

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fear



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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The Christian's Attitude Toward Fear

Introduction

A. What is your attitude toward fear? That is, what is your mindset toward the things you perceive to be dangerous or threatening to you and others? Do you view your fears from a Biblical perspective? Or, do you allow your fears to impact you in ungodly ways?

B. Everyone has something they are afraid of. Some of the most common fears include: Heights, snakes, enclosed spaces, insects and spiders, dogs, storms, flying, needles, being in social settings, being alone, germs and dirt, etc.

C. Although some consciousness of the dangers around us is natural, healthy, and proper, the problem is that fear often results in irrational behavior, wherein fear takes control over our lives, limiting the things we do and negatively impacting our lives in various ways.

D. For the Christian, allowing fear to be in control of our lives poses significant challenges to our faith and the ways in which God wants us to live. This, then, can (and often does) result in sin.

E. Purpose: To learn how to view fear from a Biblical perspective so that our fears will be conquered by faith in Jesus.

1. Some Perspective

A. Fear is an emotion God created us to possess

1. When God created mankind, He created us to experience a variety of different emotions. These help us experience life and process information.

2. Regarding fear, fear is a natural emotion that works to protect people from harm whenever real danger is detected or imminent (i.e. some snakes are dangerous).

3. There is a sense in which fear is not wrong and is even natural.

- In Job 41:33, God presents the mighty Leviathan as a creature which had no equal on the earth and a creature devoid of fear. The implication is that lesser creatures would naturally have a sense of danger.
- In 1 Corinthians 2:3, Paul said that he came to the Corinthians in fear and in much trembling. But, while he experienced these emotions because of the dangers he faced, he did not allow these emotions to control him.

4. Although emotions are natural, God also teaches us how to respond to them. And, God wants His people to respond to the emotion of fear in a way that demonstrates faith (i.e. just as Paul did what he needed to do regardless of his emotion of fear).

B. Fear can work against faith

1. It is not acceptable to say we believe in God and then refuse to do what God desires because we are afraid! This is not true faith!

2. We see an example of how fear was allowed to override faith in Numbers 13 and 14. The Israelites (who God had delivered out of Egypt) were told to send twelve spies into the land God had promised to give them. When they returned, conflicting reports were given.

- They all agreed that the land was great, the fruit was incredible, the people living in the land were strong, and the cities were large and fortified (Numbers 13:27-29).
- Caleb (one of the spies) quieted the people and urged them to go take possession of the land, saying they can certainly conquer it (Numbers 13:30). However, ten of the spies urged that they could not attack the people because they were stronger than the Israelites (Numbers 13:31-33). After the Israelites began to complain, Joshua (another of the spies) urged them not to be afraid (Numbers 14:7-9). Yet, the Israelites chose to listen to the ten fearmongering spies over the two urging faith in God – and the whole generation died in the wilderness as a result (other than Joshua and Caleb)!

3. We must live by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). While there are situations we face that will cause us to experience fear, we cannot determine our actions solely based on our sight. Rather, we must determine our actions based on God's will (the Bible)!

C. God has promised to punish the cowardly

1. Just like the Israelites who chose to live by fear rather than by faith died in the wilderness, God promises there will be severe consequences for those who choose such today!

2. Revelation 21:8. Of all the wicked things that will cause one to be separated from God eternally in the fires of Hell, God's inclusion of the cowardly in this verse demonstrates how serious God views the offense of those who choose fear over faith in Him!

3. The one who is a coward is one whose actions demonstrate he/she will trust in himself/herself more than God. This one does whatever he/she believes is appropriate for self-preservation rather than trusting God enough to do whatever He desires and requires!

D. God can rescue us from our fears

1. Having faith in God does not mean we will never face real danger in life. Rather, it merely requires that we trust God enough to do what He says, believing He will deliver us from our fears in the end!

2. David knew what it was like to experience fearful earthly situations (i.e. running from King Saul, running from his son when he was attempting to overthrow David). Yet, he was reassured that God would deliver him from these fears (Psalm 31:13-14; Psalm 34:4).

