



TOUCH POINT

## NO FEAR. TouchPoint for April 28, 2021

### 1 John. God Is Love

*7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

*13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.*

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.*

*19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

*"God is love... And ... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment..."*

God is love. Not God loves. God is love. It isn't a quality of God. It isn't an act of God. It is the essence of God.

It isn't like here is this thing called God, and one aspect of this thing called God is love. No, this is the core, the essence.

We talk about the purity of God... but pure what? What is God pure in?

Love according to John and this passage ... and what is the definition of love? I suppose there are many but the best I have ever heard of is love means 'doing what is best for the other.'

Doing what is best for the other! Which can't come from an ivory tower nor from some words in a book, the Bible or otherwise. Love, and doing what is best for the other, means I involve the other, listen to the other, engage the other.

And maybe that's why I fear love... because it involves me in the other.

But John writes, *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment...”*

Love cast out fear... and fear comes from punishment. So if love casts out fear, love must necessarily cast out punishment. So if God is love... ergo... i.e., therefore... and in conclusion...If God is love, God is not punishment.

Let me repeat that again: God is not punishment. You know what, let's let that one sink in one more time.

**GOD IS NOT PUNISHMENT!!!**

I want you to think about God without thinking about punishment. Can you conceive of God without conceiving of punishment? Can you picture, image, conceptualize God without the thought or threat of punishment? Can you?

I don't know if I can.

And how much of our theology is based on fear of Hell? Fear of punishment. And think of how acceptable it has become when we talk about God in that way.

Now imagine you heard this conversation coming from the family next door from where you live...  
“I love you Father” ... “Why?” “Because if I don't, you won't feed me and care for me”.  
You'd think that's crazy, insane, sick.

Now compare that to this...

“I love you heavenly Father” ... “Why?”... “Because if I don't, you will make me spend eternity in Hell.”

And you know what the church thinks? OK... Good... God will accept that. Enter into heaven. Praise the Lord and Hallelujah! Another soul is saved. Because of their FEAR of Hell and PUNISHMENT!

Ahhh... there's nothing like a sinner in the hands of an angry God. Just ask Jonathan Edwards. Sometimes I think our theology is hopeless.

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment...”*

Is it possible to even think of God without thinking of fear and punishment?

I know I can't. And how do I know I can't? I only need to go back to the last time I drove down into central Scottsdale.

Some guy cut me off, almost ran me off the road. Now, having been in an accident 8 years ago that I still feel the effects of, I didn't respond well. My immediate thought wasn't “God bless you.”

No, it was “God damn you.”

But then I felt guilty, bad, and fearful. Now I didn't feel guilty, bad, and fearful because I had just asked God to send someone to Hell for all eternity. No, I felt guilty, bad, and fearful because I was taught I shouldn't talk or think like that and now I was afraid God was going to do to me what I had just asked God to do to that other guy.

So maybe I should listen to the words of 1<sup>st</sup> John again: *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment...”*

What would happen to our theology if we took out the words fear and punishment when we talk to people about God? What would happen to our way of evangelism if we took out the concepts that evoke fear or punishment?

Fear and punishment do not have a place in love and since God is love, they don't have a place in God. Punishment does not have a place in God.

So is it OK to say “God does not punish?”

You know, I'm not sure how far I want to take this, not out of fear of punishment from God, but from fear of punishment from just about every church, pastor and Christian and non-Christian I think I've ever talked to. Because if there is one thing everyone seems to agree on, it's that God is the one who evens the score, gives people what they deserve, doesn't let anyone get away with anything.

But if love is 'doing what's best for the other' then punishment as vengeance, evening the score and retribution, is not love. It may make me feel better, but it is not love of the other.

Now, I want to make a distinction between discipline and punishment. Because I think we confuse the two. Discipline is restorative. Punishment is retribution. I think John is speaking to the latter. Punishment for punishment's sake. Vengeance, retribution, evening the score – exacting one's pound of flesh.

Discipline is different. It's restorative. Its purpose is to put back together.

Now I suppose if you think you are perfect, discipline will feel like punishment... but hopefully we have matured beyond that.

Does God discipline? Does God correct? I hope so. Otherwise, what hope do I have? Actually God doesn't just discipline and correct, God kills and raises to new life, God brings about death and resurrection.

Punishment is concerned with death only. Love is concerned with death and resurrection.

There is a difference. A rather significant one I might add.

But isn't God the ultimate giver of reward and punishment? They go together don't they? Reward and punishment. Two sides of the same coin. So if punishment goes away, does reward also? Yes!!! Love actually kills punishment, and reward, and raises up something new. A new creation. Can we even imagine a life not based on reward and punishment?

If God is not a God of reward or punishment, then what is left? What is the alternative? I think John is trying to tell us.

God is love. And to live in God is to live in love. And if God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being, then it is love in which we live and move and have our being, not fear and punishment.

So to live in love is to live outside of reward and punishment. To live in love is to be dead to reward and punishment. The radical nature of this passage from 1John is astounding, I would say almost frightening... but since... *perfect love casts out fear*; I guess I can't.

And now I think about this meal... and it isn't just Peter who denies this Jesus, this Christ, this God of love and not of fear and punishment... and it isn't just Judas who betrays this Jesus, this Christ, this God of love and not of fear and punishment. It's me too. Because I am constantly denying and betraying this God of love by invoking God's punishment on others, and fearing it for myself or invoking God's reward for myself, and often withholding it from others.

And you know what God does in this meal to Peter and Judas... and me too... well, God doesn't punish me for this denial and betrayal. No, God reaches out to me with love... and forgiveness.

"Take and eat... take and drink... this is my body and blood shed for you and for ALL people for the forgiveness of sin."

Fear and punishment died on the cross in Jesus' loving pronouncement of forgiveness.

And here in this meal we feast on that love... and it lives in us.

**Amen.**

# *Spirit in the Desert*

## **Opening Song**

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

### **Spirit Divine**

(Keith Duke)

Spirit of Love, enfold and teach us.  
Spirit of Peace, rest deep within  
Spirit of change, transform and heal us  
Spirit Divine

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Healer of Our Every Ill**

(Marty Haugen)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow. Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope  
beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding

Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

## **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Taize Reflections)

## **Benediction**

### **A Celtic Blessing**

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you,  
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of  
your life.

The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.