

“Enjoying God’s Justice”
David and Saul Part 11 Fear of Man Pt.4
1 Samuel 18:20-30 11-11-2007

Summary: David received betrayal and injustice from Saul. How do you respond when that happens? Enjoy God’s promise to give you the mercy of justice (making things right). Seek it from God and trust Him to take care of it (though it may be invisible). David did that and it freed him up to be humble, loving and respectful to Saul.
Conclusion to series on man-fearing: The solution is to fear God. One way to do that is through the good kind of man-fearing – fearing the opinion of those whose opinion lines up with God’s. Use accountability!

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²⁰ Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. ²¹ "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." So Saul said to David, "Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law."
²² Then Saul ordered his attendants: "Speak to David privately and say, 'Look, the king is pleased with you, and his attendants all like you; now become his son-in-law.'
²³ They repeated these words to David. But David said, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known."
²⁴ When Saul's servants told him what David had said, ²⁵ Saul replied, "Say to David, 'The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.'" Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines. ²⁶ When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed, ²⁷ David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins and presented the full number to the king so that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.
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

In v. 20 Paul finds out that his daughter Michal is in love with David and the very first thought in his mind is how that could come in handy in his effort to kill David. He knows David is going to decline again because he feels he’s unworthy, so Saul hatches this plan. He knows David doesn’t have any money, so he makes the bride price an act of heroism. That will get past the problem of David thinking he is unworthy, and Saul figures if he makes that act of heroism dangerous enough, that will get David killed. So Saul gets the word out that the price is 100 Philistine foreskins. Most of the surrounding Gentile peoples practiced circumcision, so requiring

foreskins would prove that it was actually Philistines that were killed, and more importantly, by requiring a part of the male body that is always covered by clothes it makes it that much more difficult. That is not something you could quickly do in the middle of a battle when there are other Philistines around. So David gathers some guys together and says, "Let's go."

He outmaneuvers a small band of Philistine soldiers and gets around behind them on some higher ground, uses the element of surprise, hits fast and hard, and he and his men deliver lethal blows to all of them before any of them could strike back. OK, now he's got 5 – 95 more to go. Later he finds one Philistine soldier off by himself, 94 left to go. The problem is, now they are on to him. They keep finding the dead mutilated bodies of their comrades, and now they are on high alert. That is all conjecture – we don't know for sure how it all happened. All we know is in a relatively short period of time David came back not with 100 foreskins, but with 200. So now David is a hero, his popularity goes through the roof, he marries Saul's daughter Michal, and he is still alive and well. So much for Saul's plan.

Injustice

We have been studying the life of David, and throughout most of 1 Samuel, David is contrasted with Saul. The train wreck of Saul's life is caused, in large part, by the very wicked sin the Bible calls "fear of man." Up to now we have been looking at it from the perspective of Saul, since that is the way it is presented in these chapters. But as we wrap up this study this morning, let's take a moment now and think about it from David's point of view. David is suffering two really hard things: betrayal and unfairness.

Betrayal

With the exception of the spear throwing incident, all Saul's efforts to kill David are disguised as acts of friendliness toward David. Saul offers his daughters for David to marry, keeps promoting him in the military – pretending to be doing good to David while in reality he's trying to kill him. Eventually it became clear to David what was going on, and that really hurt David. To be betrayed by someone you highly respect and love is an extremely painful thing. David wrote about what it was like for him in Ps. 55.

Ps. 55:21 His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.

Unfairness

And not only did David have to deal with Saul's betrayal, he had to deal with terrible unfairness and injustice. Saul's whole plan to use marriage to his daughters to push David into dangerous warfare was actually illegal.

Dt. 24:5 If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.

That was David's God-given, civil right, and it was stripped away from him by Saul.

When you face injustice

So how do you deal with those kinds of things? Some of you know what it is like to have people pretend to be showing you kindness when in reality they are stabbing you in the back. They are nothing but smiles and hugs to your face, but behind your back they are gossiping about you, lying about you – turning everyone against you, or maybe they did not intentionally hurt you – they just let you down. They were unfaithful to you as a spouse or maybe just as a friend. What they were to your face turned out to be different from what they were behind your back. What do you do when you are betrayed by someone you love or respect? How do you handle the pain of

that? Maybe the person eventually apologizes and repents – but still, how do you deal with the damage that has been done? How do you live with that without getting angry every time you’re reminded of it?

And what about when someone takes away what is rightfully yours? How do you deal with unfairness? How do you handle it when your mom and dad say no to you because they are assuming things about you that aren’t even true? Or when your teacher punishes you for something you didn’t even do? Or when your boss docks your pay or gives you a bad review for no good reason? Or when you get stuck having to pay for someone else’s mistake? Somehow when you are in those situations your dad’s old speech about “Life’s not fair, get over it” doesn’t bring much comfort. How do you handle unfairness in life? Let’s look at David’s response.

