

Good Fear Gone Bad

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[0 : 00] So let me start by just thinking a little bit about what good fear means and is intended for us. And I think, let me just start by a little questionnaire, a little quiz for everybody here this morning.

There are fears I think we're very used to, have names that perhaps we're familiar with as well, common phobias that maybe we experience or those around us experience.

So if I was to say to you the phrase claustrophobia, what would that be the fear of? Anybody know? Claustrophobia? The claustrophobia is a common one.

About 5% apparently of the population suffers from claustrophobia or the fear of confined spaces. Here's another one which you probably know, arachnophobia. Arachnophobia, fear of spiders, that's right, another well-known one.

Well, how about this one? Perhaps a little bit more unusual, not a name you necessarily know, but ophidiophobia. Ophidiophobia. Anybody know that one? Long words.

[1 : 06] No, it could be. No. Actually very close to fear of spiders. Ophidiophobia is the fear of snakes. And then last long word, teromahanophobia.

Teromahanophobia. Anyone can guess what that's? That was the most complicated one I could find. Teromahanophobia. If you had that, you're very unlikely to get on an airplane because that is the fear of flying.

Fancy words, perhaps ones we've never heard of before, but all fears, I think we can understand where the basis of them comes from. They all have a potential of risk, maybe danger or harm or pain to us.

And God has created us with this capacity to fear so that we understand when there is a threat of danger or under certain circumstances that we might fear.

And it is meant to act as an alarm bell, a kind of a sensory system to alert us to danger. Good fear is meant to function to protect us so that we avoid danger and enjoy all the goodness of God's creation.

[2 : 12] So, for example, if you're out hiking and terrible storm comes down, good fear would lead you to find shelter, maybe away from the risk of falling trees and flooding rivers.

Maybe if you're out camping as well, you're toasting marshmallows over a campfire. Good fear warns you not to pick up the marshmallow that falls into the fire through fear of burning your hand. As Sean said, I've got seven kids. Three of them are now driving. One is still learning. But in their driving instruction, they've all went through classes with their instructors early on where they were taught to focus on road safety and were given lessons about why they should wear their seatbelts and why you should never text and drive so that they develop a good fear that keeps them and others on the road safe when they're driving.

Now, Jesus, of course, is God's son, our creator. He knows how good fear is meant to function in us as God's creatures.

And yet no one knows us better than Christ Jesus for how the fall has affected us, how sin has distorted what God has called good and how sin makes good things bad.

[3 : 37] And that includes our sense of fear and how it is meant to function in our lives. And this morning, in the particular context of our passage, we're going to think around the application, particularly of fear in terms of fear of man, although it really applies to any fear.

But in the context this morning, particularly the fear of man. And so that leads us to our second point. Very quickly, we get to what Jesus says to us about how good fear has gone bad.

By its proper definition, a fear becomes a phobia when it's out of proportion to or it's excessive compared to the actual danger presented to us.

Now, there may well be very genuine mental or emotional health issues associated with why a person would have an elevated sense of fear that's out of proportion to the actual danger. And there are ways to help to address those issues of mental or emotional distress. But in our passage this morning, Jesus addresses his disciples and he addresses us at a far more deeper level, at a level of spiritual level that applies to each and every one of us here this morning. [4 : 57] He speaks to our beliefs and addresses how sin distorts our sense of fear. He addresses how good fear has gone bad.

We see in verse 4, he's addressing a fear that is bigger than the actual danger. He says, Do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do. Now, if you're familiar with Jesus' teachings, he often says things in a way to provoke attention, provoke response, because the honest answer to that verse alone should be something like, Jesus, what are you talking about?

It does seem entirely reasonable, doesn't it, to fear someone who's threatening to kill you? Didn't we just talk about examples of how good fear is meant to function to protect us from danger?

Surely someone threatening to kill us is something where we are meant to rightly fear, and that's meant to function to protect us. Well, of course, Jesus knows very well what he's saying.

[6 : 08] And we need to understand his words in their full context. It's hinted at in the second half of that verse and developed into the following verse in verse 5. So, again, he says, Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.

What more is there that they can do, Jesus? He goes on to tell us. He says, But I warn you whom to fear. Fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. The reason Jesus tells his disciples not to fear those who can only kill the body is because it's a distorted fear.

