

## Fearing Christ

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We've been through a lot this past year: fear, death, love. In fact, each of these have intensified: greater fear, increased loss of life, longing for deeper love. I want to pick up on three themes in our passage and show you how Jesus reframes, deepens, substantially alters: fear, love, death.

### Fear

We've all been living in fear of getting sick and dying, anxious we'll contract covid and join the three million dead. This fear has, naturally, altered our lives: funerals via video not in person, conversations with friends thru masks, avoiding people altogether. Our fears *form* us: made us more cautious, less social, more inwardly-focused, less busy. How do we overcome fear? Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard says, *by facing a greater fear*. "[This is the way a person always gains courage; When he fears the greater danger, he always has the courage to face a lesser one; when he is exceedingly afraid of one danger, it is as if the others did not exist at all.](#)" *We overcome one fear by facing a greater fear*. As austinites, this was painfully apparent when the snowpocalypse hit. We'd been fearful of the pandemic, seen it take lives. But then the storm hit and we lost power, heat, and water. We flocked into warming shelters, into one another's homes maskless, gained courage to live in close quarters with people for days that we'd avoided for a year. Why? We encountered a greater fear. Reverence for the storm gave us courage to confront our fears. Now what would happen if we encountered *the Fear of fears*, the greatest danger? How might that change our lives? What is it? 2 Cor 5:10: [For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.](#) The greatest danger isn't covid but Christ: [Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened](#) (Re 20:11-12). The greatest fear isn't even death; it's the judgment of Christ. Heaven and earth flee from him. How much more should we tremble? Why? We will be judged for *what was done in the body, good or evil*. This means what you do in this life matters. Our known and unknown actions, our public and private sins. Christ will bring

“bring to light things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Co 4:5). Our motives laid bare. Now we’ve got a lump in our throat. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hb 10:31. Who will be judged? *All must appear*. A universal judgment: young and old, great and small. It’s not optional. *Must*. It is inevitable. History is moving toward this point. What will happen? *Each one may receive what is due*. The word receive means “to bear” in personal experience. When divine justice arrives, the evil done by us will be returned to us, laid at our feet, and good with it. How should we respond to this terrifying thought? **2 responses**. *Moral Flourishing*. Since we will be judged for good and evil, this picture of Christ should motivate a life of goodness not evil, of moral flourishing. When we find the fear greater than all other fears, it should launch us out in courage. Those who encountered the greater danger of the snowpocalypse were launched into acts of goodness: inviting strangers into homes, sharing food and water, rescuing strangers. One guy in my neighborhood went door to door in full ski gear, with helmet, checking on people. So it should be with us. In awe of the fear of fears, we launch out in moral excellence and service. *Repentant awe*. Rendered defenseless before the great white throne, its pure and holy gaze, we admit our faults, confess our sins, and cry out for mercy. Do it now in the presence of Christ. Turn away from sins and turn to Jesus, who is not only the sovereign Judge but also the sacrificial Lamb, slain for our sins. What person possessing all the power, justice, and righteousness in the universe would become a sacrificial lamb for those who reject him? Not me. Willing to bet not you. And that’s why *he is the Christ*. *He is worthy of our awe*. The sovereign Lord become the sacrificial Lamb.

## Love

This brings us to love. Verse 11, *Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others*. An active fear of the sovereign Lord moves a person to persuade others. Of what? Of the Christ they’ve encountered. Why persuade others of Jesus? For the Christian it can’t be to escape judgment. She knows Christ has borne her judgement. Perhaps to score points with God? Not if in turning to Christ, we receive his A++ righteousness. Why persuade others? Verse 14: *For the love of Christ controls us*. Atheist Penn Jillette asks the Christian, *How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them?* You see, to love somebody is to tell them where to find everlasting life. The *love* of

Christ compels us. Paul describes this motivating love, [because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died](#). The one has died for all. The word “for” is the world “on behalf of” or in the place of, which means Jesus expressed his love for us, not with chocolates and flowers, but by suffering and dying in our place. Why? One died, not just for one, but for billions. Jesus died for billions, which means the burden of their collective debt was so immense, so gargantuan, he was crushed for the billions of sins of billions of people, and he did it willingly. In the film *The Courier* a true story about an everyday business man recruited by MI-6. Greville Wynne becomes a liaison to a Russian defector who passes along Russian intelligence, including the plans to put missiles in Cuba that could wipe out the U.S and start a nuclear war. Greville risks his life for all, to prevent a war that could wipe out humanity. After being captured and tortured for months, he is visited by his wife. Standing in a cell, a shell of his former self, he says to her through bars of death, I think of you every day I am here. That’s what has kept me going. Why did he suffer? For love, for the love of billions *and* the love of one. And so it is with Christ, love for all and love for one, for you, me. As we near death, we often become more honest with ourselves about the lives we’ve lived, the decisions we’ve made. Last year my grandfather died, but before he did he shared from his death bed his one regret—he didn’t go door to door in his apartment complex to share the love of Christ with each person. When we absorb Jesus’ love, we are compelled to persuade others.

## Death

Finally death, which for many is the fear of fears. But this passage tells us those who trust in Christ *have all died*. What does he mean? Jesus’ physical death leads to *spiritual* life. The old life of service to self and sin is executed and in its place new life springs up: [Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come](#) (17). New creation means new identity: to be united with your Creator and Redeemer. How can we enjoy this? *Resurrection*. Verse 15: for their sake died *and was raised*. When Jesus rose from the dead, he secured new spiritual life for all who hope in him. His death becomes your death, his life becomes your life. And it gets even better. Jesus doesn’t rise just to impart new spiritual life, but new physical life, which is what the first five verses are about. [For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that](#)

we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (4). Paul's hope isn't to escape the body—to be unclothed—a disembodied soul flitting from cloud to cloud. No, his yearning, our promise is to be further clothed. The word is over-clothed. Our bodies draped in resurrection, renovated by the glory of Jesus. Our future is an embodied, glorified state, free of viruses, sin, and death. How? *Death is swallowed up by life. Resurrection means Jesus inhales, consumes, swallows the one thing everyone fears, death. Easter morning Jesus ate death for breakfast!* Standing outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus said *This sickness is not unto death* and raises him from the dead. To which Kierkegaard makes another insightful comment: What if Lazarus had not been raised? He says, Lazarus would have been raised anyway. How? Because resurrection was standing at his tomb. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, victor over death. When we recover the fear of all fears, we are launched out in courage! Even death does not stand in our way. Courage to persuade others of Christ's love; courage to do good not evil; and courage to stand in repentant awe at the sacrificial lamb become the risen Lord.