

Fear of Disapproval

David & Saul Pt.8: Fear of Man pt.1 1 Samuel 18

Summary: Fear of man (being more concerned about human opinion than God's) is a serious sin that is a trap, idolatry, dishonesty, and destroys love and fellowship. God alone decides whether you have favor in the eyes of men. Seek favor from God alone and be content to let Him decide which people will like you and not like you.

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1-7 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ² From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. ³ And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. ⁵ Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well. ⁶ When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. ⁷ As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

¹⁰ The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

¹² Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul. ¹³ So he sent

David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns.

¹⁴ In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

²⁸ When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, ²⁹ Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. ³⁰ The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.

Introduction: Fear of Man

I read last week about a teenager who was sitting in the back row of the bleachers at an award ceremony, sweating bullets. He was one of the ones whose name had been considered for one of the awards, and he was scared to death that he would win it. They would call his name, and he would have to walk up there in front of everyone. He was thinking, *“What if I trip, or look funny walking up there? Or what if some of the girls see me up there and think I’m a jerk? And what would the other students who were up for the award think of me? How could I ever face them?”* And so he just sat there praying – begging God not to let him win.

The time came to announce the name, and the winner was ...Rick Wilson – some kid that no one even thought was a candidate for that award. And here is what this guy wrote about how he felt: “You can imagine my reaction. Relief? No way! I felt like a total failure. Now what would people think of me? They knew I was up for the award, and someone else was chosen. What a loser I was.”¹ Life is hard for people who worry about what everyone thinks.

Some sins are recognized even by secular culture as bad things. Even unbelievers know that murder, adultery, rape, lying – should have a stigma attached to them. But today we are going to talk about a sin that is presented in the Bible as particularly wicked, but in our culture it has no scandal or stigma attached to it at all. Even in the Church most people do not think of this sin as being much of a big deal – or even a sin at all. And yet it is one of the biggest problems in the Christian life. The sin I am talking about is the fear of man – caring about man’s opinion more than God’s.

Fear of man is the main reason people compromise the Gospel. Fear of man is the main reason we tell lies. It is the reason we boast. It is the reason you come home from a social outing and lie awake in bed worrying about whether you made a fool of yourself. Fear of man makes you a leech instead of a giver of love. Fear of man causes you to constantly second guess all your decisions because you are concerned about what people think. In some cases fear of man is the reason why people become over-committed. They cannot bear the thought of anyone being disappointed in them and so they never say no to anything. And they end up not carrying out their calling because they are doing 50 other things God never called them to do.

For other people fear of man looks a little different. Maybe for you it is just that you are easily embarrassed, and you define yourself by people’s opinions of you. Or you find it very hard to be transparent and open with people. For some fear of man comes in the form of inordinate concern about their appearance. Some people fear man and do not realize it because they mostly have the approval of the people around them. And they do not realize that deep down it is that approval rather than God’s approval that is their security.

¹ Ed Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small*, 10.

At this point you may be thinking of certain people you know who really need to hear this sermon. Some among us struggle with this sin a lot more than others. But do not spend too much of your time thinking about other people this morning, because I assure you – every single one of us struggles with this sin. And if you doubt that just ask yourself – have you ever failed to talk to someone about the Lord because you were afraid? Or how about this – are there ever sins that you commit in private that you would not dream of committing in front of certain people? That is fear of man. It is an attitude that says, “I don’t care if God sees me do this, I just don’t want my wife to see it.” Have you ever quickly stopped something you were doing because you heard someone coming? That’s fear of man.

The same goes for confession of sin. Are there things you feel perfectly comfortable confessing to God but would not dream of ever confessing to another person? Or how about this – do you ever allow thoughts to go through your head in God’s presence that you would be ashamed to speak out loud for people to hear? “I would never say that out loud because I wouldn’t want people to think I am a gossip.” “I am not going to speak these angry thoughts out loud because I don’t want people at church to think I’m an ungracious person.” And yet allowing all those thoughts to run wild in our minds before the gaze of a holy God does not bother us a bit.

I did not realize that this is a problem in my life until I studied it this week. I realized that on a Sunday when I know I faithfully preached God’s Word and that He was pleased, but no one liked the sermon very much – I get discouraged.

That is fear of man – it elevates man’s opinion higher than God’s. Even the opinion of total strangers - people we will probably never see again in our lives - is often more compelling to us than God’s opinion. We do so much to avoid making a bad impression on people, and we are mostly oblivious to the presence of the one whose opinion we claim to hold as the only important opinion there is.

Is this a problem for you?

So how are you doing in this area? See if you would answer yes to any of these questions:

Do you find yourself fishing for compliments when you talk with people?

Do you embellish your stories to make yourself look better?

Or find ways to introduce your accomplishments into conversations?

Do you daydream about people being impressed with you?

When you pray in church (or don’t pray) are you motivated by what people might think of how good or bad your prayer is?

Do you work harder when your boss is watching?

Are you tempted to affirm gossip just to avoid offending the person who is talking to you?

Do you worry and fret about what people think of you?

Do you show favoritism toward the people whose respect you most desire?

Do you think of rejection as one of the worst things a person could experience?

Do you avoid conflicts rather than trying to solve them?

Do you hate being rebuked or corrected? (**Pr.15:10 He who hates correction will die**)

When you meet new people do you spend more time thinking about how to impress them than how to minister to them?

