

KOINONIA KONNECTION

A Publication of Sheffield Reformed Church

Summer 2001

Volume 2, Issue III

FACING UP TO FEAR

*"Why are you so fearful?"
(Mark 4:40)*

You deal with fear. Simply to say the word itself is rather unsettling. I don't want to admit it. Admit what? You know, uh, uh, that a person could be afraid. But is this so bad, to admit that you are afraid? Who said I was afraid; I didn't say that!

"I'm no 'scaredy cat'," isn't expressed just by children who don't want to admit that fear is present. Adults as well have a hard time facing fear. "Fear" is such a small word to have such a powerful affect in our lives.

The word "fear" is used to summarize very complex emotions within all of us. There's an entire booklet devoted to listing the hundreds of types of "phobias" that are said to be experienced. Although, I take people's fears seriously, entering into the justification of "phobias" is where Christians shouldn't go.

We should learn to speak simply and honestly about fear, without speaking simplistically about it. As with the word "love" the word "fear" can have a wide range of meaning. One person said, "I can't really define fear, but I know what it is when I have it."

Since God put all emotions in man, we shouldn't say that fear is wrong per se. "Fearing God" is an example of how appropriate fear could be when rising and directed properly. Would having a fear of danger be sinful? Not necessarily. If you took precautions to protect

yourself or your children from falling into a fire, that's not sinful, as long as what you did rested on faith and God's providence. Otherwise, it would be sinful.

That's what I'll be discussing: the fear that's sinful, and how we are to deal with it - God's way. This discussion itself must be selective and I pray it will be simple.

FINDING THE FIRST FEAR

The first sentence that Adam uttered after his rebellion against God and fall into sin contained the word "fear."

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Gen. 3:9,10)

Was man's first admittance of fear a noble thing? Certainly not. In the presence of God's holy judgment every sinner will be called upon and will acknowledge the truth. (Paul says that every sinner will one day acknowledge that Jesus Christ is LORD.) Adam's anxiety and confusion was because of the impending punishment that was represented by the voice of God. There was no love for God here. Adam was reacting, as wrongful fear always does, recoiling, removing, and resisting the consequences of one's actions and the punishment that is befitting for them.

Men and women have demonstrated their descent in Adam ever since. The first fear has been followed by the second, third, fourth,

tenth, one hundredth, one thousandth, one millionth, etc. Those we call saints in the Bible exhibited wrongful fear. At times, you'd think some of them, with the type of fearful actions or reactions taken, were not believers at all. Invariably their wrongful fear was because of some impending punishment that would be brought their way.

The Bible contrasts the fear of God, which is proper fear, with fear of man, which is improper fear. Fearing God in the Bible meant to maintain a sense of awesome (the only rightful use of the term) respect for God because of his power and greatness. It then became synonymous with the way of faith or the life of the faithful. This aspect is expressed by the words of Nehemiah:

O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name... (Neh. 1:11)

Still, the idea that God is to be held in proper respect because of his power to bring judgment and punishment is illustrated in the Bible.

Fear in man and the fear of man brings spiritual paralysis. The writer of Proverbs says, "The fear of man brings a snare..." (Pro. 29:25a). Jesus Christ our Lord commanded us against the fear of man, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28) Behind these statements is the fear of death or the punishment associated with it. Scripture declares that there is a "sting" in death (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Believers can be affected by this fear, but the unsaved are held in bondage to it: Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all

their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14,15)

FINDING THE FIRST FORCE FOR FEAR

The first action that God took that would bring a force for fighting man's wrongful fear demonstrated the action behind the word "love."

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. (Gen. 3:15)

God certainly didn't excuse wrongful fear. Destructive judgment would be brought against Satan and the curse of death. God dealt with sin and resultant fear by bringing in his force of mercy (love) over judgment.

It would be God's love (grace and mercy; affection and fellowship) that would cast out fear. God didn't run from sin, cover it up, or try to hide it. In love, through the promised seed provided, God dealt with fear. What has been brought to bear on the force of fear is the triumphing force of love: love casts out fear!

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 Jn.4:17,18)

Christ brought victory over fear. His love was perfect. It shouldn't surprise us that Scripture never records fear being associated with Jesus. He was never afraid. Therefore, the Christian doesn't need to fear death. Notice what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:15: For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.

