conscious effort to be open to and to understand other points of view. This understanding does not require agreement. To understand does not require agreement. But that is often a distinction that gets lost along the way. If you fear that understanding might change your mind, then you put up a barrier to that understanding and you keep the others at a safe distance.

To begin with, it's essential that you build a strong foundation of things that you really understand yourself. Your own foundation. If all you've ever believed is based upon what someone told you, then your foundation will be shaky. You'll know this in your heart, and if you sense a weakness in your own foundation, this turns into a fear of being wrong and a fear of change. Some good signs that you may be on a shaky foundation, perhaps have you ever shared a fact you heard elsewhere?

If and when someone contradicts it or pokes a hole in that fact, you are suddenly forced to question did you actually have a fact in the first place? You have no context to work with or hold onto because this was not even your own fact. This was something you heard somewhere else. Have you ever seen someone respond to a question without their own words? Perhaps they quote directly from a volume or reprint.

That's great, but then do they make it their own? Do they say, I like how this quote here and this quote here come together to make this point? Or do they just quote something and that's the answer? I don't need to add my own 2 cents. This is similar to the first point, because are they really sharing their own thinking and reasoning?

If the information and reasoning that you're sharing is correct, if it's not in your own words, with your own thoughts to back it up, then you run the risk of parroting a belief without really understanding the details, and as before, if you're forced to confront questions about that belief, you might find yourself uncomfortable and fearful and perhaps even becoming angry.

You know, it's great to share a valuable and meaningful quotation, but be sure not to leave it there. Add your thoughts, add your explanations, add what it means to you. Another valuable tool is to make use of your closest friends. Find a confidant, a trusted brother or sister, maybe a therapist if the circumstances are troubling. The important part is if you have someone you can speak with where you have no fear of judgment, enabling you to spend time in a safe environment sorting through your reactions and converting them from reactions to conscious responses.

I'm sure many of you remember brother Rick Serasi's excellent discourse on this gap between your experience and your response to it, right? And we have to work to get to that point where we're thinking about our responses and consciously responding. We need to focus on ourselves much more than on those who are around us. If I'm constantly striving to be better and understand more and 95% of my energy is spent in that direction, I don't have time to worry about the things you

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believe differently than I do.

Consider the Pharisees again. Do you get the impression that the bulk of their energy was spent on themselves and them trying to be better and understand God's will more deeply? Was that really what the Pharisees were doing? Or were they instead focused on Jesus is saying something that undermines our beliefs and perhaps he's taking away our power and our limelight and maybe the income we're making. Imagine what it must have been like for them to devote their entire lives to the study and interpretation of the law.

Imagine the extent to which their self worth was enmeshed with this status in this position, and then imagine how fragile it all seemed when Jesus began poking holes in that foundation. They became threatened, they became fearful, and they lashed out in anger. Can we find ourselves doing the same? If your heart is close to God and you see the overarching beauty of his plan for mankind, then your foundation is in the right place.

Matthew, chapter 7 starting with verse 24 verses 24 through 27 anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise. Like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the flood waters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish. Like a person who builds a house on sand and when the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.

There are really two things to keep in mind here. 1. It's important to build our house on that rock to make sure we have a firm and trustworthy foundation. 2. Be careful about how large and all encompassing you try to make that foundation.

Because every time you add a new component that you're sure is rock solid and inflexible and we can't debate, you risk trusting on shaky ground. You risk building out beyond that firm foundation, and if you ever add a component that is shaky ground and you don't recognize it but you insist that it is, if that component starts to shake, your entire structure will feel insecure. Now, this is not an attempt to say we shouldn't have strong beliefs, but rather an encouragement to put yourselves in a position where you can discuss other viewpoints without a sense that you feel threatened. There are a couple more minor points I want to suggest.

These fall under the category of wisdom that even the world recognizes. Get out and meet people beyond your immediate comfort zone. Participate in social gatherings. Travel. Meet and befriend people who stretch your experience and understanding outside the boundaries of what's safe and comfortable.

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely. On these accounts, broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime. That was from Mark Twain back in 1869. Also remember the saying where two disagree, it is not possible for both to be right, but it is possible for both to be wrong. The Spirit of Love we spend a great deal of time looking at our fleshly experience with fear and its dangers.

One obvious solution to these challenges is to recognize those dangers and try to minimize those dangers. We can also spend time exercising our minds in the opposite direction, and that's by exercising the spirit of love. A neighbor moves in next door and they're Muslim. You know, there are people out there who would assume the worst, but they're against them in some way. They're

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dangerous.

The alternative is to greet them, make them feel welcome, befriend them, learn about their culture. Obviously, this is oversimplified, and obviously I'm picking on one main theme in our world today. But the underlying point is an important one. Most people would publicly and consciously recognize that the United States in particular has a foundation on individual freedoms, including the freedom of religion, and yet there's a very large and active and vocal minority that acts as if the foundation only involves the freedom of their religion and the other are somehow a threat to that.

