

18. Fear

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When I was a young child, I was a major chicken. I was afraid of anything and anybody. When an elementary school bully picked on me, I was scared and cried. When my family watched a horror movie, I was terrified and even used to have a nightmare. Finally I got tired of being picked on, I started to learn martial arts.

By the time I became a fine arts college student majoring in sculpture in Seoul, South Korea, I became quite brave, rather should I say careless like the majority of young people.

It was not unusual for me to work on my sculpture projects at night all alone in the classroom which had one big window and a gigantic metal door. One full moon night, I was working on my sculpture at my spot way in the back of the room. The moonlight was spilling through the window into the dark dimly lit classroom, it generated eery silhouettes of sculptures in human shape in that room. Then all of sudden a strong wind came along and pushed the old metal door. It flung open all by itself with a loud squeaky noise. It would make just about anyone have a heart attack with fear.

Fear is an emotion with which we are all quite familiar. You know what it is like to be gripped by it. That shiver running down the spine, the hairs standing on the back of your neck, your stomach knotting and sinking, feeling like the walls and the ceiling of the room are closing on you and then your mouth goes dry while your palms are flooded with sweat. To make the matter worse, your knees start to shake and buckle under you.

We have all experienced that in life on different times. On occasion, when we thought we were facing the verge of death, we experienced extreme fear. Do you remember that? Some of you are thinking, "No, I don't want to remember that. You are depressing me, preacher." I don't blame you one bit.

We find largely two types of fear mentioned in the Bible. The first one originates from the fear of satan. Then it branches out with the fear of men, the fear of an unknown future, the fear of death, the fear of rejection, the fear of illness, the fear of loss of the loved ones, the fear of financial loss and much more. We can do without these kinds of fear. The second fear is the fear of the Lord which we all should have at all time.

Let's see what the Lord is going to teach us from His Word this morning.

A. THE FEAR OF SATAN

Psalm 91:5 You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day

Ephesians 6:16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Among the ancient warfare tactics, using arrows from the distant is like using a sniper rifle in modern warfare. Apostle Paul mentions fiery darts in Ephesians chapter 6 which means flaming arrows. The enemy would often light their arrows and barrage their opponent with them. They would fire hundreds, even thousands of flaming arrows. These flaming arrows may not kill fatally, but it brings massive dis-

ruption and confusion due to the fire that comes with it. It sets fire everywhere it lands.

That is exactly what the devil wants in our hearts with his fiery darts. When we are shielded by faith in God, we are well protected. But anytime we step out of God's protection through our faith in Him, we would be shot by the fiery darts of the devil that starts fear and doubts in our hearts.

The fear of satan makes us think that he is as strong as God if not more. In addition to that, fear has a twin brother with whom he likes to hang out – worry. Often times worry and fear work in tandem. Not only will we experience the fear of something, but then there is the worry of "What if this happens, what if that happens." You can get caught up in these two areas and get dragged down spiritually. Excessive worry, experts say, can actually shorten the human lifespan.

B. DISCOURAGEMENT AND DESPAIR FROM FEAR

The fear of satan generates other fears. Discouragement is one of satan's most effective arsenals that allows him to open a gapping hole on our spiritual armor.

Moses, who was known as a friend of God, a great man of faith, chosen by God to deliver the Ten Commandments to Israel and to lead two million non-stop complaining people for forty years without a single day off or vacation. There were many times he encountered discouragement.

Prophet Elijah, shortly after God used him to call down fire from heaven at Mount Carmel and destroyed 850 pagan priests, he discovered that the wicked queen Jezebel wanted him dead. Despaired and discouraged, Elijah mourned, "Take my life Lord."

Apostle Paul, practically the second in command after Jesus in the NT, tells us of similar discouraging times when he wrote to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,

Like Moses, Elijah and Paul, if you have ever experienced times when you were overwhelmed, don't feel alone.

Fear is 'unbelief' and discouragement is from 'looking at ourselves and circumstances, not God'. The enemy of God cannot stop the help that comes from the Lord, but the unbelief we have in our hearts can. Even though fear itself is not a sin, but unbelief of God is a sin.