He's addressing this good fear gone bad. It's distorted in two ways. It's distorted in that it takes being killed and elevates it above what is appropriate, making physical death the absolute and ultimate terrible thing.

And at the same time, it's a distorted fear because it takes what is really the absolute and ultimate terrible thing, being called to judgment before God, being found guilty of breaking his laws, and being cast into the eternal agony of hell.

[7 : 38] Taking that truly ultimate terrible thing and reducing it, reducing God, in fact, reducing eternity to something less serious, less important, than what can happen to us in the here and now.

And Jesus is saying to his disciples at this point of his ministry because he knows the threat of death for him is looming ever closer.

And because of that, it is looming ever closer for those who would choose to follow him. Just before our passage this morning, at the end of Luke chapter 11, Jesus has been at a party.

He's been invited to a party, a dinner party at the house of one of the religious leaders, one of the Pharisees. And Jesus doesn't hold back in condemning his host and his other guests for hypocrisy and self-righteousness and for ignoring and condemning the Old Testament prophets.

And chapter 11 ends by saying, As he went away from there, as he left the party, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him to catch him in something he might say.

[8 : 58] And then chapter 12 starts, In the meantime, when so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to essentially teach his disciples.

So our verses this morning are in the context of a huge crowd gathered around Jesus and his disciples. And no doubt in such a large crowd, there were some of these Pharisees among them or those who were perhaps loyal to the Pharisees, those who would be looking to put an end to Jesus and to put an end to any who would hold to his teaching.

And under those circumstances, Jesus presents this loving warning to his disciples, to his friends, to us today, not to fear what man might do to you, to let that get distorted, to not to let good fear go bad and elevate fear of man over the fear of God.

For the disciples, the prospect of being killed was very real for them. And more than likely, all but John and Judas of the apostles were martyred for their faith.

And throughout church history, from the time of the scriptures through to today, disciples of Jesus Christ have faced being killed for their faith.

[10 : 23] There remains many parts of the world where being a Christian, simply standing to be counted as a follower of Christ and seeking to be obedient to his teachings is enough to be killed at the hands of men.

And yet for you and I living in America currently, we are unlikely to face deadly opposition for our faith, for the sake of Christ.

But I know for myself, I don't need the threat of being killed for my sinful broken heart to wrestle with distorting the fear of man, to distorting what thought or what man might do to me and to us and to elevate the fear of man and allow it to occupy a place of dominance in our lives that is the rightful place for the fear of the Lord alone.

And just to be clear again, the fear of man isn't limited to distorting fear about what somebody may do to us as a Christian. This isn't a unique fear actually to just Christians.

Once we distort or elevate the fear of man above the fear of God, once that good fear has gone bad for us, from then on we place undue focus on what others might do to us or think about us, not only for being a Christian but for anything else.

[11 : 48] When good fear has gone bad, we are submitted to things, we are preoccupied with things that God intended to us to be only submitted and preoccupied with him. This is true of any distorted fear.

A distorted fear of man will affect how we bear the name Christian when it's unpopular with those around us, but it may also, a distorted fear may also affect what dominates our thoughts and our actions when we're around our friends, around our peers, our colleagues, so that we act or we speak for their approval and to avoid their rejection regarding what sports team we follow, maybe what clothes or shoes we wear, maybe what movies or television shows we keep up with and what computer games we play, what car we drive, what neighborhood we live in.

The list goes on and on and on. And of course, we live in an age where social media can fuel that distorted fear ever so easily because we see very clearly what others think because they tell us through likes and comments.

Fear of man affects how we think about our school, our work, our job, so that we can pursue success and praise from our professors, our teachers, our parents, our boss or it affects how we seek to cover up and make excuses for our mistakes and our failures.

One Christian counselor, Ed Welch, said, fear of man is such a part of our human fabric that we should check for a pulse if someone denies it.

[13 : 35] And I think he's accurate in that assessment. So we would do well to listen to Jesus' words of warning and counsel and counsel in this passage so that we can recognize and confess before God where good fear has gone bad in our lives and in our hearts and so that we can receive his cure for bad fear and the cure that Jesus offers to us.

