

Fear Management  
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Texts: Eph. 5:21

Continuing in this series of pastoral sermons, building the tool box necessary for maintaining the Christian walk, we should recall that of the first importance was the aptitude or capacity for hearing from God. **And, of course, this rests upon a fervent desire to know God—this is the generation of them that seek Him!** But behold the interference—we are all familiar with interference when it comes to our I-phones and Androids—there are areas of poor reception, there are storms that compromise phone use. AND there are so many voices clamoring for your full attention. “Listen to me,” clamors one . . . “No, no, listen to me!” shouts another. It is all very loud, intense and enough to drive you to distraction—*which is precisely the strategy. Keeping us off balance, fearful, busy, unsettled and/or distracted is the Devil’s plan.* The Devil seeks to keep us fearful, in full panic mode. **Be still and know that I am God** frustrates his purposes! Straightforward temptation happens, of course, and blatantly so often—but the obviousness of direct temptation is, fortunately for most of us, off-putting. Hence “the slight of hand” distraction—the subtle trap, or snares (which operate by hiddenness, or bait . . . It’s the the creeping, stealth temptations of life that harm us most. We must stay alert, conscious of our spiritual surroundings—be vigilant! We’ve heard that Satan is like a hungry, prowling lion, **seeking whom he can devour.** Satan is a predator. So, unless you want to be his luncheon meat, stay alert and remind each other that the world is a dangerous place.

Despite the dangerousness of the world, most of us fall into sin incrementally, little by little—in a horrifying parallel to the manner we are to learn godliness (**precept upon precept**)! There is a line in a familiar spiritual that runs “I ain’t going to study war no more,” if we put in the word “sin” in place of “war,” we would still have a powerful refrain to sing! Something flies in under the radar of our moral sensibility, or through rationalization: the cover of “just this once,” “no-one will see it (except God), or everyone is doing it—it can’t be that bad” (the herd instinct of sin is very powerful as an influencer!), “I can manage myself, my drink, my drug use just fine,” this self-talk is very treacherous. It greases the skids for transgression. Into the midst of this real life business—this fearful enterprise called life!—God speaks a word. That word recalibrates everything. Here it is:

**Submit ye one to another in the fear of God.** Fear, as I have been suggesting, is a major player in our human condition. (See End Note 1.) Basically things can degenerate to the point where the saying, “You have nothing to fear, but fear itself!” seems the best summary of it all. *But it isn’t.* That is why we are going to look into the ramifications of **the fear of the Lord, or fear of God.** Yes, it is the beginning of wisdom and we, after we have sorted out the two kinds of fear of God usually meant, should have a better idea of how the right kind of fear tends toward holiness and a life pleasing to God. It is a holy affection.

There are two kinds of fear, *filial fear* and *servile fear* when it comes **to the fear of God.** **The first fear filial fear, God desires and approves of.** *Filial fear*, as a son harbors towards one’s father, or parents is consistent with the mercy, kindness and love that God has expressed for us in creation and in redemption. It is a fear for a God who

is good, who cares, guides and disciplines us, a God who is concerned with our morality, character and integrity. God is wanting His holiness to become our own, His righteousness to be our righteousness because He created us with eternal fellowship in mind and He works constantly on making us fit company for that spiritual fellowship/communion.

*Servile fear* is the kind of fear that a slave has for his master. It is performance based and entails a dread of punishment—either for misbehavior, or failure to perform up to standard. *Servile fear* is the best that unbelievers and idolators can offer and that fear does not please Him. If we think of the Egyptian bondage—the cruelty of which caused the people to cry out to God which was coupled with God’s desire that His people might **go out into the wilderness and freely offer worship, offer sacrifices to Him!** To do their duty. Exodus 10:9 relates some *urgency* to attending to this duty: **we must hold a feast to the Lord**. And the fact Hebrew sacrifices were hated (an abomination) to the Egyptians has been pointed out. This is partially explained in Exodus 5:3 where Moses and Aaron explain their request to Pharaoh:

**3 Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”**

Obedience to the Lord is always a matter of consequence; our duty both counts and matters!

There is more: **fear of God** is, in part, the *means* by which men can bring themselves to submit to God, to God’s order for their life and to submit readily to one another. *It is a spiritual impulse, rather than a natural instinct*. **Fear of the Lord** is partly the *manner*, the *how* of submission. Meaning the **fear of God** is the “efficient cause” that which motivates, or moves a man to submit—to perform all his duties *to both God and man*. It is, I am certain, fairly odd to hear life **framed in terms of duty to God and to neighbor**, but relationships and obligations are traveling companions for persons living in God’s creation.

