

Self-Control and Defending Yourself against Fear and Worry

Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Timothy 1:7

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All of us have had a common experience in this life: we have been afraid. There was no fear as long as Adam walked in obedience to God and enjoyed the love and communion of God, but when Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fear made its first appearance in the heart of man (**Genesis 3:9-10**). When sin was committed, fear paralyzed the heart of man (beginning with a slavish fear of God, and then a fear of everything else followed thereafter). Try as we may to disguise our fear by laughter, anger, wealth, being around people, drunkenness, pleasure, body-building, martial arts, or hypnosis, fear is now bred into the very fabric of man's nature.

Fear even makes us a terror to ourselves. Being all alone can at times be the occasion of our greatest fears. For then we have time to replay in our minds those Goliath-like fears that shake us from the top of our heads to our trembling knees.

What are your fears today? From what are you running? Are you trying to escape a guilty conscience, an overpowering individual or group of individuals in your life? Do you fear the loss of work, the loss of family, or the loss of your home? Or perhaps you fear the ruin of your health, or the loss of freedom in this country. You may fear the consequences of being wrong or even the consequences of being right. Maybe you are overcome with a fear of the threat of war, of economic disaster, or of death.

Regardless of what your fears may be, today we want to face those fears (rather than pretending they do not exist) and learn the divine way to fortify the wall of godly self-control against all those fears. The fruit of the

Spirit of temperance/self-control has been given to all Christians for the purpose of defending your heart and mind against the attack of fear, worry, and distress over what you and your family face or may face. Fear of man or circumstances will not only destroy your health, but it is also a sin into which we have all sadly fallen, even as Christians. Though falling into fear, we cannot remain in fear, for fear (like all sin) shall not have dominion over us, because Jesus has legally conquered our fear through His death and resurrection. Fear is a defeated foe. Thus, the Christian and nonchristian are distinguished by what characterizes their life: fear or boldness (**Proverbs 28:1; Revelation 21:8** [who through fear of losing their friends, family, approval, jobs, possessions, and life cast Christ and His truth aside in order to temporarily hold on to what they must eventually leave behind at death]).

Our main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) What God Has Not Given to Us—Fear; (2) What God Has Given to Us—Power, Love, and a Sound Mind.

I. What God Has Not Given to Us—Fear (“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear” 2 Timothy 1:7).

A. As we consider our text this Lord's Day, Paul delivers his last will and testament to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy.

1. Timothy had been designated for assignment in Ephesus to firmly establish the church that had been earlier planted by Paul in that important city. Paul writes from a Roman prison knowing that the end of his life is drawing to a close. These are in effect Paul's dying words to Timothy as he faces the sword of Nero for having been faithful to Christ in preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God. Paul in this final letter is passing along the baton in this great relay race of the faith to the next generation through Timothy.

2. Interestingly, though Timothy had been hand-picked by Paul to accompany him and had been chosen by Paul to build up and establish the Church of Ephesus, Timothy apparently did not manifest the same boldness and courage of iron that was so evident in Paul's life. Timothy (it would seem) was more like many of us by nature: timid, shy, and fearful of others. Thus, Paul uses this letter to admonish and encourage his beloved son not to be ashamed of Christ or of Paul as Christ's prisoner, but rather to stand against the temptation to be fearful and timid in the face of opposition that he would face (2 Timothy 1:8).