David’s response to injustice

Just consider the list of everything David says or does in this chapter:

* In vv. 5,13 he faithfully does everything Saul tells him to do, even at the risk of his own life.

* In v.10 he plays the harp for Saul to try to help him with the torment of the demon.

* In vv.18,23 he declines the opportunity to marry Saul’s daughters because he is a nobody and is unworthy of such an honor.

* And in v. 27 he gives Saul double the bride price.

And what is really striking is what he does not do. There is no trace of any anger, animosity, revenge, bitterness, disrespect, or anything like that.

Humility

David’s humility is a beautiful thing. It is a rare man who can have everyone in the nation, including the king, enthralled with him, women dancing in the streets over him, and not let any of it go to his head. Most of us put our trophies on display on a mantle somewhere. David did not care about any of that. Think about the greatest trophy David ever won - the sword of Goliath. David brought it into his own tent, but later on he lost track of it. Somehow it ends up in Shiloh (ch.21), and David does not even know it’s there. He did not care about trophies or status or any kind of self-exaltation.

Respect for Saul

Saul is dominated by murderous hatred for David yet David speaks about Saul only with the most reverent and respectful words and attitudes. He is submissive to Saul, obedient to Saul, loyal to Saul. He does everything he can possibly do to be a good servant to the king who hated him. David loved his enemies. When David was king, it was a little different because an attack against the king of Israel was an attack against God, but when it was just an attack against David as an individual, David’s tendency was to love his enemies.

Ps.35:12-15 They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. ¹³ Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, ¹⁴ I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. ¹⁵ But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee

That is amazing. Can you imagine having an enemy who hates you so much that they gather in glee whenever you stumble, and yet loving that enemy so much that when they get sick you fast and mourn and bow your head in grief and weep as you would if it were your own mother? How do you learn that kind of love? How did David have such an amazing response to unfairness and betrayal?

Trusting God for justice enables love for enemies

When you read David’s psalms and then watch his behavior in 1 Samuel you might wonder at first if it is the same man. In the psalms he is so concerned about getting justice – over and over

crying out to God for justice. “I’m innocent in this matter God, I’m being treated unfairly. Give me justice!” But then when we watch him in 1 Samuel we see a man who seems oblivious to whether he receives justice or injustice. He seems to not even care at all.

Why is there that disparity between David’s prayer life and his actions with Saul? The reason is because for David, justice was a matter between him and God. David fully trusted God to bring him justice, and that freed him up in his dealings with people to love them in humility. His life was not a fight for his own rights because He entrusted all that to God. Instead his life was a life of serving and loving and honoring people.

Enjoying God’s Justice

David was able to respond the way he did because he had insight into a very important attribute of God: justice. Justice is taking what is wrong and making it right – and God loves doing that. If people take things from you – steal from you, or take away your reputation, or take away your income or anything else, God can pay you back far more than what they took. He can... but will He? He will if you seek justice from Him. Ultimately, on Judgment Day, God will make all wrongs right, and if you are a believer, then on that day you will be repaid for all the wrongs done against you. But what about in this life? Does God always make everything come out even in this life? No. So what determines whether He grants you justice in a certain case or not? A number of things determine that, but one of the biggest is whether or not you seek justice from Him.

But what about all my sin?

For some of you this may be a completely new concept. Some of you would never dream of asking for justice from God. You have been taught that since you deserve nothing but hell, the last thing you want to ask for from God is justice. People who teach that say, “No matter how bad you are being treated you are receiving far better treatment than what you deserve, so just keep your mouth shut.”

If you are one of the people who believe that way, I hope you do not carry that philosophy into your parenting. When one of your kids treats his brother unfairly I hope you don’t say, “Well, you just deserve nothing but pain anyway, so don’t complain.” “Somebody busted your toy? Well, two years ago you broke my expensive lamp, and so you are still in debt, so anyone can break any of your toys they want.” And I am glad the government does not take that approach. Your neighbor breaks into your house and steals all your stuff, and the judge says, “You just deserve hell anyway, so he can keep the stuff.”

God does not transfer guilt from one area of your life to another. If you are in a conflict right now and you are in the right in that particular conflict,¹ then you are in the right. And even if you have been in the wrong 1000 times before, that does not change the fact that you are in the right in this particular case. An unfair parking ticket is unfair even if you are guilty of some other crime.

If you have always thought of God’s justice as a negative thing, as if it were the opposite of mercy, or as something that we need to escape and never seek, that is a misconception. If you look up all the times His justice is mentioned in the psalms you will notice that it tends to show up in context with love and mercy and kindness. Justice is a merciful thing that God grants.

Ps.103:6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed

Isa.30:18 ...the LORD longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion, for the LORD is a God of justice

(He shows compassion not *in spite* of the fact that He is just, but *because* of His justice.) God shows us mercy by making things right when life is unfair.

