

Fear

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon explores the relationship between fear and holiness, arguing that perfect love does not cast out all fear, but rather the fear that has torment and is inconsistent with holiness.

Scripture: Joshua 1:9, Psalm 34:4, Psalm 56:3, Proverbs 9:10, Proverbs 29:25, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 10:28, Romans 8:15, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Fear Of God", "Holy Courage"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin delves into the concept of fear and its relationship with holiness, exploring the distinction between natural fear, spiritual fear, and the fear of the Lord. He emphasizes that while natural fear is necessary for self-preservation and certain situations, spiritual fear should not hinder individuals from fulfilling their God-given purpose. Baldwin uses real-life examples of individuals facing storms, accidents, and childhood fears to illustrate the complexity of fear even in those who profess holiness. He concludes by highlighting the importance of courage, not as the absence of fear, but as the willingness to do one's duty despite fear.

Transcript

We were at one time approached by a young lady who said, "Between my home and the place of meeting there is an old, deserted factory on a dark and lonesome street. Some terrible things have occurred there. Am I wrong because I am afraid to pass that way at night?" We replied, "You would be foolish to pass that way, go around and avoid danger." This brings us to the thought of fear, and how far it is consistent with holiness. Fear is defined as "an emotion excited by threatening evil, or impending pain, with the desire to escape." We are often told that self-preservation is the first law of nature, and we do know that there is in every man a deeply laid something, instinct" is perhaps the best name for it, which causes him to wince involuntarily when some object approaches his eyes, or to dodge with lightning rapidity when in danger of coming in contact with some "irresistible" body, or to inwardly shudder and shrink away at the thought of impending pain. If there were no such a thing as the law of self-preservation the race would soon become extinct, or rather it would never have continued. This "fear" is found in the lower animals as well as in man and is a safeguard against injury. This fear is not cast out when an individual is perfected in love. One man said, "I was on a porch with a number of other people when it began to fall. They all ran away quickly, but I didn't. I had perfect love." That is not perfect love, it is perfect foolhardiness. It would have been just as sensible for Jesus to have cast Himself off the pinnacle of the temple. Why should He fear? He surely had perfect love. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

In the village of Cortland, Ohio, there is a large brick Methodist Church. The rear of the building, where the pulpit is located, is towards the west, and the auditorium is on the second floor. One Sunday morning when the people were gathered for preaching service there arose an awful storm. The wind, lightning and thunder were so terrific that the people became uneasy and frightened. The minister was standing in the pulpit doing his best to encourage them, and said, "Do not be afraid. Before I was converted, I, too, was afraid of storms, but when I was saved I lost all that fear." At that moment the whole gable end of the church fell in and started for the pulpit where the minister was standing. There was no time to consider, or to think of perfect love casting out fear; he jumped from the pulpit and ran down the aisle, shouting, "Come on, brethren." Some of the folks laughed at him -- after it was over. If he had been swimming in the love of God, he would have done just as he did or he would have been a suicide.

The writer was on the camp ground at Steubenville, Ohio, when a cyclone struck it. Thirteen trees were blown down in the circle of tents, the tabernacle fell on the congregation, tents were blown about, people were pinned to the earth and one young lady was killed. These people were good, some of them professed, and doubtless had, the experience of holiness, but, notwithstanding this fact, some of them were on the verge of a nervous collapse, some of them did go under for a time, and others would leave the grounds as soon as a little wind arose. May the writer confess that he has never felt quite as easy in a tent since that time. If the wind blows he would sooner see how things are going on outside than be cooped up in his tent, and he would rather have a tent out in the open than be in danger from suspicious looking trees. Now if any person suspicions the state of the writer's experience, he has company, for there are others who were there that eventful day that will testify to the same feelings. There are possibly some "nervous women" who have never recovered from the shock.

I do not know what form of neurosis a physician would call it, but I have heard a big man testify as follows: "When I was a small boy I had two older brothers who were always scaring me about ghosts and all sorts of spookish things. The impressions thus formed have never left me, and while I know better, and have no real fear (?) yet I can scarcely go out in the dark without a suspicion that there is some lurking bug-a-boo about. And this is true although I have enjoyed perfect love for a number of years." Remember the deep impressions of this man's childhood -- and we are told that such impressions are never forgotten -- and perhaps you will have an explanation of this phenomenon.

Will a holy person fear a thunder storm? Some say, "No," others say, "Possibly." One thing that convinced Wesley of the genuineness of the religion of the Moravians was their fearlessness in the ocean storm. It may be this question should be studied with reference to the psychological or mental makeup of the individuals concerned. In some the sense of sublimity is so highly developed that they stand in awe before a mighty mountain, a waterfall, a rushing cyclone, or the crashing heavens. They are very near eternity. Combine this with a nervous dread of sudden developments, or unlooked-for occurrences (and sublimity and nervous susceptibility are very often combined in the individual,) and one will readily see why a chain of lightning or a crash of thunder might startle such a person, and this might develop into an almost hysterical dread. The law of self-preservation will cause one to stand at attention when facing real or supposed danger.

Before proceeding further may we state that there are two kinds of fear, as there are two kinds of love, natural and spiritual. We have never seen this distinction definitely drawn unless it is by inference in the passage from Adam Clarke: "Natural fear is a necessary accompaniment of our mundane existence, and is not cast out by perfect love." It would be absurd to un-christianize a person because he fears a backbiting dog, a kicking mule, or a murderous man. Or because he trembles as he stands before a

congregation, or shrinks from public notice. Bramwell says, "Our work as ministers of the gospel is of such importance that I frequently tremble exceedingly before I go into the pulpit. Yea, I wonder how I ever dared to engage in such a work." This is the natural man trembling under the burden of the cross. Some of us often feel the same way! Fletcher says that perfect love inclines to timidity.

