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## **BEWARE OF BEING FEARFUL**

The Bible refers to two different types of fear: one is good and the other is bad. The “good” fear is known as “the fear of God”. The “bad” fear is usually described by the adjective “fearful”. These two fears are poles apart!

**The fear of God** is something all true Christians are supposed to have. It is something we are supposed to learn at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 14:22-23). Keep this in mind, that the fear of God is associated with ENJOYMENT and with keeping A FEAST! The fear of God is a fear to do anything that is wrong, based on our understanding of the laws of God. It has a **very clear focus**, that focus being a desire to be in full agreement and harmony with God’s laws and His way of life. It also has a clear understanding of the infinite, almighty power of God. And as long as there is no knowing transgression of God’s laws, the fear of God actually produces in people a boldness and a confidence in God, so that those who do have the fear of God come “**BOLDLY**” before God’s throne and boldly (i.e. **confidently**) ask God for help (see Hebrews 4:16). People who have the fear of God feel **secure** and confident in God’s promises and in God’s faithfulness. The fear of God is in fact totally devoid of any fearfulness! I have discussed the fear of God at length in a previous article available on my website, which article I wrote about 15 years ago.

**Being fearful**, on the other hand, is a frame of mind that has **no clear focus** at all! While a fear of doing anything that is wrong before God may be included in this frame of mind, it goes far beyond this point. It is a spirit of feeling **generally insecure**, even when we haven’t done anything wrong to warrant this feeling of fear and insecurity; or even when we aren’t feeling any temptation to **PERHAPS** do something we know to be wrong before God. It is an insecurity even when it knows that it is doing what is right before God. It is in fact a **spirit of fear** which is apprehensive of what God may do to us, a fear that **even our best efforts will not be enough** to please God. It has an absolutely wrong perception of what God is really like, and of what God expects from us. And this frame of mind will ultimately be punished by God with **eternal death**, because it is a frame of mind that God simply cannot work with.

So we must beware of being fearful because this is an extremely dangerous condition for anyone to be in before God. People who are fearful simply do not have the fear of God. Being fearful is only a diabolical counterfeit of the fear of God. And being fearful is a spirit that pervades the whole world, and it can also very easily dominate our lives.

## **THE DANGER FOR THOSE WHO ARE FEARFUL**

Let’s start by looking at Revelation 21.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But **the fearful** (Greek “deilos”), and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is **the second death**. (Revelation 21:7-8)

It is significant that God, who spoke these verses, has listed “the fearful” first in this list of eight categories of individuals who will end up in the lake of fire. In plain language: if anything, God views being fearful even more seriously than He does murderers, whoremongers and sorcerers. And what

God's people everywhere need to understand quite clearly is that we in God's Church are tempted FAR, FAR MORE to be fearful than we are ever tempted to become murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers. This is a serious matter!

The Greek word here translated as "the fearful" is the adjective "deilos". This is not the normal Greek word for "fear", which is "phobos" (the verb is "phobeo"). Rather, the Greek adjective "deilos" means: cowardly, timid, no courage, AFRAID to make independent decisions, AFRAID to take independent actions, an absence of confidence.

Are you beginning to understand God's rejection of this frame of mind?

The word "deilos" here refers to a state of being which has no specific focus. It is a frame of mind that is largely independent of external circumstances. There is an inclination towards being timid and lacking courage. This is an outlook that controls how the mind thinks and reasons, and what decisions the mind will make. It is a mind that is easily intimidated. And it is not that uncommon amongst people in God's Church. The chances are that all of us know some people who are like this, people who are easily intimidated and almost always afraid to make their own decisions, people who are constantly looking for assurance.

The word "deilos" is only used in two other places in the NT, in Matthew 8:26 and in Mark 4:40. Both these verses refer to the same incident, when the disciples were on a ship in a storm, while Jesus Christ was asleep. Matthew 8:26 could equally correctly be translated as "why are you so cowardly and timid, o you of little faith"; and Mark 4:40 could be translated equally correctly as "**why are you so cowardly? How is it that you have no faith?**".

Revelation 21:8 makes quite clear that "deilos" describes a frame of mind that is unacceptable to God. This is extremely serious! And it is the opposite of the fear of God, which is bold, confident, courageous, firmly committed to making totally independent decisions for oneself in order to conform to God's laws and God's way of life (i.e. independent of anyone who might want to pressure us to compromise our commitment to God). The boldness in the fear of God is generated by the knowledge that God has accepted our repentance and that God will never leave us or forsake us, provided that we remain faithful. This knowledge emboldens us to step out in faith.

Let's now look at Hebrews 4 for an instruction Paul gave to the Church.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. **Let us therefore come boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Clearly there is no timidity and no cowardice in the right fear of God. Now let's examine a passage where Jesus Christ discussed this matter of fearfulness. This is in the parable of the talents. You are familiar with this story. The two servants who had received five talents and two talents respectively were motivated by the fear of God to go out **boldly** and to work in order to double the talents that had been entrusted to them.

Let's look at the servant who had received just one talent.

But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. (Matthew 25:18)

Keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the One who chose the imagery for this parable. Here Jesus Christ was telling us something specific. It is most unusual for someone in peacetime circumstances to go and bury money somewhere in the earth. WHY would anyone possibly do that, except in very extreme circumstances? Why not keep it under your mattress in your house, or in a locked storage place? Why in the earth?

Jesus Christ wanted to tell us that this man was motivated by FEAR, because it is only fear of loss that would motivate anyone to bury something of value. Once buried, the item of value becomes totally useless! It is simply not available for anyone to use in any way! The question is: WHY would this particular servant possibly have been so fearful?