¹ If you are in the wrong you should still be a lover of justice. You should be the answer to that other person’s prayers for justice. Let it come through you. Repent, confess your sin, admit you were in the wrong, seek forgiveness and do all you can to make it right.

Life is not fair, but it should be. Injustice and unfairness are painful things to endure because God built us with an appetite for justice, and that is not a sinful desire – it is a good, God-given desire. Justice is a wonderful blessing – that is why God promises it to us so often in Scripture and expects those promises to be motivating to us. So it is fitting that when something is unfair, it should be painful. That is not you being a wimp – that is just you desiring justice.

Wrong conceptions of justice

Now, I should say there are some false ideas of justice and injustice that we need to watch out for. For example, we are born into this world thinking fairness is when everybody gets the same thing. If I get a cookie and my brother gets a cookie and my sister gets two cookies, that is unfair! Wrong! That is not unfairness. It is just grace for your sister. It is not an injustice when you get some benefit and someone else gets a greater benefit even though they do not deserve it. When you get upset because someone else gets a greater gift of grace that you get, that is not a desire for justice – that is just sinful, wicked envy and lack of love. Jesus told a parable about this in Mt. 20. A man agreed to work all day for a day's wage and he was happy to get that wage until he discovered that one of his fellow employees got paid that same amount for working only a couple hours. But Jesus said it was wrong for that man to be unhappy about that. If what you get is good you should be thankful, and if what someone else gets is better, you should be happy for them. If justice required that everyone always got exactly the same thing then there would be no room for grace and special expressions of generosity. So if your brother gets to spend the night at a friend's house five times and you only get to do it once, do not think of that as unfairness. If a coworker gets paid more than you for no good reason, that is not injustice. Unfairness, or injustice, is when something that is rightfully yours is taken away without a good reason.

Another thing we sometimes mistake for injustice that is not injustice is when people fail to give us the thanks or appreciation we think we deserve. When we do what we do at work or at school or at church or anywhere else, we must always remember it is a privilege, not a burden to serve the Lord. Paul's task involved getting beaten and whipped and stoned and mocked and hated and betrayed and thrown in prison and killed, yet he calls it a mercy and a grace poured out on him in abundance. When we work for God it does not put God in debt to us. It puts us farther in debt to Him. Everything you ever do for God is a gift from Him to you. So if no one thanks you for your work, do not think of that as injustice. It is only injustice if you fail to be thankful to God for the work He does through you.

So if you are upset because someone else got some wonderful thing that you didn't get, that is not a craving for justice either. That is just sinful envy and lack of love. If you are upset because someone isn't showing proper gratitude, or because no one seems to appreciate your work, that is not a craving for justice, that's just the idolatry of human applause. But if you are in distress because you really were treated unfairly, that distress comes from a God-given appetite for justice.

We can seek justice from God!

God gave us the appetites of the soul for the same reason He gave us physical appetites. He gave your body the appetite for food and water because He wants you to eat and drink, and He gave you an appetite for justice because He wants you to seek justice. Just make sure you seek it from Him and no other way. God is a God of justice, and one of the most delightful things about being His child is the fact that we can seek justice from Him.

Invisible justice (requires faith)

It is very important, however, for us to take a careful look at how God provided justice for David. When Saul took away David's civil rights and sent him off to war right away after he got married, how did God provide justice? Did He do it by having some authority stand up and rebuke Saul and tell David, "Go ahead and take your year off"? No. David had to go to war, and from a human standpoint it must have seemed like that wrong was never made right. From a

human point of view it seemed like David got no justice, but from the point of view of the writer of ch. 18 it is crystal clear that God gave David justice. Saul tried to take from David, but God just kept giving to David. The more Saul treated him unfairly the more God piled on the blessing. But David didn't have the book of 1 Samuel to read so from his point of view it would have seemed like he was just being treated unfairly and no one cared and all the breaks he got were because of his own strength and prowess on the battle field. There was no obvious connection between the unfairness and the blessings. God's justice was invisible. When David had success and enjoyed popularity that was the hand of God making right all Saul's wrongs toward David. The writer of 1 Sam. 18 makes that obvious to us, but it would have been totally invisible to David. The only way for David to enjoy that was by faith. David was so sure that God would follow through on His promises to grant justice that he did not have to be able to see it.

How many times have we endured some injustice, cried out to God for justice, and then God made it right by heaping some blessing on us, and we continued in sorrow or bitterness or confusion or distress or anger because we did not see any connection, and so we assumed the injustice still stood? You get ripped off in some deal, and you are out \$200 so you cry out to God for justice, and God gives you justice by making the repair on your car only \$40 instead of the \$340 that it was going to be. Now you have your \$200 back plus an extra hundred, but you have no idea because you didn't know God changed the situation with your car repair. So often justice is invisible, and so you cannot take delight in it unless your soul really does believe the promises that God will give you justice.

Justice promised

Over and over and over in Scripture God promises to give us justice when we are treated unfairly.

