

Oct 12: A Biblical View of Fear (part 2)

Just a quick reminder that you can find Equipping Hour notes, and now recordings as well, on the church center app.

Last week we began our worldview discussion on fear. I shared that my two goals are for us to accurately view fear biblically and to offer hope and freedom found exclusively in God's Word. We covered how the idea of being whole, or complete, healthy in our thoughts, emotions, desires, and motivations, soundness of mind, is impossible without God's Word applied to our hearts through our partnership with the Holy Spirit. We talked about authority, which is something we will return to over and over again as we continue examining worldview.

Nothing I share with you today will matter or have any lasting impact if you have any reservations as to whether or not God's Word has the answers for what it means to be whole, complete, and of sound mind. Nothing I share with you today will matter or have any lasting impact if you haven't submitted yourself to the authority of God's Word in all areas of your life because sin permeates all areas of your life. Jeremiah 17 declares that our hearts are deceived above all things and desperately sick, which means we need all of God's Word to examine all of our hearts. The Word of God is the power of God for making us whole and complete.

Last week we also covered a secular worldview of fear, examining several theories and practices, but all with the same goal of eliminating fear, at least fear that interferes with daily life. Fear is believed to come from experiences and distorted thoughts. The "gold standard" secular theory and therapy is currently Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, an approach that attempts to connect a person's behavior to his or her thoughts. If this therapy can help people think differently, behaviors change. Meaning, if therapists can get people to stop responding to fear in maladaptive, unhealthy ways that impair their lives, if they can get people to think differently about their painful experiences and circumstances, people can overcome that fearful response in the future. Let's look at this from our worldview chart.

Behavior – if the end goal is an adaptive, healthy life filled with good choices, successful relationships, and self-confidence, meaning overcoming fear, what values need to be practiced?

Values – what is good for my family, what is good for my health, what is good for my relationships, what is good for my job, what is good for me. It is good that expect these things of and for myself. That's the world's value system.

What **beliefs** have been embraced as revealed in these values? If I don't look out for me, who else will? I have to look out for me. The belief is that this is what it means to be normal,

healthy, a good person, a good citizen, a contributor to society. This is what people expect from me. I have to do this for me; I just need to unlock my full potential.

Ultimately, what **reality** must be adopted in this worldview? Where have I set my heart, soul, mind, and strength? What's the message I have adopted? I have the power within me. I am self-sufficient. I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul. Autonomy. Self-empowerment. This is the lie. This is the trap. There's no lasting or eternal freedom in adopting the worldview that you are enough.

Now it's time to switch gears and examine the topic of a biblical perspective of fear. Creator God has a lot to say about fear, through examples, stories, inferences, and commands. Professor and biblical counselor Dr. Nicholas Ellen breaks these down into fairly neat categories, actually, of externally caused fear and internally caused fear. Mind you, we are talking about causes, not responses or solutions. Yet. Let's start with externally caused fear.

Externally caused fear can be traced to something identifiable outside of our being, our personhood. A good example is the jump-scare, something startling. The fear associated with being startled is an immediate and instinctual response. We experience this when someone jumps out at us from behind a door, or when the bad guy leaps from the bushes in the movie and attacks, or when you hear a rattlesnake nearby when you're hiking.

For instance, when Boaz, in Ruth 3, falls asleep at the end of a heap of grain, he's startled to discover a woman sleeping at his feet when he turns over at midnight. When Jesus appeared to His disciples in the upper room after His resurrection:

Luke 24:27: They were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

This sense of fear is morally neutral. It's automatic.

Now let's move to the next external category, these being morally righteous external causes of fear. Again, these fears can be traced to something identifiable outside of our being, but they are consistent with loving and trusting God.

The first is a fear described as reverence for the Lord God, what Scripture calls the Fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

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Proverbs 14:27

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

We are going to talk a lot about the fear of the Lord next week in our application, but it's important to say that the fear of the Lord is not terror. It's about recognizing His absolute supremacy, authority, and sufficiency, His raw power and greatness, and responding with awe, humility, and reverence. Come back next week!