Have you ever avoided closeness in a relationship out of fear of getting hurt?

How do you see people?² Do you see them as gas pumps – designed to fill you up? Do you see people as your ticket to acceptance and love (or even fame)? Do you see people as priests who have the power to make you feel clean – so if they approve of you then you are OK? Do you see people as dangerous, unpredictable terrorists – you never know where they will strike next? And so you have to

² This list is taken from *When People are Big and God is Small* p.181.

keep your guard up all the time to keep from getting hurt? Do you see people as dictators, whose word and opinion is law for you? How are you doing? Anybody here need a sermon on fear of man?

Review

Last time we had a little excursus about the coming victory of the Son of David. But if you can think back to the message before that – our last study in ch.17, we compared God-trusters to self-trusters. We found that self-trusters fail to seek God as their help and look instead to earthly securities and comforts. They lack courage and tend to lose heart easily. God-trusters see God as the only source of security and help.

Trust and fear - 2 sides of the same coin

The outcomes in your life are determined by who you trust. That's one side. The other side of that same coin is that the outcomes in your life are determined by who you fear. That is not to say that fear and trust are the same thing – they are not. But they do go together because the one you trust is the one you will also fear.

Ex.14:31 when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him

Whoever it is you believe is most powerful – whoever you believe is in charge of your well-being – that is who you will both trust and fear. You will trust them because you believe they are in charge of your wellbeing. And you will fear their displeasure because if they are in charge of your wellbeing they are also in charge of your non-wellbeing.

Isa.51:12 I, even I am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal man?

God says, “What right do you have to fear men? I am the one who comforts you.” The one who is in charge of your comfort is the one you fear.³

And so if David was a man who trusted in God, you would also expect that he would be a God-fearer. And if Saul was a self-truster, then you would expect that his life would be driven not by fear of God, but by fear of man. And that is exactly what we see. Saul was a man whose entire existence was driven by fear of man. You see that all through this chapter.

7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." 8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" 9 And from that time on Saul kept a [jealous] eye on David.

12 Saul was afraid of David,

15 When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him.

²⁹ Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.

³ Ps.130:3,4 ... with you there is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared.

God is in charge of whether or not you are forgiven, and so He is the one you fear.

Ps.2:11-12 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The one powerful enough to be a refuge is the one you should fear – lest He choose not to supply that refuge. So whatever or whoever you think is the greatest source of refuge and the one who can deny you refuge – that's who you will both trust and fear.

The writer keeps repeating the fact that Saul was afraid of David. And his sinful treatment of David (which became the defining factor of Saul's entire life) all grew out of that fear.

If you think fear of man is not a big deal just look at what it did to Saul. It made him a rebel, a lunatic, and a murderer who will give his own daughters away in marriage to someone just for the purpose of making them widows.

Varieties of man-fearing

Fear of man in the heart of Saul has been a major theme ever since ch.15. Fear of man comes in several varieties. There are three that I see in Saul. The first is fear of being disliked. The second kind is fear of harm or death – we see that in ch.17. And the third is fear of loss, which is the main theme of ch.18. So we will take these one at a time. In today's study let's think through the first kind – fear of disapproval.

Fear of Man's Disapproval

The sin that cost Saul the kingship was a *fear of human opinion* – the idolatry of popularity. When Saul disobeyed God and failed to completely destroy the Amalekites he said:

1 Sam.15:24 I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

That is the first kind of man-fearing – fear of disapproval. He was not afraid that they would hurt him or kill him. He was afraid they would not like him.

When it becomes sin – when man's opinion is more important than God's

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be liked by people and not wanting to be disliked. Where it becomes sin is when the opinion of man becomes more important or more motivating to us than the opinion of God. If the soldiers were pressuring Saul to keep the best of the spoils, and Saul did not want to disappoint them, there is nothing wrong with that. But God had clearly told Saul not to keep any spoils. And so Saul had to make a choice – disappoint the soldiers or disobey God. And when Saul preferred disobeying God to disappointing the soldiers he showed that he was more motivated by human approval than by God's approval. That is fear of man.

The world's lame labels

And even the world recognizes that as a problem. The popular name they give it is peer pressure. Other times it is called low self-esteem, or codependency. And as usual the world's labels are unhelpful and misleading. The term "peer pressure" implies that the source of the pressure is your peers. The problem is other people. But in reality the source of the pressure is your own fear of their disapproval. If you do not fear their disapproval there is no pressure. So the pressure is coming from you, not from them.

The term "codependency" misses the mark because it makes it sound like the solution is independence, rather than dependence on God and love for people. And the term "low self-esteem" is way off. That term makes it sound like the problem is too little esteem for yourself, and so the solution is more pride. That is the opposite of the truth. What the world calls low self-esteem is really nothing but pride that is being frustrated. Low self-esteem is an attitude that says, "The most important thing in the world is for me to be accepted and liked by people, and I am afraid it is not going to happen." When the most important thing for you is your own glorification the solution is not more pride!

Just as a side note – it is amazing how much easier it is to solve problems in the Christian life when we get the label right. Satan has worked hard at pressing the labels of psychology into our vocabulary because those labels obscure the nature of the problem and point us in wrong directions. So the first step in counseling others or counseling yourself is applying biblical labels to your problems. So let's call this one what it is – fear of man. (Scripture also calls it “people-pleasing.”⁴ “Fear of man” describes the root problem and “people-pleasing” describes the resulting action.)

