

“Two Prevailing Contemporary Fears and One Everlasting Solution”

I John 4

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

August 29, 2021 • Sunday Evening Sermon

In this study, we will be looking at a couple of passages as we enter into our time together. I'd like to start by looking at Joshua 1. It was challenge enough to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Frank Barker when I became the pastor here but how would you like to follow Moses? That is where Joshua was and now the Lord says something to Joshua that Moses has already said to Joshua – you are facing a significant moment and you didn't pick this moment but I picked you for this moment and I'll be with you in this moment, so this is where your confidence is.

Now this is what He says to Joshua in Joshua 1:1–9; [1] *After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, [2] “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. [3] Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. [4] From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. [5] No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. [6] Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. [7] Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. [8] This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. [9] Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous.** Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*

Joshua is to be strong and courageous because the task is formidable and one God is with him as his strength and secondly My Word is what will guide and equip you and give you your life view that will be seen in your lifestyle. The positive was to be strong and courageous and the negative was not to be frightened or dismayed. That statement would not be given if there wasn't an occasion to be frightened and dismayed. Joshua is going to be cast in the middle of it. It is an extraordinary mission that he has been given, following the steps of Moses who guided them for 40 years into the wilderness, and God say He will be with him, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. God's Word will guide Joshua and if he stays in His Word, surrender to His Spirit, follow His commandments, being strong and courageous, not being frightened or dismayed because it's not Joshua (you) but the Lord your God is with you wherever you go on mission.

Now I'd like to look at Philippians 4. This is Paul's missionary support letter to the church at Philippi as he writes back to them. Philippians 4:4–7 says [4] *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. [5] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; [6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which*

surpasses all understanding, will guard (stand century) your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Here is your confidence, for even as you make your petitions, your praise and your supplications you do so with thanksgiving out of your confidence in the Lord. Other than prayer, preaching/teaching is the primary ministry of a pastor and so I want to tell you why I would do this kind of study today. I have tried to be appropriately transparent about challenges in life and ministry, but what about a life of a pastor/teacher. I have been guided as a preacher/teacher with certain convictions where God's Word is infallible, inerrant, sufficient, supreme, sovereign and absolutely reliable so in the pulpit ministry I have always felt the best and safest thing to do is to do what Paul said to Timothy – preach the Word. So, I preach continually in the text and it is also known as expository preaching.

There are many great blessings of expository preaching and one of them is you know there will be balance built into your preaching ministry because God's Word is not imbalanced. II Timothy 3:16–17 says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* God's Word is sufficient and equips Christians for every good work so since all Scripture is inspired by God I can't go to a bad text. We know God's Word is profitable anywhere I am preaching from will be profitable. It is profitable for teaching and application (reproof, correction and training). It is profitable for discipleship for preaching pulls the trigger on small group and life on life discipleship, therefore the man of God will be equipped for every good work.

Also, a pastor has a discipling dynamic with his people so I have also tried to make room for topical expository preaching. That is choosing topics, not to preach on the topic but the text that addresses that topic and preaching on that text as the Holy Spirit lays it on my heart so that God's people can understand His Word on this topic.

Thirdly, every once in a while, there is a topical sermon that I tend to look at more like a presentation or a talk. On Sunday mornings I almost always try to stay in an expositional series where I have preached on book after book after book in the Bible. There may be some subjects, themes or doctrines a pastor might want to avoid because they are controversial but when it comes up in the text God makes you take it on and you have to do it. I am constantly amazed in an expositional sermon an unbeliever as come to Christ, a believer has been comforted and another believer has been convicted where in the same sermon God multi-tasked by the Holy Spirit doing the work He does in a glorious way.

On Sunday nights the main fare is topical expository preaching. For instance, I just finished about nine studies on contemporary progressive Christianity and I tried to deal with that topic from Scripture. When doing topical expository sometimes you deal with the topic and then present it from the text, other times you go to the text and then to the topic. It goes both ways. An example from Scripture comes from Acts 2 when Peter reads a text and then he expounds it from Joel 2. In my last study Paul gave us doctrine in Romans but then he went to Genesis 6 which was the text. So topical expository can start with the topic and go to the text that needs to be addressed or it can start with the text and then go to the topic to identify the roots from which you have heard and just embraced.

