

Oct 19: A Biblical View of Fear (part 3)

Just a quick reminder that you can find Equipping Hour notes, and now recordings as well, on the church center app. I would encourage you to listen to and read the notes from last Sunday when we examined the causes of fear from a biblical perspective. This morning we will explore God's way for solving the problem of fear after a brief recap.

Remember our goals for this topic: first, to accurately view fear biblically, and second, to embrace hope and freedom found in God's Word.

Last Sunday we covered morally neutral fear, the startle. It's morally neutral because it is automatic. Mind you, we are talking about the source of fear, not the "F"-bomb you dropped when you were startled. That's on you, but that sense of fear is neither right nor wrong. It just is.

Then we covered righteous external causes of fear:
The fear of the Lord, the godly reverence due God,
The fearful godly concern for others,
The fearful godly respect for those in authority.

These fears are consistent with loving and trusting God and will produce the peace of God within the conscience of the believer. These fears get the "thumbs up" from the conscience rather than the penalty flag.

We then discussed the sinful external causes of fear as defined by Scripture, and these are:
The sinful fear of false gods and superstitions,
The sinful fear of worry,
The sinful fear of man.

These fears receive the penalty flag from the conscience because Scripture commands us not to fear these things. We covered how the fear of false gods and superstitions are actually a fear of Satan and his minions. A helpful way to distinguish between concern and worry is that concerns comes with a clean, peaceful conscience and worry comes with a lack of peace and a noisy conscience. Worry will be self-centered; concern will be God-centered. This is why worldview is so important because our motivations will reveal the truth of the matter. Worry and concern may look really similar behavior-wise, but once we start asking ourselves the values behind the behavior and the beliefs behind the values, our conscience will either affirm or accuse. Our motivations can easily turn something morally righteous into morally sinful.

Recall that the fear of man includes pursuing the approval of others above God, which can come across as being timid, cowardly, or intimidated, also showiness, hypocrisy, and self-promotion. How does it manifest? Perfectionism. People-pleasing. Worshiping significance. It's the fear of not having or receiving approval, acceptance, and significance

from others. 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. For many people, this can come across as anger. For others, this looks like fear (e.g., timid, cowardly, intimidated). Sinful fear and sinful anger are opposite sides of the same coin. Both are a response, meaning both are behaviors, values, and beliefs that reveal our worldview.

And lastly we examined a fear that appears to have no known causes but in reality is described in Scripture as the fear of God's judgment against sin. 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 judgment against sin. 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. We saw this clearly articulated in Genesis 3.

This fear is a byproduct of a guilty conscience and therefore outside your control. You cannot will this fear away; you have to run from it, hide from it, numb it, or literally any other means of escape at your disposal. You can even go so far in your fleeing as to experience a seared conscience whereby you no longer experience this fear whatsoever, revealing a calloused heart that has utterly and forever rejected God's mercy and grace. It's important to mention that Christians experience this fear. Happens all the time. It's called a guilty conscience, and the longer you ignore it, the louder, and stronger, it gets, which means the fleeing will become more and more extreme.

A guilty conscience produces the fear of God's judgment, and the challenge for the believer is this: the more you understand and apply God's Word to your heart, the more attuned you will be to your conscience accusing and affirming. Think about that for a second. This is why so many Christians don't study God's Word because it pokes at their conscience and they don't want to feel that yucky feeling. This is why so many "Christians" rejected godly, biblical teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness because it means having to start something they don't want to do or quit something they don't want to stop. God calls this rebelliousness.

Having this fear isn't sinful in and of itself, but rather having this fear points to a sin in your life you need to deal with as soon as possible because there is only one way to address this fear and experience the peace of God. Discovering, or unpacking, what is causing that fear of God's judgment can sometimes be a challenge because, again, we have been inundated by a culture that explains away fear and tries to bring comfort by making us the victim, but this actually produces slavery, not freedom. Christ came to set us free, but He has already done His part. According to 2 Peter 1:3, we lack nothing. So what's your part?

Before we look to God's Word for the solutions to these fears, it's important I mention this again. 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. The Word of God is the power of God for making us whole and complete. It's also the authority for telling us how to get there. But it requires being honest with ourselves. It requires understanding and listening to the Holy Spirit's voice amplified through our conscience instead of fleeing when no one pursues. Facing your fear of fear is a matter of both divine providence **and** your submitted will.

So here are the solutions. They are simple and hard:

Sinful external fear has to be overcome with the fear of the Lord.

