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Fear

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"For this cause was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and also the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear" (Neh. 6:13-14).

"For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).

"For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7).

"There is no fear in love: but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment; and he that fears is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

"The fearful... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8).

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ...Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, even then will I be confident" (Psa. 27:1,3).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning (the chief part) of wisdom (knowledge)" (Prov. 1:7).

"There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18).

"Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

"Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

"So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

"And if ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judges according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

"And fear came upon every soul" (Acts 2:43)

"And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came upon all that heard it. And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things" (Acts 5:5,11).

"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

"And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17).

"And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, the Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 24:5-6).

The two series of Scriptures speak for themselves, and I think it would be good if we were all to sit down quietly with them. What I shall say now will not by any means cover the ground, but I trust will just be useful in the Lord's hand to bring us to something concerning which He would have further thought and consideration afterwards.

Among the major evils which are revealed in the Word of God there are two related to one thing, that one thing being fear. On the one side, there is the very great evil of fear; and, on the other side, there is the evil, and the very great evil, of not fearing. For both of these evils the Lord has had to deal with His people very seriously, and, if you look again, you will see that the strongest things in the Word of God are said by way of condemning both of these evils - fearing and not fearing.

The whole Word of God is shot through with strong condemnations of fear. We could spend hours in gathering up the Scriptures bearing upon that, the almost countless exhortations not to fear. "Fear not, be of good courage, be strong!" There is so much along that line, rebukes again and again for fear. Then, on the other side, in even more solemn tones and often rather in acts than in words, terrible rebukes for not fearing. Well, let us meditate on these two evils in connection with fear.

The Evil of Fear

Not many of us need to be informed that one of Satan's most successful and powerful weapons against the children of God is fear. He drives, he harasses, he torments, he worries; yes, he does many things for the undoing of God's people by means of this weapon of fear. How many of the Lord's people are found in a state of weakness, impotence, and paralysis, because of fear! They are afraid, they fear. How many are found in a state of indecision, incapable of taking any definite,

deliberate, strong step, because of fear. They are all the time moving so cautiously, so uncertainly, because they are afraid, because of fear, and multitudes of the Lord's people are in a state of positive spiritual defeat because of fear working in some way - foreboding, dread, apprehension. Fear, John rightly says, has torment, and it is possible to get into such a state that you are almost afraid to leave your home for half an hour lest you might come back and find that something has gone wrong, to take a journey without all the time wanting to keep in touch with things. You are afraid. It is a terrible thing, this fear, and in countless ways the enemy lashes the children of God by this rod, this whip, of fear.

The Word of God is very strong about this matter. "*God has not given us a spirit of fear*", and let us once and for all get this kind of fear defined and disentangled from the other fear of which we have to speak, the right kind of fear. I think that failure to discriminate in this matter is perhaps at the root of a very great deal of the defeat. We, somewhere in the back of our minds, in an undefined way, have got muddled up and confused. Fear - yes, but we are commanded to fear, the fear of the Lord. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" We must fear lest we make mistakes, lest we go wrong, lest we grieve the Lord; we must fear this and that. Oh, but let us drive the wedge clean in between the devil's fear and the fear of the Lord! They are two different things, and let us settle it once and for all that this kind of harassing, driving fear comes straight from the pit; it is born in hell, a weapon forged there by the devil himself against the children of God. Let it be settled in your heart forever that this kind of fear is not from God. This fear is from Satan. Oh, I do feel that it is so important that the people of God should nail this matter of fear. When you find yourself in this state because of fear, you say, "This is not from God!" Fear is a master weapon of Satan, and you have got to free yourself in the Name of the Lord from his awful drive by this means.

What is he after? It is always good to ask ourselves what is the effect of a thing in our lives. I can very well discover where it comes from if I recognise what the effect is. If a thing paralyses me, if it takes all certainty and confidence and assurance out of my heart, if it takes the steady firmness out of my walk, my tread, if it holds me up in weakness and paralyses so that I am afraid to move, then that is not of God. God wants His people to go forward with assurance and confidence, with a firm and steady tread, not to have in their hearts everlastingly a paralysing doubt. So what is the effect? Recognise that and you know where it comes from.