Ps.37:6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Ps.9:7-9 The LORD ...has established his throne for judgment. ⁸ He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. ⁹ The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed

Ps.11:7 For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.

Ps.33:5 The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

Ps.36:6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.

Ps.72:2 He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

Ps.103:6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Loving His love for justice

Do you want to increase your desire for God and your love for Him? Learn how to take delight in the fact that you can seek justice from Him. Every time you are treated unfairly in some way, do not let that distress go to waste. Use those feelings of distress to teach your heart what a wonderful thing it is to serve a God who *loves* justice. However distressing injustice is, that is how wonderful justice is. However bothered you are by unfairness, that is how much your soul craves this attribute of God's fairness.

In fact, there is another attribute of God that is even more wonderful than His justice, and that is His *love* for justice.

Ps.33:5 The LORD loves righteousness and justice

God not only is righteous and just, but He *loves* righteousness and justice. God loves things being as they should be (righteousness²), and He loves the setting right of those things that are not as they should be (justice). God never sets something right reluctantly or without taking delight in doing it. We do that all the time. Many times we do the right thing but with a grudging, reluctant attitude. God has never done that – ever. He loves justice. When God wants to do something that is enjoyable to Him, He finds something that is messed up and makes it as it should be. When you pray for justice remember that you are praying to a God who loves giving justice.

So what should you do when you are treated unjustly? Delight in a God who delights in His plans to make that injustice right! How will He do that? And when? What will it look like? We don't know. But we do know that whatever He does it will be something that is pleasing to a God who loves righteousness and justice.

What about times when you are overcome with grief over the injustice others have received at your hands, or when your sin has created what seems like unredeemable disaster? Delight in the truth that God loves the prospect of setting that mess right. He makes everything beautiful in its time, and He loves His plans to do so.

Trust God for justice... and wait

So seek justice from God, and then trust Him to give it. If it does not come in the form you had in mind, do not interpret that to mean it hasn't come, because it might be invisible. Visible or invisible, just delight in the fact that it will come because God loves doing it. And that will free us up from feeling we always have to scratch and claw and fight for our rights. It will free us up to love our enemies in humility like David. And if the injustice persists, trust God's timing. Wait for Him to bring justice. Isa. 30:18 tells us how to think about God in those times when justice is taking a really long time to arrive.

Isa.30:18 The LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him.

Conclusion to the series on fear of man: The solution to fear of man is fear of Fear God

The different outcomes of man-fearing and God-fearing

Let's take the time we have left and just wrap up this whole series on fear of man. The purpose of ch. 18 is to show us two contrasts: the contrast between Saul's way of living and David's way of living, and the contrast between the outcomes of those ways of living. Saul is consumed with pride and self-glorification; David is clothed with humility and does nothing to lift himself up. Saul hates his enemy; David loves his enemy. Saul fears man; David fears God. The result: all Saul's efforts were frustrated and all David's efforts enjoyed great success. When you care more about what people think and what people can do to you than you care about what God thinks and what He can do to you, the outcome will be that your life will resemble Saul's – frustration, failure, and decline.

When you care more about what God thinks and you most fear what He can do to you, the result will be a life of blessing and spiritual success.

So the bottom line is this: the solution to fear of man is fear of God. All these aspects of man fearing that we have talked about these past several weeks - the solution to all of it is fear of God.³

² That which aligns with God's nature and character

³ Some people have a hard time with the idea of fearing God because they think of it as being like their fear of an impossible-to-please father who abused them or who was angry all the time. That would be an evil kind of fear of God. The wicked, lazy servant of Mt.25:25 who buried his talent in the ground because he was afraid of his master's harshness had that kind of fear. Mark this: *Anytime your fear pushes you toward laziness or disobedience that's the wrong kind of fear.*

Ex.20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

That verse mentions both kinds. Do not be afraid of the Lord, but do fear the Lord. The difference between the kind of fear a person has of his abusive father and proper fear of the Lord is very simple. The first fear is a fear that he might do something wrong. If you are afraid God will do

Fear God through fearing... people(!)

I am not going to take the time right now to do a whole series on how to generate a fear of God in your heart but I do want to point out one thing, because this might be a point of confusion. One way to learn to fear God is through the good kind of fear of man. There is a kind of fear of man that is actually a good thing. After a month on the sin of man-fearing that may come as a shock, so let me explain. When you love God alone that does not mean people are out of the picture, it just means they are tools that you use in your effort to love God. You love God through loving people – your love for them is an expression of your love for God. It works the same way with fearing God. Fear of man can actually be a good thing if it is a tool you use to help you fear God.

Fearing the sword

One example of that is the fact that God expects us to fear the punishments from human authorities He has placed over us.

Ro.13:3-4 ...if you do wrong, be afraid, for [the one in authority] does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

If there is a conflict between the human authority and God's authority, so you have to decide whether to suffer the human punishment or God's displeasure, then you should always fear God's displeasure more. Do not be afraid of human punishment when you have to face it in order to please God.