Let's continue with the parable.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: **And I was afraid** ("phobeo"), and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. (Matthew 25:24-25)

[We might note that this particular servant described himself as "terrified" and "scared" (Greek "phobeo"). He would certainly not have used the word "cowardly" (Greek "deilos") to refer to himself, because in his own eyes his fear was legitimate and perfectly understandable. More on this point later.]

Notice God's response to this servant.

His lord answered and said unto him, **Thou wicked** (Greek "poneros") **and slothful servant**, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: (Matthew 25:26)

The word "wicked" here means: delighting in injury, doing evil to others, dangerous and destructive. The word "slothful" tells us that this individual was also lazy. Christ is telling us that it is in fact dangerous for God's people to be around this individual. This wicked servant's presence has an extremely adverse, negative effect on those who try to live God's way of life. His presence is dangerous to people who are committed to God. That is precisely why God says:

And cast ye **the unprofitable servant** into outer darkness: there shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. (Matthew 25:30)

Understand that whenever Jesus Christ used the expression "weeping and gnashing of teeth", He was referring to the second death in the lake of fire! The expression "outer darkness" when applied to human beings is likewise a reference to the second death. These expressions never apply to those who come up in the second resurrection; they are always a reference to the second death!

This wicked servant with his twisted and distorted view of God and his totally irrational fear would NEVER fit into the Family of God, and destroying him in the lake of fire is really the only option available for him. If that sounds harsh to you, look again at Revelation 21:8.

Keep in mind that this wicked servant wasn't really an evil person by the world's standards: he wasn't necessarily a murderer or an adulterer, and there wasn't anything specific that was bad in his conduct. But he had an overriding spirit of fear, which influenced his whole life and his whole conduct. And it

grossly distorted his perception of God. This point the world would hardly notice, because the world as a whole has exactly the same spirit of fear and the same distorted perception of God. But his distorted and perverted view of God, coupled with his irrational fear, is before God just as serious as if he were a murderer or a sorcerer.

This wicked servant saw God as “a hard man” who was (supposedly) totally motivated by “THE GET-WAY OF LIFE”, reaping where He hadn’t even sown and gathering where He hadn’t even strawed. God is in this man’s view someone who wants to get something for nothing.

Anyone who persists with that idea of God can NEVER be in God’s kingdom, because that is totally and completely Satan’s image of God! It is an extreme insult for the God whose very nature is best expressed by the word “GIVE”, and who was willing to GIVE His only begotten Son in order to make salvation for mankind, including this wicked servant, potentially possible. And at no point anywhere along the line had God ever given this wicked servant, or any other human being for that matter, any justification for harboring such a negative perception of God. There is no justification for being fearful of God, as long as we live our lives in full integrity and honesty. But his is the world’s commonly held view of “the harsh God of the Old Testament”. People who hold that view will not be accepted by God.

This wicked servant convinced himself that his best efforts would not be enough to please God; so therefore he didn’t even bother to try to give it his best shot. He gave up from the word “go”. He told himself that no matter what he might do, it would never be enough to please God. However, a part of his motivation in adopting this perspective was to hide his own laziness; Jesus Christ clearly stated that he was in fact also “slothful”. He used his fear as a justification to make no effort to grow and to overcome. But this excuse will never be accepted by God, as Jesus Christ made quite clear in this parable.

Let’s now look at what Paul told Timothy.

For **God hath not given us the spirit of fear** (Greek “deilia”); but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)

The Greek noun “deilia” comes from the adjective “deilos”, and it means: cowardice and timidity. There is indeed a spirit of cowardice in this world, and that spirit comes directly from Satan. In this verse Paul has clearly isolated this wrong fear as something that assuredly does not come from God. Cowards are totally under Satan’s control, because they will do whatever Satan requires of them, in an attempt to avoid the things they fear.

For example, Satan inspires in people a fear of the unknown. Now WHY should we fear the unknown? After all, God is in full control of His entire creation; so why should we inherently fear the unknown? That is not something a sound mind will do ... be automatically afraid of the unknown. We need to beware of a spirit of timidity.

Notice what David, a man after God’s own heart, was like in this regard:

In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; **I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.** (Psalm 56:4)

The LORD is on my side; **I will not fear: what can man do unto me?** (Psalm 118:6)

David made some mistakes in his life, even as we do. But that did not stop David from being bold and

confident that God was on his side. We must have that same confidence in God.

Here is an instruction from Jesus Christ.

**Fear them not therefore:** for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. ... And **fear not them which kill the body**, but are not able to kill the soul: **but rather fear him** which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (i.e. in the lake of fire). ... **Fear ye not therefore**, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:26-31)

In all four instances here the word “fear” is a translation of the Greek verb “phobeo”. Three times in this passage Jesus Christ instructs us to NOT fear human beings, and once He instructs us to fear God! Notice that in this context Jesus Christ also connected fearing with destruction in the lake of fire.

Where “deilos” and “deilia” refer specifically to timidity and cowardice, the Greek words “phobeo” and “phobos” are more general in referring to fear. These words can refer to both, the right fear and the wrong fear. The key is always the object of the fear. If the fear is directed towards God, a fear of what God will do to us **if** we knowingly disobey God, then it is a good fear. But if the fear is directed towards other human beings, fearing what they may do to us, then it is a bad fear. “Phobos” is the source for our English word “phobias”, a word that refers to illogical and irrational fears.

We need to recognize that ALL PHOBIAS COME FROM SATAN! If we have any irrational fear, that is evidence of Satan’s influence upon our lives. And when you are in the presence of people who have phobias, then you are in the presence of people who are under Satan’s influence to some degree or other!