3. Timothy was a younger man and was distressed to some degree in facing people and problems in the Church of Ephesus (**1 Timothy 4:12** ["Let no man **continue** despising thy youth"]). We get a little further insight into the timidity of Timothy from Paul's words to the Corinthian Church (**1 Corinthians 16:10-11** ["Let no man therefore despise him"—aorist tense because Timothy is not yet among the Corinthians]). Perhaps this fear of others also contributed in some degree to the stomach problems with which Timothy was afflicted (**1 Timothy 5:23**). Many of us should be able to identify with Timothy's fear of people and circumstances that faced him—I know I can. Timothy was clearly gifted and qualified as a minister of Christ, otherwise Paul would not have laid his hands upon Timothy to ordain him to this service of Christ (2 Timothy 1:6). Dear ones, no matter how gifted one is, no matter how well trained one is, no matter how morally and biblically qualified one is to serve Christ, if one is controlled by his fears, he will not speak or if he does speak, he will not speak that which offends those listening (he will compromise, he will avoid the truth when it hurts, he will tickle the ears of people so as to fill the seats and to keep the financial support coming in).

4. So in the preceding verses of this first chapter, Paul expresses his longing to see his beloved son in the faith, Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4), recounts the godly heritage of Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5),

and calls Timothy to remember and to exercise the gift of his calling as a minister despite the opposition he may face (2 Timothy 1:6).

B. Paul then begins verse 7 with the word “For”. Here is the reason why Timothy can and must exercise his ministerial gift boldly: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear.” Paul is emphasizing to Timothy that the fear he has was not the gift of God to him—God gifted him to be a courageous minister, but did not gift him (or any of us) with fear so as to negate the gifts he has given to us to use to serve Him and others. The Greek word for “fear” is *deilia*. The various nuances of this word move from fear to timidity, shyness, cowardice—in other words, fretting about having to stand before people, to deal with people, and to resolve difficult situations involving people—exactly what Timothy would be called to do as a minister of Jesus Christ.

C. Let us consider briefly, What Fear is Not and then What Fear Is.

1. **What Fear is Not.**

a. Fear is not a due respect for lawful authority (**Proverbs 24:21**). This applies to all lawful authority (whether in the family, or in the church, or at work, or in the civil realm), for it is founded upon the Fifth Commandment (“Honor thy father and thy mother”).

b. Fear is not a cautious determination to avoid danger, sin, or temptation. This is actually keeping the Sixth Commandment wherein we are taught to endeavor by all lawful means to preserve our own life and the life of others. Therefore, walking away from a fight, reasoning with one who is angry, or fleeing persecution in order to preserve one’s life is not sinful in itself, as long the testimony for Christ is not abandoned or forsaken in the process (**Matthew 10:23**). Consider the Nicodemites who did abandon their testimony to avoid persecution.

c. Fear is not a serious concern or burden for oneself or others (**Galatians 6:2**). God places such burdens upon our hearts not that

we might plunge ourselves into fear, but rather cast ourselves and others upon the strong arm of the Lord. It is when we do not cast these burdens upon the Lord that we are led into sinful worry and anxiety (**1 Peter 5:7**).

d. Fear (a sinful fear) is not a holy reverence for the Lord, for God has indeed given us the spirit of a holy fear of Him (**Proverbs 9:10; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:28**). This holy fear is an awe and wonder of God's greatness, God's holiness, God's mercy—the absolute perfection of His attributes. This fear is a holy fear wherein we take God seriously. We take His promises, His commandments, and His warnings seriously. We treat Him not with disrespect or irreverence by our thoughts, words, or deeds, but rather seek to preserve the infinite dignity of His name and works by which He reveals Himself.

2. **What Fear is.**

a. Fear is being overwhelmed by anxiety, worry, or even terror of people or circumstances in life or death. It is to be controlled by our fears, led by our fears, tormented by our fears. Consider how Elijah fled from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19). This fear leads us to run away and to hide from those people or circumstances that threaten us. Though Peter did not literally run in fear, he did in a sense run each time he was confronted with knowing the Lord, and ran to a denial of the Lord 3 times.

b. Fear is to see the giants in the land but not to see the God who made the giants and can crush the giants with a single word. Consider the servant of Elisha who only saw the armies of Syria gathered around the town of Dothan (**2 Kings 6:16-17**). This fear at times paralyzes us so that we cannot get out of bed, cannot make a decision, and cannot utter a word (or if there is a word, it is a word of compromise).

