

The Anatomy of Fear

The Doctrine of Fear

This is the First Lecture upon the Topic of Fear

“The LORD your God which goeth before you, He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes...”

Deuteronomy 1:30

“Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Joshua 1:9

Since the regenerate, transformed, Christian still battles against the old sin-cursed nature, certain sinful tendencies remain.¹ Even though we are now new creatures in Christ, there are times when these sinful tendencies are made manifest. Obedience is not obtained without a struggle. It is certain, that the new birth of the soul does not eradicate the inward dwelling and working of sin.

Spiritually, in our *soul existence*, we are judicially “*the spirits of just men made perfect*”² Pragmatically, we are in a continuous battle against the lust of the flesh and the wicked workings of the old Adam. In other words, there still exists sin in the believer’s life. Yet, by the indwelling and effectual workings of God the Holy Spirit, those sins never become a dominant force in the life of the true Christian.³

The true saint does not *live, nor walk*, after the flesh, but lives and walks in the Spirit.⁴ Neither does he war after the flesh, but by the power of God, his warfare is fought by the indwelling and inward working of God, who worketh in the regenerate soul, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.⁵ The Word of God is the believer’s delight, and the Law is his lamp and light. The true saint knows that the Law of God is Holy, Just and Good, therefore beneficial for every aspect of life.

Anticipating this reality of every believer’s indwelling sin, God cautions His people against falling prey to perhaps one of the greatest anesthetizing sins ever known to man; fear. Fear is a paralyzing sin. It is cousin to doubt and worry. According to the Scriptures, to worry is to be wavering in faith, and by definition it is sin. Fear stifles faith and fights against all spiritual Wisdom. It is the initiating sin of all failures, and all defeats, and has no place in the life of the Christian saint. Fear is the great adversary of potential victory. Knowing, however, that man is subject to all manner of worldly fears, God commands His people to be strong and of good courage despite those fears.

Godly Fear

*Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and **walking in the fear of the Lord**, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. (Acts 9:31 AV)*

¹ See Paul’s discourse on Romans chapter 7. Cf Gal 4:14

² Hebrews 12:23 and Hebrews 10:14

³ Galatians 5:16-17

⁴ Romans 8:5-11

⁵ Phil 2:13

There exist two types of fear. The first is a fear, which is of God, in reverence and Holy awe toward God, and the other is a fear, which is carnal and selfish. The Lord, upon the regeneration of the soul gives the first as a grace, the latter is born of the fall of Adam. Natural men do not fear God.⁶ Upon regeneration, God gives the saint the Spirit of Christ, which dominates the natural spirit of man's fear.

*For God hath **not given us the spirit of fear**; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7 AV)*

*For ye **have not received** the spirit of bondage again to **fear**; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15 AV)*

*There is **no fear in love**; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18 AV)*

The resurrection of the soul establishes Godly fear in the heart of the Christian. This is a fundamental principle. When God commands His people not to fear, **He is not commanding them to do something they cannot do. Rather, He is commanding them to do something He has prepared them to do.**

Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies. (Psalms 108:13 AV)

What is Ungodly Fear?

According to the Word of God, fear is defined as *dread* or *terror*. It is translated as *terrible, to be afraid, dreadful, and reverence*. By direct implication, fear means to *stand in awe of something or someone*. The Scriptures use the same Greek word in Matthew 10:28 to identify both the fear of men and the fear of God.

And fear [5399 phobeo] not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear [5399 phobeo] Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28 AV)

According to Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, *fear* includes, *the painful emotion or passion excited by an expectation of evil, or the apprehension of impending danger*.

The natural response to any impending danger is to avoid it. Fear is the anxiety response to that danger which triggers action. Yet God commands, and expects, the people of God, not to fear.

There are two principles here, *firstly*, whenever there is the possibility of danger, either real or perceived, there will be fear. *Secondly*, fear is natural to fallen man. This is precisely why God commands the Children of the inheritance not to fear. Knowing they will fear, He addresses what the proper godly response should be to terrible situations with a specific command, "*fear not*".