It is important to underscore the **awe-filled respect** of divine majesty which originates in the experience of God’s goodness, or, in other language, from “faith in the mercy and goodness of God.” (Gouge, p. 8) Those who have tasted that sweetness are aware that all happiness (even true bliss) resides in divine favor. The desire to live a pleasing and acceptable life **arises warmly** from these coals. A believer’s filial fear seeks to please God.

A careful endeavor to please God, joined to attentive avoidance of any and all things that might offend His sovereign majesty aligns with: **The fear of the Lord is to hate evil** (Prov. 8:13). It is said of Job, he is **a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns from evil** (Job 1:8).

Sometimes the element of distrust enters into a believer’s life. I mean, if one were to doubt God’s mercy, *and expects nothing but reprisal and revenge from God*, the very thought of God would precipitate dread—and that makes him, momentarily, fear God rather servilely. So, either from faith in mercy and from doubt regarding that mercy, we discover the two kinds of fear described before. Pau; a[[ears to be addressing this with

**Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear** (this is servile fear); **but ye have received the Spirit of adoption** (filial fear) **whereby we cry, Abba, Father**” (Rom. 8:15 which is filial fear). The servile slave fears divine punishment (of his offense) and that can be translated into a form of hatred, or resentment of God. Such a man fears not to sin, but fears to burn in hell for it. “A son simply fears to offend or displease his father, so that his obedience is accomplished with love.” (Gouge, p. 9) He is like Abraham, **God’s friend**, who refused to offend God by disobeying the demand of sacrificing Isaac. This same truth can be expressed positively: Abraham sought to please God by obeying Him.

Slavish fear is more than something generated by adverse social and political situations. It is diabolical. Fear is one of Satan’s choice weapons. Demons, who know that there is judgment, **tremble**. “It makes men wish there were no hell, no day of judgment, no Judge, even no God.” (Gouge, p.10) If anyone were guilty of “wishful thinking,” I would suggest that it might be atheists and deniers! Reality is unpleasant to them. Therefore when we speak of **the fear of the Lord today**, it is to filial fear that we are chiefly referring. God even wears the title **Fear** in a fatherly way, (Genesis 31:42 See. v. 53)

It is proper to fear men, especially magistrates or governmental officials—especially those property raised to a supervisory role—judges before the bar and so forth. And this is largely to do with the image of God placed in him by virtue of some authority, or dignitary like sheriffs and police officers. However this fear of man must never sup[plant, or usurp the fear due God. This suggests that the **fear of the Lord** has a very wide application and scripture bears this up; it is added to many of the duties commanded of us: serving (Psalm 2:11), **perfecting holiness** 2 Cor. 7:11), even **the working out of our salvation** (Phil. 2:12) and even **worship**. Many of the notable men in scripture (Abraham, Joseph, Job and many others.

It may not occur to us frequently but one reason for the Holy Spirit is to disclose the disparity between the integrity and perfection of the image of God first planted in man at creation . . . and the renovation of that image as a man is sanctified during his walk in this life. In the beginning the image was so perfect that man needed no other motive than love. Subsequently that motivation had to be urged upon us repeatedly: **You shall love the Lord your God . . . love God and walk in His commandments**. “But by Adam’s fall, and the corruption which thereby infected man’s nature, the love of God has grown cold in man.” (Gouge p. 12) Fear, affixed in the heart, is a holy affection which prevents sinning and spurs one to every good duty, or work.

**So we have covered briefly the nature, object, extent and use of fear in the Christian walk.** Fear also motivates us to render service to one another. This is the essence of the second tablet of the ten commandments: love of neighbor. This applies to judges appointed by Moses, or by kings of Israel. Citizens and subjects may through a fear of the Lord learn to submit themselves without severe laws and tyranny, oppression. Men can be enslaved and forced to comply with directives from on high but that is not best for either rulers, or for their people. Citizens and rulers submitted to the Lord are the best mix for any country. If we respect more what God requires and commands . . . more than what our corrupt hearts desire. . . a self-denying populace will replace a restive and demanding one. Our proud minds will be humbled and our gentleness will increase . . . and law enforcement will require less violence and cruelty

or severity. It would be possible to just get along. There will also be a decline in lying, deceptions, greed, theft and conspiracies because the considerations embedded in the ten commandments do the heavy lifting of a responsible and godly people. Correspondingly, “Where no fear of God is there will be no good submission to man.” Abram suspected the men of Gerar due to their lack of filial fear of God. No common honesty to stay abduction, kidnapping, forceful seizure or rape. And the reason for that is that natural corruption tends in such a direction. It is manifest good sense that all be encouraged in the fear of the Lord—especially ministers (as you see that I am doing!).

Happy is the kingdom, the country where rulers and magistrates and subjects all fear the Lord!

Happy is the church where the minister and the congregation fear the Lord, where leaders and followers, those in authority and those subordinate to the authority and mutually submitted one to another.