Sinful internal fear, meaning the fear of God's judgment, has to be overcome with confession, repentance, embracing God's forgiveness, and walking by the Spirit.

Everyone in the room is thinking a collective, "Duh!" Folks, the solutions are unchanging, but so are the applications. We just have to take the time to pursue them in His Word. That's why we are doing worldview, because if you are *not* fully convinced that God not only knows all the problems you have but also has the solutions, then this doesn't work because you will be double-minded, you will have itching ears as Paul writes to Timothy, reserving a part of your heart for wisdom of the world, wisdom from your own deceived heart, desires and self-protection mechanisms that actually lead to harm, enslavement, and perhaps even destruction. God has **the** answer for the problem and offers the only real solution. That has to be the reality you embrace, by faith. So that's where we have to start.

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

I've said this before, and I will keep saying it. The most powerful, most God-honoring, most anger-soothing, fear-destroying thing you can do when confronted by people and circumstances outside your control, when confronted by something drawing you to respond in anger or fear, when you are bumped, is to stop and pray out loud: "God, I trust you with this. Even with this, I trust you." God, I trust you with my children. God, I trust you with my health. God, I trust you with my aging parents. God, I trust you with the state of our nation. God, I trust you with this difficult coworker. God, I trust you with my finances. God, I trust you with these painful memories. God, I trust, I trust, I trust...

This prayer rightly places God as sovereign within your heart and rightly embraces His control of all outcomes. It also rightly places you in a position of humble submission because you're recognizing your lack of control, you're recognizing your neediness. Your faith will grow in leaps and bounds if you can make a habit of responding to difficult people

and circumstances in this way. Again, for most of you, this is probably another giant “Duh!” Many of us know all the “Church” answers. That’s good, because that gets us to the real question, but recognize that every answer will ultimately come back to faith, because that’s at the core of worldview, the reality you have embraced by faith.

So the real question becomes “how?” How do I overcome sinful external fear with righteous external fear? How do I confess, repent, embrace forgiveness, and walk by the Spirit? And what do I do if I’ve already tried all these things and it’s still not working?

If any of those questions sound familiar, I hear you. God hears you. You are not alone in this struggle. Let’s do our best to answer these questions one at a time while realizing two realities we need to keep in mind:

First, our complete and total victory over fear won’t happen until we see Jesus face to face. He promises to one day make all things right, to one day wipe away every tear, to one day remove all pain and sorrow. But so far, it’s not today. But that’s our hope and our reality. We have been saved, but we have not yet received the fulfillment of our eternal longing. Paul Tripp calls this the “already but not yet” reality of our existence.

Second, we have a part to play for living in freedom, which means we have a responsibility because God won’t just do things to and for us, but rather with us. He initiates; we have to respond.

So, how do I overcome sinful external fear with righteous external fear? Answer: You need a bigger God. The problem isn’t that your problems, or fears, are too big, because they might be big! But rather your problem is that your God is too small. The bigness of your problems can only be overcome by the bigness of your God. You have to dwell on the bigness of His greatness, power, glory, holiness, wrath, love, and mercy. All of Him. You need to remember His promises, His covenant with you as revealed in His Word. You need to set your mind on practicing His presence. This doesn’t deny the bigness of your fear, the bigness of your problems, but it rightly places them UNDER God. When we are spiritually stuck, it’s a clear indication that we have made God smaller than our problems, experiences, pain, or fear.

We humans are too easily impressed by the things of this world, both in the negative and positive sense of that word. We chase after the “good things” and shy away from the “bad things” because we are impressed by them, meaning they leave an impression. We are afraid of what people will think of us, afraid of ridicule, embarrassment, or rejection. We are too impressed by their opinions. We crave approval, praise, and significance from others. We are too impressed by their opinions. How often are we impressed by God?

Here’s a common trap: we try to overcome fear of man by using biblical truths about what God says of us. Sounds good, right? Sounds biblical even! But if that’s the premise, who’s your focus? Yourself. What does God think of me. No! What do I think of God! Am I

impressed by God! If I'm not impressed by God, why should His opinion of me matter more than these humans I'm around all the time, the humans around me I so desperately want to impress and be impressed by, because eventually that's what happens when this is our premise, when this is our motivation, when this is our worldview. If only I could convince myself of how valuable I am to God, I wouldn't care what these other people think. The common denominator in all this thinking is that it's focused on self. Self is the actual problem, so how could it possibly be the solution? Jesus said in Matthew 16:22, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

How often do we gaze upon God with fear, awe, and trembling? Does sitting under the reality of God leave an impression in your heart and mind? It's impossible to dwell on your fearful situation when you are consumed by awe and worshiping Almighty God. And that word "worship" is key. It's how we tell the difference between sinful worry and godly concern. If my "concern" gets in the way of worshiping God, then it's sinful worry. Is your worship in order, or is it disordered? Are you worshiping comfort, safety, significance, approval, recognition, pleasure, or are you worshiping the Lord our God? The solution to sinful external fear isn't growing in confidence; it's growing in worship. Confidence will be the byproduct of righteous worship, just like fear is the byproduct of sinful worship.