3. Although God has often delivered people from the things that threatened them physically and He certainly can deliver us from such things today, we must recognize that God does *not* promise to deliver His people from every physical thing that threatens us.

- There are many examples of Christians suffering in the New Testament – even in very painful ways. For example, Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:58), Saul imprisoned and killed various Christians (Acts 8:3; Acts 22:4), James was beheaded (Acts 12:1-2), Paul faced many dangers in his service to God (2 Corinthians 11:22-33), etc.
- Today, Christians look to God for deliverance from fear on primarily a spiritual level – as God promises everything will work out for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). That is, He will ultimately reward us with eternal life in Heaven if we are faithful to Him (Revelation 2:9-11, note that such will never be harmed by the second death – in contrast with the cowardly).

E. The fear of God must override all our fears

1. Whenever living by faith and obeying God conflicts with what your fear wants you to do, you have a choice. And, this choice is ultimately one that concerns what/who you fear most.

2. Matthew 10:26-31. As Jesus sent out the twelve on the “Limited Commission,” He warned of pain they would experience (vv. 17-18, 34-39). However, they were not to fear (stated three times). Ultimately, they were to fear God more than any other and recognize that God cared for them!

3. The most whoever or whatever we are afraid of can do is harm our physical lives. However, not fearing God and living for Him as we should will result in spiritual and eternal consequences – which are far greater! Therefore, we must choose to fear God above all else!

2. The Danger Of Fear

A. Exacerbates anxiety

1. Anxiety/worry is already something that challenges people. However, if fear is not kept in its proper place, it will increase the anxiety that is experienced.

- Fear and anxiety have a way of working together and wreaking havoc on a person’s faith. For example, when fear leaves its proper place, it focuses on “what if?” scenarios that may or may not happen.

2. When fear and anxiety act in tandem, Satan attempts to distract us from our true purpose. And, rather than trusting in and obeying God, we are tempted to trust in something/someone else and act accordingly.

3. In this way, fear results in more sin caused by anxiety and worry (Matthew 6:25, 31, 34). Rather than allowing fear to increase our anxiety and worry, Jesus tells us to trust God and seek Him first, knowing He will take care of us (Matthew 6:26, 33) – and cast our anxieties on God in prayer (Philippians 4:6-7).

B. Paralyzes faith

1. Allowing fear (coupled with anxiety and worry) to control our decisions will prevent us from doing what God desires. This was seen with the Israelites when they listened to the ten spies who gave the negative report. Although they should have immediately moved to

conquer the promised land, their fear caused them to want to return to Egypt and reject God!

2. There are various examples in Scriptures that demonstrate the negative impact fear has on faith.

- Matthew 14:29-31. Fear of the wind caused Peter to stop walking on the water and start sinking. In response, Jesus called Peter out for his little faith and for doubting.
- John 7:13. People allowed the fear of the Jews to keep them from talking publicly about Jesus, though they were trying to figure out who He was.
- John 19:38. Fear of the Jews caused Joseph of Arimathea (who asked Pilate for Jesus's body after his crucifixion) to be a secret disciple of Jesus.

3. In every circumstance, fear puts limitations on what faith can accomplish and causes us not to produce the fruit we could otherwise produce in Christ's service!

C. Leads to sinful responses

1. Not only does fear result in faith not accomplishing what it otherwise could accomplish in our lives, but it can also result in other sin. This happens any time our fear leads us to act in our best physical interest above what faith in God requires.

2. Consider two examples concerning Peter. In Matthew 26:69-75, Peter denied Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested. Then, in Galatians 2:12, Peter was hypocritical in eating with Gentiles because he was afraid of the Jews.

3. Fear (of persecution, of not fitting in, of death, of danger, etc.) can result in sins of commission (doing what God says not to do) and omission (not doing what God says to do).

- Consider whether you ever don't confess Christ, attend the assemblies of the church, choose holiness, preach the gospel, etc. because you are afraid of doing so! If so, you are being a coward because your faith is being conquered by your fear!

3. Reasons Not To Fear

A. God is greater than whatever we fear

1. Numbers 14. Joshua and Caleb recognized the same threat the others saw. However, they concluded that God was stronger than

those enemies and they would, thus, be able to overcome them (v. 9). Because of this faith, Caleb was said to have a different spirit (v. 24).