A Trap

Pr.29:25 calls the fear of man a trap. The promise of human approval and applause lures you in, and then the trap springs and closes down upon you so you can't escape. From then on it dominates and controls your life. The reason you cannot escape is that the only way out is through fear of God – caring more about God's approval than man's. But you cannot fear God and fear man at the same time.

Ps.86:11 give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

You cannot fear God while your heart is still divided. And that is why fear of man works like a trap. The more focused I am on human approval the more oblivious I am to God's approval or disapproval. So being in the trap is the very thing that makes the walls of the trap stronger and stronger.

The wickedness of man-fearing

Before we get to what the Bible teaches about how to escape from that trap, I feel like I should probably spend a little time showing you what Scripture says about the wickedness of this particular sin. When we are dealing with a sin that even our Christian culture tends not to take very seriously, we need to pay all the more careful attention to what Scripture says about it. Because if we do not see this as a problem, we are not going to be motivated to try to throw this sin off.

Fear of man is Idolatry

The most wicked thing about the fear of man is the fact that it is idolatry. Whenever you see statements in Scripture forbidding fear of man you will find that fear of man is always portrayed as the opposite of faithfulness to God.

Pr.29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

Isa.51:7 ...Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. ⁸For the moth will eat them up ... But my righteousness will last forever

Isa.51:12-13 "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men... ¹³ that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens

Mt.10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Fear of man takes the place of fear of God, which makes it idolatry. In fact, it's a kind of double idolatry – it makes an idol out of people and an idol out of self.

When we live for people's approval what we are doing is seeking our own glory and honor. Living for human applause is essentially the same sin as what Herod committed when he accepted people's

⁴ Gal.1:10, 1 Thes.2:4.

praise and worship on his birthday and God struck him down and he was eaten by worms for not giving glory to God. Fear of man makes an idol out of self. It is an attitude that says, “I am the one that needs to be glorified around here. I am the one who needs to be affirmed. I am the one who people should be talking about and praising in their conversations. And my own status in the eyes of people is more important than God’s status in the eyes of people.” It makes an idol of self.

And beyond that, it makes an idol of others. Living for approval from men causes you to look to people for that which you should seek only from God. And that is idolatry. God is our comfort, God is our security, God is the one who determines if we are doing a good job or bad job, it is before God alone that we stand or fall – not man. When we live for people’s approval we elevate man to the place of being the determiner of who is exalted.

Ps.75:6-7 No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. ⁷ But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

Do we believe that? Do we live as though human beings were in charge of whether we are well-liked? Or do our thoughts and affections and actions show that we believe God alone is in charge of whether we are well-liked?

Man-fearers elevate people to the place of being the determiners of who is exalted and not exalted. And on top of that, they also elevate the word of man to be the final say rather than the Word of God. If you are a person who lives for human approval you know what I am talking about. If you overheard a group of us talking about you, and you heard us say that you are doing a terrible job at your ministry – what would happen in your heart? People who fear man would take that as gospel. It would not even occur to you that maybe our assessment is off. And the same for positive things. If everyone comes up to you and says you are doing a fantastic job, that is all you need. God’s judgment is not ultimate – man’s is.

Fear of man is dishonesty

So fear of man is a trap and it is idolatry of self and idolatry of others. And on top of that, it is dishonesty. When everything we do is calculated to cause people to be impressed with us, what are we saying? What we are saying is, “Be impressed with me, because I am impressive.” But is that really true? Are we really so impressive and worthy of admiration? We are so careful when everyone’s eyes are on us, why? “I have to be careful when I walk up on stage, because otherwise people might think I’m a klutz.” But... you *are* a klutz! Aren’t you? No offense, but don’t you from time to time try to take a drink from a glass and somehow something goes wrong and you spill the drink all over your shirt? Don’t you still sometimes stub your toe, or trip, or stumble – and you’ve been walking for how many years now? If you get a really bad bruise on some part of your body you notice that all day long you are banging that part of your body on doorknobs, handrails, chairs, telephones. (And it doesn’t matter what part of you is sore – that part gets banged all day, which means we must be banging all the parts of our bodies on everything all the time!) We are klutzes with a capital K! If I do something that convinces you that I am always smooth and glide around life without ever doing clumsy, klutzy things, I am lying to you.

Fear of man says, “I have to be careful, otherwise people will think I’m stupid.” But don’t you do dumb things consistently, on a regular basis – things that make you just shake your head and say, “dumb, dumb, dumb!” The truth of that matter is we are all a bunch of clumsy, dorky, dopey, average-looking, sinful, people who stumble and fail every day. If I live in a way that makes people think I am something other than a clumsy, dorky, dopey, average-looking, sinful man, I am lying.

Fear of man destroys love

So fear of man is a trap, it is idolatry of others and of self, and it is dishonesty. On top of all that, fear of man destroys love. Just look at what it does in Saul's attitude toward David. Our number one duty toward one another is love. Love for one another is the life blood of the church. But fear of man is the biggest destroyer of love.

