

Thursday Group  
July 23<sup>rd</sup>  
2015  
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## *Rising Fear or Raising Gospel Fear*

### **Introduction to the Series**

In this series we will begin to examine the nature of fear, how that impacts upon our relationships with God and each other and the Gospel impact on our fears. Christians may give little thought to fear, and sometimes this thought may be conflicted. After all isn't it true that God's love cast out all fear? Yet the Apostles understood and taught that a certain fear is an essential component of our walk of faith in Gospel grace. In fact the Gospel establishes this fear and we ignore it to our own detriment. Are the Apostles simply taking with one hand and giving with the other. Is the fear we know as unbelievers simply returned to 'keep us honest' as believers. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a fear that actually delivers dread, more specifically the dread of being found in the presence of God. Then there is Gospel fear which delivers us into true worship and in fact true humanity. The modern translations translate this as reverent fear however the word *reverent* is not in the Greek. It is the translators attempt to simplify the way the Scriptures speak of fear.

### **Fear/anxiety in Our World**

Throughout the years and centuries fear levels in our world rise and fall. In an ever shrinking world of information immediacy we experience seasons of intense fear when fear feeds on fear and like a bushfire reaching the canopy of a eucalypt forest it develops a life of its own. The fear level is currently high in our community, and in most nations. Terrorism, airplanes disappearing, cyclones, climate change, ebola etc. all seem to take 'the fire into the canopy.' As we will discover these things of themselves are rational reasons to fear, however, what lies behind them, the root of all our fears is the fear of facing God as Judge. These events then become the means by which we may suddenly confronted by the presence of God. The very God we have been attempting to be apart from as a fallen humanity: The One whose presence represents ultimate fear (to all 'as-godders'). But Christians face other fears as well as those above. With increasing secularism and the ever increasing 'voice' against Christianity, we may begin to wonder if God's Gospel will ever break through again.

Anxiety disorders are amongst the highest ever recorded. *'Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. In Australia, it is estimated that 45 per cent of people will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. In any one year, around 1 million Australian adults have depression, and over 2 million have anxiety. Anxiety is the most common mental condition in Australia. On average, 1 in 4 people – 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men – will experience anxiety (Beyond Blue).'* This means that some of us here today may be struggling with anxiety.

### **Fear and anxiety in Scriptures.**

Both fear and anxiety have a wide usage in the Scriptures. Both have a wide diversity of meanings which may lead to some confusion of interpretation if we do not come to the issue with the wisdom of grace. Apart from grace, that is the holy grace of the Gospel, fear and anxiety are fissionable materials: wherever we store them they radiate our being with corrupting emissions. Both seem to involve some kind of continuum, a line down which the same word is used in a variety of ways and different intensity both negative and positive. For example our translations use fear in the following diverse contexts: God told Noah on exiting

the ark that the animals would all fear him. *The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given* (Genesis 9:2): And then concerning God's Messiah, the spirit of fear of the Lord will rest on him. *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord* (Isaiah 11:2): And when John heard a voice from heaven speak about the people of God and their true response, they are to praise God as servants who fear him. *And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great"* (Revelation 19:5).

In the case of anxiety a wide spectrum of usage is also apparent. Our Lord and His Apostles taught us to be anxious for nothing. *"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"* (Matthew 6:25). Or similarly, Philippians 4:6 where Paul said, *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* But then Believers are told to wait anxiously for the Lord, *Keep yourself in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life* (Jude 1:21).

### **The difference between fear and anxiety in the Scriptures**

The root meaning of fear is to 'run away' (hence the flight part in our modern term flight or fight response). So the flight response is a good gift of fear in some scenes and a bad idea in others. To be propelled away from a dangerous force or situation is a good gift of terror. But where fear drives us see God as undesirable and worse the One from whose presence we must escape to be significant and fulfilled, then that fear drives us instantly into the arms of the 'father of lies' and terrible enslavement. The cringing and pitiful cover-up routine of the primal couple became the alienating and alienated norm for the human family

On the other hand fear in the sense that the Gospel creates, delivers us into an overwhelming sense of reverence and awe for the Father of our Lord, which transports our heart into the deep and true worship of true humanity.

Anxiety is more often than not seen as a negative thing. Starting from simple concern it can become something which 'divides the mind' (Matthew 13:22). It involves the ability think ahead, to anticipate a certain threat or danger, and to be drawn into worry that impacts on the present. Hence we enter the world of "stewing" over things. Human anxiety is greatly amplified by our ability to imagine the future, and our place in it. So it assumes some bad or evil outcome on the basis of our understanding of God, the world we are in, our perceived standing in that world. Our conscience becomes the dominating director and destroyer of both future and present hope.

Unlike with the word translated fear, nowhere do we find the sentiment, "Anxiety is the beginning of wisdom." We see in the words of Jesus that anxiety cannot deliver what we are anxious about, so it brings only deceit and nothing to assist us to live and love freely. It can do nothing for our basic ontology, for the way we have been created to live. *And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?*

Anxiety can become free floating, living with a sense of dread which is not based upon anything apparent or rational. We may attempt to deaden this dread with all manner of things; drugs alcohol, compulsive sociability, isolation, money etc. So anxiety leaves us easily seduced by superstitions and conspiracy theories, a host of alternative medicines and so called life fulfilling products.

The Bible is clear that all fallen humanity actually lives in fear continually. One of the most contested passages in Scripture says that we live constantly in the fear of death.

*Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:15).*

Death is not just dying, funerals, burials and future judgement. It also includes the fear of amounting to nothing, or be seen to be a failure or disappointment, that is the fear of immediate judgement. The fear of losing face is not only an Asian fear. Self-justifying activity is often a passionate striving to appear acceptable and so great emphasis is placed upon our behaviour. We call upon our actions to save us from present embarrassment right through to our future judgement. The power of death is the enslavement to fear of death. The fear of death is the fear of God's presence as judge, in the present or particularly at the day of judgement.

When fear grips our hearts and our minds it brings its own climate in which our personality and activity may change. We wonder how we can escape to protect ourselves. We may move from openness to isolationism: From thoughtfulness about the big picture to a defensive reductionism and legalism.

Running into self-protectionism is the root response to fear. "I don't watch the news anymore" may actually hide a bunch of fear driven questions about my own safety, my own 'lordship' (my fragile yet vehemently held belief that I am my own I am), my own ministry about the good and gracious presence of God demonstrated in the Gospel, my own assurance concerning God's proclaimed presence. So fear to do with God's character and his perceived presence or absence is a major part of the focus of our life. Fear about what God appears to be doing (Presence). Fear about what he appears not to be doing (Absence). Fear about what is happening (Presence in harsh judgement or absence in careless indifference). Fear about what God is thinking of me (Perceptions of presence or absence). Fear that God is not thinking anything about me (Absence). These fears surround and attack our experience and trust in the presence of God proclaimed in His Gospel. So we may not only resort to running and hiding, but shouting the facts of the Gospel louder as if by emphasis they become more reliable or effective. What then does God speak into our fears through Jesus and indeed the whole biblical revelation? How did the Apostles comprehend the nature of fear in the believer?

The Gospel of grace involved receiving a new 'spirit of life' a new dynamic that leads us away from fear as dread. *You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again* This is what we will explore next time (God willing). The answer to some of our fears lies within our reasoning, but the solution to the base fear of death must be attacked and cast out by God himself. The Gospel becomes both the eradication of fear as heavy dread, of terror at the thought of being with God. Only the Gospel can recreate true fear, the commencement of holy fear, the fear of the true human in the presence of God in full, trembling delight and joy.