When fear comes into our hearts, we still have a choice to put our trust in the Lord. But more often than not, many of us choose not to see and remember all the attributes of the Lord – His faithfulness to provide our needs, to be with us no matter what and so on. It is so easy that we allow ourselves to be deceived by satan whenever we take our eyes off of the Lord.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Please remember this when you face fear from the devil: The Lord gives us the power to refuse fear and the sound mind to receive His peace and comfort. However, just because we refuse fear, it doesn't mean that our circumstance would change right away in every case. But our hearts will be changed to deal with the situation with the power of the Holy Spirit.

C. THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The word 'fear' in this verse lacks its true definition in English. The Hebrew word for this is 'yirah' which translates "fear, terror, awesome, respect, reverence". If we combine all of these words, we probably can have a proper definition of 'fear'.

Do we need to be scared of our God? Yes and no.

Yes, people need to fear His wrath that comes as a result of disobedience of His commands from the Word of God and distrust of His faithfulness.

No, God declares that He is our Refuge, our Fortress and we can find a shelter in Him when we come to Him in reverence and obedience.

He is not some unknown abstract divine being who throws lightning bolts from heaven because he has this uncontrollable anger issue or he just wants to be mean to his creatures.

We've heard derogatory references to hellfire-and-brimstone preaching. But I don't think that this is much of a problem today. Because we don't hear that much about preachers delivering hellfire-and-brimstone messages from the pulpit anymore.

What we do hear are messages about how we can be successful, how God will prosper us, how much He loves us. Encouraging sermonettes, dramas, musicals to make the congregation feel good all the while the pastors and preachers allow their congregation to be ignorant biblically and starving to death spiritually and vulnerable to satanic attacks spiritually and emotionally.

It is rare to hear about a holy God who wants us to repent of our sins and live righteously and holy and walk with Him. This is no longer popular. People don't want to hear what the Bible tells us about the controversial social issues. Pastors and teachers don't want to talk against homosexuality, abortion, sex before marriage, adultery, pornography and other issues in fear of losing people and revenues from their churches.

So those pastors and their congregation started to develop a new God, an all-loving, benign being who is hovering up somewhere in the universe with all smile and winking at just about any sin people commit.

If you came to this church and you are expecting that I would declare that our God is like that, you came to the wrong church. That is not the God of the Bible. That is a god of your own making. Without a question, the real God is a God of love who loves you so much that He gave His only begotten Son Jesus to die for your sins that you can have eternal life in heaven. But you must repent of your sins and accept Him as the Savior and Lord.

The real God is holy. That is why we not only should love Him with all of our hearts for His sacrifice and love, but also we must fear and revere Him.

Proverbs 3:7-8 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, To turn one away from the snares of death.

Proverbs 14:16 A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident.

When we fear the Lord truly, we have a strong confidence in His unchanging characters and we do not want to do anything against Him to bring disgrace to Him.

Fear of the Lord is a constant abiding awareness of God's presence in our lives at all times. Worldly fear of the Lord is the fear that He might hurt us, but godly fear of the Lord is the fear that we might hurt Him.

The fear of an unknown future, death, rejection or people can not coexist with the fear of the Lord. Because the fear of the Lord allows us to see the situation from God's perspective, not ours. It means that the fear of the Lord brings us holy living.

We all have two major dates in our lives. You can see them on the headstone of a grave, separated by a little dash: The date of our birth and the date of our death. We can not choose our entrance date, nor can we choose our exit date. But what we do with that little dash in between is all ours to decide how to live.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Living a holy life goes against our carnal grain. Holiness is not simply refusing to do evil things, because even unsaved people can practice self-control. True holiness is more than conquering temptation. It is conquering even the desire to disobey God.

Love is central in God, but holiness is the center of His love. Because God's love is a holy love. Love without holiness is a monster that can destroy God's perfect law, while holiness without love would leave no hope for the lost sinner. Both are perfectly balanced in the divine nature and works of God.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) While the fear of the Lord brings positive results to us, the fear of other kinds always brings negative impacts in our lives.

2) Even though fear itself is not a sin, but unbelief of God is a sin.

3) True holiness is more than conquering temptation. It is conquering even the desire to disobey God.