

December 1, 2013
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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DON'T TAKE AWAY YOUR TRUTH
Psalm 119:41-48

The fear of the Lord is a common theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The concept first appears in God's relationship with Abraham. God put Abraham to the test when He requested him to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Abraham obeyed God to the point of laying Isaac on a crude altar and raising the knife to slay him. At that moment God stopped His servant and said to him, *"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me"* (Genesis 22:12).

The Abraham's story is all about relationship. Abraham believed God and he was called the friend of God (James 2:23). Friends trust. Friends have hope in and for each other. Friends love fellowship. To be a friend of God, we must fear God.

That concept is so misunderstood because we typically judge a word based on the way it is normally used. That is to be expected. Therefore, the common usage "fear" is never positive. We try to avoid fear. Bad things and bad people cause us to fear. Unsavory or harmful circumstances generate fear in our hearts. By all normal means fear is not a good thing. Therefore, if we were to tell people that God loves them with an everlasting love and because of that love they should fear Him, we have just sent conflicting signals to their brains. It is difficult to understand why God desires for us to fear Him until we grasp the full breadth of fear as it is defined in the Bible.

The second relationship where we find the fear of God is in God's relationship with Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God made it plain that because Pharaoh and his people did not fear Him, He would continue to pour out plague after plague that would continue to ruin

the nation until the people did fear Him (Exodus 9:30). The theme continued as in the broader context of that exodus story we learn how God revealed His majesty and power at Mount Sinai. When the people experienced the thunder, smoke, fire, earthquake, and blaring trumpet, they were greatly afraid.

That is where fear of the Lord begins. It is proper for sinners to fear God's wrath so much that they will confess their sin to Him. But when they experience the steadfast love of God that takes away their sin and guilt, their fear of God takes a decidedly different path. Because we have experienced God's love, we develop a deep and abiding respect for Him. That is mature fear. That is the kind of fear David had for God. In this section of Psalm 119, David expresses this lovely concept of deep respect for God. His request is simple: *"Do not take your word of truth out of my mouth for my hope is in your rules"* (v.43). That is what genuine, mature fear of the Lord looks like. In this text, we should be challenged to love God so much that we fear losing fellowship with Him if His word becomes unimportant to us.

Our Relationship with the Lord Is Rooted in Salvation (vv.41-44).

David understood that God's love is revealed in salvation (v.41). This knowledge undergirded his request for God to, *Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD* (v.41a). That is a request for God's goodness. The Hebrew word used here (*ches'ed*) is one of the great words of the Bible. It speaks of God's mercy that withholds from us the punishment sin deserves and gives to us instead according to God's compassion. The steadfast love is what Jacob asked God for when he knew he was going to have to meet Esau (Gen. 32:10). It is what God gave Joseph to sustain him while he was in prison (Gen. 39:10). It is the very character of God who shows mercy to thousands who keep His commands (Exo. 20:6).

We cannot even begin a relationship with God until we have His steadfast love. David certainly understood this when he prayed, *Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!* (Psalm 25:7). Indeed a sinner is and always will be the enemy of God until God shows us His mercy. Paul taught the same

eternal principle in the New Testament when he wrote, *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).*

The love of God begins to become obvious to us when we understand the depth of His mercy. Here is a great truth. God did not save us “out of His mercy” which would be like God dipping into His reservoir of mercy and giving us some of it. Though that action would provide salvation for us, it would not express the depth or steadfastness of God’s love. Rather God saved us **according to** the vast, endless supply of His steadfast loving kindness. Would you prefer to have a wealthy benefactor give you a gift “out of his treasure” or “according to his treasure.” Out of his treasure could mean that you would receive \$20. According to his vast treasure of a billion dollars you would receive a huge sum. Because God saves us according to the measure of His inexhaustible mercy, we will always enjoy the steadfastness of that mercy.

The word *ches’ed* requires that we supply the qualifier “steadfast.” God’s mercy is as certain and enduring as He is. It is therefore, steadfast mercy. That is especially encouraging when we consider God’s special name “Yahweh” which emphasizes His everlasting self-sufficiency. God’s love, revealed in His mercy, will stop the day He dies—which means it will never stop!