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FAMILIES IN FOCUS

MARRIAGE - COVENANT VOWS GUARDED



We have seen in the past that the marriage institution pictures the loving, covenant union between Christ and His bride, the church. While the church here on earth is corrupted with sin, the love of Christ guarantees that one day she will be a pure bride. This brings up a major problem. The scenario goes as follows: Christ loves the church unconditionally, and the church is so unfaithful, 'playing the harlot with many lovers' yet Christ does not give her up but maintains with perfect integrity, His covenant to her. The only reasonable conclusion is that divorce is sinful and therefore is not permitted under any circumstance. Just as Christ is always faithful to His unfaithful church, so a marriage partner ought never to put away the other party, hoping for a better end. Add to this, that in Malachi 2:16, Jehovah, the personal, covenant-keeping God, says that He hates divorce. Then, also consider the attitudes of our modern culture. They despise God, the marriage institution itself, any idea of covenant responsibility and accountability and they worship self so as to give themselves whatever they want at that particular time. The pragmatic thing to do for the church seems to be to uphold the marriage covenant and disallow any divorce. Is divorce allowed, biblically speaking?

The first thing that we need to consider, is that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. His delights are with the sons of men, and by giving His Son, He showed that nothing would prevent His communion, or fellowship, with them. Marriage pictures this. A broken marriage gives a false picture of Christ and His relationship to His church. It is no wonder that God says that He hates divorce, for it maligns His love for the church.

The second thing that we need to contemplate, is that in marriage, covenant infidelity is a sad

fact. It is not that the covenant does not stand, but that the covenant is violated. It is not possible for one partner to maintain the injunction that the two shall be one flesh, when the second partner refuses to carry out their role. Even worse, it is impossible to have a couple be one in marriage when one of the partners turns to a third party to find oneness.

The marriage bond is sacred. Adultery and fornication violate the bond. An adulterer violates the bond with his or her spouse and becomes one flesh with a third person. This is unfaithfulness, which portrays God as being untrustworthy and unfaithful. It also victimises a marriage partner where they are most vulnerable. They have been intimate and open with one, in body, mind and spirit, and now they are abandoned for another as though they were of no value. When a person leaves a marriage partner, they are also saying in effect, that God has made a mistake in bringing them together. While people often make a sinful choice of a marriage partner, God in His redeeming grace can overcome all obstacles to a fulfilled marriage. As the love of God in Christ has its effect on a married couple, they will be cleansed of both personal combined sins. How often when one partner is converted, the other also is. The reason then, that God hates divorce, is, sin assaults God and His creatures.

God, in His perfect justice and infinite wisdom, has allowed for divorce. This is not inconsistent with His hatred for divorce. He hates divorce because of the sin which occasions it, and because it is itself a sinful act because of the behaviour of at least one of the partners. God says that He hates divorce and also that He is faithful to His covenant. Yet a striking passage in scripture tells us of even God di-

avoring an unfaithful people. "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce" Jer. 3:8.

The occasions for which He allows divorce are two, adultery and the desertion of a believer by an unbeliever. Note that in both situations, church discipline is a forgone conclusion. As covenanting publicly contracts a marriage, so its dissolution is also publicly recognised. Jesus Himself declares the legitimacy of divorce on the grounds of adultery. In Matthew 19 He stated that putting asunder that which God has joined together is forbidden to man. Then He states a single exception clause; the case of sexual immorality. Matt. 19:4-9 Since marriage is a union between two persons, an adulterer abandons that union to establish another. In other words, adulterers become one flesh with someone outside of their marriage union. If such a person marries a second person, the first marriage partner is automatically divorced. Scripture says, "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two shall become one flesh.' 1Cor.6:16 If a man is one flesh with a harlot, then he is not one flesh with his wife. Without repentance and forgiveness, this necessitates the dissolution of the marriage. It is the covenant community's duty to seek to bring sinning members to repentance, and if they refuse to repent to deal with them with biblical discipline. The church should never encourage divorce in order to leave room for the display of mercy and forgiveness. But it should not bind the conscience of the offended party that true justice be not resisted. Jesus made allowance for it.

The other legitimate occasion for divorce is the desertion of a believer by an unbeliever. In 1Cor. 7:10-7:16, Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes, "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with

him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband, who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know O husband, whether you will save your wife?" The desire of every Christian would be that their spouse would share in the joy of salvation, adding a fulfilling dimension to their marriage. But when an unbelieving spouse would leave the marriage, they are not under the discipline of the church because they are not members of the church in the first place. In order to maintain the peace of the family, God has allowed that that marriage bond be severed. The believer is then free of the obligations of such marriage vows. Where there are no marriage bonds, a person is free to be (re)married.