A second righteous external cause of fear is concern. This fear is consistent with loving and trusting God and is expressed for someone else's benefit.

Galatians 4:9-11

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years!¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Paul is expressing godly concern for the genuineness of the faith of the Galatians church. He describes this same concern in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:25-28

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.

Paul is expressing deep, loving concern for both Epaphroditus and the church in Philippi, and this concern is an expression and demonstration of godly love for others, not for his sake, but for theirs. This "anxious" is not absent of the peace of God that transcends all human understanding, but rather a righteous moral expression of that peace of God. This is about the conscience. We'll get more into this later.

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A third a final righteous external fear mentioned in Scripture is the fear described as respect for authority that is consistent with loving and trusting God. For instance, Paul writes in Romans 13 that human authority has been appointed by God, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Romans 13:3

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval...

This respectful fear of authority is a righteous fear when we rightly see this authority as an extension of God's authority. The same is true of fathers to children.

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹² for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Just wait until your Father gets home!

Proverbs 23:22

Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

An undisciplined child has no fear of his or her father, which will be reflected in his or her view of God the Father. A healthy, godly respectful fear of parents is a necessary and godly reflection of the fear of the Lord, just like all authority figures.

So, just to recap, there are three righteous external fears mentioned in the Scripture. We have:

The fear of the Lord, the reverence due God,
The fearful godly concern for others,
The fearful godly respect for in authority

Now we need to address sinful external causes of fear. Again, this means we can point to the thing or person we are afraid of. But God commands us not to be afraid of this thing or person, so our fear is, in fact, a violation of God's standard and therefore sinful.

The first is having a fear of false gods and superstitions. This fear is inconsistent with loving and trusting God.

Jeremiah 10:1-5

Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. ² Thus says the Lord: "Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, ³ for the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. ⁴ They decorate it

with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. ⁵ Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.”

Here's something you may or may not have considered before: all false gods are Satan. His influence is the direct cause of every false belief, false religion, false god. That's a discussion for another time, but the point is we are no more to fear a lifeless wooden pole decorated with gold and silver than we are the Deceiver and his minions because “greater is He that is in us than he who is in the world.” We'll talk more about this next week.

A second sinful external cause of fear is worry. Being worried is a fear that is inconsistent with loving and trusting God.

Matthew 6:25

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

“Do not be anxious about” can be translated as “worry about, overly concerned with,” and even “do not be distracted by cares.” Or as one commentary put it bluntly, “Stop worrying.” When you hear the word anxious as we continue in the passage in Matthew 6, it means worry.

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

We'll get to the solution, but for now be sure you are reading this as a command and not a suggestion. If it's a command it means we have responsibility, and since we have responsibility to follow the command, it has to also be within our control. But God never asks us to put something off without replacing it with something we put on.

A third and final external fear we will look at described in Scripture is the fear of man. The fear of man is a sinful fear inconsistent with loving and trusting God and includes being timid, cowardly, or intimidated. The fear of man means I am more concerned how people perceive and respond to me than I am how God perceives and responds to me. In other

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words, I'm more concerned about what you think of me and what you will do to me than I am what God thinks of me and what He has and continues to do for me.

This can be as extreme as the fear of invasion from a foreign threat.

Isaiah 51:12-13

"I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, ¹³ and have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy? And where is the wrath of the oppressor?"

This can be as mundane as someone mocking you for being a Christian.

Matthew 10:24-26

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

Fear of man manifests in many, many ways, certainly not just through threats of bodily injury and name-calling. It also includes seeking the approval of man instead of God.

When confronting the Pharisees in John 5, Jesus says:

John 5:43-44

"I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

John's Gospel reiterates this accusation in:

John 12:42-43

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Galatians 1:10

"Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

1 Thessalonians 2:4

"We speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."