So let's look at that now, the cure for bad fear. And before we dive into the passage and the scriptures to see what the right fear is that Jesus offers to us, I think it's important that we recognize and call out a couple of bad cures for good fear gone bad that we might consider taking or have presented to us because there are many alternatives out there.

first of all, if the fear of man or fear of what man may do to us is, if we accept that as wrong thinking, that it lifts up man and brings God down, then the cure for that bad thinking, for good fear gone bad, must not be to replace wrong thinking with just a different sort of wrong thinking.

and there's a very particular example that I want to bring to you this morning and it's the example of the trust in yourself mentality. Don't be afraid, you can do it.

Now don't get me wrong, there can be genuine and valid encouragement in those words. I've used them with my children many times when they've been hesitant or frightened to do something that I know they're capable of if they try and apply themselves.

[15 : 20] But there is danger if that is the only thing that is repeatedly said to fight fear. You can do it, just try harder, trust in yourself, be harder working, be stronger, be smarter, be better looking and you won't have anything to fear anymore.

That's replacing one form of wrong thinking with another form of wrong thinking. It's a lie and Jesus' words expose it for a lie.

Sure, doing those things may feel like they help to some degree for some amount of time. You may become stronger than those around you, you might become smarter or better dressed than those around you but you won't remain that way forever.

Jesus deliberately takes us to the ultimate and the final reality that everyone will face, death and judgment before God to help us to get our fear in perspective and see the cure that we truly need. Trusting in things that really cannot save you reminds me of something that I did when I was a little kid. the very first bedroom that I have memories of as a boy growing up had this fantastic wallpaper all the way around the room.

[16:51] My parents put this up and it had Superman wallpaper and it had this reoccurring images of Superman all the way around the room all in various different action poses, heroic poses and it certainly fueled my fascination with superheroes but I remember that I developed this rather particular childlike habit of dealing with fear because of my Superman wallpaper.

My bed in that room was right up against one of the walls and at night time if I ever was frightened whatever it may have been maybe I heard a bump or a noise in the house or maybe I was worried about monsters under the bed whatever it was I developed this pattern of I'd lie right up against one of the walls and I'd think to myself I'm going to be okay Superman is all around me and he will protect me and that's a sweet childlike thing but it is ultimately quite useless because what was going to happen if any of those things that I was frightened of actually turned into a material danger or threat where was my hope truly placed in those circumstances I was trusting in my wallpaper and Jesus offers us something far more substantial I think you'll appreciate than wallpaper this morning but it's a silly example to show how we can take wrong thinking and comfort ourselves with other wrong thinking if we are not careful in the same way Jesus challenges us with his words to make sure we are not dealing with distorted fear in the wrong way in a way which is ultimately still going to let us down you can do many good things you can work out you can study hard you can help other people you can have a nice family you can have a well-paying job but Jesus does not intend for us to trust in these things to protect us through life and they will not protect us at the end of life either one more error before we get to

Jesus cure for good fear gone bad it's another form of replacing wrong thinking with wrong thinking dealing with this distorted fear of man by trying to go to the other extreme not giving any care or any thought to the opinions of others on the face of it that might sound like a good idea right if I shouldn't elevate other people above God so that I fear what they might do to me or what they might think about me then perhaps I can deal with caring about them too much by not caring at all about what they think I'll just do my own thing I'll do my own thing my own way so I don't care what you think what you say whether you're my peers my parents my professors my pastors I'm not going to fear you in fact I don't really care what you think or what you do of course the problem with that approach is that

Jesus says we are to truly care appropriately care about others about what others think and what others do in humility we are to count others more significant than ourselves and for certain people in particular roles that God has placed around us and above us honoring God means honoring people in roles of authority that God has placed over us so Jesus isn't suggesting we deal with a distorted fear by deliberately not caring about what anybody else says around us so what is the right cure for bad fear that Jesus is offering we've seen it already in verse 5 the right cure for bad fear is the right fear of God again he says I will warn you whom to fear fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell yes

I tell you fear him may not his will fear will how he will use this power and this authority.

[22:10] Scripture has made it abundantly clear to us, plain to us, who God is, how he is holy and just. He doesn't randomly assign people to hell, nor does he make wrong judgments ever.