Fearing God and loving God go together just fine, but fearing man and loving man are mutually exclusive. Fearing man is not loving because forces people into a position that it's not right to put them in. It forces them into the role of being our providers and our judges and source of encouragement, and comfort and strength and meaning. It puts them into the position of God in your life, and that is unloving, because they cannot live up to that.⁵

Have you noticed that people-pleasers are so needy of constant affirmation, constant praise, constant encouragement – and so everyone tries to give them all that as much as possible to keep them happy, and so they get tons of it, and yet no matter how much they get it's never enough. Those people are almost always depressed or discouraged. When you are a man-fearer no one can supply as much affirmation as you need, and so people just make you crazy all the time. You find yourself always disappointed in everybody. It makes it hard for you to love others and it makes it hard for others to love you because you are like a leech that is never satisfied.

A lot of time this is the problem with church-hoppers. They go from church to church trying to find one that will make them feel good about themselves. And they cannot find it, and so they get frustrated with the Church. It is not the church's job to make you feel good about yourself. It is the church's job to make you feel good about *God*. Our job is to show you His glory and majesty and goodness and beauty and grace and kindness and power and wisdom and love, and to help you experience all those things so that your heart fills up with love for Him, and your soul delights in Him like a marvelous feast – like drinking from a fountain of living water. If we focus people on their own self-esteem we ultimately make them miserable. But if we point people to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ we usher them into fullness of joy. So our job is to help you take delight in God. And your job and your God-given responsibility is to help us find greater delight in God. Your job is not to find people to welcome and affirm you.

Neediness of people is not love

So fear of man destroys love. Sometimes people-pleasers think it is just the opposite. They mistake their fear of man for love. They point to their boyfriend and say, "How can you tell me I don't love him? I love him so much I couldn't live without him." That is not love. That is just being a parasite. What is loving is when you get all you need from the Lord, which frees you up to be a giver rather than a parasite.

Now do not misunderstand – that is not to say it is OK to be a lone ranger or that you do not need the rest of the Church. We need people because God has chosen to dispense his grace through people. But there is a huge difference between seeking grace from God dispensed through people and seeking what we need from people without reference to God.

Fear of man destroys fellowship

Seeking grace from God through people is called "fellowship," and fear of man destroys that too! Not only is it a trap and idolatry and dishonesty, and not only does it destroy love; on top of all that it destroys fellowship. It guts out the church and makes it an empty shell. God's design is for the church to be a close-knit family. Over and over we see that God did not design us to be able to live the Christian life on our own, without the help of fellow believers. Lone rangers are dead rangers. So much of what God wants from you depends on your connection to us. And so much of what God wants from us depends on our connection with you. If you build a car, you will not be satisfied with any part of that

⁵ To look to God as our ultimate caretaker and provider and judge is loving, because that shows Him to be the only source of those things. That's why loving God and fearing God can go together but loving man and fearing man can't.

car – no matter how well it works and how beautiful it is – if that part is independent from the rest of the parts. And that is the way God is with His Church as well. It is as meaningless as it can possibly be how good a preacher I am in my closet. And the same goes for all the gifts. Your gift is as useless apart from the body as a clutch is apart from the rest of the car.

But in so many cases (especially in our 21st Century American culture), we are mostly independent from the rest of the Church – especially in the areas where community is most important! For example: We continue in a sin that we could have victory over simply because we are too afraid to confess our sins to one another and get help. When we fail our first thought is, “I have got to do this different,” “I’ve got to lick this,” “I have to get stronger,” “Next time I’ll do this,” etc; instead of “I need help. I think with the help of five or six brothers and sisters in Christ I will be able to gain victory in this area.” Maintaining our good reputation is more important to us than conquering the sin. That is fear of man in the extreme. Secondly, we turn true fellowship into a lie, because we fear man so much and worship human approval so much that we are not really transparent with one another. We present ourselves as something other than what we really are, so that our whole interaction at church is a big charade.

Another example of how fear of man destroys fellowship - what about when we lose heart and fail to persevere in ministries, because we fear man so much, and are so needy of human approval and accolades, that as soon as someone criticizes us (or even fails to praise us), we get discouraged and quit? And a fourth example - As I mentioned before, many people build up resentment toward the Church because they fear man instead of God. If I think of you as being in charge of meeting my needs, when it seems like my needs are going unmet I am going to be unhappy with you. But if I think of God as being in charge of meeting my needs, then when it seems like my needs are going unmet I am forced to adjust my idea of needs. And instead of getting angry at you, I am driven to pursue grace from God. So fear of man is the culprit behind the animosity many Christians have toward the church. Fear of man ends up making you want to quit church and stay home. Fear of God – seeing God’s grace dispensed through His people in His ways – causes you to be zealous about coming to church, small groups, Bible studies – every kind of fellowship you can come to.

So fear of man turns what God designed to be an intimate, loving family into an empty, powerless, formal institution. Fear of man destroys fellowship. So are you convinced this is an issue for which we are in great need of guidance from Scripture?

Is favor with man a good thing to be sought?

OK, so let’s look at the solution Scripture gives us for this problem. There is so much that needs to be said about this. It is hard to know where to even start. Let’s begin by turning our eyes to the glory of God. There is one of His attributes that is especially helpful in this area. The attribute I have in mind is the fact that it is God and God alone who grants favor in the eyes of men.