Let’s consider the word “soul” in the above verse:

While the word “soul” is frequently used in the Bible as a synonym for “body”, in Matthew 10:28 Jesus Christ clearly CONTRASTED “**soul**” with “body”, using the word “soul” to mean “**the POTENTIAL destiny**” for every human life. Notice that God CAN destroy this “soul” in the lake of fire, showing that “soul” obviously does NOT refer to something that is “immortal”. But while “soul” does not imply “immortality”, at the same time it also implies “more than just the physical life”, because it is something that other human beings cannot destroy. To paraphrase verse 28, while human beings can kill us, they can never take from us the potential of a resurrection to immortality, whereas God can kill us and also take from us that potential of a resurrection to immortality. That potential goes beyond this physical life, but it is by no means automatic. The achievement of that potential depends very much on how we live our lives. It is with this meaning that Jesus Christ used the word “soul” in this context.

Notice Paul’s instruction to God’s people on this subject of fear.

So that we may **boldly say**, The Lord is my helper, and **I will not fear** what man shall do unto me. (Hebrews 13:6)

Paul is telling us that we must make an active decision to set our minds to not fear what other people may do to us. This is our calling, to live without fear of other human beings! The reason why we are not to fear people is given in the previous verse.

Let your conversation (i.e. conduct) be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, **I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee**. (Hebrews 13:5)

The reason why we are not to fear is our total trust in God. And we need to recognize that IF we do not fully trust God, THEN God cannot trust us either. God can only trust us if we first trust God.

It should be obvious that it is Satan who wants to instill fears in us and in all human beings. Satan is the real source of all scary stories and scary movies. They are all a part of Satan's strategy to fill us with fears, so that we will then also have irrational fears towards the God who is offering us salvation. Satan presents fears as a perfectly normal part of the human existence. But without guilt there should never be fears!

There is A SPIRIT of fear which comes from Satan. Fear is Satan's main tool in enslaving all mankind. Notice what Paul explained to the Romans.

For ye have not received **the spirit of bondage** (i.e. slavery) again **to fear**; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)

Like all dictators, Satan uses FEAR to enslave humanity. People whose lives are filled with fears ( the fear of ill-health, loss of a job, rejection by other people, loss of money, fear of being attacked, irrational phobias, etc.) are in slavery. We must never ever allow fear to dominate our lives.

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and **be not afraid of their terror**, neither be troubled; (1 Peter 3:14)

Yes, this is a tall order, to not fear when we are faced with threats and suffering. But that's what we have been called to, to not be afraid of people and their actions. Fear is a terrible slave-master.

Let's consider some examples of people fearing.

When the king of Syria wanted to capture Elisha, he sent an army which surrounded the small city where Elisha lived. Notice these responses:

And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, **Fear not**: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, **open his eyes**, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, **Elisha prayed** unto the LORD, and said, **Smite this people**, I pray thee, **with blindness**. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15-18)

While Elisha's servant feared greatly, Elisha had no fear whatsoever, not even the slightest hesitation. Faced with a specific problem (a hostile army that wanted to capture him), Elisha in faith asked God for a very specific form of intervention; please strike these people with blindness! This is an example and a lesson for us. When we are faced with similarly serious threats, there is no reason whatsoever why WE could not and should not ask God for a similar type of direct intervention. God will surely help us today even as He helped Elisha in this situation.

When we look at the life of Elijah, we see where Elijah called fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:37-38). Later the same day Jezebel, as Satan's instrument, threatened Elijah's life, and Elijah became fearful and fled for his life.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. And when he saw that, **he arose, and went for his life**, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Kings 19:2-3)

So Elijah wasn't immune to fearing for his life. We know the account where God then confronted Elijah with the question: what are you doing here, Elijah (verse 13)? In other words: why on earth have you fled from Jezebel, what are you afraid of? At a later point Elijah boldly faced groups of 50 soldiers who wanted to arrest him. Twice Elijah called fire from heaven to destroy those who wanted to arrest him. It was because an angel told Elijah "go down with him and be not afraid of him" (2 Kings 1:15) that Elijah didn't call fire from heaven a third time. In this episode Elijah did not fear at any time.

Similarly, Abraham asked his wife Sarah to present herself as his sister because Abraham feared for his life (Genesis 20:2, 11). At other times Abraham displayed great bravery and boldness. The point is that it isn't always easy to not be fearful in certain situations, but that's what we must strive for nonetheless, to not fear any other human beings. We must always keep in mind that if we still have any fears at all, then we are still in slavery to Satan.

Let's now consider a number of points that show why fearfulness is such a huge potential problem for true Christians.

### **1) FEARS PROVE THAT PEOPLE ARE STILL RECEPTIVE TO SATAN'S WAY OF THINKING.**

God told Adam and Eve that all human beings would have to die at some point. Death is the unavoidable termination of the physical human life. But God did NOT intend for human beings to fear death. **The fear** of death is actually a curse! And the fear of death comes from Satan. Notice what Paul explained:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who **through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage** (i.e. slavery). (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The fear of death is a Satan-imposed slavery on all human beings. By getting us to actually FEAR death Satan coerces us into conduct and decisions and perspectives that are not sound and right before God, decisions that are not the products of a sound mind. Death should be our graduation from this physical life, not something to fear.

Let's see Satan's thinking clearly exposed.

And **Satan** answered the LORD, and **said**, Skin for skin, yea, **all that a man hath will he give for his life**. (Job 2:4)

That's how Satan thinks and reasons. This is the premise on which Satan has enslaved all mankind. And that is the thinking that humanity has accepted as perfectly logical. It is the premise violent criminals rely on when they say: unless you give me what I want, I will kill you or your child or spouse or all the hostages, etc. It is all based on the premise that "all that a man has will he give for his life".

