

Thursday Group
July 30th 2015
Alive in Holy Fear or Dead in Dread
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Study 2

Fear as Dread, Cast Out

Last week we began to consider fear, its prevalence in our life and its terrible effects on our comprehension and relationship with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw how the Bible identifies a wide variety of fear. From simple fear, a good gift of self-preservation in the face of danger, to Holy fear, a good gift of right thinking about our place in the Father's family and creation.

But we live in a world wracked by fear as dread. During our Lord's ministry amongst us his most common greeting was "Peace!" This was no casual "Giddy!" but the clear recognition that everywhere he looked he saw fear molesting and enslaving humanity. Fear as dread, and fear as a lurking bleakness that plagued every activity and changed every personality. Some may say that nothing much has changed on the human scene. The statistics would even suggest that the time we live in is particularly fearful.

Some of our fears are irrational and may be treated by a return to rationality. This has been the approach of many secular attempts to help people in their fears. Much has been helpful. But some cannot simply be explained away, or self-talked into non-existence. The Bible speaks of dread as the product of our guilty conscience in the presence of God. Consciousness of sin is the issue. The whole drama of humanities goal, their consciousness of sin and the sacrifice which alone cleanses the conscience has always been the question. *For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?* (Hebrews 10:2). Whatever we have done in the world to camouflage, deny or excuse our sin along with its dread, terror and hatred of judgement there remains a deadly and deadening deposit directing our consciences. Instead of holy fear which teaches the heart to run to the Father in trembling fear, to delight in the depth and height and width of His mercy, grace and power, our consciousness of sin seeks to drive us from every need of Him. Note the guilt spoken of in the Scriptures is not so much guilty feelings, although they of course will be there, but the actual alienation of humanity from the living God. That alienation is actual and not simply psychological.

Where the conscience is polluted by guilty fear then we dread any form of face to face encounter with anyone, but most of all Father God. In fact we no longer yearn for His Fathering as we were created to do but actually spurn it. But having been structured to correspond to Him and relate to Him we find ourselves out of whack with ourselves and all things. In this we enter a deep conflict for we are created to be in free and open relationship with Father God. We cannot live in this land of dread but we cannot deliver ourselves from it. But our conflict is even greater. Under the pollution of guilt we not only hate God but are driven to blame Him for our condition. When Adam blamed his wife he was actually lashing out at God. His Father's gifts were now viewed critically, cynically and suspiciously *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate"* (Genesis 3:12). So in his objective guilt his heart now sought all manner of irrational and improper excuses, all of which cast him into more alienation with God and his family. After all if he was to be

as God he should no longer be subject to the judgement of God. King Saul, the archetype of fearful rulers and indeed all fearful people, found himself living in a similar land of dread. On failing to obey what was a simple command his dread enslaved him and he refused to wait for God's way of proceeding. After Saul was anointed as King by Samuel and had joined the school of the prophets and been promised that God was with him he was commanded to go down to Gilgal and wait seven days for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifices. But by the end of those seven days Saul was deep into the land of dread and proceeded by sight and not trust. When confronted by God (in Samuel) Saul said, *"Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, ¹² therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favour of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering."* (1 Samuel 13:11, 12). There are clear echoes of Adam here. The points we make are simply that Saul lost all wise thinking about himself, the people and the enemy from within the land of dread, and compounded his sin by blaming God for his disobedience.

So this fear as dread is all about us, death and the Judge, *And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment* (Hebrews 9:27). We were created to love the judgements of God. The judgements of a loving Father who always loves without guile and for His ultimate glory which is to have a humanity that loves and delights in Him. His judgements may come against us as we struggle to be as He is but His judgements are always for us. The guilty one never sees that. Living freely and willingly under Father's judgements (discipline) means living within our limitations as creatures and trusting Him to complete His purposes within us and within His world. Be very sure that God has perfected a way for us to be confident not terrorized by the Judge.

So being captive to our guilt, with no way to extricate ourselves the Father Himself must be the active one in restoring to us His true image. He must bring us back from the land of dread (guilt), through the fore-wall of our hostility, to delight in his presence with true fear (1 Peter 1:17, Philippians 2:12).

To do this the holy judgement against all guilt must be full and effective; His transmission of that must effectively reach our conscience and then our heart; He must be able to give us this blessing in the present world of contest and pollution, where the fear of death (judgement) is universal. *That he might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives* (Hebrews 2:15). John brings this whole action of God to the forefront in 1 John 4:7-21). God puts His decisive and effective solution to our problem directly onto our table in this passage.

Working backwards the story goes like this. God's passion (goal) for his love in us has to do with bringing us into freedom from fear as dread. Our reaching God's goal for us has to do with confidence in the presence of God's judgement. God's goal for us has been and remains linked to His Son. The present condition and blessing of His Son is the present and future certainty for all who abide in the Father. As free as the man Christ Jesus now is from all our fear, dread and torment that he became on the cross is gifted to us by the Father now. As surely as the Son "Finished" it on the cross so surely has the Father cast it from us now.

By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us.

Our boldness in the day of judgement, and therefore every day leading to it, is based upon the objective reality of how the Son is now.

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Boldness at the day of judgement means that the fear of death has been removed. But John is not just interested in that future day. He speaks the glory of that day into our now, *As He is, so also are we in this world.*

So this confidence (freedom from the land of dread) is directly linked to how Jesus is now and our connection with Him now. So without being flippant we need to ask, "How is Jesus now?" If Father's gift to cast out all fear as dread is to make us like Jesus is now we need to know the answer to that question. Is there any fear of God? Is there any rising dread that one day God is going to read the riot act to him for any of your sin, ISIS sins or any sin? Are there any moments when the absolute anxiety of, "*MY God My God why have you forsaken me!*" returns to stalk his heart? What has been made so for him in the Father's presence is made so for us in this present world. This must include every aspect of the now world: Terrorism, affluent disregard and isolationism, cyclones, disappearing jets. We cannot have fear as torment and enjoy and feel at home in the Father's presence.

That was the goal of Father's love for us all. When did it reach its goal? John gives the answer in Vs 16. When you came to know that the one who abides in God's love abides in God and God abides in them. Here is the miraculous reversal. Being present without dread in the presence of the One we once hated and thought would be the most undesirable and terrorizing place to be. In the Son we have Presence without anxiety or terror in the face of anything in my world, and no fear of Absence because of anything in my world. This we will find leads us directly to worship in awe and trembling. We have been restored to our place in creation where worship begins with silence and weeping and inexpressible joy.