Favor in the eyes of man is a good thing

Living for human approval is a wicked sin. But as you have heard me say that over and over I hope you do not conclude that favor in the eyes of men is itself a bad thing. It is a good thing. It is like riches – we are forbidden to seek it or to love them, but when God gives it to us as a gift of His love we should receive it and enjoy it.

Favor in the eyes of men can be a wonderful thing. It was the way God chose to bless David, and it is promised to us as a blessing several times in Scripture. And you have to have some of it just to live. If you had no favor in the eyes of anybody you could not do anything. If nobody liked you at all, and nobody trusted you at all, what ministry could you offer people? We need to have some favor in the eyes of men. In fact, when you have it you should be careful not to squander it. The book of Proverbs teaches us that it is foolish not to care at all about your reputation.

Pr.22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

So when you fight against the sin of fear of man do not overcorrect and become one of those people who says, “I answer to God alone and I don’t care what anyone else thinks.” If you do not care what anyone thinks you have gone too far.

Paul took pains to do what was right not only in the eyes of the Lord but also of men.

2 Cor.8:20-21 We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹ For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

Just like money, favor in the eyes of men can be a useful tool in the work of the kingdom.

All favor is from Him

Just remember that it is all from God. Have you noticed that those people who have a lot of fear of man - those people whose life is all about making everyone like them- have you noticed that those are usually the people that are the least pleasant to be around? It is ironic. They are the ones that most people like the least. The more concerned you are with winning everyone’s favor, the less most people will like you. The more you work to impress everyone, the less impressed most people will be with you. The more you try to get people to look up to you the more they will tend to look down on you. That is because favor in the eyes of men is not something we have the ability to gain. God alone is in charge of that. Only God can reach into the heart and touch people’s affections. You could take classes on how to be charming, you could read books about winning friends and influencing people - no matter what you do, you will not have the power to cause people to favor you. God alone can do that.

Ps.75:6-7 No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. ⁷ But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

If your boss likes you, and your neighbors like you, your teachers like you, customers at work like you, co-workers - in times like that do not ever assume you have favor with those people because you have figured out how to be a good employee or student or neighbor.

If God withholds this blessing, it is amazing what happens. You can do all the same things you were doing before and yet everyone starts misunderstanding you – even people who normally understand you just fine. People start mistrusting you. Your efforts to correct misunderstandings backfire. People believe lies about you. People misinterpret your motives. And you are absolutely powerless to change any of it. The more you try the worse things get.

Favor in the eyes of your family, friends, enemies – anyone is an undeserved gift of grace and mercy from God. And if God turned His face away from you to discipline you, it could all be gone overnight. One misunderstanding could shatter what you thought was a lifelong friendship. One event at work could cause your boss to be suspicious of you and dislike you. One lie told about you could change everything between you and your coworkers. A series of events could easily happen that would destroy even the trust your spouse and children have in you. All the favor you have in the eyes of people is a God-given gift of grace. And all of it is dependent upon His favor for it to continue tomorrow.

Let God be in charge of the favor you have in the eyes of man

So how should we approach this issue of favor in the eyes of men? If it is such a good thing, it seems like we should seek it. And yet living for that as a motive can be such a wicked sin. How do we find the delicate balance in our attitude toward favor in the eyes of men? The answer is right here in ch.18 in the example of David.

I mentioned before that in the beginning even Saul loved David. But that quickly turned to hatred. It is interesting – ch.18 portrays David as the recipient of favor in the eyes of men. He is portrayed as a man everybody loved, and who was extremely likable and popular. That is one major theme in this chapter. And the other major theme is about the guy who hated David and was trying to murder him. Even when God grants you favor in the eyes of men, some men will still hate you.

If you are an approval junkie – and you struggle with fear of man, one of the most painful truths you can ever hear is this one I am about to say. And to some of you this will come as an absolute shock. To some of you what I am about to say is such an intolerably painful truth that it will cause literal pain in your ears when I say it. Are you ready? Here it is (brace yourself) *Not everyone is going to like you.* If your mom did not tell you that when you were a kid I am sorry to have to be the one to break it to you. But not everyone is going to like you.

There are people who can live with anything except the knowledge that someone out there does not like them. Or even that there *might* be someone who does not like them. Even if you orchestrate every single movement of your whole life in a calculated effort to please people – still you will find that some people just really do not like you. You cannot please all of the people even some of the time. Because if you live in a way that pleases some people, that very way of living will offend other people. There is no way of living that pleases everyone. The Prince of Peace, who was the most humble, most loving individual who has ever lived, had His life come to an end with masses of people screaming for His blood. Even when God grants you favor with men not everyone is going to like you.

So what should our attitude regarding favor in the eyes of man be? Realize that some people will like you, others will hate you, and still others will not care about you one way or the other, and be content to let God be in charge of which people are in which category. We always want to take charge of that. “I want that one over there to like me!” Do not do that. Leave it all in God’s hands and be thankful for whatever favor you get. And always remember that it is from God. The only reason anyone likes you is because God granted you favor in their eyes.

If you want to know what your life will look like if you try to take charge of which people like you (or if you try to get everyone to like you), then watch Saul in this chapter. And if you want to know what your life will look like if you leave it up to God, watch David.