Do YOU also accept that premise? If YOUR life is threatened, are you prepared to give everything you

have in order to save your life? If you are, you are clearly still in slavery to Satan! All criminals work for Satan! And so they will obviously use Satan's philosophy, which is to threaten our lives in order to pressure us to comply with their evil demands.

Those who fear death are Satan's slaves. And since the whole world fears death it follows that the whole world is enslaved by Satan. It is **the fear of death** that has entrenched Satan as the "god of this present age" (see 2 Corinthians 4:4), not some kind of special appointment by God to that position! Satan is a dictator and not an appointee, and his dictatorial power depends on instilling fear in human beings. But Satan is not the "god" of all those who reject the fears he tries to impose on all of us. Now the only way to break Satan's slavery and to reject his status as "god of this age" is to not fear what man may do to us, and to do so by relying on the power of God.

Notice what Paul wrote.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:26)

Death is an enemy, yes, but it is not an enemy we are to fear! With God on our side we are not supposed to fear any enemy, and that includes death.

Here is an admonition Jesus Christ gave to the people in the Smyrna era of the Church:

**Fear none of those things** which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: **be thou faithful unto death**, and I will give thee a crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

This is a clear instruction to not fear death. Satan's statement in Job 2:4 is not to be true for God's people! It is extremely important that we don't have a spirit of fear, because fears prove that Satan still controls and manipulates our thinking.

Let's look again at Matthew 8:26, where Jesus Christ said to His disciples: "WHY are you so cowardly, o you of little faith?". The point here is that the fact that the disciples all feared for their lives was clear proof that they had no faith. This was a lesson for them, and it should also be a lesson for us, since we too are likely to be cowardly under similar circumstances, right?

Notice God's testimony for those who will be in the first resurrection.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and **they loved not their lives unto the death**. (Revelation 12:11)

Those who will be in the first resurrection did not make their decisions based on being fearful for their lives. They have overcome Satan's fear-imposed slavery. That is what the martyr Stephen was like.

And **they stoned Stephen**, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, **lay not this sin to their charge**. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:59-60)

When Stephen was willing to kneel down before God, it in effect made it easier for them to stone him, but it proved that Stephen did not fear death. Obviously, this was extremely tough! But Christ never said



that it would be easy. And we have been called to reject the fear of death just as surely as Stephen rejected that fear.

Here is something the Apostle John explained.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because **fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.** (1 John 4:18)

As long as we have fears we cannot really grow in our understanding of God's mind and God's way of thinking. Fears shackle our minds to flawed ways of thinking and reasoning. Fears are clear evidence that we still think like Satan thinks!

Consider James 4:7.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** (James 4:7)

We must resist Satan's spirit of fear. When we do resist Satan, he flees because he fears those who, with the power of God on our side, resist him. He flees because he has no hold on those who don't fear him, and who reject his spirit of fear.

## **2) FEARS ARE THE GREATEST EVIDENCE OF A LACK OF FAITH.**

Paul explained that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). And fear is always the clearest evidence of a lack of faith. Faith and fears are mutually exclusive. When we are fully convinced that God is on our side, then all fears just disappear.

Recall the example of Peter walking on water.

And he said, Come. And when **Peter** was come down out of the ship, he **walked on the water**, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, **he was afraid**; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, **O thou of little faith**, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:29-31)

As long as Peter had faith, he was able to walk on the water towards Jesus Christ. But once he focused on the actual circumstances he doubted and became fearful. And as he became fearful, so his faith disappeared. Peter became afraid of the circumstances. The lesson is that we must not allow circumstances to cause us to fear. Of course this is far easier said than done. But that doesn't change the answer, nor does it ensure for us leniency for failure. The answer doesn't change irrespective of the degree of difficulty. And to consciously reject the spirit of fear, which spirit has engulfed the whole world all around us, is indeed a tall order. But that's what we've been called to.

It is faith in God that will help us to cope with that "tall order".

Here is another principle we should keep in mind.

**The wicked flee** when no man pursueth: but **the righteous are bold as a lion.** (Proverbs 28:1)

The wicked obviously don't have any real faith in God, and they flee because the spirit of fear fills them

with constant fears and insecurities, even when there isn't anything to fear. But living in integrity before God (i.e. "the righteous") gives us faith, and faith gives us a boldness and confidence in God, a confidence that we have nothing to fear. God has called all those in His Church to become "as bold as a lion". Faith does not walk by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

### **3) FEARS ARE THE EVIDENCE THAT WE DON'T TRUST GOD TO HELP US.**

This is a continuation of the previous point. We should understand that God is always on the side of the bold and the brave (who are also living in integrity; I'm not talking about "bold criminals"), because their conduct shows that they are resisting and rejecting Satan's spirit of fearfulness. And the God who is aware of every single hair on our heads (Matthew 10:30) always takes note when people resist ANY aspect of Satan's influences.

So when we boldly step out in faith, we are showing God that we really trust Him to be on our side. We fully believe what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19.

But **my God shall supply all your need** according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 4:19)

When we still have fears then we don't fully believe this statement. We have to become like David, who said in Psalm 23:

Yea, though I walk through **the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil**: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

David trusted God implicitly with his life. We too must have that same trust in God, that we also place our lives in God's hands. And a prerequisite for this approach is that we set our minds "to fear no evil".

### **4) FEARFUL PEOPLE THEMSELVES CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**

This is extremely serious. Fearful people simply cannot be trusted to make decisions based on what is right and what is wrong, or based on what is the best course of action. Their fears always take priority in the decisions they make. They in effect make the decisions that Satan is pressuring them to make. And THAT is one major reason why God cannot work with fearful people; they are unreliable.

