

Thursday Group
August 20th 2015

Rising Fear or Raising Gospel Fear

Study 5

Casting Our Fears Onto the Father

1 Peter 5:1-11

The questions we address today are these. Do those who live with a correct fear of God and who delight in His commands, ever feel fearful or anxious? If we do how do we respond? Why do we become anxious about trusting the Father? What is the nature of the anxiety we are to cast onto the Father?

The battle will always be against us at the point of fear as dread. The evil one is relentless and never ceases to accuse. This is with the direct intent to bring us under a consciousness of sin and thus dread of God, His creatures and the creation itself. His attack will more often than not be subtle and far more ingenious than we think. We could never outwit him or by our own ingenuity silence him.

Peter has shown us that the norm for believers is to live in a holy fear of God, *If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth* (1 Peter 1:17). This fear is accompanied by joy that actually delights in His presence, *You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever* (Psalm 16:11). It unites our heart (Psalm 86:11), sets us straight and into our right place in the Son, as true servants and creatures in Father's creation. That is, as a true son in the Sonship of Jesus, we return to loving the Father freely. As a true servant through the Servanthood of Christ the Lord we return to free giving and relating. As a true creature, living in the new humanity that Jesus Christ forged, we joyfully and contentedly depend upon the Father. So when the Psalmist said, *How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments* (Psalm 112:1), he was speaking about the person who by covenant grace had been restored to their right place within creation. He could not have been referring to one who was in dread of facing the presence of God for such a one cannot stand the commands of God or any other lesser authority.

Ongoing anxieties and the Comfort of the Father

A lesson from Paul (2 Corinthians 7:5, 6)

It is clear from the Scriptures and experience that believers get fearful and anxious. Paul spoke openly about his fears. *For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within* (2 Corinthians 7:5). This is a succinct yet comprehensive explanation of Paul's battle. He felt a whole body frailty that persistently attacked his rest at a deep emotional level. His afflictions were due to both external and internal triggers. Wherever Paul preached the Gospel opposition often followed (See Acts 16:11-40, 17:1-9 for Luke's description of the battle Paul was in as he ministered in the Aegean region). It seems too that Paul was anxious within for the scene at Corinth. He had written them a bold pastoral letter and was waiting for news from Titus as to how it had been received. It seems that Paul, along with Luther had more difficulty with these inner fears than the outward opposition (2 Corinthians 7:8, cf. 2 Corinthians 2:2f.).

Still battling the flesh and living in a world where fear is prevalent we feel our imperfections keenly. We feel and battle these imperfections but we must not become perfectionist lest we lose hope. The perfectionist cannot deal with Paul's open confession of depression and weakness. For them Paul should not have felt this way let alone speak about

it. They cannot help but live in disillusionment and cannot minister to those who need comfort. However, we can take heart from Paul's next verse: *But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus* (2 Corinthians 7:6). Paul was not ashamed to say that he was depressed and not too proud to say that he needed comfort. Dependence means feeling the need of dependence. There is no such thing as simple, abstract theological dependence. In writing a strong letter to Corinth Paul must learn to trust the Father for the fruit of that letter. He was not anxious about humbly trusting the Father and the Father's means of grace to him. It was in his affliction that the God who comforts came to him to comfort him. He had introduced God to the Corinthians as *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort*. He could humbly trust the 'Father of mercies' for he knew Him as 'The God of all comfort'.

We note that Paul expected the Father of mercy and the God of all comfort to minister through Titus. There were two elements to the comfort Paul expected through Titus. He expected to be comforted by the Father simply by the presence of Titus. But there was another aspect of God's comfort that Titus would bring. He would be able to share with Paul that the Father had been working effectively in the Church at Corinth and Paul's fears for them were dispelled. So in broad terms we are comforted by the presence of Father-glorifying believers and in that context we can become aware of the Father's gracious, merciful, sovereign ministry in all parts of our lives, especially within His people.

A Lesson from Peter

Last study we traced the transition of Peter from debilitating fear and character deforming anxiety into a man living freely in holy fear. Peter had been converted. The gift of repentance had born its wonderful fruit. He now knew the Father of His Lord as His Lord did. He no longer stood outside looking in as a fearful man. In Paul's words he knew the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. All his anger-driven sin and mess-ups had lost dominion over him. He had been set in a new and healthy place and could now say, *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you* (1 Peter 5:6-7). Peter connected humility with casting our cares onto the Father. This humble, anxiety-casting spirit came out of a heart-directing delight and passion because he knew the Father as his Lord did. Humility is not humiliation. Peter could now submit to the Father and all His ways in joy. Humility was not a danger to Peter but the home for which he had been created.

Why is it that our old sinful patterns of pride, rage and fear don't lose their dominion over us? Because we don't know God as the 'Father of mercies' and the 'God of all comfort'. In other words we see more joy and riches in other things and our hearts bend eagerly towards those things. Remember how Peter's heart had longed to go back fishing after Calvary? That was where he thought his comfort and success lay. That was where he thought he could amount to something. All his images of God and him together in the future lay in a fishing boat not his Lord. Until by grace that was changed Peter would remain under the passions of his disillusioned heart. But Father broke into that disillusionment, found Peter and recreated him into the likeness of His Son, in which he knew the Father as Jesus did. That was the axe that was laid at the root of his sin driven fear and fear driven sin.

So it is with us. If we attempt to define our sin in simply moralistic ways (not relational) and then seek to overcome them by using the Bible as a moral manual, to be applied when convenient, then like Peter we go back fishing with all the fear and anger boiling our bellies. We could do this all our 'Christian' life, and never know the 'Father of mercies' and the 'God of all comfort.' We will never desire to "Cast our anxiety on God by trusting that he cares for us" (1 Peter 5:7) if we don't see Him as trustworthy Father. Not

knowing God as Father means, in practical terms, not having any heart to trust Him with our anxieties. We must then trust fate, luck, religious duties or all three.

So to be brought by grace into the right place as a human being is to be brought to humbly trust the Father with our anxieties. Never the less the flesh still gets very anxious about humbly submitting to the Father, and we are continually surrounded by a world which defines that as humiliating. Peter links humility and casting our anxiety on the Father. *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* So we humble ourselves by casting our cares upon Him because He by His mighty arm cares for us.

Humility and humbling ourselves can be misunderstood by believers. Many simply pray for humility as if it was foreign to their will and must come as a gift bestowed. On occasions God did humble men, Kings and nations, but generally the believer is urged to humble themselves. *So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience* (Colossians 3:12).

The Father, His rest and Our Peace

To know we are the Father's is to come into His rest (come to Him). *"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). Only from within His rest are we renewed to humble ourselves, *It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute* (Leviticus 16:31). See too, *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful* (John 14:27).

Our dear Father gives completely before He seeks anything from us. He gives knowing that His gifts bring us to the place where giving back is done freely with great delight.

No doubt all God's commands not to be fearful and anxious are do-able. But like the Apostles we learn to do them in the battles that come. Our failures grieve us deeply, but it is not the grief of dread in which we wonder if we have just crossed God's line in the sand and will suffer rejection. It is the grief instructed by holy fear which sees that our weakness cannot separate us from Father's holy loving. In that embrace we may cry with David that we love the discipline and correction of the Lord for it is measured out to us by Faithful Father, the Faithful Creator, the very One who has bound us to Him for ever.