⁶ Psalm 36:1 Romans 3:18

The Rising of Fear

Fear rises out temporal perception. The way we perceive our physical surroundings dictates our response. The best example perhaps is found in Matthew 14:24-32.

v24 *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

v25 *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

v26 *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they **were troubled**, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for **fear**.*

v27 *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; **be not afraid**.*

v28 *And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

v29 *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

v30 *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was **afraid**; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

v31 *And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, **O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?***

v32 *And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. (Matthew 14:21-32 AV)*

In this account, the situation for the Apostles was grievous. We must relate this situation to our own difficult situations. Whenever we are as those in the midst of the sea, tossed with an adversarial wind, we will fear. Furthermore, it must be underscored that Jesus was not with them in the ship at this time. It was as if He had abandoned them for a season when they needed Him most. This caused them to fear.

The combination of the storm and the absence of Christ caused great terror. Yet, what had driven them to fear was their perception of both the situation and their anticipation of its outcome.

Naturally we are morbid folk, fearful and unbelieving. The regeneration does not entirely remove the remnants of this tendency. Therefore we are exactly like the apostles in the ship.

Consider the commandment of the Lord in the midst of their trouble. *“it is I, be not afraid”*

The Lord here declares a number of doctrines. He states that it is He that is seen walking upon the water. His walking upon the water signifies His sovereign rule over the wind and the waves. He alone rules all events and circumstances. In other words, He is orchestrating the trial upon the sea. The very trouble that caused the Apostle to fear was in fact set up by the will and power of God.

We see another lesson here as well. Peter acknowledgement that it is the Lord is done so in the form of a test. He tests to see if it truly is Christ.

“Lord, if it be thou, bid me to come...”

Like Peter, we too test the Lord, and will not readily take Him at His Holy Word. Although He proves that He is God, and the Sovereign Lord Almighty, we are not quite sure how that translates to our everyday lives. Furthermore, when He bids us to *“fear not”*, we seek to prove Him by sight, and not by faith.

Peter asks the Lord to enable Him to come out upon the water. Amazingly, He does, and Peter walks upon the waves of the sea. That is, until he assesses the situation according to sight, and not of faith in the Lord's Word.

Application:

Firstly, whenever we are in the midst of the sea, in trouble, and terrified, we must reassert to ourselves that it is HE who has brought these things to pass.

Secondly, we must understand that all trials are for our good and not for our destruction. Too often we make God out to be a fierce, destroying God, without remembering that He is the Merciful, Heavenly Father of all His Holy Elect. Although the trial is terrible and may be for our chastisement, it is also for our good. Therefore we must receive it with joy and know that it is unto the praise of the Glory of His grace and the benefit of all His obedient covenant Children.

Thirdly, we cannot trust in the eye of sight. We must ever learn from the example of Peter and trust in the Holy Word of God alone. When He states that it is He and we ought to be not afraid, then that is what we must endeavor to do.

Fourthly, we need only to ask the Lord to walk upon the waves of our adversaries and troubles and He will oblige us.

Fifthly, although we sometimes find ourselves walking fearlessly upon the waves of the sea does not mean that we are free from rekindled fear. Fear may come upon us at any time. What is profoundly exemplified by the example of Peter is that fear may arise even in the presence of the Lord Himself. Yet, Peter's fear overtook Him when he took His eyes from Christ and considered the tumultuous waves of the sea. We must face all our enemies with our minds firmly fixed upon the Word of God.

The Anatomy of Fear

This is the Second Lecture upon the Topic of Fear

Who Do We Fear?

Perhaps we should identify what men fear most. The list is endless. It is also a list, which varies from person to person. Each individual will be plagued differently by different fears. Men will differ from women and children will differ from adults. The weak will vary in their fears from the strong as will the ignorant from the intelligent. The same holds true for the rich as opposed to the poor. Of all these types, the one common denominator is that there will be *something* that they fear.