When you have favor in the eyes of men take advantage of it. Use it to advance the Kingdom. But be content to let God be in charge of it. Do not try to bring it about yourself. Do not love it. Do not seek after it. Make favor with God the only thing you care about and the only thing you seek.

Benediction: Psalm 2:11-12 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Devotionals

Fear of Disapproval

1 Samuel 18 Day 1

7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." 8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" 9 And from that time on Saul kept an eye on David. 10 The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand 11 and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. 12 **Saul was afraid of David**, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul. 13 So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. 14 In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. 15 When Saul saw how successful he was, **he was afraid of him.**

²⁸ When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, ²⁹ Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.

Pr.29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

Both an evidence and a cause of Saul's wickedness was what Pr.29:25 calls "fear of man." He feared David and the people rather than God. He saw David's successes as a threat to him. God had already told him that He would take the kingdom away from Saul, but Saul didn't fear the word of the Lord; instead he was afraid of the people and of David. He saw his wellbeing as being held in their hands, not God's. If you fear God and you believe your wellbeing is determined by Him alone, then when a threat (like David) comes along you respond by seeking God's favor. But if you fear man you respond to the threat by trying to eliminate the threat (kill David and seek approval from the people).

You alone, dear Father, are worthy of my fear. Yours is the only approval/disapproval that should drive my affections and actions. But how far short I fall of this! I commit sins in "private," before Your face, that I wouldn't dream of doing if people were around because of my fear of their disapproval or disappointment. I allow thoughts to go through my head in Your presence that I would never dream of speaking out loud for people to hear. Even the opinion of total strangers- people I will probably never see again in my life - is often more compelling to me than Your opinion. I do so much to avoid making a bad impression on people, and yet am mostly oblivious to the presence of the one whose opinion I claim to hold as the only important opinion there is.

You have warned us that fear of man is a snare – a trap. It has enticing bait that lures me in (the promise of human approval and applause); and then the trap springs and closes down upon me so that I can't escape. It holds me like a trap because the only way out is through fear

of You, but I can't fear You and fear man at the same time. The more focused I am on their opinion the more oblivious I am to Yours. When I freely confess my sins to You, but can't bring myself to confess them to anyone else even though You have commanded that I do so, that is fear of man.

I will fear the one I believe holds the keys to my comfort. When I fear moral men I do so because I believe they are in charge of whether I am happy or unhappy. They control my comfort or discomfort.

Isa.51:12 I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass?

Help me walk through this day with a greater awareness of Your presence, and incline my heart such that Your approval and Your comfort is all I seek, and Your disapproval is all I seek to avoid.

Who is worthy of fear but You? Who can make promises like those You make? Oh what promises You have made to the righteous! You have promised rich, abundant blessing.⁶ In relationship to circumstances You have promised empowerment⁷ and protection/refuge.⁸ In relationship to material things You have promised provision,⁹ prosperity, and reward.¹⁰ In relationship to other people You have promised favor with men,¹¹ vindication before enemies,¹² and an extended legacy.¹³ In relationship to myself You have promised flourishing and thriving,¹⁴ sustaining,¹⁵ boldness,¹⁶ and joy.¹⁷ And in relationship to You You have promised the nearness of Your presence,¹⁸ love,¹⁹ attendance to and answers of prayers,²⁰ and special favorable interest.²¹ And Your warnings to the wicked are every bit as severe as Your promises to the righteous are wonderful. Dear Lord, I believe – help my unbelief.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who alone is worthy of our fear and who is ever present

Promise to trust: He will search my heart, and will give me His approval if I treasure His approval.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Righteousness, motivation, acceptance, fear of God

⁶ Ps.1:6, 5:12, Pr.3:33, 10:6, 11:23

⁷ Ps.75:10

⁸ Ps.7:9, 34:21, 37:16,17,39, Pr.10:25, 29,30, 11:8,9, 12:3,7,21, 14:32, 18:10

⁹ Ps.37:25, Pr.10:3,6, 13:21, 15:6, 13:22,25, 21:26

¹⁰ Ps.37:29, 58:11

¹¹ Pr.11:10, 28:12, 29:2, Ps.142:7

¹² Ps.58:10, Pr.14:19

¹³ Pr.10:6, 13:22, 20:7

¹⁴ Ps.72:7, 92:12, Pr.4:18, 11:28, 12:12

¹⁵ Ps.55:22

¹⁶ Pr.28:11

¹⁷ Ps.97:11, 118:15, Pr.4:18, 10:28, 13:9, 21:15

¹⁸ Ps.14:5, 118:20

¹⁹ Ps.146:8

²⁰ Ps.34:15-17, Pr.10:24, 15:29

²¹ Ps.11:5, Jer.20:12

Fear of Disapproval

1 Samuel 18 Day 2

Pr.14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life

There are some Christians who struggle with the idea of fearing God because they are plagued with the feeling that God is perpetually displeased with them like an irritable, impossible-to-please father. Such a view is wrong, and the initial impulse of some is to conclude that such a person has too much fear of God. But it is as impossible to have too much fear of God as it is to have too much love of God (for the connection between love for God and fear of God see Pr.15:16-17 where love and fear are used as virtual synonyms). “Excessive” fear of God would result not in estrangement from Him, but in more abundant, joyful life from His fountain.

