

The Old Paths

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“One Of Man’s Greatest Fears”

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FEAR is one of man’s most basic emotions. It is something that is a part of each of us. Of course, fear must be controlled lest our fear paralyze us and keep us from being active in life. When we think about fear, we know that there is a kind of fear that man calls “healthy fear.” This is where one might be afraid when he sees a snarling dog, a snake, or a loaded gun pointing in his face, and tries to distance himself from the danger. This type of fear is connected with that “in-born” defense mechanism of “fight or flight” when one is faced with fighting or fleeing a life-threatening (scary?) situation for the preservation of his life. This is a “good” fear and needed at times.

At the same time, there are some forms of fear that are not good or “healthy”. Some may have a fear of the dark, or the number “13”, black cats, walking under a ladder, etc. Such fears as these and others are not healthy. They affect people in a negative way, and can keep some folks from being productive citizens in society.

Jesus knows that fear is a part of the human experience, and while He walked this earth, He encouraged His disciples to not be afraid. No less than nine times, Jesus’ words, “*be not afraid*” are recorded for us. On five occasions, we read Jesus’ encouragement to “*fear not*” in the KJV.

When we think about fear, I imagine one of the greatest fears men face today is the fear of losing control. I speak to folks who say they fear losing control of their minds due to old age and disease. Others fear losing control in a job, or in a family situation. Some fear losing their power, position, or political control in life. Sometimes, folks feel popular among men, but then become terrified when they think they might lose that control and therefore lose popularity, becoming just another “face in the crowd.” When we read the Bible, we also read about folks who feared losing control, and with that fear came sin. Let us study this subject and then make some applications to our lives.

King Jereboam

Due to the sins of Solomon, God determined to “rend” the kingdom out of the hands of Solomon (I Kings 11:7-11). God named Jereboam as the king of the 10 tribes (I Kings 11:31), leaving only two tribes for Rehoboam to rule. When Ahijah the prophet spoke to Jereboam about this, Ahijah spoke the words of God and told Jereboam, “*I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will*

give Israel unto thee” (I Kings 11:37-38).

Notice that God promised that Jereboam and his lineage would rule so long as he (and they) was obedient and faithful. Sadly, it was not long until Jereboam decided he might lose his position when the people returned to Jerusalem for worship times (I Kings 12:26-27). Jereboam did not consider God’s promise as true, and so began to fear losing control of his position and his kingdom. This fear motivated him to start a new form of worship with new cities in which to worship, new priestly tribes, new days of worship, etc. (I Kings 12:28-32).

Unfortunately, this man lost his kingdom, not because the people went to Jerusalem to worship, but because his fear of losing control motivated him to be disobedient to God (I Kings 14:7-10)! Had he been obedient to God, he would not have lost his kingdom.

The Pharisees And Jewish Leaders

After Jesus raised Lazarus, we are given insight into the fear that possessed the Pharisees and leaders at that time. They spoke to one another and said, “*What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel*

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16)

together for to put him to death" (Jn. 11:47-53).

The text says that the Jewish leaders determined to kill Jesus. Why was this? It was because of their fear of losing control! They freely admitted that Jesus was performing "many miracles," and were therefore afraid of what the Romans might do to them if the whole nation of Jews were to follow Jesus! Their solution was to kill Jesus in an attempt to stop His work! Little did they know that by giving in to their fear and killing Jesus, they would bring about the greatest event ever witnessed in history, and bring about the conversion of untold millions to the Lamb of God! Jesus had prophesied such in John 12:32-33, but their fear of losing their control of the people actually resulted in them losing their power. This is evident as we find large numbers of Jews converting and becoming Christians in the book of Acts. Among these included priests, Saul of Tarsus, and many others!

Diotrephes

The book of III John records this name, a name often associated with pride and arrogance. His infamous deeds are recorded by John and listed for us today. Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church" (III Jn. 9-10).

Diotrephes had a big problem in that he had control or power over these folks and loved it! Go back and read III John 9-10 again and notice the extremes to which this man went to make sure that he did not lose his con-

trol over the congregation. However, instead of him being considered a special person, a holy and upright Christian, John writes to condemn his actions. Diotrephes had a control over this group that was not right, and in fear of losing such power, he was selective as to who was allowed to influence the congregation! In fact, he went so far as to speak against those preaching the truth, and discourage folks from being around them. When folks tried, John said he "casteth them out of the church."

No doubt, his intent on holding control over the people motivated him to sin in these ways! Perhaps he was sincere and noble at first, the text does not say, but we know that he currently was in sin due to his fear — fear of losing the control he had over the people!

Conclusion

The fact I find quite interesting is the following: If and when people will submit to Christ and be saved, they are doing just that — submitting to His will! To call Christ "My Lord" means I must relinquish all control I have in my life (real or imagined), and follow only what He says! This is certainly one reason why people do not want to follow the Lord's plan for salvation and be a part of His body, the church. It is because they see themselves as in "control" and they fear losing

"control" to anyone, including Christ!

You see, in being a Christian, my will becomes the will of God. My thoughts must be in line with the thoughts of Christ (I Cor. 1:10). My actions must follow in the steps of Christ (I Pet. 2:21; Col. 3:17). Even my own body belongs to Christ as I use it in service to the King (I Cor. 6:19-20).

The folks we have studied fought against God and Christ to the point of plotting to kill the Messiah for fear of losing the control that they thought they had! All of these people suffered as a result of these decisions. The same thing is true today. If my fear of losing control of my life keeps me from being obedient to Christ, then really, I have fallen under the control of Satan! How ironic! The "freedom" and "control" I was trying to have without Christ, actually brought me into bondage; while it is when I am obedient to the Lord that I find true freedom (Jn. 8:36; Gal. 5:1a). This is a problem that happens among folks "outside" the church, as well as those "within"! Let us heed the warnings from this lesson. The Bible makes it clear that we can either serve Christ, or we will serve the Devil, but we cannot have it both ways (Matt. 6:24; Jn. 8:31-34; Rom. 6:16-17; II Pet. 2:19)!

Determine that we will relinquish all control to Christ, never fear, and follow Him so that we can receive His blessing.

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