God hates divorce because of the sin which occasions it

One interesting observation is that only these two grounds are permitted for divorce. In scripture, 'extreme abuse', 'mental suffering' and 'incompatibility' are not given as grounds for divorce. Divorce is granted only where there is a 'full' violation of the seventh commandment. These are times when God's grace sustains His people in difficult marriages which are not broken by adultery.

It seems, then, that divorce is granted legitimately in the church that the people of God may enjoy a positive expression of the unconditional love of Christ for His bride. We ought to pray that our marriages would reflect Christ's love to the church and her devotion to Him.

-Bill Kroesbergen



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

INDONESIAN MISSIONS

"Please come to Borneo, my people need the Bible in their own language. They need to be able to hear from God himself. Many of my people claim to be Christians, but they really aren't." The pastor continued to plead with us to send translators, trainers and literacy workers to his region, but we had no one to send.

"Perhaps you don't know how badly we need translators in my province" he implored, "so let me show you." With that warning he began to show some of the most grisly slides I had ever seen. After showing about ten pictures we all hoped he would stop. We didn't need more words to convince us. One picture was worth more than a million calls for help.

The gruesome pictures depicted Muslims who had been decapitated by so-called Christians because they envied their business success. The pictures were almost more than my stomach could handle. Thousands of Muslims had been killed by those who had identified themselves as Christians. Hate, envy, bigotry, prejudice that could only have come from the devil himself was reflected on slide after slide. Who, in their right mind, could do these things?

As we viewed the pictures we realized the urgency of our task. Many things were at stake, the foremost being the honor due our Lord, Jesus Christ. People calling themselves by his name committing such atrocities undoubtedly grieved him. Those who committed these atrocities had obviously never been touched by the loving, nail-pierced hand in whose name they committed these crimes. The pastor explained these inhumane acts had happened because his people needed to hear Christ's voice in their own language; they needed a Bible in their heart language so their hearts could be changed!

How are these people going to come to feel, touch and hear the counsel of the one who died for such evil? Only by hearing God's voice in a language they understand. How shall they hear His voice in their language? Only if someone is willing to take the time to translate His words. How will the one who translates get there to do the job? Only if you pray, send and support them. Thank you for supporting us as we attempt to train Indonesians to address the urgent needs in Indonesia.

-name withheld for personal safety

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send you all a little update on our lives here and on our plans for furlough.

We thank the Lord that we could accomplish so much this past month. We have prepared all the churches with sufficient Sunday School curriculum to take them through to the end of the summer. Vacation Bible School plans are

As these last few weeks before furlough wind down, we thought that it would be good to

well under way so that we will be ready to jump into this event the week after our return to Quito. Fred and I have completed our last conference this past weekend. We taught a conference to the members of a very poor church high on the slopes of Pichincha. In a very providential way, God opened wide the doors for us to work in this church and neighborhood recently. We are in the process of helping them set up a good educational program for the children. There are about 50 children in this church and so the need is very urgent. A week ago Saturday, Arlene held a

Sunday School Workshop for the Sunday School Teachers, and this past weekend we included the whole church body in the teachings that we conducted. Once this ministry has been set up, they have also asked us to help out with teaching on the different family related topics and setting up Bible Studies. Fred will try to begin some of this during May and the rest will have to wait until our return.

Fred is preparing people to take over the leadership of the Bible Studies we conduct in Comite del Pueblo and in Puengasi. The studies there continue to go well. Please pray for all the people involved in these neighborhoods as we are all feeling pangs of sadness at the thought of leaving one another for several months. Please pray that God will bless these people in a mighty way during our absence and that the gospel will continue to bear much fruit in these communities.

Please continue to pray for the many counseling situations that are coming our way. Many times we feel our littleness when confronted with the heart wrenching situations of unfaith-

fulness, abuse and the other results of sin.

We have finished studying the book of Ephesians with the Ladies Bible Study and this coming Thursday we plan to begin the First letter of John. Please pray for this study also as many new ladies plan to attend this new study. Pray for those who have not yet embraced Christ as their only Saviour. Pray for Pilar as she leads this group.

Fred continues to meet one on one with Timoteo and Luis for Bible Studies and discipleship. Please pray for these two men. May God raise them up to become leaders in their communities.

This coming Sunday we will celebrate the faithfulness of God in La Iglesia de la Gracia as it will be the second anniversary for the new church. We are very excited and thankful for the work God is doing in this young church.