The specifics of fear also differ between Christian and non-Christian. Those of the Christian world vary in their fears in comparison to the secular humanists. Yet the commandment to fear not, is only applicable to the Christian. Nowhere in Scripture does God comfort the humanistic pagan to be courageous in the face of fear. The reality of the situation is that those who are not of the Covenant have everything to fear whereas those in the Covenant have nothing to fear.

But what is it that the Christians stumble over when it comes to courage? What frightens the saint to the point of stupidity and panic? According to John Calvin, many fear poverty, or the loss of treasured possessions. Some fear sickness or death. Ultimately all these fears stem from unbelief and a failure to internalize the Covenantal promises of God.

The Initial Promise

God does not deny that His people will fall to dread and terror. Anticipating this, He commands a defense against dreadful fear. After the flood in Noah's day, God pronounced a fundamental principle concerning the believer's position in the world.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. (Genesis 9:1-2 AV)

Noah (*lit. rest Heb. No'-akh*) here is a typification of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is essentially *His fear* that is upon the earth whereby men shall either fear God in adoration or dread. God however is crystal clear as to the extent of this promise when He includes the sons of Noah. The *sons* are a typification of the Church of Jesus Christ, the true saints of God. Therefore, we may conclude that this particular commission is for the Church as it exists, in Christ, and in History.

In light of this promise, we would be hard pressed not to understand it to mean exactly what it says. Simply, those who are "*beasts*" will be fearful of those who are the

ambassadors and dispensers of Truth. “Beasts” typically, in the Scriptures, refer to those who are unregenerate and who behave rebelliously against the Law of God.⁷

In Genesis 15 God again promises dominion and victory in behalf of His people when He blesses Abraham.

*After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, **Fear not**, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. (Genesis 15:1 AV)*

Consider the phrase, *Fear not*. This is a specific commandment attached to the promise, reflective of the promise given to Moses in Deuteronomy 1:30 and to Joshua in Joshua 1:9. The phrase, *fear not*, appears some 144 times in the Scriptures. Each time it appears as an admonition for the people of God to look back to the initial promises in Genesis 9 and Genesis 15, and to consider who God is, and what He has promised in light of a fearful situation.

Fear and Speculation

Fear is a part of our lives. Fundamentally we fear men and circumstances so much, because we fear God so little. Whether it is the fear of death, the fear of physical hurt, poverty, affliction, the loss of children, the loss of possessions or any such thing, we all have experienced fear in the face of certain situations.

The reality however, is that most often fear comes as a response to a *possible situation* rather than a real situation. We play the “*what if game*”. “What if this happens, or that happens?” “What if I get sick, or what if I die, or what if I am injured or loose my employment?” These speculations only produce anxiety and fear. Moreover this kind of speculation is in direct violation of Matthew 6:34.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:34 AV)

The word used here in Matthew 6 for “*no thought*” is the Greek word, *merimnao*. It is the word which means *anxiety*. Literally, a more precise translation would be, *a division of mind*. Therefore we learn that worries and cares are actually a division of the mind. Anxious worry is a distraction from God and the Word of His Promise. Thus, when we are distracted with worry, which is nothing more than mild fear, we loose our moorings and fall prey to panic. Once fear progresses to panic all sobriety and applicable Theology falls by the wayside. This is exactly what God warns against. Since fear and doubt go hand in hand we can identify these as sins of unbelief. The Lord cautions, “*Be not faithless, but believing.*” *John 20:27b*

Fear is the uncertainty of the unknown. Generally what we are afraid of is what we do not know. Assurance that all will be well is not enough. If that were the case then we have all the assurance we need from the Scriptures. What we actually want is to see with our eyes all is well and we are safe. When the outward circumstances seem to point to our affliction, discomfort or even destruction we break down and are frightened. What we actually are fearing is what awaits us in the unknown future.