Happy is the family where husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants and fulfill their duties gladly as unto the Lord.-thanking, praising and magnifying God in what they purpose to do, and actually do accomplish relying on God for help.

In such an arrangement the mutual and common good of all rises to the top and selfishness, advantaging oneself dwindles and fades away. All duty must meet the bar of this fear of the Lord. This is how respect for God is manifested and this is how we show ourselves approved to God. **Rule . . . in the fear of God.** Magistrates are to **judge . . . in the fear of God.** (2 Chron. 19:9 and Nehemiah 5:15) Subjects are to **obey** and servants are to **serve . . . in the fear of the Lord.** 1 Peter 2:17 reads: **17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the [a]king.** Note how **Fear God** precedes **Honor the King!** It is as if he has said, you show your fear of God by honoring the king—these two things God and King ought not to be in opposition. God is in fact the greatest of all lords “to whom primarily and principally all service if due—whether a man be placed high or low.” *And because God has set men in their places, whether high or low (You would have no authority over me at all unless it be granted to you by my Father in heaven,* Jesus replied to Pilate.) “He that does not obey those who are over him in the fear of God, shows no respect of God’s image, and he who does not govern those who are under him in the fear of God shows no respect for God’s charge. Besides God is that great Judge to whom all superiors and subordinates are to give account of their service.” (Gouge, p. 15) **God will not hold guiltless those who hold Him in contempt.**

*“What are we to say of the folly of those governors who wholly apply themselves to the fancy of their people?”—especially when what they fancy is against God and His word?! This was Adam’s folly, and the folly of Aaron who stooped to popular demand and fashioned a gold calf for the people to worship! (Ex. 32:1) Or, of King Saul when he allowed the people to take some of the Amalekite plunder when it had been placed under the ban. (1 Sam. 15:21) And of King Joash who set up idols and Solomon who built high places for his wives foreign gods . . . or Pilate, who to please the crowd subverted justice to have an innocent man crucified! (Mark 15:15) Biblical history records the results of this folly as disastrous.*

It goes equally poorly when subordinates please their superiors contrary to the will of God. *Thereby they show that they fear man more than God—or are more anxious to please man temporarily than to please God eternally.* The men sent to fetch Elijah died in pleasing the king. The king could not save them from the fire sent from heaven to consume them. The women who offered incense to the queen of heaven with their husbands consent were not excused thereby for their offense against God! (Jer.. 44:19) Both failed the test of the **fear of the Lord**—do not swerve from it ever.

**Amen.**

### *End Notes*

I. Tyrannical governments use fear to manipulate and control their people—they seek a one-sided submission. In these United States, I suggest, we describe the people as “the voting public.” That category used to be a legally discernible and recognized status: we were “lawful citizens.” If a tyrant wants to manipulate this country, he has to disarm the citizenry—gun control is about control. Another way to achieve this control is to water down the meaning of *citizenship*—i.e. flood the country with non-citizens and hand out the right to vote indiscriminately making citizenship meaningless, or obscuring its definition—then, substitute “universal rights” for national rights so that those in power can have their way with the masses, the fly-by people, or “the peasants and peons.” Contempt and control are Siamese twins! Treat citizens as stupid, as dependent on the superiority of their political betters. They exist to be ruled, right? When “the people” are terrorized, they tend to do what they are told by the “authorities,” those in charge. The founders may have been wiser than their current detractors imagine. Maybe that is why we have a balance of powers in our government—a House of Representatives and a Senate.

Yes, it is very crafty the way Satan weaves the people’s belief that the government exists to protect them (anesthetizing them with welfare checks and free stuff) while, at the same time, terrorizing them (with plagues, climate control and food shortages) in order to maintain *social control*. And, for the purposes of this message, this is inducing servile fear in the public arena

Everyone knows how bad it is to yell “fire” and to precipitate panic in a crowded venue. Why is it okay to shout “armed insurrection,” about a riot where few are armed as opposed to riots (with looting and arson) where citizens are being killed? *Aren’t both false alarms??* Note: the same chaos erupts when a mass shooter opens fire in a public space, restaurant, shopping center, or a mall as when yelling “Fire!”. COVID-19, global warming/climate change, violent crime and urban lawlessness . . . shut-downs and federal mandates (designed to produce fear so as to manage people). Then it sadly turns out to be some special interest group promoting their agenda, or a certain political elite currying the public so as to stay on top and maintain their position and privilege!) A cynical spokesperson remarked, “Never let a crisis go to waste!” Blame the opposition party, or find some international scapegoat like Putin, or Zelensky to distract attention away from the real problems at home and abroad. Blame-shifting and fear mongering are media darlings and political playthings.