It is an uncomfortable feeling to be around people who are constantly fearful. Have you ever tried to dispel a small child's groundless fears about some totally insignificant thing? Have you ever tried to do this with a fearful adult? Have you noted how irrationally such fearful people behave? Have you ever witnessed an adult making a totally wrong decision because of some or other fear? Many people have made financial decisions, job decisions, marriage decisions, child-rearing decisions, housing decisions, nutritional decisions, health decisions, etc. based on certain fears they harbored. And **the decisions they made in those situations were bad decisions!** That is why Satan inspires this fearfulness, to get people to make bad decisions in order to ruin their lives.

Let's look at one example which graphically illustrates how irrational the thinking of fearful people really is. Let's consider a woman who has **anorexia nervosa**.

The real cause of anorexia is **A FEAR OF BECOMING FAT!** The woman is in all likelihood already as much as 15% below the normal body weight for her size, but she is **CONVINCED** that she is still fat, and when we point out how skinny she really is, she invariably responds with denial and with anger. You've

read articles about this and you are familiar with this information, and there is no need for me to provide more details.

The real cause of anorexia is a spirit of fear from Satan, who is intent on destroying that person's life. And that spirit of fear has warped the woman's mind, and she cannot be trusted to make sound decisions. It doesn't matter that everybody else can see how wrong her perception is; as long as she is enslaved by that spirit of fear, she will **vehemently** argue against the facts! In this situation all of us can see how wrong this woman is in her perceptions, and how self-destructive her response really is. But she cannot see that because of the spirit of fear.

Now listen carefully.

The obviously flawed, irrational and vehement response of someone with the condition of anorexia (obvious to all objective outside observers) is exactly the same with every other fear! **People with every other fear respond just as irrationally and just as vehemently as someone with anorexia when their fears are challenged!**

The main difference between the fear that produces anorexia and most other fears is that the evidence for this irrationality is not nearly as obvious as it is with anorexia. And therefore it is also more difficult to get people to see how their irrational fears have perverted their judgment and their decisions. And any challenges to the soundness of their fear-based decisions almost invariably meets with the same vehemence as is the case with the anorexic person denying the obvious facts. In the decisions that fearful people make, their fears always take priority, and so they will make bad decisions.

Can you understand this when you consider some people who you know are fearful? And are you able to grasp that **if you yourself have any fears**, then you yourself are also very likely to respond just as irrationally as the anorexic person when YOUR fears are challenged? You know that the anorexic person will vehemently deny being skinny. Will you, if you have any fears in your life, also deny that your fears pressure you to respond irrationally when those fears are involved?

I am not trying to put you down or to make you look bad. I am trying to help you to understand how and why a fearful mind makes bad decisions, all the while deceiving itself about the real facts of the situation. Can you objectively look at yourself? You don't have to admit anything to any other person. But please examine your own mind as objectively as possible. And if you know that you do have some fears, then face them and face the possible bad decisions you might have made or are likely to make because of those specific fears. One example will suffice: a person who FEARS not finding a mate and staying single is a very high risk for making a bad decision regarding marrying someone they then may meet.

If you can really understand what I am trying to explain here, then this has vast ramifications. For example: there are people in God's Church, including some ministers, who FEAR that certain challenges to established teachings may in fact be correct. For example, they FEAR that the Jewish calendar is not what God wants us to use, or they FEAR the evidence against certain other specific accepted teachings. So when such people FEAR the truth about something they believe, how are they likely to respond?

They will respond just like the anorexic person responds to the pressure to start eating properly, i.e. with anger and with a rejection of the facts they cannot really refute.

Their fears don't allow them to see the truth, to see that what they have always accepted as true is in fact wrong. Their fears prevent them from seeing just how flawed their foolish arguments in support of the erroneous teaching really are. And they will vehemently deny all the evidence that exposes just how

wrong their current belief really is.

So whenever you see someone who angrily denies the facts that challenge what they firmly believe, be that in the Church or be that outside of the Church, think of the person with anorexia. That is what fears do to our minds! It is only by resisting the fear of the consequences of considering that our present understanding may in some cases be flawed, that we can become free, free to accept whatever may be the truth.

## **5) FEARFUL PEOPLE INEVITABLY MAKE WRONG DECISIONS.**

The logical follow-on from the above point is that it is inevitable that fearful people will make wrong decisions. To be very clear:

**WHENEVER FEAR IS THE MOTIVATION FOR A DECISION, THEN THAT WILL ALWAYS BE THE WRONG DECISION! ALWAYS!**

As pointed out above, fears distort our judgment, because what is right and what is wrong is totally independent of what we may fear. In 1 Samuel 15:24 king Saul finally acknowledged that he had made the wrong decision “because **I feared** the people and obeyed their voice”. The result of **that fear-motivated decision** was that God rejected Saul. God does not accept fear as a valid justification for disobedience.

Satan’s explicit intention in trying to instill a spirit of fear in people is to get all people to make wrong decisions in order to destroy our lives. For example:

When our lives are threatened and we then make decisions based on fearing for our lives (comply with the demands of criminals, agree to do things that are wrong, etc.), then we always make the wrong decisions. We need to recognize that it is Satan who is presenting us with the threats, and he attempts to intimidate us . Do we really have to comply with the demands of people who threaten to mug us or to stab us or to shoot us? WHY? Would God want us to comply with the demands of such criminals? Or would God want us to see the “horses and chariots of fire” (2 Kings 6:17) that are round about us at that very point in time? Would God at such a point answer our request to strike our attackers “with blindness” or “to smite them with fire from heaven”? Why would God NOT answer such a request from one of His people in need? Were such events in the Old Testament to be examples (i.e. **precedents**) for us or not?