God's design to give us foundations for a Christian world and life view as to how we're to live as it confronts, right now we're experiencing the clash of world views the secular humanistic materialist view with the Biblical Christianity that has influenced our culture in the past. So, I think it's time to go back to get the foundations of God's design as to how we are to

see everything and I can't think of a better book to do it from than Genesis. On Sunday nights I'm trying to disciple those whom God has moved with a hungry heart to be there. This is not the same as one on one discipleship and small groups but it is a type of discipleship. So, I explain this role of a pastor preacher/teacher for you to understand what he is called to do and to minister to you the Word of God.

In this role he is also a pastor and a shepherd. He is always aware of people, not only to respond to crisis in their life, blessings and challenges as well, as he shepherds (small s) them with the elders in the church, which include older women shepherding the younger women, but he is to be a model, mentor and multiplier of that shepherding ministry. When he looks upon people in the context of life, he asks God to give him awareness as to where the friction is, what the issues are, what is happening in their lives and that not only helps him with the application section of expository preaching but it also helps him with his one on one and small group ministry. It also helps him to identify things that need to be addressed from God's Word which comes out through topical expository preaching. We live in such a time.

For instance, when COVID-19 started I tried to give a Biblical world and life view and I revisited it once from Titus 2. I shared how we live in a present distress by giving three framing points. You live with prudence but not panic. You live trusting God but not tempting God. You live faithfully in order to live fearlessly. By in large, I have seen much success in God's people in addressing it in that way but I have also seen in the last 4 to 5 months some dismal failures of how we have allowed the encroachment of Satan's strategy of fear to be at work in the lives of God's people.

I love the book series Chronicles of Narnia and I also love the book series The Lord of the Rings. In the first book, The Fellowship of the Ring, I love the moment when Frodo and Gandalf talk about the time in which they live. It says *"I wish the Ring need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."* We are appointed to the times by God and the times are appointed unto us. I'm paraphrasing but Frodo's friend Samwise says something to the effect, 'Let us live in such a way that in times past they will be singing songs about us.' This is where me and Samwise part ways.

Our desire is to live in such a way, not that they will sing songs about us when it's over but that they will sing the songs of Zion. There are so many wonderful faithful spiritual hymns that we sing that really explain it all. There is one from the Heidelberg Catechism, one from Romans 8, Romans 5 and John 17 which contain glorious truths. We want to sing those songs by having seen what the Lord has done in us and through us in these times. Are we in times like these ambassadors for Christ or when people evaluate us would they evaluate us as ambassadors for economic or political agendas? How would they see us? Because a Biblical life view is read through the lifestyle. When you have the life love of Christ in your heart and a life view of the mind of Christ for life, then your life points people to Christ.

I know in a moment like this, I'm asking you to be a missionary in these times and things. These times I think are very difficult in three areas right now. We are disoriented and I sense at least momentary, Satan's success. Sometimes I feel like I'm in the book of Corinthians, especially the opening chapter where Paul says to the Corinthians, 'I hear there are divisions among you and these ought not to be.' Paul makes room for one division. Paul takes seriously Jesus' prayer in John 17 – that your people will be one and others will know you are His disciples. I don't think when Jesus prays that His people will be one is speaking about organizationally for that's another whole issue – denominations in churches. Jesus is speaking

organically – the organism of the body of Christ. With all its diversity there ought to be a demonstrated unity – a unity that is built on truth of His Word and enabled by the Holy Spirit. I love the way Ephesians 4:3 says [3] *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. And it's through the love of the brethren for one another. It is so crucial for this to be understood.

Paul looked at Corinth and didn't see this unity. Paul understood there were necessary divisions about the truth of God's Word for there are times division has to take place because there is an adulteration of God's Word or there is apostasy to the level of heresy. Heresy are theological errors that if embraced and believed will damn the souls of men. We cannot have fellowship or unity with that. Even in the matters of God's Word, God's people by the Spirit of God have enough Divinely ordained common sense to understand that some things are primary, some are secondary and some are tertiary.

Did you know that Al Mohler and I have some very interesting differences on baptism and church government? But we have an organic unity in serving Christ together and we understand what is primary, secondary and tertiary. Now, if you abandon the deity of Christ and the Gospel, the salvation message that you are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone that is another whole issue. Those are things that if you get wrong will damn the souls of men but we have enough sense to negotiate and agree to disagree on secondary and tertiary issues and we certainly do not let the world's divisions into the church.

When I see divisions in a church over whether to wear a mask or not that's of Satan. We can have all kinds of convictions but things like are you going to get vaccinated or not should not cause divisions. I did a program on how to look at origins of vaccines but when medical decisions begin to produce divisions in the body of Christ, that's not right. We don't know the reasons why people wear a mask or don't or get vaccinated or don't, I just kind of work with people where they are as they work through these convictions. There is not a verse in the Bible about whether to wear a mask or not or whether to be vaccinated or not, so I refuse to be divided over these issues. When people make them divisive then they have to be addressed, directly and pointedly. It is not of the Lord.

Now, I want to try and substantiate that Biblically for you. If there are issues of primary doctrine, I am willing to lose my credentials, willing to be disciplined, willing to be excommunicated but I am going to stand for the truth of God's Word. But I am not going to let Satan set the agenda for my life, in the divisions that he is producing in the culture and in the world. I want to meet them as Christ would have me meet them and meet them in a way that when I'm done people will see Jesus in truth and love at work. I am fully aware I am nowhere near perfect in that endeavor, but that is my heart desire. I want in these times to have wisdom from above so that people will sing the songs of Jesus, not the songs of political movements or cultural trends. We want people to see something different and not the tactics and strategies of the world, but the love of Christ that cannot be defeated.

I believe Satan is at work and I see the evidence of his work. I realize why he is here. These are difficult times. You are living in a time when you see your culture in a death spiral and we know it. The absurdity of a culture of movements by a board of education to take urinals out of a men's bathroom – how utterly ridiculous can we become. This is why I would like for you to read Carl Trueman's book, [The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self](#). Here is my effort at a succinct statement; we live in a culture of self that is devolving into insanity, absurdity because of the embrace of immorality. That causes us, if not filled with the Spirit of God and the Word of God, to be shaken and that's frightening.

We are seeing the evangelical church abandon the supremacy and the sufficiency of Scripture, losing the Gospel under the pressure of surrender to the world's sexual perversion and promiscuity. Where does Paul go to substantiate by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone? He goes to the Scriptures. What were his Scriptures? It was the Old Testament. I just read a quote from one of the leading pastors of progressive Christianity who said, 'we will lose the next generation if we do not disconnect from the Old Testament.' A person asked me what I thought of this and I said 'Disconnect from the Old Testament??? I need to be saturated with the Old Testament as it is fulfilled in Jesus and explained in the New Testament.' This leading pastor who said that, is being put before many churches and those coming out of seminary as a model to reach the next generation. I get discouraged, dismayed when I hear and see that as I think of just little ole me in Birmingham, Alabama for this is overwhelming to me. I never thought in the last half of my ministry I would be dealing with these issues. So, I see the disillusion of the culture, a culture that's in dissipation, but also the church that is spiritually and Scripturally illiterate, impotent and embracing unbiblical truths and announcing it as a badge of honor. Mainline Protestant is gone. This is happening in historically evangelical churches.

Then I see this marvelous American experiment that I have been blessed with that was the fruit of the Reformation, was instigated by the Great Awakening from 1735 to 1765 and I am watching a prostitution of government with sensibilities, a nation which has liberty governed by law through elected representatives and the law is king, being exchanged for the government that offers to be your new messiah. I see the culture in disarray, the evangelical church disintegrating and government trying to be the new messiah and think Lord, can't you stop this thing? How can we be salt and light in this?

Then I see what is thrown in the mix in the sovereignty of God – a pandemic – and a government that will use the pandemic to further its overreach and the church confronted with the pandemic that doesn't equip its people to think and how to live with prudence but not panic, with faithfulness but not fear, and with trusting God but not tempting God. How do you live thoughtfully as God's people in moments like this? Sadly, the church is not using this for discipleship but capitulates what Satan would do from the culture into the church. Now I see people in the church dealing with others over the issues associated with the pandemic as if their brothers, sisters and pastors are this diseased government in the culture, instead of dealing with them as brothers and sisters in Christ who are on the same journey together attempting to deal Biblically of how to deal with a plague.

This is similar to a plague happening during Martin Luther's time, and Luther would say he would live fearlessly and go minister to people who got the plague. Then he would fumigate his house and open the windows so that it airs out. Prudence without panic – faithfulness without fear – and trusting God without tempting God. Yet I don't see that kind of thing happening in the church today and thus the divisions. Why is this there?

Satan has strategies, schemes, snares and servants. I will be doing another series here soon on spiritual warfare that goes more in-depth on what Satan does. Satan has three strategies which are intimidation, imitation and infiltration. All three of these he has at work right now in the evangelical church. Imitation – evangelical churches that aren't evangelical. Infiltration – where Satan has infiltrated the pastoral leadership with false teachers and leaders and he has infiltrated the fellowship with slander and gossip. I have observed slander in violation of the 9th commandment that has absolutely frightened me in the midst of Christ's church. Slander and gossip are not merely telling lies for it may be telling truth the wrong way to the wrong people.