What is Satan after? You say, to paralyse me, to destroy me, to hold up. Oh yes, but that is only secondary! He is after dishonouring God, and God is dishonoured in His people. It has ever been that Satan has aimed at the work of God's hands, aimed his blow to dishonour God, and God is dishonoured when His people are, in the wrong sense, fearful. What is fear, after all? Well, it is mistrust, it is lack of faith. John says that it is the opposite of love. There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear, and he that fears is not made perfect in love. Fear is the opposite of love, and what is love if it is not trust? None of us would agree that we were loved if we were not trusted. We demand absolute confidence as the hallmark of professed love. It is only feigned love which has reservations about an object which it professes to love. It is mere empty sentiment and pretence which says, "I love you but I am not sure of you". Oh no! That is the only kind of love that we really, in our hearts, can accept and believe in. A lot of people tell me they love me, but I know all the time they have got big questions about me and they are suspicious. I say that kind of love is not much good, it does not help me very much. It does not get us anywhere just to keep that shadow all the time in between. But carry that into the divine realm. Can that be tolerated in relation to God? I love God, but I do not trust Him, I am not sure of Him. I am afraid to go out tomorrow lest something should go wrong, lest the Lord should let me down. You see, it is very practical. Perfect love casts out all fear. It is by this fear and fearfulness that Satan is seeking to dishonour God in us by keeping us in a state of uncertainty about God, a reservation of confidence and trust. Fear is the opposite of

trust. If we trust, we are not afraid. It is put quite simply: "*I will trust and not be afraid*" (Is. 12:2). These two things cannot live together - trust and fear. "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*" (Ps. 27:1). Oh, the gain to the enemy against the Lord along the line of fear!

But, of course, this is a very real thing, this fear, and although the Word of God may not use the phrase, we have reason to believe that amongst the hosts of evil spirits, there are definitely the spirits of fear. For very often this thing is something extra to ourselves; it comes upon us. It is something that happens to us at times. We find ourselves afraid. The enemy wants to make us afraid and his spirits of fear are sent forth to do that. There needs to be a very definite and strong attitude taken in spirit before the Lord to resist the devil in this form. When we say the devil, we mean all his hosts as well; however he may come - to resist fear. It is a resolution - "*I WILL trust, and not be afraid - for the Lord...*".

Well, that is all I am going to say for the moment about the evil of fear. I want you to take that word and keep it in your heart; dwell much upon it, because I am convinced that the enemy is pressing very much along this line. Do you notice what Nehemiah said? Oh, it was a significant thing! Nehemiah said something more than he knew he was saying, I am quite sure of that! He said a thing which embraces a great deal of the New Testament. He said, "*For this purpose were they hired that they might make me afraid, and do so, and sin*". Yes, but that is only half. And then what? "*That they might have an evil report, a case, against me*". What the enemy is after all the time is, first of all, to make afraid, and then to get us to take some step, to do something out of fear, and then to come right round on us and accuse us before God. How cruel, how subtle, how wicked! - but that is of no consequence to him. What he is after is to cast the saints down by accusation, and if he can only get them either to do or to refrain from doing through fear, he has got a case, and it will not be long before he comes back on that very ground and makes accusation, condemnation, and distress.

The Evil of Not Fearing

Now we pass over to the other side - the evil of not fearing. But this is another kind of fear, fear of the Lord, walking in the fear of the Lord, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord. "Great fear came upon the church" - with what result? It lost heart, it became afraid, it was paralysed? No! - the Name of the Lord Jesus was glorified and the Church multiplied. Oh, this then, must be another kind of fear. It operates in exactly the opposite way from that of which we have been speaking.

What is this fear? Well, it is the fear of devotion to the Lord. It is that fear which, in the first place, has all questions of relationship with the Lord settled, has the whole matter of acceptance by the Lord settled, the sin question is got out of the way through the righteousness which is of faith. Then the fear of the Lord means recognition of His glory, recognition of His greatness, recognition of His holiness, His majesty, and a humble submission to Him in the fear that would not in any way work against Him and His honour. It is another kind of fear, the fear of devotion to the Lord, and the chief characteristic of this fear is meekness. And that is where the sin of not fearing is found in the Word of God.

If you go through the Word and you find those various instances where God came out in judgment because this fear was not there, you will find that it was that those instances represented something like this. In Numbers 16 you have Dathan and Abiram and their company. What are they doing? To Moses, the meekest of men, the anointed servant of the Lord, they say, "You take too much on yourself. You are not the only one through whom the Lord speaks. We are as much the children of

God as you are!" That is how they speak, and they fear not to put their hand upon that which is anointed. It is not that Moses is anything, but it is the anointing. It is something anointed of God and they were guilty of the sin of spiritual assumption; it was due to a lack of meekness. The Lord came out in terrible judgment, showing for all time that when the Lord anoints anyone or anything, that anointing is not something that constitutes that person a special office or officer. The anointing is the Lord, the Lord Himself. The Lord is on that, the Lord Himself is in that, the Lord is there, and when you touch that, you touch the Lord; you touch that in word, you touch the Lord, you touch that in deed, you touch the Lord. "He reproveth kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm" (Psa. 105:14-15).