On the other hand, spiritual fear, as we have called it, for want of a better name, is servile dread of the Almighty, slavish fear of man, carnal shrinking from showing one's colors, shrinking from doing one's duty because of the consequences, or any other form of fear that hinders a man from being his whole bigness for God and from standing in every place where brave men are needed. Then there is what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord. This fear, in a greater or lesser degree, exists in every saved or sanctified heart. But even this fear, as we will see in the quotation from Edwards below, is regulated by the fullness of the Spirit which one has attained. When the fear of the Lord becomes servile, it is inconsistent with sanctifying grace. The fear of the Lord which is not cast out by perfect love is filial and loving; servile fear is salutary and tends to lead the soul to God; filial fear is binding and tends to hold the soul in loving contact with the Lord. With awe and reverence the trusting soul pillows its head on the bosom of the Almighty, and says, "I love Thee for Thou hast loved me."

The feeling of natural fear will cause one to shun dangerous places or circumstances, such as burning buildings, falling walls, thin ice, pestilences, dark and dangerous alleys, dangerous communities. One may dread public notice, false accusations or calumny. They may stand in awe before natural phenomena, such as earthquakes and storms, or before those whom they consider their superiors or those who are unduly critical; they may hesitate under the cross of an unusual burden, and cry, "If it be possible, let this cup pass," but grace will add, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Clarke says,

We are not to suppose that the love of God casts out every kind of fear from the soul; it only casts out that which has torment.

1. A filial fear is consistent with the highest degree of love; and even necessary to the preservation of that grace. This is properly its guardian; and, without this, love would soon degenerate into listlessness, or presumptive boldness.
2. Nor does it cast out that fear which is so necessary to the preservation of life; that fear which leads a man to flee from danger lest his life should be destroyed.
3. Nor does it cast out that fear which may be engendered by sudden alarm. All these are necessary to our well-being. But it destroys: (1) The fear of want. (2) The fear of death. (3) The fear or terror of judgment. All these fears bring torment, and are inconsistent with perfect love.

Thus far Clarke.

With reference to the latter part of this quotation: As we have seen in a former article Wesley makes a strong point of the depression which very often accompanies want of bread. We submit that there is in the very nature of every man, possibly some would not call it fear, a shrinking from the article of death. The Lord has promised to deliver those who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage, and He does this when He takes away sin, the sting of death; but He still leaves the sanctified man with a spirit which loves life and shuns death. Holiness will not rob the judgment of its awfulness, but it will rob it of its dread, for the heart is right. Amen. Wesley and Clarke agree in the following statements from Clarke:

1. Profligates and worldly men in general, have neither the fear nor love of
2. Deeply awakened and distressed penitents have the fear or terror of God without His love.
3. Babes in Christ, or young converts, have often distressing fear mixed with their love.
4. Adult Christians have love without this fear; because fear hath torment, and they are ever happy, being filled with God."

Jonathan Edwards, in his treatise "On Religious Affections," gives the following excellent description of the alternations of fear and love:

There are no other principles which human nature is under the influence of that will ever make men conscientious but one of two, fear or love; and therefore, if one of these should not prevail as the other decays, God's people, when fallen into dead and formal frames, when love is asleep, would be lamentably exposed indeed; and therefore God has wisely ordained that these two opposite principles of love and fear should rise and fall like the two opposite scales of a balance; when one rises, the other sinks. Love is the spirit of adoption, or the childlike principle; if that slumbers, men fall under fear, which is the spirit of bondage, of the servile principle; and so on the contrary. And if it be so that love, or the spirit of adoption, be carried to a great height, it quite drives away all fear, and gives full assurance; agreeable to that of the apostle, 1 John 4:18, 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.' These two opposite principles of lust and holy love bring hope and fear into the hearts of God's children in proportion as they prevail, that is, when left to their own natural influence, without something adventitious or accidental intervening, as the distemper of melancholy, doctrinal ignorance, prejudices of education, wrong instruction, false principles, peculiar temptations, etc. Fear is cast out by the Spirit of God no other way than by the prevailing love; nor is it ever maintained by His Spirit but when love is asleep.

After all real courage is not ignorance of danger or heedlessness of consequences, but he is a courageous man, who, seeing the danger, in spite of trembling limbs or quaking heart, goes ahead and does his duty. The following poem by Almon Hensley, descriptive of the reveries of the mother of a soldier boy who did his duty even though he was afraid, beautifully expresses the thought.

"Leave me one here, proudly, with my dead,

Ye mothers of brave sons adventurous;

He who once prayed: "If it be possible

Let this cup pass" will arbitrate for us.

"Your boy with iron nerves and careless smile

Marched gaily by and dreamed of glory's goal;

Mine had blanched cheek, straight mouth and close-gripped hands,

And prayed that somehow he might save his soul.

"I do not grudge your ribbon or your cross,

The price of these my soldier, too, has paid;

I hug a prouder knowledge to my heart,
The mother of the boy who was afraid.
"He was a tender child, with nerves so keen
They doubled pain and magnified the sad:
He hated cruelty and things obscene
And in all high and holy things was glad.
"And so he gave what others could not give,
The one supremest sacrifice be made,
A thing your brave boy could not understand;
He gave his all because he was afraid!"

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