Intimidate is also being seen in the church and maybe Satan's most powerful weapon is fear to shame, silence, discourage, detour and depress God's people.

I Peter 5:8 says *[8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* Why does a lion roar? It roars because it tends to paralyze the victim. That is what Satan is trying to do with this pandemic infiltrating the culture, the government and the church and that God's people would be so frightened that they are either paralyzed or cause us to act irrationally which is something else fear does to us – not the way we ought to in light of who God is in His truth, but the way he wants us to – division, discouragement. Satan wants with fear to distort, paralyze and divide.

What do we do? God's single antidote is found in I John 4. I John 4:7–12 says *[7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. (Our greatest example of love is the demonstration that the Father has in giving His Son and the Son has in giving Himself) [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

No one out there in the United States or the world has ever seen God. They have seen the evidence of God, the handiwork of God, the fingerprints of God but they haven't seen God Himself but He say when you love one another Biblically the world sees God. They sing the songs of God. Let's look further at what John says.

I John 4:13–21 says *[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 testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. [15] Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him, and He in God. [16] So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. [17] **By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment,** because as He is so also 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 been perfected in love. [19] We love because He first loved us. [20] If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

God's love for us produces confidence according to I John 4:17 and not carelessness. Our antidote to the fear that Satan would bring from the disillusion of the culture, from the deformity of our government and from the dissipation of good sound theology in the church, is our confidence in Christ. There's your perfect love. Paul said in Philippians 4:6 to be anxious for nothing, so how do you disband anxiety? You go to the Lord for He guards your heart and mind. I want you to know how big your God is so that you understand how great His love is and when that happens there is no room for fear and anxiety. That does not mean we live carelessly. It doesn't mean I don't wash my hands (during this pandemic) but it does tell me how I live.

So, when I go to the barber to get my haircut and he tells me when I go in that he wants me to wear a mask, I say 'yes sir' or I go get another barber. Perhaps we'll have conversations about it but I won't be fearful, careless and I realize in the lives of Christians (my brothers and sisters in Christ) there must be room for them to have concerns the way I have concerns. The

same Paul who said not to be anxious for anything, also said he had *concerns* for the church (II Corinthians 11:28). You can have valid concerns in a Biblical world and not be dominated by fear. The question is, how do you deal with the concerns? You deal with your concerns with your confidence in the majesty of God and His demonstrated love for you that you now want to demonstrate in that moment. I will not be a shill for any cultural, political movement. I'll be engaged but I want to be an ambassador for Christ and I want people when it's done to say 'man he could have really done a lot better but at least he is trying to point me to Christ.' I want you to sing the songs of Zion.

My spotlight in life is Jesus and I ask Him that I won't get in the way of that light for others. Lord, please let me point others to You – the majesty of who God is and His perfect love for us. When that happens God's people live care less but not careless, concerned, wise but not paralyzed and not irrationally. We don't let the world set the agenda in the body of Christ. God's Word and His Spirit lead us and we love one another well with patience, kindness, longsuffering, gentleness and that's the way we do it carefully. Philippians 2:3 says [3] *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant (important) than yourselves.*

Then when the love of Christ takes hold, we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). In Romans 8 we find out that fearless lives that walk with no confidence in ourselves but unshaking confidence in Christ – who will lay a charge against God's elect? God has justified us. Who is it to condemn us? Christ Jesus has died and perfect love cast out that fear, more than that He is raised, more than that He is at the right hand of the Father and right now intercedes for us. Does that make me careless? No, but does that tell my cares that they have less impact in my life? Oh yes. Do I still have concerns? Yes, but do I walk in the triumph of Christ, what is the worst Satan can do? I die, then I go to heaven. That doesn't mean I live careless, it just means I live with confidence in Christ for He is my Conqueror.

What shall separate us from the love of God in Christ? The government? A disarranged culture? Apostate churches? A pandemic? No, for in all these things we are more than conquerors. The Greek word for conquerors is *hupernikaó* which literally translated mean super conquerors – through Him who has loved us and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. I pray O God, that You would bless Your people that we may walk with a Biblical world and life view that issues forth in an imperfect but an intentional lifestyle whereby people will see the humility of those by God's grace who have been broken, yet now walk in the triumph of Christ. No personal triumphalism, but every step is our growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ and nothing can separate us from His love. May that perfect love be seen among us as the world watches us for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.