Once again, we thank you so much for all your prayers, love and support.

Fred and Arlene Jonkman

BOOKS IN REVIEW

"If God has redeemed me from sin, and given me his Holy Spirit to sanctify me and give me strength against sin, why do I go on sinning?" This question has plagued many believers throughout their life of faith. It brings many to despair and darkens even the brightest times in a Christian's life.

*The Enemy Within
Kris Lundgaard
P&R Publishing*

This book will offer insight, encouragement and hope for those who struggle with indwelling sin and desire to overcome the enemy within. It's subtitle is "Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin". The author has taken John Owen's "Indwelling Sin in Believers" and "The Mortification of Sin" and as he states in his own words, "I kidnapped Owen. By force I took him as my co-author, and together we've written a new book...and tried to bring his profound understanding of the Bible into our world." The book is divided into four sections: The Power of Sin in What It Is, The Power of Sin and How it Works, The Power of Sin in What it Does, and Nailing the Lid on Sin's Coffin.

*This book is an extremely easy reading. As one reviewer has written, "Here is a must read for all who desire not to wave the white flag and surrender to sin, but to soundly defeat it."
-Cope Jonkman*



HEAD & HEART GO TOGETHER



"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself.'" (Luke 10:27)

Christians should declare and demonstrate that "Head and Heart Go Together." What does this heading mean? Truth is never intended to be merely an intellectual exercise. It should be held with passion and passed on with compassion not only to the church but also unto your community.

It's unfortunate today that the Christian community appears so polarized. In one group there're those who propose to have all the right theology but aren't actively and aggressively in the marketplace with those truths. This group had rather stay enclosed in a theological fortress rather than to be out among "sinners." Where's the heart?

The other group had rather be here, there, and everywhere but spending time in the word of God to learn solid theology that honours God with their mind. They're out among people but with little, if any, application of God's transcendent truth for man's most desperate need. They're known for being friendly, but the sheep of God can't survive on human friendship and kindness alone – man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Where's the head?

I realize it's a challenge to keep head and heart together, but this difficulty doesn't negate the indispensable relationship between the two or their continuous pursuit. No one should or can care more about God's truth than the Christian.

Certainly, Christians can't be all things to all people. God never indicated that such should be the case. There's absolutely no excuse or justification, however, for separating the head and heart of Christian faith and love.

We should be deeply concerned that many are known for theology but not for compassion. Why be content with academia? Others are known for reaching out and caring but have little truth to sustain the sinner once the rescue has occurred.

When the head and heart are together then the church fulfills its mandate. First, the church must reach up. It must regain the centrality of Christ-centred biblical worship. Second, the church must reach in. It must nurture those in its body from covenant children to the senior saint. Finally, the church must reach out. It can't remain snuggled within its walls with a fortress mentality.

The only cogent faith is the Reformed faith. One's head receives a remarkable challenge through its systemization and summarization of truth. The Reformed faith should also be the truly compassionate faith. One's heart should be compelled toward others for the love of God and his truth when transcendent truths are understood. I'm convinced that the Reformed Christian community, beyond and besides all others, should know and testify that by the grace of God the head and heart are united in faith and love.

by Pastor Perry G. Brackin

FACING UP TO FEAR
CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

God's anger has been removed through the force of his love. Therefore, the Christian no longer is scared stiff to face God.

The more fear in our lives is an indication of less love. The more love in our lives is an indication of less fear.

FIGHTING THE LAST FEAR

You and I will have to deal with fear in its various forms throughout our lifetime. It is present because of indwelling sin. It is allowed to affect us adversely because of our attitudes and actions. God can't be blamed for our sin. But what if there was no aid available for us? Our life would be a miserable lot indeed. We praise God for his unspeakable gift of love. It isn't God's love as if it were an emotion to be described in isolation from an event or more-over from a person. It's God's love as demon-

strated in his Son. This is the ultimate force for us against fear. There's a friend that sticks closer than a brother. I think the best way through fear is with a friend. Jesus as a friend of sinners, doesn't let us coast through life nor run too long from our fears. What's at stake is love for God and our neighbour. Therefore, Christ assures us from his word that he has removed the enmity between God and us; the promises of God's word keep coming again and again, because our memories are short; the access of prayer into the throne room of the Father; and the aid of the Holy Spirit are all proved by our friend to help us face up to fear.

"When I am afraid, I will trust in You."

-Pastor Perry G. Brackin

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