God’s promised salvation expresses that steadfast love. David described God’s steadfast love as, *your salvation according to your promise (v.41b)*. For the Psalmist, salvation had two applications. On one hand, he was thankful for God forgiving his sins and giving him eternal life. That is salvation as we commonly know it. Who understood that better than David? He wrote, *Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit (Psalm 32:2)*. He prayed to God, *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit (Psalm 51:12)*.

On the other hand, David also prayed often for God to deliver him from the actual human enemies who would surround him or shut him in. The immediate context of this Psalm makes that clear. The context of David’s life really makes that clear. David always seemed to have opponents. Sometimes there were enemies simply because David was a warrior. Sometimes he had opponents because of his

own foolishness (Absalom, Shimei, Ahithophel, etc.). Often David had adversaries simply because he was righteous and the chosen servant of God (Saul in particular). Here the context seems to favor temporary salvation from the victory of human enemies over him.

We are able to identify with David’s prayer both for eternal salvation and for salvation from contemporary “taunters.” Along with the Psalmist, we too rejoice in the certainty of God’s salvation that comes through His steadfast love. As Paul wrote to Titus (Titus 3:5), we have eternal salvation because of God’s love. But we are also allowed to pray for respite from our enemies who seek to shame us, embarrass us, defeat us, or just attack us out of any number of reasons like jealousy or envy.

David showed us here that this wonderful promise of salvation is the reason to trust God’s word (v.42-43). Faith provides for us a confident answer. David prayed that God would grant salvation according to His promise so, *then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word (v.42)*. David was concerned that he would be able to give an answer. There were times when he needed to respond, give an answer, or give an account for something. That was necessary in times when he experienced people misrepresenting him, misquoting him, or purposely using his words against him. David’s chief concern was that when he answered the person who taunted him, the answer would honor God.

We, too, are supposed to be concerned to give a right answer when asked. Peter wrote the standard for us when he penned, *But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you (1Peter 3:15)*. To *regard Christ as holy* is precisely what it means to say, “Fear the Lord.” When we maintain the right relationship with God, we will have the right answer. Notice that this statement comes in the context of persecution because of our faith. When we are right with the Lord, we are more likely to know how to answer the “taunters” (as David called them) according the Word of God. That does not conclude that the taunters will suddenly back down, change his mind, or repent. Typically they will not. But we should have confidence to stand before God and give an account when we give an answer that fits with God’s Word.

Giving the right answer will often depend on where we find our answers. This is where we learn how important our relationship with God's Word is. Fear maintains a right relationship with God's word (vv.43-44). For the genuine believer, our love for God fears losing His word. That is what David meant when he prayed, *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth (v.43a)*. Fear of losing God's Word is mature fear. David's concern was not that God would punish him. Rather, his concern was that he might not lose God's Word. That loss would be possible either by replacing God's Word with an answer from his own human wisdom, or he would forfeit God's Word if he lived in sin without confessing it. Either of these sins would break fellowship with God. Mature fear fears that loss of fellowship.

We should be so immersed in God's Word that to give an answer that is contrary to God's truths or that denies God's truths would grieve our hearts. That is because our faith in God rests on His word. David put it like this: *for my hope is in your rules (v.43b)*. Where is your faith? What is the foundation for it? We err greatly if our faith is in an organization, a creed, or a person. And yet such is often the case for religious people. Too many professing Christians are well versed about what their church practices, or what their denominational bent believe, but they are unfamiliar with what the Bible says. Maybe the most obvious example of that misguided faith is the Roman Catholic Church. When we stand before the Eternal Judge, we will stand well if our hope is planted squarely on His rules.

Hope or faith in God's rules is so important because our service for God is governed by His word. David confessed, *I will keep your law continually, forever and ever (v.44)*. On one hand, this is impossible—which is a good thing. Knowing God's rules, or law, is critical for us to understand our need of the Savior. Fear that we have broken God's law drives us to the Savior who kept God's law perfectly and then died to pay for our sins.

On the other hand, because Christ the perfect law-keeper kept the law and we desire to be like Him, we will try to keep the law also. We will never keep God's law completely in this life. Be that as it may, we do strive to be conformed more and more to it, knowing that it is a revelation of God's character. We know that God's law is the

rule for eternity where we will be like Christ and keep God's law perfectly.