What does this worship look like?

Psalms 33:8, 18-22

⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ¹⁹ that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰ Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. ²¹ For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. ²² Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Do you stand in awe of Him? Do you hope in His steadfast love? Do you believe He will deliver your soul from death? Does your soul wait for the Lord? Is He your help and shield? Is your heart glad in Him? And folks, do you trust in His holy name? Can you say, "God, I trust you with this. Even with this, I trust you." God, I trust you with my children. God, I trust you with my health. God, I trust you with my aging parents. God, I trust you with the state of our nation. God, I trust you with this difficult coworker. God, I trust you with my finances. God, I trust you with these painful memories. God, I trust, I trust, I trust...

When the fear of losing someone you love takes your breath away...

When the overwhelming memories come crashing down on you...

When the darkness seems like it will never end...

This is where cognitive belief meets functional belief, where your real faith will be revealed. When the sum of all your fears come crashing down on you, like it did for Job, will you respond with worship?

Job 1:20-21

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Will you say, “Lord, I still trust you. Even with this, I trust you?”

If the answer is yes, and this is your reality, the center of your worldview, then how is it displayed in your beliefs, values, and behavior? What beliefs need examining? What values, meaning priorities, need to change? Folks, we don’t have fear problems; we have worship problems.

Next question: what to do with the fear of God’s judgment. If the solution to removing the fear of God’s judgment is confession, repentance, embracing forgiveness, and walking by the Spirit, how do I do all that? Well, first we need to understand the problem, and the problem is sin. In Matthew 22:36, an Old Testament expert asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment in the Law, and He answers:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Call me a reductionist if you’d like, but since the entirety of what it means to follow God’s commands centers on loving Him and others, then it means all sin is a lack of love for God or a lack of love for others. Scripture actually affirms this through the work of our conscience.

1 John 4:16-18

We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

This is about the conscience, about the fear of God’s judgment because of our unloving, sinful responses. When we respond to difficult circumstances and people outside our control with a lack of love for God or others, we violate God’s Law and experience a sense of guilt and a fear of God’s impending judgment.

But what is this sense of guilt? How does it manifest? And, perhaps more importantly, what happens immediately after the conscience throws the flag? Consider for a moment that

when there's a flag on the play, it's followed up by a penalty. The flag is like a check engine light. This guilt is screaming, "Hey, address this quickly!"

One of the clearest ways to define this sense of guilt is an absence of the peace of God. The peace of God which transcends all understanding and the sense of guilt from an unloving response to God and others act like repelling magnets. They cannot occupy the same space. When one is present, the other is not.

Isaiah 57:21

"There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

In this discussion on fear, we are talking about a sense of guilt rather than the state of being guilty; however, and this is super important, the conscience does NOT differentiate between the choice and the person. Worldly wisdom and worldly theories try to make this distinction between the choice and the person for the sake of our "self-esteem," our "self-identity," but the conscience, according to Scripture, does not make a distinction between what you are doing and who you are. If you experience the sense of guilt, you are experiencing the fact of guilt, and there is only one biblical way to deal with guilt.

Our culture has done a magnificent job trying to remove your identity from what you do. It wasn't me; it was my society. It wasn't me; it was my biology. It wasn't me; it was the devil. The world tells me I can and should feel good about me because I'm not responsible for my choices, therefore personal guilt is an illusion or a defect I need external help to address. **The world desperately wants you to disassociate what you do from who you are as a means of dealing with guilt and the fear that accompanies it. This is the greatest deception of our Western world. Literally nothing else compares to this incredible lie that has millions enslaved.** By subtly adopting this worldly message within the church, we have done significant damage to our understanding of the power of sin, significant damage to our understanding of the work and purpose of the conscience, and worse still, significant damage to our understanding of the power of confession and forgiveness. The cross becomes just a token on a wall or around my neck. Grace becomes either some nebulous, abstract idea or just plain cheap.

