

FEAR, FEAR OR FEAR – WHICH IS IT?

- A. When talk about fear, what are we talking about?
- B. Why is it important for us to have a clear definition of what fear is?

I. THERE ARE ALMOST AS MANY TIMES WHEN THE BIBLE COMMANDS US TO FEAR AS THERE ARE PLACES WHERE IT TELLS US NOT TO FEAR.

- A. For example:
 - 1. I Peter 3:2 & 6
 - 2. Hebrews 13:6 and I Peter 1:17
- B. What's going on here? On the one hand the Bible says "Don't" and on the other hand it says "Do"... Is the Bible contradicting itself? How do you harmonize these different statements?
 - 1. Do that by recognizing that the Bible is referring to at least two different kinds of fear; recognizing that there is a good kind of fear that is constructive and there is another kind of fear that is destructive.
 - 2. Our goal as Christians is not to become fearless; we're not talking about eliminating all fear.
 - 3. What this means is that there is a kind of fear that is not sinful, but just part of being a human being. Is a kind of fear that can be productive and constructive depending on whether it controls us or we control it. Few examples of the productivity of the right kind of natural fear:
 - a. In Psalm 9:20
 - b. Esther 9:1,2
 - c. Luke 1:57 – 65, esp. 65 - Zechariah
 - d. Luke 5:17 – 26, esp. v. 26
 - e. Acts 5:1 – 5, 11, 14
 - f. Acts 19:11 – 20
 - g. 2 Corinthians 7:9 -11, esp. 11
 - h. I Timothy 5:19, 20 – esp. v. 20
 - i. Proverbs 22:3
 - j. Isaiah 7:25.
 - k. Romans 13:3, 4.
 - l. I Pet. 2:18; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22 – 25, esp. v. 25
 - m. Prov. 7
 - n. 2 Peter 2:9 – 11

C. What we're talking about here is the importance and desirability of a natural kind of fear; we're talking about the importance of the kind of natural fear that is part of being a human being; we're talking about a kind of fear that should cause us to avoid as many of the harmful things we can avoid without disobeying God; we're talking about the kind of fear that is the prudent thing to have.

1. It's not sinful to have a proper fear of heights that causes you to be careful, but it is prudent;
2. Causes you to be concerned about falling off a cliff;
3. Causes you to be concerned about swimming in the deep end of the pool if you don't know how to swim;
4. Driving a car too fast so that you lose control;

II. THE SECOND CATEGORY OF FEAR MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE – THE KIND OF FEAR THAT IS NO LONGER JUST NATURAL, BUT SINFUL.

A. Brings us to the question, when does our fear become sinful fear

1. Our fear has become sinful fear when it keeps us from obeying God's commands.

2. Our fear has become a sinful fear when it causes us to disobey God's commands.

See this fact about sinful fear illustrated in Nehemiah 6.1 – 13

3. Our fear has become a sinful fear when it causes us to think and act selfishly.

a. Scripture – I John 4:18

b. Biblical love causes people to do what Philippians 2:3 & 4 says

c. Causes people to do what Romans 12:10 tells us to do ...

d. On the other hand Bible gives us examples of men who sinned by allowing their natural fears to cause them to think and act selfishly.

1). One such example - Isaac in Genesis 26.

2). Another - Peter in Galatians 2

3). Another - John Mark – Acts 13:13; 15:27 –

4. Brings us to a 4th fact about the nature of sinful fear - Our fear has become a sinful fear when it springs from thinking unbiblically.

a. In Phil. 4:6 – 9 Paul is telling us how to overcome fear and anxiety

b. What this means is that if our minds are dwelling on anything other than the qualities mentioned in Phil. 4:8 we are disobeying God and, more than that, we should not expect that we will be delivered from sinful fear.

- c. People who are being controlled by sinful fear are often people who live in the land of “what if”. What if people are thinking this about me? What if they are saying this about me?

5. And now one final bottom line thought about the nature of sinful fear and that is that our fear has become a sinful fear when it flows out of unbelief.

- d. Mark 4:35 – 40, esp. v. 40 – note how Jesus explains the nature of their fear
- e. Contrast that with the account we find in Acts 27:13 - 25, v. 22 – 25.
- f. Romans 8:28 - 39; Job 23:10; James 1:2-5; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 13:5,6; Jer. 29:11

III. 3rd KIND OF FEAR IS WHAT WE COULD CALL A HOLY FEAR – NOT NATURAL, NOT SINFUL, BUT IS SUPERNATURAL AND HOLY.

- A. Referred to in I Peter 1:17 and many other passages of Scripture – more about this next week.
- B. Concerning this holy fear John Flavel wrote, “Natural fear is a normal passion of the soul, sinful fear is the normal passion of the soul corrupted and perverted, and holy fear is that normal passion sanctified and put to good use.”
- C. In our book GSLP, we write – page 61 – “Holy fear and sinful fear are opposites.”

Conclusion: