

## Hebrews 4.1-2

### Fear and Faith

Fear and faith seem to us to be polar opposites, but in truth, when they are rightly understood, they are very closely related. Although as John tells us, "perfect love casts out fear" we are still commanded to fear... we are still told to fear the Lord. So there must be a difference. Many instinctively react to the idea of fearing God with a revulsion that speaks of misunderstanding... or of a soul that is not at peace with God. A soul that sees its sin grow large in the mirror without any tempering by grace and forgiveness: John Owen remarks that "this fear, in its latitude, is a consternation of spirit, upon an apprehension of God's greatness and majesty, with respect unto present or future judgments, — when the mind is not relieved by faith in the reconciliation made by Jesus Christ, — weakening, disheartening, and alienating the heart from God" This is not the fear that is given to believers as part of our sanctification... but when those terrors are present, instead represent a soul that either is not at peace with Christ or which does not understand its salvation. We are to view fear

as a tool in our box, useful for our sanctification. Speaking of the physical response of fear Henry Ward Beecher said: "God planted fear in the soul as truly as He planted hope or courage. Fear is a kind of bell, or gong, which rings the mind into quick life and avoidance upon the approach of danger; it is the soul's signal for rallying." This same signal for rallying, for ramping up your defense and seeing your situation with clarity is what the writer of Hebrews is pressing on us when he instructs us to "fear, lest any fall short". So let us consider carefully the relationship between us and fear, and between fear and faith.

## **I. FEARING GOD**

### a. Negative

- i. A dread of the holiness of God -
- ii. Terror of the possibility that we will be consumed –

**Hebrews 10.30-31**

iii. The awareness of God as an enemy who will punish sin, it is a fear of God with respect to future judgments...

b. Positive

i. An acknowledgement of the character and nature of God as more than we are –

Genesis 31:42 (NKJV)

<sup>42</sup> Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night.”

ii. A ready acquiescence to

1. the supremacy of God in all things
2. The glory of His presence
3. The wonder of His perfections

iii. An immediate and contented submission to His

1. Authority
2. Will
3. Rightness
4. Righteousness

iv. A comfort and confidence that fearing God means you need fear nothing else.

## **II. FEAR AS A WARNING-**

It is a chastening, sobering warning against falling into sin.

a. We are called to consider their fate

- i. To be warned
- ii. To worship God for His holiness, justice and wrath
- iii. To be encouraged that evil will be punished

- b. The example they gave should cause us to pause and consider
  - i. Our position with Christ and relationship to God
  - ii. Our actions
    - 1. Faith and obedience
    - 2. Doubt and rebellion
    - 3. Hope and promise, resting in God to provide
    - 4. Lust and violence, taking by force what we want
  - iii. Our destiny
    - 1. Heaven with God
    - 2. Hell with wrath

### **III. FEAR AS A TOOL**

- a. Fear strengthens faith –

- i. Drives us to God when our flesh would rather do otherwise
  - ii. Encourages us to take an active hand in our own sanctification
- b. Fear defines the edges
- c. Fear shapes our resistance
  - i. To God
  - ii. To sin
  - iii. To obedience
  - iv. To rebellion
- d. Fear becomes the measuring line of our level of trust. It is only possible to truly enjoy the richest of experience with God when you fully comprehend and appreciate the terrible and awesome power that He restrains to allow you to even come close. If we are reckless in our approach, we do not fully comprehend just who it is we are dealing with. Consider the example of Uzzah –

## 2 Samuel 6.1-15

- i. They all were treating with God contemptuously. Not obeying the simple instructions for how the ark was to be carried.
- ii. Uzzah presumed that his hand was cleaner than the dirt, and completely ignored the most basic command to not ever touch the ark.
- iii. David presumed that half-hearted action was preferable to full orbed obedience
- iv. Punishment was swift and severe...
- v. fear ensued...

e. Notice what grew –

- i. fear brought respect,
- ii. reverence,
- iii. caution
- iv. obedience.
- v. But look a little closer... fear brought worship. Before, they celebrated the return of the ark, it was a carnival of happiness, but it gave little thought to God. But later, the procession was still joyful, but worship was the heartbeat of

the day. God was properly revered, fully worshipped and righteously obeyed.

#### **IV. TWO RESPONSES TO FEAR**

- a. Consider the physical reality to help us define the spiritual
  - i. Terror which keeps you away. This is the person who is so scared of heights that they will never climb a set of stairs if they can avoid it. This is unbalanced, raw and even hate-filled. It is a fear that does not bring wellness in its wake.
  - ii. Awareness which increases enjoyment. This is the person who can stand on the cliff edge, and see the chasm below. Who participates in the wonder, who is changed by the experience where fear sharpens the moment but doesn't hinder us from enjoying it.



- b. Now apply this to the spiritual –
- i. Israel did not reject the promised land on that day when they stood on the Jordan and said "we won't go in." They rejected God. And in doing so, they lost the thing that mattered most. They lost the only reason for living which has ever mattered. They turned away from God and turned completely to themselves. And when God pronounced His judgement they STILL rejected Him and then tried to go in alone... they were utterly routed... they did not ever really get to enjoy the God who had called them out, settling for merely taking His blessings. This had been the pattern all along, on the mountain, they refused the invitation to come near, instead begging Moses to intercede and be the intermediary...

**Exodus 20.18-21**

- ii. Those who understand who God is and treat with Him accordingly experience the wonder

of knowing just how far they are permitted to come into His presence.

### Exodus 33.18-23

c. Let fear bring you closer with wisdom.

Understanding should deepen this response, it should allow us to know the God we serve, and govern our lives before and towards Him. Here is the truth of this response to fear, it only grows in the shadow of the cross of Christ. Because it is only under the cover of His shed blood that the wrath of God is satiated and we are safe to approach. Understanding the terrible power of God's wrath against sin is the first requirement for us if we are approach Him in wisdom and find mercy. For that understanding helps to drive us to our knees in repentance, crying out for the mercy that God desires to give.