Are we supposed to fear the criminal with a gun, or should the gun-toting criminal fear the God whose servants we are? Let’s get our priorities right here, shall we? Just who REALLY has more reason to fear: God’s people or violent criminals?

If we make the wrong decision because someone is pointing a gun at us, just how are we to understand Matthew 16:25?

**For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 16:25)**

Every time our lives are threatened, the issue becomes one that revolves around “for my sake”. “For my sake” is not at all limited to situations that involve standing up for our beliefs when they are openly challenged. The reason why “for my sake” is not limited to such situations is that whenever our lives are threatened we are forced to deal with Satan’s spirit of fear. And it is Jesus Christ’s instruction that we

confront and resist that spirit of fear, regardless of the circumstances in which this becomes an issue.

Do we really feel that it is right for us to comply with the demands of criminals, simply because those criminals are pointing a gun at our heads, or are holding a knife to our throats? Why should any of God's people EVER give in to the demands of criminals who happen to threaten us? Why?

We have been conditioned by movies and by stories that, if someone is threatened with a gun, then the (supposedly) obvious response is to comply with the criminal's demands. After all, we (supposedly) have no other option. And there isn't any point in us dying needlessly, is there? Movies show us this approach all the time: the bad guy holds the gun to the good guy's girl's head, and the good guy supposedly has no other option but to throw down his own gun. Movies like that condition us to assume that it is the normal and only logical response to comply with people who threaten our lives, because it is Satan who wants to force us to comply. Too bad nobody told Elisha that this is how he was supposed to respond to being surrounded by a whole hostile army.

Do any of us today actually have the faith that Elisha had? Are any of us actually prepared, if our lives are threatened, to resist making the wrong decision? I am telling you in no uncertain terms that if you are living your life in full integrity before God (falling short at times, which all of us do, does not necessarily affect our integrity), then God will be on your side in times of extreme threats to your life, in exactly the same way that God was on the side of Elijah and Elisha! Therefore **be bold when you are threatened!** And ask God for very specific intervention, doubting nothing.

And don't fear! God will neither leave you nor forsake you! So don't fear! Leave the fearing to those who are on Satan's side!

It is also good to understand that the people who attempt to make us fearful (i.e. they threaten us in some way or other) typically are fearful themselves. THEY FEAR, and that is why they threaten us. Most threats are made by people who fear something!

Consider also all the advertising that constantly confronts us. Most advertising follows one of two appeals: EITHER the advertising is aimed at getting us to lust and to covet whatever is being advertised; OR the advertising is aimed at getting us to fear something negative happening to us.

Looking at advertising that is aimed at creating a fear in us: the advertisers know full well that IF they can in one way or another make us afraid or insecure, THEN we are far more likely to make a dumb decision, based on our fears, that dumb decision being to buy their product! Without fears and feelings of insecurity most people would be immune to the majority of these stupid fear ads. And obviously, if we are among those people where the ads did not persuade us to fear something, then we will be in the group that recognizes how stupid those ads actually are, appealing to immature, frightened and insecure souls, with the barely disguised greed of the producers of the advertised products being glaringly obvious.

Do you know what product is sold more often in America than any other? That product is actually intangible, and it is very successfully marketed under the slogan "**PEACE OF MIND**". Advertisers know that most people have a spirit of fear, and so they aim their advertising at that spirit of fear, and for a price (usually exorbitant for what you get, which is frequently nothing worthwhile) they offer you "peace of mind". Appeals to peace of mind are justification to charge more for just about any product imaginable. God's people should not need any product in order to have peace of mind. Peace of mind is not something money can really buy, because money cannot buy freedom from Satan's spirit of fear. It takes God's spirit of power to set us free from the spirit of fear.

We must not allow anything to intimidate us. It reminds me of a set of glasses I bought some years ago.

The glasses commemorate the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States Marine Corps. The back of the glasses have the motto "I REFUSE TO TIP-TOE THROUGH LIFE JUST TO ARRIVE SAFELY AT DEATH" inscribed on them. While this statement can certainly convey arrogance and conceit and a false confidence in one's own supposed powers and abilities, the general principle expressed by that motto is: don't live your life based on fears! And that is certainly a good and valid principle. God's people should never be the ones who "tip-toe through life".

"Tip-toeing through life" expresses a fear to make decisions, a sense of insecurity for which there is no rational justification, and a lack of confidence in the promises God has given to us.

The only right fear is a fear of the consequences if we do what is wrong before God. There should be no other fears in our lives. As Paul said: "what shall we then say to these things ? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Let's now look at different ways of preaching.

## **6) PREACHING THAT IS AIMED AT MAKING PEOPLE FEARFUL**

By now you hopefully clearly understand that a spirit of fear comes from Satan and not from God. But what about **preaching that makes people fearful**? What about the charismatic preachers in this world who have intimidated church-goers with sermons of "fire and brimstone"? Is that the fear of God or is that Satan's spirit of fearfulness?

And what about preachers in the churches of God over the past 50 years, whose fiery sermons scared the living daylights out of many of us? For a number of men giving such fiery sermons was their ticket to promotion up the ranks in the ministry. Such "fiery sermons" were usually viewed as evidence of inspiration, and some members would dutifully tell such ministers afterwards "how inspired" their sermon had been. But was that really the case? Had GOD actually inspired the man to intimidate the congregation? Would God do that? Is that the kind of obedience God is looking for, one based on fear and intimidation?

If you were a part of the Church of God between the 1950's and the 1980's, a period during which such sermons were fairly common, then you need to understand this matter very clearly.

