

Freedom Series

3. Freedom from Fear: slavery to fear

Fear. What are you afraid of? When I was a boy, I was afraid of the dark. Why? Because in the darkness was the unknown because I could not perceive things with my eyes. It's fear of the unknown and what might happen to you, whether that is rational or not. Many people won't fly because they are afraid that they may crash - but they are quite happy to travel there by car even though it is 25 times more dangerous to do so!

In fact, fear in human beings is rarely rational, sometimes its justified and sometimes it's not. However, it is also an essential part of the human make-up. We were created to feel fear because it protects us from going into situations without first weighing up the risks of doing so. One of the biggest dangers to small children is that they have no fear that they will come to harm and sometimes part of good teaching it to encourage them to be fearful of certain situations - like walking near to the edge of a cliff or walking across a road. Why, because they are ignorant of the dangers.

Fear is something that characterises the lives of many Christians and it is another way in which satan is able to bind us up and lock us in chains so that we do not achieve our potential in walking as the children of God. So what are we fearful of?

In the next few weeks we are going to be examining some of the fears that lock Christians up and prevent them from moving forward. You'll remember that a few months ago we looked at the issue of spiritual warfare and I said that in the Bible we find three kinds of enemy that oppose us: the world, the flesh and the devil and over the next couple of months we shall be examining aspects of these themes. We shall also be looking at one of the biggest fears for both unbelievers and believers - fear of death. It's an area where unbelievers should be fearful - very fearful, but believers usually have unjustified fears.

In fact, the sermons over the next few weeks are going to help us break the chains of fear in many areas of our lives, because God wants us to be free to serve Him and grow in Him.

Let's read on in Romans 8 where we left off last time.

Romans 8:15-28

Have you noticed how defensive people are when you try to discuss matters of faith with them? "I never discuss politics or religion!". I wonder why? It usually isn't because they have everything about religion sussed. It's the reverse, they don't have a clue and they don't like talking about it. If your one life is all you have then you realise that it flashes by quickly. The older you get, the more you have to contemplate matters of life and death. They say you know you are getting old when you only meet old friends at funerals!

We'll deal more with this next week but the main problem that non-Christians have is that they are without hope. It only lasts this year or next year. Things

that they may look forward to in the future are down to "lady luck". I'll do well in my retirement - if I'm lucky. I'll go round the world when I'm retired - if I'm lucky.

Where's their hope? They don't have any real hope. The future is a great unknown and they are shackled by it. They are slaves to fear.

How people deal with fear varies. Some are overcome by it and they become depressed. For many, they go into denial. They won't talk with you of subjects that make them fearful - death, cancer, illness. They don't like to think about it. When we want to talk to them about matters of life and death they say "I'll think about that later. I'll leave it until I'm older". A friend of mine had a great fridge magnet. It said "Waiting until the 11th hour? What if you die at 10-30?"

Are you sure of your future this morning? Or do you live in fear? Fear of death, fear of life, fear of your boss, fear you may lose your job, fear you may get ill, fear of your neighbours, fear of the youths which loiter around town, fear of crime, fear of what God may do to you, fear because you know that you have lived a life that does not please God?

These are all characteristics of people in our society who don't know Christ. Slaves to fear. Our world exists on fear or self-denial of it. It's Satan's way of exercising control, by paralysing us with fear. Maybe you know people like that. Maybe you are one of them. In slavery to fear.

One of the saddest things about many Christians today - people that have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Lord is that we have the same fears.

Look again at these verses *15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

When we accepted Christ we were released from the bonds of slavery. Are you shackled this morning still? Afraid of the future, afraid of the world or whatever. Fear. It paralyses us and stops us doing what we should. Slaves to fear.

But as God's people we haven't received a spirit of fear. Fear of death or the world, the flesh or the devil should not be a characteristic of our lives. But so often it is. So why shouldn't we be afraid. Paul gives us three reasons:

- *We have the Spirit of sonship*
- *We have a glorious hope*
- *The Spirit Himself intercedes for us*

▶ **We have the Spirit of sonship.**

Why should we not fear what the eternity, death, the world, or the devil can throw at us - because we are the children of God.

Who does God fear? What a ridiculous question! God fears no-one - we are His children! We are the children of God. We have a Spirit of sonship who testifies to us who we are. Let's act like it.

Unfortunately, for many Christians we have the wrong relationship with our Father and we don't act like His children. Why might that be? Look at *Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools*

despise wisdom and discipline. Or 9:10 " The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

This phrase the fear of the Lord is common in the OT, particularly in the Psalms and Proverbs - it occurs about 19 times. Why should people *fear* God? First of all let me say, if you are not a Christian here this morning then be afraid, be very, very afraid. God is just and cannot tolerate sin. *Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and come short of God's glory.*

If you understand that this morning and know you are a sinner and you fear what God not only might do, but will do to you then there is another verse just for you:

Prov 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

God wants to turn you from the snares of death this morning by coming to him, turning away from your sins and accepting Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. You needn't fear what God will do.

Unfortunately many Christians often misunderstand this aspect of the fear of God. They fear what God might do to them if they sin. The Emperor Constantine went through the whole of his life with a rather ambivalent attitude to the Christian faith and was only baptised when he was close to death. Why? Because he feared that if he were to follow Christ and displease God, he would be turned away by God. What a load of nonsense! His picture of God was all wrong.