⁷ Psalm 73:22 Eccl 3:19

Rather than embracing the many heavenly promises declaring the protection and deliverance of the children of God from all evil, the Christian crumbles at the slightest hint of danger. What the Christian fails to remember is that God is not only in the unknown future, He has ordained that future unto the praise of the Glory of His Grace. The unknown does not unfold without the Sovereign ordination and control of the Almighty. Furthermore, all things of providence work together beneficially, and for the good to those that love God and who are the called according to His purpose. Events in history are not exercised outside of the Divine will. Once these fundamental Christian truths are embraced in the realm of life, the saint is enabled to face fear with courage and faith.

Fear and Natural Wisdom

When the children of Israel assessed the possibility of destruction before their enemies, terror filled their hearts. Rather than assessing the situation in light of providence and God's promise, (*the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest*), they assessed the circumstances according to their natural wisdom. ***Assessment by the fleshly wisdom of man, according to the obvious and potentially dangerous situations of life, will always produce fear.*** What God's people failed to incorporate into their assessment of the danger around them was the truth of GOD and His Word. Today the church functions in much the same fashion as the nation of Israel before their enemies. They forget that God is with them whithersoever they go. If the Church is engaged in a godly work, God is with them. There can only be deliverance and blessing from obedience. Furthermore, it again must be asserted that, it is God who has set up each dangerous situation with all manner of terrors to specifically prove that He is their Rock and Defense and that He will perform the Word which He has spoken.

Who are the Enemies we ought not to fear?

In order to battle fear on a practical level we first must identify the enemy. In Moses' day it was Pharaoh. For Joshua it was the inhabitants of Jericho and the people of Ai among others. During the grooming of David it was initially Goliath and the philistines, and then Saul from his own camp. If we reflect upon other instances we find that at times the enemy existed outside of Israel whereas at other times they existed among the people of Israel.

There is one essential element in battling fear, identifying the enemy that stirs it. Today the enemy of the Church is natural wisdom. We call it Secular Humanism. Secular Humanism exists both without as well as within the church.

Directives in battling Fear

Like all other sins and maladies, ungodly fear must be mortified. This mortification can only be brought about by the work of God as He applies His Word to the hearts of His saints. Abraham, Moses, and Joshua along with all God's Prophets and Apostles were given the admonition not to fear the enemy. Essential to the giving of that commandment was the giving of the promise that God would be there to fight along side the saints. It was upon that promise that the people of God should have acted, and not upon the temporal situation before them.

When Israel stood in the valley of Eshcol, Moses commanded the rebellious people not to fear nor dread the Amorites. In the face of their terror he gives the commission to be *courageous* and *valiant*, for the land was to be given them of the Lord. Today God gives us a similar commission. Yet we murmur and fearfully dread the face of Secular Humanism and laws that defy God.

Conclusion

Today's Christian lives in theological fantasyland. Doctrine replaces practice and practice is reduced to a vague notion of responsibility. There is little application of the precepts of Scriptures in the real world. It is almost as if Christianity exists in a vacuum apart from daily life. Yet, the reality of life engages each and every one of God's people daily. There can be no denying that God's Word must be thoroughly applied to daily living in order to truly *be* a Christian. His Law of Truth must be obeyed from the regenerate heart, by the power of effectual Grace and Divine intervention.

If the Church is ever going to fulfil their Divine commission in time and history, it must embrace the promises of God as real and effectual in the face of circumstantial dangers. In this way, and in this way only, will the Lord bless His people, and in so doing, bless the nation.

*Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; **and let him be your fear**, and let him be your dread.*
(Isaiah 8:13 AV)

Pastor Paul Michael Raymond

Pastor Paul Michael Raymond is the Pastor of the Reformed Bible Church In Central Virginia

You can e-mail the author at pmraymond@earthlink.net

www.hisglory.com