First of all, we should recognize that in most cases such intimidating sermons (including those given by worldly preachers) were aimed at getting people to reject doing certain things (dancing, playing cards, drinking alcoholic drinks, fornication, certain dress styles or hair styles, etc.). The sermons spell out dire consequences for us if we do not comply with the speaker's points. In effect, people are scared into compliance with the speaker's instructions, which instructions may in many cases even be valid. But for many people the real motivation for compliance with the speaker's instructions (whether valid or not) then becomes NOT the fear of God, but a spirit of fearfulness, a fear of the consequences the speaker presented so vividly in his sermon. In effect, for many people the result was that they did the right things for the wrong reasons, because a spirit of fearfulness is ALWAYS the wrong reason for any action. We should never confuse a spirit of fearfulness with the fear of God because these two are poles apart.

I have deliberately included a reference to worldly preachers in the above section, because the tactics employed by preachers in God's Church were identical to the tactics employed by such worldly preachers. And some of the preachers in God's Church during those years had actually previously been preachers in some of the world's churches, and they brought "the tools of their trade" with them into God's Church. Surprised? Anyway, the results achieved by preachers in God's Church were also identical to the results achieved by such fiery worldly preachers, those results being a spirit of fear that motivated compliance with whatever the preacher happened to demand. The same spirit of fear that

motivated people in the world's churches to reject dancing and card playing and all alcoholic drinks also motivated people in God's Church to reject fornication and other ungodly practices. We need to understand that **THE END RESULTS NEVER JUSTIFY THE MEANS!** Achieving the right results by using unacceptable means is just as bad as achieving the wrong results by any means. It is never right to use the spirit of fear, which comes from Satan (see 2 Timothy 1:7) to achieve obedience to God's laws! That's what "the fearful" being at the top of the list in Revelation 21:8 tells us in no uncertain terms! And you need to understand where we as a Church have come from.

During that period of time in the Church of God the speakers that were considered to be the most effective of all, were those men who could inspire a spirit of fear that had no specific focus. If they could make the congregation feel generally afraid, fearful, insecure in their relationship with God, apprehensive of their chances "to make it", inspire a feeling of guilt when there was no specific guilt to examine, etc., and to do so without even focusing on specific things people were to do or not do, then they were almost certain to advance in the ministry. That's how highly esteemed the ability to instill fear in a congregation had become.

In those years none of us understood that all that such speakers were doing in most cases was to instill the wrong fear, a spirit of fearfulness, in people. And that wrong fear had negative consequences.

If the above sounds a bit harsh to you, then we need to apply the principle Jesus Christ told us to apply in this type of situation. In Matthew 7:15 Christ warned us to "beware of false prophets" who come to us "in sheep's clothing", but inwardly they are "ravening wolves". The most obvious effect **wolves** have on sheep is that they **instill fear in the sheep**. And sheep are not supposed to fear their shepherd.

These are Jesus Christ's instructions. To help us identify false ministers, Christ said the following in the next verse:

### **YOU SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS!**

This point Christ then repeated in verse 20.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:20)

This principle applies to all ministers. So let's examine "the fruits" of all those powerful speakers that instilled fear in the congregations of God's Church during those years.

First of all: **where are those men today?**

Some of them left God's Church even before Mr. Armstrong died in 1986. And almost all have left since then. Some of them accepted the heretical teachings that were introduced into the Church, and some of them even morphed into very mild speakers, trying to get away from their previous reputations as "powerful speakers".

So where are those fear-instilling ministers today? They have pretty well disappeared. So what fruits are there in their own lives and in their personal commitment to God for us to examine? In most cases, not very much.

Okay, so **what about all the people** that came into the Church through their powerful speaking? What about all those people who listened to their fear-instilling sermons?

In this regard we need to **distinguish between** the **preaching** and the **responses** to that preaching. For example, we may be exposed to preaching that presents us with a spirit of fear. However, we may resist

that spirit of fear, and instead respond correctly with the fear of God. We can do exactly the same when confronted by a spirit of fearfulness in society in general; we are free to respond with the fear of God by resisting the pressure to become fearful.

The point here is this: The general approach in many of the fear-instilling sermons we heard in those years was identical to the approach you could find in some of the fire and brimstone sermons in the world's churches, that approach being: unless you do exactly what I am telling you to do, here is a graphic description of what will happen to you. That is the approach of instilling fear. However, we could resist becoming fearful, and instead respond with the fear of God, a boldness and a confidence in God's promises because we know that, in spite of our weaknesses, we are living our lives in integrity before God. Not haughty or arrogant or self-confident, but an unshaken confidence in the promises of God, coupled with the boldness that the Apostle Paul speaks about.

So even when the preaching was of the wrong type, we were not forced to respond with the wrong fear; no, we still had the freedom to respond correctly with the fear of God.

To get back to the people: there is a reason why so many people who came into the Church of God in the 50's and 60's and 70's have since then turned their backs on the Church of God and the true teachings of the Bible, and instead have "turned unto fables" (see 2 Timothy 4:3-4). Far too many of those people were "scared into the Church" by these "powerful speakers". **THAT WAS THE PROBLEM!** They came into the Church not because of the fear of God, but because they had been pressured to become fearful! They were intimidated into accepting the Church's teachings, being fearful of the consequences that were presented to them if they rejected those teachings. **In effect, they had come into the Church for the wrong reasons!**

Now others amongst us heard those same sermons, but we refused to become fearful. Instead we responded with the true fear of God, which always, always, always retains a confidence in God's dealings with us. Even when David sinned and fell short, David never lost that confidence in God's faithfulness. That confidence in God identifies the true fear of God in us. And we must never allow any preaching to cause us to let go of that confidence!