The obvious, thoughtful public knowledge we have isn't the problem. It's the subconscious, reactive Defensive, fearful response for which we need to remain vigilant, and perhaps the best cure is to practice love for all. If we have love for our brethren and our families and our fellow humans, does that mean we accept otherness? Have you ever found your biases diminishing in light of actually getting to know somebody, or in recognizing the flaws in those closest to you?

There are brethren whom I subconscious tells me don't like me much, and the quiet hidden rationale is they don't make eye contact, or maybe they don't greet me at convention. I have to fight back against this reaction because it's equally likely, maybe even probable, that the underlying issue is that they're introverted or shy, and I don't approach them because I'm introverted and shy, and suddenly there's a problem where there really shouldn't be a problem. Discomfort can sometimes encourage us to leap to conclusions. A good example. I have a strong negative reaction to smoking.

In addition to the general unpleasantness in being around those who smoke, there's often an image of a smoking type of person that can be negative, and because very few in my immediate circle smoke, it became easy to divide the world into non smokers, the good ones, and the smokers the bad ones. It wasn't until I got older that I started to notice this was a terrible distinction. It's an easy distinction, and we really like easy, but it's a terrible one, and the main factor that helped me begin to break down this hasty assumption about people's character was recognizing some of my family members that have struggled to quit smoking for decades.

As soon as I consciously connected the behavior with those who I trusted were legitimately trying to stop, it changed my attitude from one of distaste and judgment to one of sympathy and patience, and the same can be said of any negative social stigma. We find it so very easy to judge others, but it's far too easy when we don't even really know them or we keep them at arm's length, and there are so many other such stigmas. I don't want to digress into a long list of them, but to point out how that in virtually any case where we see a common stigma, there's an opportunity to get to know someone.

And it's probably a good idea to get to know someone before you jump to any conclusions. If we embrace this spirit of love, do we try to be inclusive instead of exclusive? Do we seek to understand the struggles our brethren are going through? Or perhaps do some of us smugly sit on our pedestals thinking were better than others. Luke 18, verse 11.

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer. I thank you God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector. If our hearts are fixed on our goal, on our walk in love of the brethren, do we have time to worry about missing out on the latest news or gossip or entertainment?

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If we're walking in the footsteps of the Master and co laborers with our brethren and family, do we have cause to fear being alone? Yes, we can be lonely, but a family is there when you need them. We just have to try to find ways to remind ourselves of that fact. We can work to rely upon our brethren for companionship and trust in the Lord. The same can be true for danger and for loss if our treasures are in heaven and we trust that all things work together for good.

In general, we have the privilege to go through most days without living in fear. Fear has its place. Fear of a speeding car or a wild animal. But we can choose to not live every day in constant fear and worry. Do we allow ourselves to fear embarrassment?

Do we fear admitting when we're at fault? Do we ever fear not being enough? Incidentally, I think this fear is what led to Cain feeling shame and jealousy and eventually enough anger to kill his brother. If we love and trust our brethren, shouldn't we recognize they will forgive us our faults in precisely the same way we are willing to forgive them? And isn't this a wonderful reminder that this is exactly why we need to operate under this constant willingness to forgive?

There's a psychologist by the name of John Gottman. He is a pleasure to listen to. You can find many videos of him sharing his work. But one component I want to bring to you as we close is the concept that he calls positive sentiment override, and this refers to that moment when someone gives you a strange look and you have a choice to interpret it in two different ways.

One, they're looking at me funny. They must think whatever I said is incredibly stupid and I need to just stop talking. Or two, they're looking at me funny. Maybe I used the wrong word there. Or maybe they didn't quite understand something.

Positive sentiment override is the state in which you tend to interpret ambiguous words or actions as positive instead of negative. If we view our neighbors or brethren or family primarily as people who mean well and love us, it colors all those little ambiguous interactions into positive interactions. Our attitude is incredibly important in that dynamic, and at its essence, it boils down to a love for the brethren and for mankind. Try to understand them and their needs with a higher priority than trying to impose your needs or standards upon them.

First, John, chapter four. I'm going to read a big passage here. Seven through 21. 1 John 4. Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God.

Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God. For God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is brought to full expression in us, and God has given us spirit, His Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.

Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them, and as we live in God, our love grows more perfect.

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So we will not be afraid on the Day of judgment. But we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. 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.

We love each other because he loved us first. If someone says, I love God but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar. For if we don't love people, we can see, how can we love God whom we cannot see? And he has given us this command. Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.

We leave you with this. Beware of your tendency to fear and work to replace that fear with love. We're all fighting that same fight, and I hope you will encourage me in my struggles as I try to encourage you. Praise God.