However, when they are *not* at odds – when they are compatible with each other, then we should indeed fear the human authority as an expression of our fear of the God who gave them that authority. God is the one who gave the authorities in our lives the ability to apply consequences to rebellion. Parents have the God-given ability to discipline their children. Teachers can give you detention. Police can write you a ticket. Your boss can fire you. God has placed those powers in their hands for a reason, and He wants us to be responsive to that. Ro. 13:5 says that we are to obey the authorities for two reasons – because of conscience and because of possible punishment from the authority. In other words, we are to be influenced both by the threat of divine judgment as well as human judgment. When the two are in conflict it is God's judgment that trumps man's, but when they are not in conflict we are to be motivated by both.

Fear of man, then, is actually a good thing when the pressure from that person is in line with the desires of God. In that case your fear of that person can be an expression of your fear of God. It is like fear of God training wheels.

Accountability

That is why accountability is so valuable. I recently heard of a pastor who was against the idea of having an accountability partner because we should fear God, not man. If I avoid a sin because I am afraid to confess it to my accountability partners, but if it were not for them I would go ahead and do it because I have no fear of God, something is seriously wrong. Any time fear of man is more compelling to you than fear of God that is a serious problem, and we must completely reject fear of man when it is conflict with or more compelling than fear of God. However, when it is not

something bad to you – something that isn't ultimately in your best interests, that's the wrong kind of fear. If you are afraid God will do what is best for you, and that it will really, really hurt – that's the good kind of fear. All of our sin is the result of a lack of the good kind of fear. When we think, "I know this is wrong, but God will forgive me" what we are saying is, "The discipline, if there is any, won't be any big deal."

1 Cor.11:29-32 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³² When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

How severe does God's discipline get? All the way to the point of making you deathly ill or even killing you. But that's not even the worst part. As we saw in the last lesson, in some cases He will turn His face away from you. That's something that is far worse than any sickness or death. If you are suffering but you know you have God's approval and favor, you can endure it. But if you are suffering and you know that suffering is the result of God's displeasure toward you; if He has turned His face away from you and you can sense His anger with you; *nothing* is more painful than that. As we saw last week, it is more terrifying than even the worst torture and pain the world could possibly inflict on you.

in conflict – when it is working in concert with God’s desires, then fear of man can be a wonderful aid to help us fear God.

It is an over-reaction to sinful man-fearing to go too far in the other direction and pretend we don’t need involvement with other people. The fact is you and I are vulnerable to being deceived. We can develop blind spots. Our hearts can begin to harden, and we can start to turn away from God and the solution to all that comes from God *through people*.

Heb.3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

What is the solution to the fact that I might develop a sinful, unbelieving heart that becomes hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and turns away from the living God? It is encouragement from God that comes through people. The only thing you need in life is grace from God – nothing else, but you need people because God delivers His grace through human beings.

If you are going to argue that you do not need accountability because you fear God alone, then you also have to conclude that you do not need teaching because you learn from “God alone, and you do not need exhortation because you are led by the Spirit alone, and you do not ever need to be admonished, rebuked, comforted, instructed, counseled, reprovved, warned, encouraged, strengthened, or corrected by people. But Scripture says you need all of that from people. Even David, the man after God’s own heart, needed Jonathan to come to him and help him find strength in God. (1 Sam.23:16) And just as we receive encouragement from God through the words that come out of the mouths of human beings, so we learn to fear God through human beings coming to us and reminding us of the consequences of sin that are found in Scripture.

And if you think, “Fine – they can warn me all they want and I’ll welcome that, but I still don’t see why I have to make myself accountable to them.” If you don’t like the term “accountable” fine – don’t use it. When I use that term I am talking about confessing your sins, being transparent and forthright and revealing your heart in an honest way. If you want to use another word to describe all that fine, but just make sure you are doing it – and doing it with someone who knows the Scriptures, who is not afraid to rebuke and reprove you, and is skilled in applying the Scriptures.

Just think about the kinds of things we are to reprove one another for. Just look at this Heb. 3 passage. What are the problems you are to address? A sinful, unbelieving heart that is drifting from God and being hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. How could you possibly know if those things are taking place in my heart unless I am transparent and open and honest in the way I expose my heart to you? You can’t tell from a person’s actions alone if they have a sinful, unbelieving heart that is drifting from God or being hardened. You can make some guesses, but for us to really know what is in one another’s hearts we are going to have to be transparent with one another.

I have several accountability partners that I confess everything to, and when I fail it scares me to death to have to do that. If things get too bad I know my job as a pastor is on the line (because all but one of those people are in leadership in this church). But I do it anyway because righteousness is more important to me than my job. And if something will help me become more godly I will do it even if it means losing my job. The fear of being exposed to those men and to my wife is a good thing because it is an expression of my fear of God. And I know that because the pressure I feel from them is in line with what God desires for me, it motivates me to obey God.