In fact, the gospel of Jesus Christ starts with the bad news that all of us, every single one of us in this room here this morning, we all deserve to be subject to God's authority and judgment that we see here in verse 5.

We don't deserve to be in God's presence. We deserve to be cast into hell because of our rejection and our rebellion against him and against his ways.

And yet, the gospel tells us this amazing truth, that this terrible judgment that each of us faced Jesus has taken it upon himself on the cross so that everyone who trusts that Jesus' death in their place satisfies God's judgment upon us.

So that you are forgiven of your sin and your offenses against God, including our distortion of putting other fears, fear of man above the fear of God, fearing creation rather than the creator.

[23:30] If you've done that this morning, if you're a Christian, this fearsome God no longer calls you his enemies, but he calls you his children.

Which brings us to the last verses of our passage, verses 6 and 7. If verses 4 and 5 sound like Jesus is speaking quite in harsh extremes to help us see through our distorted fear of man over the fear of God, then verses 6 and 7 sound almost humorous in their gentleness and their tenderness towards us.

He says, These two verses that help us see the gospel cure for bad fear because they tell us two profound truths about the fearsome and almighty God whom we worship.

It tells us that God knows you completely. And it tells us that God cares for you deeply. So much of the distorted fear of man centers around being exposed.

Perhaps being exposed to physical harm, but also being exposed to shame, to ridicule, to condemnation, for people to see us as we truly are, to know our darkest secrets, our most embarrassing and shameful moments.

[25 : 18] Jesus' words connect to that distorted fear and they correct that fear. We may be able to go through life hiding our dirty laundry, as it were, from others around us so they don't see.

But God sees. God sees you completely. And He knows you completely, down to the hairs on your head. Now, as time goes on, for some of us, like myself, that's an easier job for God than others.

But He knows us completely. If you were to pour out your heart in complete honesty before God, confessing all your thoughts and all of your feelings, warts and all, nothing held back, God would not respond to you, wow, I had no idea that that's who you really were.

I need a time out. I need to reevaluate what's going on here as to who you are. That is not what God would say.

Rather, He might say something like, thank you. Thank you for being honest. Now, would you like me to tell you what you missed?

[26 : 45] He knows you. He knows you completely. He knows the hairs on your head. He knows the freckles on your face. He knows the first thought you had this morning.

He'll know the last thought you have before you go to bed tonight. He sees everything, knows everything about you, and rather than push you away, He draws you close to Himself in Christ.

Because of the cross, Jesus has dealt with everything that caused God to reject you. And now He calls you to Himself as His child. He loves you.

If you are a Christian, He's drawn you to Himself. He knows you completely, and God cares for you deeply. God cares for the sparrow, Jesus says.

So small and so fragile, even though it's of little worth. How much more is the argument Jesus is making here? How much more will He care for those who are made in His own image?

[27 : 51] God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, not because that was a fair price for what we're worth, but that that was the price to redeem sinners, like you and me, out of bondage to slavery, bondage to good fear gone bad, out of His own love with which He loved us.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, our God chose to pay that price. That price is what He cares for you. The gospel is the cure for bad fear, for distorted fear.

And as we're confronted with the enormity of the Almighty God's love for us, the cross declares how He knows us completely, warts and all, and yet cares for us deeply to give us His Son, to bring us to Himself.

And now He's given us His Holy Spirit to live with us and within us, working in us power, the power of the resurrection to bring renewed hearts and minds that orient around right fears, good fears, appropriate fear of man, and appropriate fear of God for who He is.

There are two very simple words in our passage this morning which we can easily overlook. We find them at the beginning in verse 4 that are profound if we understand them correctly.

[29 : 24] Jesus calls those who are His disciples my friends. My friends. If you're a Christian, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, second person of the Trinity, the one who has the power and authority to lay down His life and the power to bring it back up again, this Jesus calls you my friend.

When we grasp hold of these truths, we can affirm and live out the words we see the Apostle Paul say at the end of Romans chapter 8. I think we have these to project as well.

We have this recorded for us. What then shall we say to these things, to any of these fears that may be distorted in our lives?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also along with Him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies, who is to condemn. Christ Jesus is the one who died.