c. Fear is also a slavish dread of a condemning God. This servile fear may result from one actually being under the Covenant of Works wherein one awaits the infinite judgment of God's consuming fire. Or it may result from one who although redeemed from the curse of the

law by Jesus Christ yet mentally removes himself from under the Covenant of Grace (where Christ accomplishes all righteousness and favor with God for us) and rather casts himself under the Covenant of Works (where we must accomplish our own righteousness and favor with God for ourselves). All that we secure for ourselves in such a state of mind is torment and fear of God's condemning wrath and anger. Our conscience becomes guilt-ridden even when we try our hardest to please Him. God in such a state of mind appears to be an avenging Judge whose infinite wrath cannot be satisfied. Here is a state of mind in which we endure (as it were) torment. However, dear ones, there is hope in Christ. For God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7).

D. No doubt as Christians we realize that the more extreme degrees of fear are sinful and not from God, like panic, terror, and phobias. However, what Paul refers to here are the less extremes of fear, like timidity, worry, or anxiety—these also God has not given to us. Being timid is often the result of simply being intimidated by what others think of us. Such a fear grows out of our pride and our seeking the approval of others and craving to be accepted by others. But such a fear will ensnare us into doing what is contrary to God's commandments and will render us powerless in standing against compromise, so that we can fit in with the crowd (**Proverbs 29:25**). Thus, Paul writes to set Timothy (and all of us) free from the snare of the fear of man.

1. No Christian will be controlled by the fear of man who is trusting an Almighty Heavenly Father who loves us with an infinite and eternal love and has given His Only Begotten Son to suffer the torment of hell that we might know deliverance from the torment, the timidity, the worry, and anxiety of fear.

2. To wallow in fear of people (whether fear of standing for the truth, whether fear of confrontation, whether fear of looking foolish, or whether fear of being rejected), to be overwhelmed by anxiety over

financial security, over troubles in the world, over family/friends, and to quake under the shadow of the giant but not to have the eye of faith to behold the giant-crusher—Jesus Christ—is a form of idolatry; for it is to fear and take man more seriously than we fear and take God seriously. It is to bow before the power of man and circumstances rather than to bow before the power of the Almighty God. How big is your God, dear child of God? That will determine to a large extent whether fears will break through the wall of self-control and set siege to your heart and mind.

II. What God Has Given to Us—Power, Love, and a Sound Mind (“But of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” 2 Timothy 1:7).

A. Paul now turns from what God has not given to us (namely, fear) to that which God has given to us to combat fear and to fortify the wall of self-control around our hearts and minds (namely, power, love, and a sound mind).

1. It’s as if Paul were saying to Timothy, “Timothy (or put your name in the place of Timothy), you do not have to live in fear, because God has already given you the very spiritual graces that will keep the wall of self-control standing against these fears. These graces of power, love, and a sound mind are not somewhere a million miles away, but are already yours; they have already been deposited into your spiritual bank account when Jesus purchased them for you by His death and resurrection. The problem is not that you do not have the resources to overcome your fear. The problem is that you are not signing the withdrawal slip by faith to access these treasures that already belong to you as a part of your inheritance in Jesus Christ. As much as you draw on the power, love, and a sound mind that is in your spiritual bank account, you will never have the less. Therefore, draw on these graces by faith every day and throughout the day, as often as your need to.”

2. It is like the poor widow of Zarephath (in 1 Kings 17) that

fed Elijah with her last bit of meal and oil in faith and obedience and found that the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil did not diminish no matter how many times she drew upon it.

B. Let us now briefly consider these three graces that will fortify the wall of self-control against the attack of fear in your heart and mind.