I think one of the reasons so many people have not found accountability to be helpful is because they go to people and say, “Please hold me accountable for this.” That is backwards. No one can hold you accountable. They can try to remember to ask you about it, but even if they do think to ask you – you can lie. No one can make you accountable – you have to make yourself accountable. Only you can expose what is in your heart.

Make yourself accountable

I have a one-page form that I fill out every week and send to my accountability partners. I have copies of that sheet at the back and you can also get it on TreasuringGod.com in the Articles Section of the Resource Library. It takes me about two or three minutes each week to fill out that form and email it. I want to strongly urge all of you to commit to something like that. It is something you need to do every week. If you do it once in a while, then whenever you have a failure you won't do it that week. Is that form the best approach for everyone? Probably not. But if you do not do that do something. And if the person you are accountable to right now is so understanding about your failures that there is no fear involved in confessing anything - so that it is not helping you fear the Lord, add another partner (or two or three) until it becomes a helpful, motivating thing for you so that the fear of the Lord might be with you to keep you from sinning. Use the good kind of fear of man to help your heart fear God.

Conclusion

Let's be a church of God-fearers. If you have a hard time thinking of the fear of God as a good thing, take a look at the current pastor's blog. I wrote an article about the good kind of God-fearing and the bad kind and how to tell the difference. The bottom line in that article is the bad kind drives you to laziness and disobedience, and the good kind drives you to glad, willing obedience.

So let's fear Him. Let's fear His displeasure more than man's. Let's crave His approval more than human applause. Let's be afraid of His rod far more than things like suffering or torture or death – because it hurts a lot worse than those things. And when His rod comes, let's seek to restore nearness and intimacy with God rather than trying to out maneuver His rod in our lives. Let's look to Him for all our justice, and trust Him for that so we can be free to give and to love in humility.

Benediction: Dt. 32:4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

Fear of God

1 Samuel 18 Day 1

The solution to fear of man is fear of God. Fearing God involves respect, reverence and awe, as well as actually being afraid of His displeasure and His rod. The being afraid part of that requires two things:

- 1) You must believe that God really does chastise His children, and that it really is severe when He does.
- 2) You must have awareness of that threat all the time. It does no good to believe that there is a threat if you forget about it at the moment of temptation.

Having a constant awareness of the threat of chastisement requires a habit of living under the constant gaze of a Holy and omnipresent God.

Job 31:1-4 I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. ²For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? ³Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? ⁴Does he not see my ways and count my every step?

Job's sexual purity grew out of his awareness of God's seeing and considering his "every step." Scripture describes life as being like a walk, so each thing you do to get from one moment to the next is like taking a step. Every thought is a step in one direction or the other. Every word, every action, every inaction is another step. And the picture is not just of God being aware of each of those steps, but of His actively watching them with a searching, discerning, evaluating, testing, refining eye.

When God's searching gaze turns to a look of displeasure and chastisement, it is exceedingly painful. In times like that the soul desires that God look away (with His harsh, chastising or testing eye) so that He might look again with His gentle, loving eye.

Ps. 39:13 Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more.

Job 7:17-20 What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, ¹⁸that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? ¹⁹Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? ²⁰If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?

Attribute to behold, desire, experience and enjoy: The God who always examines my heart

Promise to trust: He will watch over me to keep me from straying from Him into danger

What will result if I experience this attribute today: fear, intimacy, desire to obey

Fear of God

1 Samuel 18 Day 2

In yesterday's devotional we saw the harshness of God's watching eye. Most of the time, however, the examining look of God is a welcome, desirable thing for the believer. In fact, it is even portrayed as a privilege that believers alone enjoy.

Ps. 139:1-12 You have searched me and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. ⁵You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are here. ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

There is something wonderful about being thoroughly known and perfectly understood. That's why it is so aggravating when people do not understand you. In times when it seems no one understands you it can cause a profound sense of loneliness. Your soul's craving for intimacy cannot be fulfilled by people who do not really know you, or who do not understand you.

Dear Father, You have searched me and You know me. You are my most wonderful companion, and Your companionship is all I need to be satisfied. I will seek intimate friendships with people, not because I need something other than You, but because I want to love those You love.

Another reason why the examining eye of the Lord is desirable for a righteous man is because when he is in the right in some conflict God knows that.

Ps. 7:8-9 Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High. ⁹O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts,

Ps. 26:2-5 Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; ³for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth. ⁴I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked

Jer. 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

It is a frustrating thing when your heart is pure but the people around you don't believe you. The wonderful thing about being a child of God is that never happens before Him. When you are innocent in some matter, He always knows.

Another reason God's scrutiny is welcome to the believer is because it is a purifying, sanctifying gaze.

Job 23:10 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Pr. 17:3 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts.