[30 : 42] More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword or any other fear that you may have?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No.

In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When the gospel of Jesus Christ has taken hold of you and you have taken hold of the gospel the power of God is at work in you to cure you of good fear gone bad to heal you of distorted fears so that you can mean and say those words of Romans chapter 8 for yourself.

God wants that for you and I want to help you with just a few practical suggestions of how we can grow in applying that fear so let me close with the cure in practice.

[32 : 13] First and foremost the cure of the gospel only works if you have received it. You cannot take the cure for your fear problem if you have not received the cure for your sin problem and if you are here this morning and haven't received Christ as your savior then I'm so glad you're here so glad that I get to speak with you this morning and I'd love to talk to you more about how you can receive Christ and his life his death his resurrection for you so that you might know forgiveness and freedom from God's judgment and wrath to come and then you can start working in placing the fear of man in right proportion to the fear of God if you have received Christ then we apply this truth of putting good fear into its right place through practice simple things things I'm sure you've heard before but let me just give some specific application the first is in reading

God's word the Bible is a lifetime supply of meditation and reflection that works to correct distorted fear to put the fear of creation in its proper place and the fear of our creator in his proper place but I want to add that the Bible isn't our only input into our lives and we need to think carefully about our diet because you may be reading your Bible but what else are you reading and how is that informing your fears the world in so many different ways is telling you what to fear and it's not telling you to fear God through the news through social media through conversations with friends at school or work or college there are subtle and there are distinct voices telling us to fear this fear that fear the other all at the expense of fearing

God and you and I are taking that in every single day and honestly it is foolish and it is arrogant for us to think that we can resist that influence if we are not regularly taking in and balancing it with the word of God speaking correctly so that we can distinguish distorted fears from accurate fears so I want to encourage you feed on God's word I just read recently actually the Bible has over 365 times where we are called to fear not that's more than one a day that might be an outstanding use of your devotional time just to chart that through each day reflecting where God says fear not and what grounds he gives you for that but feed on God's word being aware that you're already feeding on other things so consider your diet carefully second application

I would encourage you to pray and to invite prayer specifically invite prayer for where distorted fear applies and is lived out in your life and we have before us an example in the apostle Paul he says to the church in Ephesus in Ephesians chapter 6 he says to the church pray for me pray for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak brothers and sisters if the apostle to the Gentiles the guy who wrote most of the letters of the New Testament if he needed God's people to pray for him I'm pretty sure you and I need prayer from those around us too so when you meet one-on-one with friends over coffee when you have small group time prayer time invite others into your struggle because they're in the same position as you are the fears might be different but we all wrestle with this reality invite others in to pray for you in very practical ways for how you see fear being distorted in your lives and then lastly a practical application is to try it try it out do not wait for your feelings to catch up to what the scriptures are telling you don't wait to feel bold being brave isn't the absence of fear rather it is being being afraid still and yet doing the right thing anyway so step out into whatever sphere it may be that you know

God is calling you to and where these fears are distorted for you being fueled and strengthened by God's word resting in the prayers of God's saints for you expect to have those old feelings that come from a distorted fear expect them to be there for a little while longer as God continues to work in you but do not let that stop you from doing what God calls you to do you may be familiar with C.S. [38 : 01] Lewis's book The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe it's a family favorite for us and we read it once in a while there's a scene in which brother Peter is seeking to defend his sisters from attacking wolves who serve the wicked white witch and Lewis writes this he says Peter did not feel very brave indeed he felt he was going to be sick but that made no difference to what he had to do it made no difference to what he had to do don't let your feelings make a difference to what you have to do to what God is calling you to do what Jesus lays out in these verses for us this morning to place God in his rightful place the gospel cure cures us from good fear gone bad and with that in place brothers and sisters friends be equipped be courageous to live out the life

God has for you serve him honoring him as you receive all of God's blessings in your life let me pray heavenly father we thank you for your word to us this morning we thank you for how you speak into our the many ways in which our lives are messed up and how you have spoken this morning and how to correct distorted fear good fear gone bad we thank you for your son Jesus Christ we thank you for your spirit and we thank you for your word word we pray Lord that you would work in us faith to step out as you call us to in ways which honor you glorify you we do this in Christ's name amen