2. 1 Samuel 17. David did not agree to face Goliath because he arrogantly believed he could defeat the giant by himself. Rather, he concluded that God was far bigger and stronger than Goliath and he would defeat Goliath by God's strength (vv. 45-47).

3. Matthew 8. While Jesus and His disciples were in a boat, a violent storm arose that caused the boat to be swamped by the waves (vv. 23-24). Jesus's disciples woke Jesus because they were afraid and believed they were about to die (v. 25). However, Jesus called out their little faith and then calmed the storm (v. 26). The disciples should have realized no storm could swallow the ship where lies the Master of oceans and earth and skies!

4. Today, we must recognize there is no need to fear anything we face as long as Jesus is "in our boat"! For, nothing and no one can conquer Him. Rather, we will overwhelmingly conquer through Him (Romans 8:31-39)!

B. God is with us and will provide deliverance

1. While Satan wants us to feel alone in facing fears, God reminds us that He is always there (Hebrews 13:5-6). Although it may not always feel like it, God is there and He provides you with the way to overcome whatever you are experiencing (though not always physically).

2. Even when we are going through dark times of suffering and uncertainty, we must not fear, but simply trust and follow the Shepherd who will always lead us in the right ways and offers us the strength and comfort we need to get through any situation (Psalm 23:4)!

3. We should always know that God cares about us (Matthew 10:30-31; 1 Peter 5:6-7). In fact, He cares about us enough that He sent His only Son to die on the cross to provide the ultimate deliverance from this life of sin and suffering! Yet, this deliverance will only be experienced if we will follow Him, even through the darkest valleys.

C. Jesus conquered our greatest fears

1. Of everything people can be afraid of, there are two things that threaten us more than others. These are the first and the second deaths!

2. Jesus has conquered the first death through His resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

- Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Although people are often afraid of that which would hurt/kill them physically, Jesus has taken the sting out of death by guaranteeing a future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). So, those who live by faith have no need to fear physical death!

3. Jesus has conquered the second death through His perfect sacrifice for sin (Romans 5:6-11).

- While those who do not live for Jesus will experience the second death in the eternal fires of Hell (Revelation 21:8), those who are faithful to Jesus will be given the crown of life and will not be harmed by the second death (Revelation 2:10-11)! So, those who live by faith have no need to fear what happens in the afterlife!

D. We should look forward to what is waiting for us

1. Rather than fearing death and what is waiting in eternity, Christians should be eagerly anticipating this time! Doing so will take the “teeth” out of your fears!

2. This is how Paul faced difficult times in his life – even when he was facing potential martyrdom for his faith in Jesus (Philippians 1:21-24; 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

3. Rather than getting consumed by fear regarding the earthly situations we face, we must remember to look at the future promises God has given concerning eternal life in Heaven!

Conclusion

A. Has this lesson described your attitude toward fear? Are you allowing your fear to conquer your faith or using faith to conquer your fear?

B. While troubles and sufferings will certainly be experienced on this earth, we must cling to the wonderful promises God has made available through Jesus Christ!

C. Always remember that God is able to deliver – and that He ultimately will deliver the faithful through Jesus Christ! Therefore, choose to fear God and keep His commandments more than you will fear anything or anyone on this earth!

Study Questions

What are some things you fear?

1. Some Perspective

How is fear an emotion God created us to possess? Is it sinful to experience this emotion?

How can fear work against faith?

What does God promise to do to the cowardly? How do these demonstrate trust in self more than God?

Will God rescue the faithful from their fears? How will He do this?

Who/what should you fear above all else?

2. The Danger Of Fear

How does fear exacerbate worry? What does Jesus teach about worry?

How does fear paralyze faith?

How does fear lead to other sinful responses?

3. Reasons Not To Fear

Why is it important to remember that God is greater than your fears?

Why is it important to remember that God is with you and will provide deliverance?

Why is it important to remember that Jesus has conquered your greatest fears?

Why is it important to look forward to what is waiting for you after this life ends?