As a direct result of embracing this lie from the world, we struggle to embrace our new identity in Christ, struggle to embrace our status as co-heirs with Christ, struggle to embrace forgiveness, and struggle to walk by the Spirit rather than gratify the desires of the flesh, because we've skipped over our responsibility to maintain a clean conscience and instead make provisions in our heart and lives for sin to remain and poison us. Please listen to this reality check from Scripture.

Galatians 6:7-8:

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Folks, you cannot, will not experience wholeness, soundness of mind, the peace of God when you are sowing to the flesh, when you make space for sin in your life, because the conscience will accuse and you will experience a sense of guilt and want to run from it. Trusting God like we have hammered several times today must, must, must include submitting ourselves to living this life under the authority of God's Word, which means doing things His way. It means the dreaded "o" word: obedience. The only other options is rebelliousness, and this will produce the fear of God's judgment, displayed by a lack of peace, an unexplained fear, and a desire to flee from that judgment by any means necessary. You have to stop trying to separate what you do from who you are! Jesus makes that warning abundantly clear in Matthew 7:15-27.

When we don't respond correctly to the flag on the play, when we ignore the check engine light, what follows is clearly spelled out in Scripture as revealed in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve demonstrated a lack of love for God by choosing to disobey His commandment. They immediately recognized they were naked. They felt guilt. This guilt produced the fear of God's judgment, so they hid from God even though they had zero context of God's righteous anger against wickedness. Guys, we experience this guilt a thousand times a day. For some of us, this lack of love goes back a long way, perhaps in how we have responded to a painful situation. The solution, regardless of how long you have been running from this guilt, is the same.

Confess and repent. This is impossible without humility. Remember that it's not about you but about what Christ accomplished for you on the cross because you have no power over this fear. None. Zero. You are helpless and hopeless against the fear of God's judgment apart from the atonement and forgiveness graciously offered through the blood of Christ Jesus. But first you have to agree that you need this gracious offer by confessing that you have trespassed against God's standard of loving Him and others. We confess to God:

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We confess to godly accountability:

James 5:16

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

We repent, meaning hate our sin, we mourn our sin, we turn from this sin and stop doing it because this guilty grief feels awful!

2 Corinthians 7:10

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Read Psalm 51 this week. What else needs to happen? What's the next step? You need to trust God's forgiveness.

Psalm 103:10-12

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Embrace the promise of God's faithfulness in 1 John 1:9. When we don't embrace God's promise of forgiveness and we wallow in regret and self-pity, our conscience will actually throw another flag because we aren't demonstrating love to God by trusting His character and His Word. We are effectually saying, "God, I don't trust that you have forgiven me. I don't trust you with this." The conscience throws another flag. This step is immeasurably important. Embrace your forgiven state; be fully convinced of it. This, too, is an act of faith. A transformed heart approaches the throne of grace with fear, awe, and trembling, but still approaches.

And lastly, be controlled by the holy Spirit. Be filled by the Spirit as it says in Ephesians 5:18. This means submitting your thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, desires, motivations, relationships, circumstances, and standards to God. When you are fully convinced of God's rightly place, you will be confident in yours.

Galatians 5:16-18

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Recognize this process is a partnership between you and the Holy Spirit. You cannot do this alone, otherwise you are building self-righteousness rather than experiencing the righteousness of Christ.

Trust the control of the Holy Spirit. Practice walking by faith rather than by sight by walking in what is right. This means dying to self and worshiping God. God doesn't have to do anything to be worthy of your worship: who He is, is enough. When you deny yourself, you're making room for the Holy Spirit to move in and through you.

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This is how we experience the peace of God and overcome the fear of God's judgment. Folks, it's pretty simple. And yet it's hard. We need God's divine help in this process, and we also need each other. We need each other's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If you have tried all these things already and are still not experiencing the peace of God, then perhaps it's time to try with those who will walk alongside you and keep to a biblical standard. If we can accurately view fear biblical, if we can embrace what God's Word has to say about the problem and the solution, then folks, there is hope and freedom to be found and experienced now. Do you believe that?

Questions

I'd like to suggest for you a resource. In fact, my goal for each of our topics is to offer you suggested reading and study, and for the topic of fear my recommendation is *Triumphing over Sinful Fear* by John Flavel. I quoted him last week. He's a 15th century English Puritan whose biblical view of fear is profoundly spot on. You'll want to read the Scriptures he references with your NIV or ESV version, though, but the rest has been adapted for modern readers.