That sounds like so much legalism according to many modern religious folks. It sounds like the kind of thing that strikes fear into a sinner's heart. It is the sort of teaching that drives away modern thinkers who want to be positive and dwell only on God's steadfast love that forgives us even when we intentionally sin. Oh? Is that really the case? Maybe we should rethink what kind of person intentionally sins. Actually, according to David's continued musings, fearing God is a very positive thing.

The Fear of the Lord Is a Refreshing Path to Walk (vv.45-48).

David was of the opinion that fearing the Lord was to walk a wide path (v.45). He said, *and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts (v.45)*. His conclusion is built on the idea that he had sought God's precepts. This is the repeated theme of the Psalm. It is not enough to be familiar with the Bible—we need to have a hunger for the Bible. One of the characteristics of a born again person is a hunger and thirsting for righteousness, which is found on the pages of the Bible (Mat. 5:6). The more a believer reads God's Word, the more he or she will seek after those precepts. Those precepts become like riches (v.13), wondrous things (v.18), my delight (v.24), light (v.105), honey (v.103), gold and silver (v.72). Is that your assessment of the Bible?

David concluded that because he sought for God's precepts like they were gold and silver, the result would be that he would walk in a wide place. Is that a good thing? Didn't Jesus teach that the wide gate leads to an easy path for sinners to walk on the way to destruction (Mt. 7:13)? Yes, and He also taught that the narrow gate leads to a difficult path for the redeemed who love God's law (Mt. 7:14). Restrictive and difficult is indeed the way the Celestial City appears to the sinner. And it is true. Following God's law is difficult because it makes God's follower odd compared to his world. Resisting sin in order to follow God is difficult.

But at the same time, there is liberty and confidence in walking according to God's precepts. The wide way is the way of liberty. It seems like a free and wide way in light of the issue that awaits us at

the end of the road. The final issue is still the fact that I must answer to God. Far better to answer with a life that desires His precepts. That confidence will give a wideness and confidence even on a humanly difficult path.

The wide path is indeed the path of confidence (vv.46-47). We are confident in God's testimonies. *I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame (v.46)*, David challenged us to be able and willing to speak to the most important people in life, when given the opportunity. This means that we are willing to speak about the witness of God's Word. Testimonies are those things that have proven true. While the secular mind dismisses God's Word as unscientific, how do they argue with the testimony of a changed heart? People who love God's Word, read God's Word, study God's Word find God's Word unfolding all around them all the time. Are we confident enough to talk about it?

The confidence is for the person who delights in God's commands. David concluded that he could speak confidently about God's testimonies, *for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love (v.47)*. If you delight in God's commands, an occasional hearing, teaching, or reading of that Word is not sufficient. You will make it a habit to be immersed in the Bible regularly. When circumstances interfere with your time with the Bible, you not only notice it, but you do not like it. There is great danger in a slow, almost imperceptible distraction away from God's Word. Discover the source of distraction and eliminate it because you love God's commands.

Finally, the wide path found in fearing God is not only a path of liberty and a path of confidence, it is also a path of contemplation (v.48). How do you lift up your hands toward God's commands? That is what David planned to do. He said, *I will lift up my hands toward your commandments (48a)*. Lifting up of hands speaks of action. To speak of loving God's Word without seeking to do God's Word is inconsistent. Doers of the Bible are obviously believers in the Bible.

People who love God's Word do God's Word; and if you love God's statutes, you will meditate on them. Speaking of the Lord's commandments David concluded, *which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes (v.48b)*. The connection here is that meditation on the Bible will result in obedience. Where there is genuine love for the

Bible, there will be meditation. The idea of meditation is pictured well in chewing (as in a cow chewing her cud). If you love a good steak, you will not gobble it down and run, but you will slowly chew it to savor the flavor. So, how do you chew God's Word? When do you chew God's Word? What does your chewing or non-chewing say about your opinion of the Bible?

If we love God's Word, we will fear being without it. We will meditate on it, speak of it, and do it. So, do you fear being without the Word of God in your mind and heart?