If you and I ever have the slightest reason to conclude that the Lord is anywhere or with any person or with anything or with any people, we touch that to our peril if it is touching it other than in the fear of the Lord. It is a tremendous check. We read that little bit from 1 Samuel. Yes, David was anointed, David was God's chosen one, but Saul had been anointed and Saul was not yet dead. Saul was not yet set aside finally, although potentially. David got an opportunity and cut off the skirt of Saul's garment and then it says, "David's heart smote him". David's heart smote him. We in New Testament times in whom the Spirit dwells would say, "The Lord rebuked me, smote me in my heart, in my spirit". Again and again this comes up - exactly what happens in the case of the bringing up of the ark. When Uzzah died before the Lord, what was the reason? It was a lack of the fear of the Lord of the right kind. It was an assumption. It was a putting forth of a hand to touch holy things. That is terrible. The evil of not fearing, you see. It comes from an insufficient apprehension of the sacredness of what is of God.

But this fear is a holy fear. Let no one think for a moment that this fear of the Lord is death, bondage, stultification and repression. Not at all. Wherever you find this fear of the Lord you find joy, love, peace and liberty. People are not afraid of the Lord. But they are careful not to grieve the Lord. They do not take liberties with the Lord. They do not think of spiritual liberty as spiritual licence. They do not cast off restraint, they do not ride rough-shod over all sacred things, calling it liberty. No, there is holy fear which restrains and in restraining keeps things pure and keeps things clear and makes a straight way for the Lord. The true fear of the Lord is not dread. It is a very blessed and precious thing.

Now you notice these passages in the New Testament show us that it was at such times when this kind of fear came in a special way that there was something to the glory of God. You know, if you get into the book of the Acts and you begin to see things happening, getting to the realm of "things doing" as we say, the expression and manifestation of divine power there is your peril. That was so in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Things were happening. What a peril when the Lord is doing something, for the flesh to just step in and begin to sport itself in what God is doing, to take advantage, to exploit the situation for its improvement, and the Lord had to step in to save the situation. What did He do? Well, what He did in the issue was to recover a wholesome fear, a fear that would keep things pure and "fear fell upon all". That kept things pure. It did not arrest the Lord. It did not mean that things had got to come under bondage again. No, it just kept things pure, and so that was repeated from time to time. "Great fear came upon all... the Name of the Lord was glorified and the Church multiplied."

What I want to say is this, that a right kind of fear, a fear of the Lord, is something which gives the Lord a very clear way to do what He wants. "To this one will I look..." - and oh, what a lot is bound up with that phrase. It does not just mean that the Lord takes a look at us, looks in our direction. When the Lord looks to us, well, there is everything we want. All that we want is in the light of His countenance. If the Lord looks upon us, it is like the sun looking out with all the beneficent rays of

warmth and light and energy. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at My word" (Isa. 66:2). Do you want, do I want, spiritual increase in understanding, in knowledge, in revelation? Do we want spiritual increase in strength from the Lord? Do we want fulness? Let me say that this is going to come to the humble man, the weak, meek one in the eyes of the Lord, the one who trembles at His word, who does not assume.

Oh, let us ask the Lord that there may be found in us that true holy fear which is love, not the fear which is contrary to love, but the true holy fear which is love. The Lord will be able to go on and lead us into all His fulness if He has that quality in us, that in us which simply means that we honour Him, we recognise Him, we trust Him, we have perfect confidence in Him, and that we are very reticent either by word of criticism, or judgment, or by any other way, to put a hand upon what is sacred to the Lord, even a child of God. If it is a child of God, then the Lord is in that one and we must be very careful. That is what it means, and this matter of the blessing of the Lord which makes rich, this matter of the light of His countenance, is a very practical matter. It may all hang upon some matter of our attitude towards another child of God. The whole of the fulness of Christ may be held up and suspended for us because of some injurious way in which we talk about what is precious to God, if we criticise it, judge it, think that we can improve it. The Lord may stand back.

Let us ask the Lord to put into our hearts His fear while on the other hand He is seeking to root out of us that evil which is so much to His dishonour. I simply bring this to you and urge upon you further prayerful reflection. Ask the Lord about this. Do not forget the enemy's drive along the line of fear, but do not forget that freedom from the enemy's kind of fear does not make us those fire-eaters who care for nothing and simply trample all sacred things down under foot because we are very bold. No, there is a right boldness and a wrong boldness, a right fear and a wrong fear. The Lord teach us the meaning of that!