The Christian who feels constant disapproval from God probably has too little fear of God. When a person truly fears God – is genuinely terrified of His displeasure or any distance from Him; when there is the slightest indication of estrangement there is an all-out effort to return to closeness with Him no matter what it takes – no matter how many hours of prayer, no matter how difficult the process of seeking Him in His Word and in fellowship; the God-fearer is desperate to be restored to intimacy. She will seek with all her heart, and God has promised that when one of His children does that, He will be found by her. But in many cases the person who feels that God is perpetually unhappy with him lives as though he is content with that arrangement. He may not like it, but it is not disturbing enough to drive him to seek hard after God. He may even begin to resent God. And the more God is resented (or ignored) the less He is feared. The man who deeply loves his wife can't stand even an hour of relational estrangement from her. If she is upset with him he desperately wants to be reconciled immediately. And if that is not possible he lives in a state of painful, tense anxiety until reconciliation can take place. That's how it is with the God-fearer. He so desperately fears God's displeasure that he seeks closeness and favor with God with all his heart, and he finds it! That is why the phrase “those who fear God” describes the same group as the phrase “those who take refuge in Him” in Ps.31:19. The person who truly fears God will take refuge in Him.

Isa 8:12b-14 Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. 13 The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, 14 and he will be a sanctuary

Dear, precious and holy Father in heaven, You are not an ogre to those who fear You. You are a fountain of life – the source of refreshment and renewal and life. You are a sanctuary – a place of asylum and refuge, as well as a place of grace, blessing and peace; a place where refugees can run and be not only safe, but cared for with rich, abundant blessing.

The word “refugee” is an ideal description of me. 44 times just in the Psalms you are called a refuge. The displaced, homeless victims of hurricane Katrina did not want to be called refugees because it sounded demeaning to them. But that which the world considers undignified I will gladly embrace if it places me in the right relation to You. What is a refugee but one who has fled with nothing and is in great need and totally dependant? Nothing in my

hands I bring; only to the cross I cling as a grateful refugee who has found asylum in Your glorious Temple.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who is a refuge

Promise to trust: He will give me asylum and blessing if I run to Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Security, blessing, safety, courage, desire for Him, fear of Him

Fear of Disapproval

1 Samuel 18 Day 3

The most wicked thing about the fear of man is the fact that it is idolatry. Whenever you see statements in Scripture forbidding fear of man you will find that fear of man is always portrayed as the opposite of faithfulness to God.

Pr.29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

Isa.51:7 ...Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. ⁸ For the moth will eat them up ... But my righteousness will last forever

Isa.51:12-13 "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men... ¹³ that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens

Mt.10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Fear of man takes the place of fear of God, which makes it idolatry. In fact, it's a kind of double idolatry – it makes an idol out of people and an idol out of self. When we live for people's approval what we are doing is seeking our own glory and honor. Living for human applause is essentially the same sin as what Herod committed when he accepted people's praise and worship on his birthday and God struck him down and he was eaten by worms for not giving glory to God. Fear of man makes an idol out of self. It's an attitude that says, "I'm the one that needs to be glorified around here."

And beyond that, it makes an idol of others. Living for approval from men causes you to look to people for that which you should seek only from God. And that's idolatry. God is our comfort, God is our security, God is the one who determines if we are doing a good job or bad job, it is before God alone that we stand or fall – not man. When we live for people's approval we elevate man to the place of being the determiner of who is exalted.

Ps.75:6-7 No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. ⁷ But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

Do you believe that? Do you live as though human beings were in charge of whether you are well-liked; or do your thoughts and affections and actions show that you believe God alone is in charge of whether you are well-liked? Man-fearers elevate people to the place of being the determiners of who is exalted and not exalted.

Holy Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. You alone are worthy of my fear. You alone determine whether I am doing well or not doing well. Your judgment alone matters. Forgive me, dear God, for living for human approval and for being more conscious of what people think than of what You think. How seldom during the day do I concern myself with how You feel. Thoughts about Your approval of my actions or thoughts or words or desires or attitudes are so rare. And when I do have them they bring me so little joy compared to what they should bring me. Why am I so dull and my heart so unresponsive to such a glorious thing as Your approval? Oh Lord, teach me to crave Your approval, and to so treasure it that I am repulsed by anything that would threaten it. Let me go through the day today with a heightened awareness of whether or not I have Your approval at a given moment.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose approval alone matters

Promise to trust: He will approve of me if I seek Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, confidence, fear, desire to obey, motivation

Fear of Disapproval

1 Samuel 18 Day 4

Fear of man destroys fellowship. It guts out the church and makes it an empty shell. God's design is for the church to be a close-knit family. Over and over we see that God did not design us to be able to live the Christian life on our own, without the help of fellow believers. Lone rangers are dead rangers. So much of what God wants from you depends on your connection to the rest of the Body. And so much of what God wants from the rest of the Body depends on their connection with you. If you build a car, you will not be satisfied with any part of that car – no matter how well it works and how beautiful it is – if that part is independent from the rest of the parts. And that's the way God is with His Church as well.