So the fact that over 80% of all the people who came into the Church of God in the 50's and 60's and 70's and 80's have turned their backs on the true teachings of the Bible is in very large measure, I believe, due to those people having come into the Church with a spirit of fearfulness. And it was especially the "powerful speakers" in those years that were instrumental in those people having this spirit of fearfulness.

So when, after Mr. Armstrong's death, the new leadership methodically dismantled obedience to God and His laws, suddenly their fearfulness disappeared. And since their fearfulness was the main reason why they had accepted God's laws in the first place, therefore without that fearfulness they no longer had any reason to abide by God's laws. They had never had the real fear of God; all along they had only possessed Satan's counterfeit spirit of fearfulness, a spirit that had been nurtured by the powerful fear-instilling preachers.

And so these people started to leave the Church in vast numbers, mostly going nowhere. Those people who had the true fear of God all along, on the other hand, stayed in the Church. Fearfulness was not their motivation for obedience to God, and so nothing changed for them; they continued to obey God's laws as before the time when the new leadership did their utmost to discredit God's laws.

The true religion is based on the fear of God, but at the same time it is assuredly **NOT A FEAR RELIGION!** Far too many people have mistaken a spirit of fear for the fear of God. The true religion is marked by faith and trust and confidence in God, with the secure knowledge that we have nothing to fear



as long as we don't knowingly disobey God's laws and instructions. The fear of God is secure in knowledge which God revealed very near the beginning of man's existence, namely that **WHEN WE DO WELL, THEN WE WILL BE ACCEPTED BY GOD!** That's what God explained to Cain back in Genesis 4:7. And that is what the true fear of God is confident of. It is a statement of assurance and security.

The problem with preaching is not that it contains references to the penalties God will impose, including the fearful events that still lie ahead of us today. At the start of this article I mentioned specific things that God will punish with the second death in the lake of fire. Mentioning any of these things in our preaching is not a problem. A problem arises when the whole focus of a sermon is to leave the audience scared half to death, when they are clearly not involved in the things for which these fearful events will be the penalties from God. Terrible times still lie ahead of us, we know that. But we who are obeying God in the integrity of our hearts should never fear those times, and no preacher in God's Church should attempt to get us to be fearful about those things, because Jesus Christ's unwavering instruction to us is "FEAR THEM NOT" (Matthew 10:26).

So unless you are knowingly compromising your commitments to God, **you have no reason to ever become fearful because of any sermon you hear from any minister.** Yes, we all fall short and still sin. But if we face our shortcomings honestly and determine to continue in integrity before God, then we should never allow any preaching to make us fearful. Beware of subtle attempts to make you fearful.

There is one more point to consider.

## **7) FEARS ARE THE MAJOR REASON FOR MOST LIES.**

When we are tempted to lie, usually that is because we are afraid of people knowing the truth; the truth about us and what we have done or neglected to do and what we think. It is fear which pressures us to make the wrong decision (which in this case is to lie).

Notice something Jesus Christ said.

And ye shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free.** (John 8:32)

In what way does the truth make us free? Have you ever seriously thought about this? What the truth sets us free from is **fears!** People who have fears, any fears, are not free. It is only when we have no fears that we are truly free! It is only when we have no fears about the truth being known, the truth about us and what we have done and what we may think and believe, that THEN we can be truly free.

True freedom is only possible in the total absence of all the wrong fears. Now the reason why we may fear the truth being known is because the truth may reveal some guilt or some inadequacy or neglect or carelessness or shortcoming on our part. Lies enslave us because lies result in a fear of the truth becoming known. Without a fear of the truth becoming known we would be tempted far less to lie. For example, without a fear of the truth becoming known, people could never be blackmailed, and people could not be pressured to do things they don't really want to do.

Fear is a terrible slave-master!

And then there is the fear that we won't make it into God's kingdom.

Yes, all of us need to beware of being self-confident. We need to beware of the attitude of the Pharisee who thought he was better than other people and that his "good deeds" had earned him a special relationship with God (see Luke 18:9-12). God has indeed called us to have a very special relationship

with Him; but that calling is not something we deserve or have somehow earned.

God has called us in His mercy, and we are just as frail and weak as other people. But we **MUST** live our lives in integrity before God, in spite of falling short at various times, and that integrity gives us the confidence that God will resurrect us (i.e. if we die before Christ's second coming) to immortal life in His eternal Family. And with Paul we are to have the confidence that "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: **and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing**" (2 Timothy 4:8).

It is Satan who wants God's people to feel: give up, what's the use? You'll never make it. Just look at you, you always fall short. So go ahead and bury that one talent; at least then you won't lose it.

Faced with such negative thoughts, we need to say (and fully believe!) with the Apostle Paul "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

### **NEVER GIVE IN TO SUCH FEARS!**

So when we put all these points together, we should be able to see that people who are still fearful are going to be a major problem for God. It is Satan who broadcasts a spirit of fearfulness to this world, with the explicit goal of enslaving all human beings. We need to recognize that such a spirit of fearfulness will warp people's minds, to the point where people will make decisions that are wrong before God.

Now of course, all of us, including me, at times still have some fears. None of us are immune, and we can think of men like Abraham and Elijah in certain difficult situations. But all of us need to get a grip on our fears. And when we can recognize that we are being pressured to fear someone or some thing, then we need to look to God in faith. Revelation 21:8 is not an empty threat. God will never accept a spirit of fear. And we should recognize that our lives are **ALWAYS** in God's hands, whether we trust God or not. And we are far better off when we resist the pressure to make a foolish decision because of fears.

When we resist Satan and the fears he attempts to impose on us, then he will also flee from us.

Frank W. Nelte