1. **Power** (“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power...”). The Greek word is *dunamis*, from which we derive our word dynamite. The Lord has already given to you, dear child of God, spiritual dynamite in Christ Jesus to prevent fear from breaking in.

a. This is not the worldly power to control and manipulate others for your own ends. This is not the power of the flesh as seen in assertive training classes. This is the power of the Holy Spirit in clinging to the promises of God, the character of God, and the inheritance of God. The goal of this power is not for you to control others, but for you to be under the control of the Holy Spirit so that the wall of self-control stands.

b. It doesn't matter who opposes you; it doesn't matter what their resources may be, the power of the Holy Spirit is infinitely more powerful. And the power of the Holy Spirit that is yours in Christ Jesus was revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave on that first Lord's Day (**Ephesians 1:19-20**). That is the power that is given to us. Beloved, we have no legitimate excuse for fear overwhelming us, because fear cannot stand before the power of God.

2. **Love** (“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love...”). The Greek word is *agape* (the very first fruit of the Spirit that Paul listed in Galatians 5:22).

a. *Agape* love is a self-sacrificial love that does not count the cost too dear to give to and to serve the one who is loved. *Agape* love is not a taking love, but a giving love, even when it hurts. It was *agape* love that sent Christ to suffer and die for unworthy sinners (chosen in

Christ Jesus before the world began). There was nothing beautiful or loving in us that God saw. It was not our love for Him, but His love for us that sent His Only Begotten to be rejected, hated, despised, beaten, spat upon, and crucified. It is this self-sacrificial *agape* love that has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

b. This *agape* love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

c. It is this *agape* love that casts out fear (**1 John 4:18**).

If we fear what others will do unto us, it indicates we have yet much need to grow in and to understand the infinite and eternal love of God for us, His own dear children, for whom Christ suffered and died.

d. Many think of power in terms of how much we can control others; but Christ's power is expressed in how much we can love God and others. The expression of our self-sacrificial love for Christ and others will tell us much about the kind of power that we claim to have. *Agape* love balances aggressive, self-centered power. *Agape* love is also opposed to fear and casts out fear, because fear stems from a sinful love of self and love to protect and defend self at all costs (regardless of who it hurts or scorns—whether Christ or others). However, *agape* love is self-sacrificial both toward Christ and others, and does not fear for the loss of property, family, friends, approval, job, or anything else in this world because the eye of *agape* love is not upon self, but is upon giving oneself to Christ and others (like a parent who will risk his/her own life to save his/her child's life when in danger). Ultimately, where your treasure is, there will your love, heart, and affections be as well. And you will not fear to give up everything when your heart is given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. **Sound Mind** (“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”). The Greek word here is *so-phronismos*, which means a sound or orderly mind, moderation, self-discipline, or self-control. This is not the same Greek word used for the fruit of temperance/self-control (*engkrateia*) in Galatians 5:23, but it is a synonym to it. The soundness of mind/self-control of 2 Timothy 1:7 is the

grace Christ gives in a fearful world to regulate and to bring the fears, worries, and anxieties in life and death under the sovereign, loving, and wise control of the Holy Spirit. This is the calm of Christ in the midst of the storm while the waves and wind completely unsettle the minds and hearts of the fearful disciples. This a soundness of mind and self-control because the Christian knows, believes, and responds to fears with the affirmation, “My almighty and loving Savior may appear to be asleep, but that is only my faulty perspective, for He that keepeth me neither slumbers nor sleeps. My boat cannot go down, for the Lord is in the boat with me.”

Dear ones, the enemy of worry, anxiety, and distress can only strike fear in our hearts when we forget that our Savior has promised, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Fear arises in your heart when you think you are all alone to face that person or situation by yourself (much like a child that fears the dark). But when you are persuaded that the Lord is with you and that He supplies you with the power, love, and sound mind to overcome your fears, you become like a child that can walk without fear in any dark place as he/she feels the hand of his/her father on the shoulder. That invisible hand of your Heavenly Father upon your shoulder is more sure, more powerful, and more loving than the visible hand of any earthly father. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

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