Your constant watching over my heart is precious to me, dear Lord. It purifies me, vindicates me, comforts me, and keeps me from sin. But it doesn't keep me from sin enough. Please, dear Father, teach me how to be more aware of Your watching eye every moment, and to really believe the threat of Your chastisement that I might not sin against you as much as I do.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience and enjoy: The God who always examines my heart

Promise to trust: He will understand me, give me justice, and watch over me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: fear, intimacy

Fear of God

1 Samuel 18 Day 3

Ps. 94:9-10 Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? ¹⁰Does he who disciplines nations not punish?

What a spectacularly marvelous thing it is, dear Lord, that You designed perception. It is astonishing what the scientists have figured out with regard to the physical mechanisms that convert sound waves and light into signals to the brain. It would take many years of study (probably more than one lifetime) just to learn all that is known about the amazing functions of the ear and eye. And yet, how superficial is that knowledge! We still have no idea how perception takes place. A person can have a complex idea - an idea so complex that it is far, far beyond anything the most intelligent animal could even begin to conceive; and he can convey that idea on the wings of light and sound waves such that after the other person's brain has decoded those signals, the same complex thought is in the heart of the listener. Sometimes the listener decodes all the communications and still does not understand. And when that happens, the communicator can give additional signals that bring the listener from not understanding to understanding. The thought of building a machine with those kinds of capacities is so far beyond technology that it is an absolute fantasy.

You, Oh Lord, are so infinitely wise that you conceived of the entire process out of nothing, and then created it and built it into us so naturally that even young children can do it with ease. How did You do it? Where is the link between the material brain and the immaterial mind? How do electrical signals become intangible thoughts, affections, inclinations, attitudes, beliefs? You have hidden that knowledge from us. It is too lofty for us.

And a God that can create all that can He not perceive and understand? A God who has such expertise in the area of interpreting sights and sound and reality, a God who knows how to build a soul and brain such that both physical events and intangible ideas can be carried on the wings of natural elements, communicated to the brain, interpreted, and impressed into the heart and soul - what mastery such a God must have over perception and understanding!

Dear Father, You see every action. You hear every idle word. You perceive every sinful thought, motive, affection and attitude in my heart with absolute clarity.

And does He who disciplines nations not punish? What a fearful question that is! We are dealing with a God who takes the switch to the backsides of *entire nations!* In a moment of displeasure He can bring an entire country to its knees. He can send famine across continents. With a thought He can bring down an army, or an economy. He can remove and grant peace among families across 50 states. He decides if our enemies will succeed or fail; whether they will break through with a new idea for a devastating attack, or be stymied. In a moment God can (and has) brought 300 million people to a standstill, our mouths hanging open, as He did on 9-11. Oh, what terror should rattle our bones at the thought of being punished by the same hand that can bend the greatest superpower in the world over His knee!

How lightly I have taken that threat, dear Father. How cavalier I am toward the threat of Your displeasure. My flesh wants to indulge in some sin, and I dismiss the prospect of discipline from Your hand as though it were a fantasy which I can decide to believe or disbelieve at my leisure, a threat I can afford to pretend doesn't exist during those moments when I want to indulge my flesh. Please, heavenly Father, teach Your servant how to fear You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience and enjoy: The God who disciplines the nations

Promise to trust: He will examine and respond to the truth about my heart

What will result if I experience this attribute today: fear of God, intimacy, motivation, desire to obey, awe

Fear of God

1 Samuel 18 Day 4

1John 4:16-21 And so we know and trust in the love God has in us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷In this way, love accomplishes its goal among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But accomplished love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The purposes of love have not been accomplished in the one who fears. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

The many warnings in John about the possibility that we could be lost even while we think we are saved are intended to be very frightening warnings. The prospect of possibly going to hell is the scariest imaginable possibility. But we need not live in constant fear. There is a way to gain confidence that our claim to be saved is indeed true, and that is if the love of God for people is flowing through us. When love achieves its purpose through us toward others, the fear that we might be lost evaporates, because no unbelievers have the love of God flowing through them to others.

There are unbelievers who are extremely friendly, and who love being around people, and who give sacrificially to people. Therefore the love of God flowing through you to people must be something more than all that. It is loving people *because* God loves them. It is loving people because you desire the experience of having God's love flow through you (because you deeply desire the experience of *anything* that comes from God). It is the desire for their highest good (knowing God). It is love that is free to give and that does not require gratitude or reciprocation because it finds all it needs in God's love. When that kind of love flows through you it is the accomplishment of God's desire, and it is powerful evidence that you will be safe on Judgment Day.

Good morning, dear Father, Author of love. Thank you for Your great love for me. You command Your love (Ps. 42:8). You decide upon whom You will place Your love, and You chose me! As much as I have resisted it and tried to flee from it and have taken it lightly or ignored it, still You have commanded it to overcome all that and find its way into my heart. O thank You, dear Lord!