But in so many cases (especially in our 21st Century American culture), we are mostly independent from the rest of the Church – especially in the areas where community is most important! For example:

- We continue in a sin that we could have victory over simply because we are too afraid to confess our sins to one another and get help. When we fail our first thought is, "I've got to do this different," "I've got to lick this," "I've got to get stronger," "Next time I'll do this," etc; instead of "I need help. I think with the help of 5 or 6 brothers and sisters in Christ I'll be able to gain victory in this area." Maintaining our good reputation is more important to us than conquering the sin. That's fear of man in the extreme.
- We turn true fellowship into a lie, because we fear man so much and worship human approval so much that we aren't really transparent with one another. We present ourselves as something other than what we really are, so that our whole interaction at church is a big charade.
- We lose heart and fail to persevere in ministries, because we fear man so much, and are so needy of human approval and accolades, that as soon as someone criticizes us (or even fails to praise us), we get discouraged and quit?
- Many people build up resentment toward the Church because they fear man instead of God. If I think of you as being in charge of meeting my needs, when it seems like my needs are going unmet I'm going to be unhappy with you. But if I think of God as being in charge of meeting my needs, then when it seems like my needs are going unmet I am forced to adjust my idea of needs. And instead of getting angry at you, and am driven to pursue grace from God. So fear of man is the culprit behind the animosity many Christians have toward the church. Fear of man

ends up making you want to quit church and stay home. Fear of God – seeing God’s grace dispensed through His people in His ways – causes you to be zealous about coming to church, small groups, Bible studies – every kind of fellowship you can come to.

So fear of man turns what God designed to be an intimate, loving family into an empty, powerless, formal institution. It destroys fellowship.

Oh Lord, please destroy the remnants of man-fearing that remain in my heart! I confess that I have done much to destroy Your precious Temple through my fear of man. Oh please forgive me dear Lord! Forgive me for my dishonesty and hypocrisy – pretending to be something I’m not. Forgive me for holding my reputation as more important than victory over sin! Forgive me for losing heart even while I have Your approval! Forgive me for having resentment in my heart toward people who didn’t give me approval and affirmation that I should have been seeking from You alone anyway.

You alone, dear God, are worthy of my fear. And Your precious Bride is beautiful, and more precious than silver, and to be treated with utmost honor because You love her. Let my love for You and Your Bride be great enough to move me to let go of my ridiculous fear of man, and be willing to undergo the discomfort and embarrassment of exposure to Your people. Make my desire for Your approval cause me to be willing to risk rejection by people. How much better, dear Lord, is Your approval than man’s! And how much more fearful is Your disapproval than man’s!

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose approval alone matters

Promise to trust: He will approve of me if I seek Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, confidence, fear, desire to obey, motivation, willingness to be transparent and honest with people

Fear of Disapproval

1 Samuel 18 Day 5

Have you noticed that those people who have a lot of fear of man are usually the people that are the least pleasant to be around? The more concerned you are with winning everyone’s favor, the less most people will like you. That’s because favor in the eyes of men is not something we have the ability to gain. God alone is in charge of that. Only God can reach into the heart and touch people’s affections. You could take classes on how to be charming, you could read books about winning friends and influencing people- no matter what you do, you will not have the power to cause people to favor you. God alone can do that.

P^s.75:6-7 No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. ⁷ But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

If your boss likes you, and your neighbors like you, your teachers like you, customers at work like you, co-workers - in times like that don’t ever assume you have favor with those people because you’ve figured out how to be a good employee or student or neighbor. If God withholds this blessing, it’s amazing what happens. You can do all the same things you were doing before and yet everyone starts misunderstanding you – even people who normally understand you just fine. People start mistrusting you. Your efforts to correct misunderstandings backfire. People believe lies about you. People

misinterpret your motives. And you are absolutely powerless to change any of it. The more you try the worse things get.

Favor in the eyes of your family, friends, enemies – anyone is an undeserved gift of grace and mercy from God. And if God turned His face away from you to discipline you, it could all be gone overnight. One misunderstanding could shatter what you thought was a lifelong friendship. One event at work could cause your boss to be suspicious of you and dislike you. One lie told about you could change everything between you and your coworkers. A series of events could easily happen that would destroy even the trust your spouse and children have in you. All the favor you have in the eyes of people is a God-given gift of grace. And all of it is dependent upon His favor for it to continue tomorrow.

Dear Father, giver of favor in the eyes of men, thank You for the favor You have given me in the eyes of my wife! Thank you for the favor You have given me in the eyes of my children and the rest of my family! Thank You, dear Lord God, for the favor I enjoy at church and among my friends! Oh dear God, every bit of it is a gift of grace from You. Thank You for the favor I have received from businesses I have worked with, when people have believed what I say and trusted me. When they have not dealt treacherously with me, but fairly. When they have sold me things at good prices, or paid me a fair wage. When they have helped me when I was in trouble, given me rides, or directions, or advice. It's staggering when I think of how much favor I have received from men dear Lord! Oh thank You! Thank You especially for the people You have caused to listen to me and trust me when I speak Your Word and proclaim Your gospel. How great and wonderful are Your gifts.

Forgive me dear God, for taking advantage of this gift from You all my life without even realizing it was a gift from You. Forgive me for taking credit for it myself, as though I were the reason why people have favored me! Teach me to see all favor in the eyes of men as a gracious gift from You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who alone is the giver of favor in the eyes of men

Promise to trust: He will give me favor in the eyes of those whose favor I need to do His work

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Favor in the eyes of men, joy