As I've said on a previous occasion, some people have an image of God as a fearsome potentate on a throne, ready to pounce on us for what we do wrong. It clouds our whole attitude to reverence. It makes us legalistic. But it affects our actions too. We feel we must do certain things to keep God happy and this affects our lifestyle. We dress in a certain way - on a Sunday only - to give God reverence. Is God less of a potentate at other times when we are more casually dressed? Or we say, "we must use this form of language before God" and we must pray in a certain way and we must worship in a certain way, because it's reverent - because we mustn't upset God. Hasn't it occurred to them that the way they think and act most of the time - the way WE think and act most of the time is an abomination to God. Yes, abomination because all sin is an abomination! What difference does your manner of dress, your form of worship or whatever matter if your heart is not right before God. It means nothing.

On the other hand I also get fed up when I see people treat God as their cosmic chum. They say "sin doesn't matter because I can come to the cross and find forgiveness". The way we do this or that doesn't matter because we are acceptable to God never mind what as He's a God of love. If that's your view of this morning then let me remind you that this is as much of an abomination as people who are outwardly reverent and inwardly in rebellion with God.

What can we say. What sort of God do we have. How do we understand familiarity or reverence or for that matter fear in the context of being a Christian.

Our God is good because he answers that one for us here:

Rom 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

He's our Father - Abba which is an Aramaic word of familiarity - Dad. How do you balance familiarity with respect? In parenthood. I believe the whole idea of God as Father is one of the most profound pieces of revelation in the NT. You see in parenthood we have respect. But fearing God is simply not a case of respect even though this is important.

If you crossed your mother or father as a child, you *feared* them. Not because they were going to murder you but because you were going to receive punishment. *Hebrews 12 : 5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."* Part of being a child is receiving discipline, yet in our Father we receive discipline so that we grow and act like His children.

However God prefers to forgive than to exact discipline. When we understand how angry God is with our sin then the fear God is that it drives us quickly to repentance. If you remember what I said earlier, fear is what we are created with because it helps us to define what is dangerous and drives us to the direct course of action.

Crossing God is not advisable, sin is not advisable. It makes our heavenly Father angry. But as a loving Father he forgives all those who repent. And in Christ we find forgiveness is full and free.

Are you in disobedience to God this morning. Does what I say fill you with fear? Don't be. Repent and accept His forgiveness afresh. Deal with that sin renounce it and live like a child of God!

Abba brings another aspect of God though. You see, God is not Mr Angry. He's Dad. God does want us to have the familiarity and intimacy with Him. God does not want to be the distant potentate on the throne to us to whom we bow in fear and trembling. He's Dad, who has His own chair and to whom we gather around to discuss life with. We tell Him where we're at and He shares the deep things of life. Well, that's how parenthood should be but unfortunately in our society parenthood is lost. Intimate relationships are lost.

If you really want to understand what reverence really means, then you won't find it in your manner of dress or your form of worship - but you'll find it by spending time with Dad. God is our Father and His desire is to be a Father to us and our desire should be to act as His children.

► **We have a glorious hope**

Look at verses 17-21. This is really profound stuff

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Why do we not fear the world, the flesh or the devil. Because there is nothing they can do to change a simple fact - our life is already mapped out into eternity.

Do you find life tough, are you fearful? Paul recognises that as he says *Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* We are God's children, liberated, and we have a glorious hope. Hope in the NT is not the same as we use today. Hope is always certain. We have the hope of eternal life means we have the word of God to it - a rock-solid guarantee. It isn't I hope it won't rain today - but it may. Why should we fear life, when we can see what's ahead? It changes the whole complexion of things doesn't it.

▶ **The Spirit intercedes for us**

Finally we have this wonderful truth.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

When we are full of fear, too afraid to pray and feeling inadequate and not quite like the children of God then the Spirit intercedes for us. Isn't that wonderful. When we are weak He is there for us, pleading our cause

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

AV And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to [his] purpose.

This is a wonderful verse. Different translators translate it different ways but the sentiment comes through. Whatever our fears, they are our fears and they bind us up. What's God's agenda here. He works all things for our good. That's the nature of our hope. We sometimes see the difficulties but we know that our Father works them for our good. Notice the proviso here though *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.* It's back to relationship. When we are walking in a love relationship with our Father, then as a good Father He acts for our good. And what if we are not walking in that love relationship?

We walk in fear - we are slaves to fear. Let's renounce that fear this morning and come before God our Father.

Father God

*I have realised that I have been living my life in fear
Fear of what people may do to me
Fear of the devil and his forces
Fear of how illness may illness affects me
Fear of what the future may hold
Fear of death.*

*Thank you that you have given me a Spirit of sonship and not a spirit of fear.
I come to you this morning in repentance
I rely no-more on myself
But I rely on You and know you will wipe those fears away
And release me from those fears which bind me
And keep me from following you as your heir and a joint heir with Christ.*

*Father I desire to know you more
To know what it is like to truly fear God
And to know Your love and forgiveness in my life.
I pray that you will do this in me
In Jesus' mighty name*

Amen



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