This verse that is intended to cast out fear actually causes a measure of fear because it is conditional. To have the confidence it promises I must love people with Your love. And that is so weak in my life. And yet, to the degree it is present, I rejoice and have confidence that I do know You, and that Your purposes are being accomplished in my heart.

Accomplish those purposes more and more, dear Father. Teach me how to be the conduit of Your love to others. Show me the balance of delight and commitment. Teach me how to love them with an eye on You, that my delight in them might be delight in You.

And Father, for this promise to cast out fear there must first be fear to be cast out. When I lack love, dear God, let that generate fear that touches the very core of my being.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience and enjoy: The God who is worthy of fear, but who also casts out that fear by pouring out His love through us to others.

Promise to trust: He will make it possible for me to be a fire hose of His love.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Love! Confidence, security

Fear of God

I Samuel 18 Day 5

²⁸When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, ²⁹Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. ³⁰The 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.

All the wrongs done to David the Lord made right.

Ps. 33:5 The LORD loves righteousness and justice.

One attribute of God is His righteousness. Another is His justice, and yet another is the sweet and glorious combination of those two in perfect proportion. Very often these two attributes appear together because there is something very wonderful about the way God's righteousness and His justice work together.

The main attribute in this verse, however, is not His love or justice or even the combination of the two. God not only is righteous and just, but He loves righteousness and justice. God loves things being as they should be (righteousness) – aligning with His nature and character. And He loves the setting right of those things that are not as they should be (justice). He loves things being right and He loves things being set right.

God never sets something right grudgingly or without taking delight in doing it. What do you do when you are overcome with grief over the injustice others have received at your hands, or when your sin has created what seems like unredeemable disaster? Delight in the truth that God loves the prospect of setting the mess right. He makes everything beautiful in its time, and He loves His plans to redeem the disaster.

And what about when you are treated unjustly? Delight in a God who delights in His plans to make that injustice right! How will He do that? And when? What will it look like? We don't know. But we do know that whatever He does will be something that is pleasing to a God who loves righteousness and justice.

And if God delights in righteousness, above all else He delights in His Son, who is the radiance of His perfect righteousness. And if we are in His Son, and His righteousness is credited to us, then we are objects of His infinite delight!

Such thoughts are too wonderful for me, Lord.

If You love righteousness and justice, Lord, let me love them. Let me see those things in You and love You more as I see them. First give Your servant a heart that delights in righteousness and justice, and then let me see those things in You in a greater way than I do now, so that my heart will take greater delight in You. Please let that begin today.

Let me see Your righteousness when I ...

**walk through my house and see my wife's efforts (or when I make the effort myself) to decorate and arrange and clean so that all is as it should be –structured in beautiful and useful ways. When I find a cup in the cabinet where it belongs, and the furniture is arranged in a way pleasing to the eye; let all that appear to my eyes as an emblem and model that points to a God who loves things that are as they should be – a God who is arranging the world and my life and all of history exactly as it should be.*

**work on my computer. When I see the arrangement of the keys, set up in a way that seems chaotic and random, but that is actually carefully designed to be useful for the purpose for which they are designed; let me see behind that a God whose seemingly chaotic arrangement of the elements of this life is really a brilliantly designed system that is perfectly suited for the accomplishment of Your great plan!*

**go into the kitchen for lunch. Hundreds of chemical reactions and processes need to take place in my body for me to be healthy. A team of the greatest doctors in the world could not bring about those processes artificially. They don't have 1/100th the intelligence or ability to do so. And yet all I have to do for it to happen is chew up a wonderful-tasting meal and swallow it, and it all just happens "by itself." That is as it should be! And You love it so. You made it that way because You love things being as they should be. Let me see Your glory in this, O Lord, every time I put something in my mouth today.*

**go to work. When I drive around and the streets are laid out in a way that enables millions of cars to drive in every direction without resulting in complete gridlock – reflecting the glory of a God who loves things being as they should be.*

Let me see Your justice when I ...

**see my wife (or myself) doing housework. As things are being set right that are not right; let it reflect into my eyes the silhouette of a God who loves the setting of things right.*

**have thoughts of distress about the injustices I am suffering. As I long for justice, let that longing pry open my blind eyes to how much You love justice.*

**see police cars as I drive. Let each one I see call my attention to a God who punishes evil and rewards righteousness and who protects the weak from injustice and who has appointed an army of His those who do not even know Him to carry out this desire on earth. He has given them the sword and has required them to act as His agents of righteousness to bring judgment on the wrongdoer. Oh Lord, please don't let me see a police car today without it cracking open a window to Your glory.*

**discipline or reward my children.*

**get my paycheck.*

**take the car in for repairs.*

Lord, let all these wake me out of my slumber and alert me to the beauty and brilliance of this beam of Your glory that loves the setting right of that which is not right.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience and enjoy: Love for justice (making that which is wrong right)

Promise to trust: He will right every wrong done to me (and by me)

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Hope, joy, love for justice, gratitude