Loving, seeking, and pursuing the glory and approval that comes from man is the same as fearing the loss of that glory and approval. It's quite literally the mechanism used to keep from having to experience that fear.

This fear also comes across as showiness, hypocrisy, and self-promotion.

Matthew 6:1

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus repeats the warning against hypocrisy three more times in Matthew 6 when it comes to giving, praying, and fasting in order to be seen by others.

Matthew 23:2-7

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others."

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

What is that fear? How does it manifest? It's the fear of perfectionism. It's the fear of approval. It's the fear of, and this is really important, significance. It's the fear of not having or receiving those things from others. The approval, praise, and attention of man is actually the fear of man, and it's a big one. We'll get more into it next week.

We wrap up today with our final biblical category of fear, sin-caused internal fear. God's Word describes a fear that is the byproduct of internal guilt. It has no discernable external cause, no external trigger we can point to. Rather, this fear has an internal cause. This guilty-caused fear is the fear of God's judgment. It's important to recognize this isn't the awe and reverent fear of the Lord we are commanded to have. The fear of God's judgment is the terror of His wrathful justice towards wickedness directed at those who make a practice of wickedness. But too often we don't recognize it as such. Because it is apparently uncaused, meaning I can't point to something, the secular clinical world calls this anxiety.

The American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology currently defines anxiety as follows:

An emotion characterized by apprehension and somatic symptoms of tension in which an individual anticipates impending danger, catastrophe, or misfortune. The body often mobilizes itself to meet the perceived threat: Muscles become tense, breathing is faster, and the heart beats more rapidly.

Anxiety may be distinguished from fear both conceptually and physiologically, although the two terms are often used interchangeably. Anxiety is considered a future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a diffuse threat, whereas fear is an appropriate, present-oriented, and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat.

The fear of God's judgment is clearly seen in Adam and Eve when they first sinned. The serpent deceives, Eve eats, Adam eats. Then what happens?

Genesis 3:7-11

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. ⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked?"

"Who told you that you were naked?"

The conscience told them. The conscience judged them guilty of their sin, and they were immediately filled with impending doom of God's wrath because they had sinned against the Lord God. The conscience accused. God didn't, at least not yet. Think about what's missing from this narrative. The moment they sinned, God didn't arrive in a hail of fire, brimstone, and wrath, pointing the accusatory finger, and declaring them guilty. That accusatory mechanism was inside them. They had absolutely zero context for knowing fear other than a guilty conscience.

The conscience is a key player in understanding what takes place in our hearts. We actually have a diagnostic tool for understanding peace, confidence, fear, and it's a right understanding of the conscience as revealed in God's Word. There is so much more here for us to unpack next week. I would highly encourage you to check out the notes from February 16, March 2, and March 9 for a refresher or perhaps to grapple with a biblical anthropology for the first time.

This fear of God's judgment manifests in some interesting ways. Adam and Eve hid in the garden. Here are some other biblical examples:

Leviticus 26:14-17

“But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, ¹⁵ if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, ¹⁶ then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. ¹⁷ I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you.”

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

The fear of God’s judgment is unlike any other fear because it is a byproduct of a choice rather than something we control with a choice. We don’t actually deal with the fear of God’s judgment by trying to remove the fear. It doesn’t work. This fear, if not addressed biblically, consumes the heart and mind, leading us to do and try anything to get rid of that fearful feeling. For Adam and Eve, it was covering up and hiding. For others it could be drugs, alcohol, or any other addiction. For still others it becomes any means to escape or withdrawn from the reality of a guilty conscience accountable to God.

A biblical view of fear requires us to examine the conscience, so again, I encourage you to check out the notes I mentioned, because next week we will examine what God’s Word says is the solution to **all** of the sinful fears we covered today.

English Puritan John Flavel wrote, “All the skill in the world cannot cure us of the disease of fear. God must first cure us of our unbelief.”

This has to be more than glib “Christian” platitudes, so come back next week as we look to Scripture to apply God’s solutions to the problem of fear.