

VIII

THE FEAR MENTALITY

God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7).

The whole concept of law causes man to be afraid and insecure. The word "unclean" occurs 94 times in the book of Leviticus alone. It is obvious that a person could become unclean by accident.

This is specifically pointed out in Leviticus 5:1-3. The first verse indicates that one can become guilty by not testifying when he knows of someone else's sin. The second verse indicates that a man can become guilty by touching an unclean animal or creeping thing. Even if he is unaware of it, he is still unclean and guilty. The third verse indicates that a person can become guilty by contacting the uncleanness of a human and this uncleanness still contaminates even when one is not aware of it.

These few references are like the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There are literally dozens of ways to be spiritually contaminated under the law.

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The most devout keeper of the law could have his entire weekend ruined by accidentally bumping into the wrong person or thing at 5:00 on Friday evening.

In Leviticus 7:21 we are informed that the soul that touches any unclean thing and then eats of the peace offerings is to be cut off from his people.

In Leviticus 11:31 we discover that a person can become unclean by touching a dead snail or other "unclean" creatures which creep upon the earth.

In Leviticus 12:4 we find that a woman is forbidden to touch a hallowed thing or to come into the sanctuary for 40 days after giving birth to a male child and for two weeks after giving birth to a female.

In Numbers 4:15 we are informed that any who touched the holy vessels of the sanctuary would die.

In Numbers 16:26 we read that the death penalty extended to those who even touched anything that belonged to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their followers who rebelled against Moses.

Let me suggest a little scenario which will provide insight into the frustration experienced by those who lived under the law.

Let us suppose that you are going to attempt to be pure, by law, for one period of twenty-four hours. You begin the day by fumigating the room where you will stay so that it will be free from any unclean insect. The room is then locked so that you have absolutely no contact with any person. Even a door knob touched by a menstruous woman could contaminate you so you stand at attention in the middle of the room . . . with the shades drawn. Before you is the law of God upon which you strive diligently to meditate, seeking to avoid any impure or unclean thought.

At the end of the day you find that you are guilty . . . not because of anything which you have done or failed to do, but because the High Priest has sinned.

Leviticus 4:3 teaches that the priest that is anointed could sin so as to bring guilt upon the people. Like the nation suffering for the sin of Achan, they could suffer again because of the sin of a King like David, or the sins of a priest.

One can easily see how the period of law promoted and perpetuated a mentality of fear. The most scrupulous individual could unwittingly commit an unclean act of the most serious proportions and those

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who were locked into the legal mentality went out of their way to avoid any possibility of contamination by what they "touched."

The story of the good Samaritan provides us with an interesting case in point. The priest and the Levite not only did not help the man who had fallen among thieves, but they deliberately avoided him. Jesus explicitly said of both that they "passed by on the other side" (Lk. 10:31, 32). The Greek word used to describe their actions is "antiparalthen." "Parerchomai" is the word which means to come or go from something, and the word "anti" before it specifies to pass by opposite or to avoid.

The Samaritan did not have a legal mentality. He was deemed as irreligious by his Jewish contemporaries. Therefore, it was the Samaritan who was neighbor to him who fell among thieves and who set an example for us. Jesus put it like this, "Go thou and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37).

Uzzah and the Ark

II Samuel 6 tells the story of Uzzah who died because he touched the ark of the covenant.

The basics of the story go like this. David gathered together 30,000 chosen men of Israel to go fetch the ark of the covenant. They brought it out of the house of Abinadab in Gibeah and placed it upon a new cart. Uzzah and Ahio drove the cart.

David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments.

When they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God (II Sam. 6:7).

The death of Uzzah involved several violations of the law of God. First of all, the ark was not to be transported on a cart, it was to be carried. Properly sanctified, Levites were responsible for carrying the ark. And finally, of course, no one was to touch it.

David corrected these errors and we read in I Chronicles 15:12ff.,

... Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of

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Israel unto the place I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. . . .

Modern Fear

Many of our modern brethren have read this story and concluded that God was teaching us always to worship Him after the "due order." Consequently, they would reject anything as "worship" which is not specifically mentioned in the "law."

As ridiculous as it may sound to the uninitiated, there are those who believe it sinful to worship God with a mechanical instrument of music, a songbook, or even a tuning fork. There are those who reject Sunday School Classes, benevolent institutions, multiple communion cups, and Christian Colleges.

Their thinking hearkens back to the days of Uzzah and they assume that God was trying to teach us to always worship Him according to the law.

Exactly the reverse is true. God was trying to teach us that it was impossible for us to worship Him by law.

The law was not given to make us legalistic, it was given as a school-teacher to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by a principle transcending the whole concept of law.

Him That Is Weak

For many years I harbored the mistaken notion that legalistic churches were strong. I thought that the more rules a congregation had and the more legalistic demands which it made increased its strength and brought it closer to God. Probably the reverse was true.

The fourteenth chapter of Romans deals specifically with this issue. It teaches us that weak people are to be received in a peaceable way without arguing about their scruples.

For one man believeth that he may eat all things, another, who is weak, eateth herbs (Rom. 14:2).

Note that the person with the most restrictive lifestyle is the "weak" one. The man who ate only herbs needed to grow in his faith.

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The same was true regarding Holy days. One man regarded one day above another and another esteemed every day alike. The legalistic Jew led a very restrictive lifestyle and some of them carried their same hangups into Christianity.

God Hath Not Given Us A Spirit of Fear (II Tim. 1:7)

The Scriptures seem to be clear that if you have a spirit of fear you did not get it from God.

God gives to us a spirit of boldness, as personified by Jesus. He was different from the Scribes in that He spoke with authority. They were never quite sure . . . always hesitant . . . always insecure. Jesus, by contrast, was never hesitant . . . never insecure, . . . and always certain.

When we appropriate the Spirit of Jesus we too become confident. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1).

Some have suggested that Timothy had a special need of this kind of admonition.

When Timothy was on his way to Corinth, Paul saw the need of paving the way for his coming by writing,

Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do (I Cor. 16:10).

When Paul first met Timothy, it was during a period of persecution. Timothy was fully aware of these persecutions and afflictions which came to Paul in Antioch, and Iconium, and Lystra (II Tim. 3:11) and for this reason may have needed a special reminder to not be ashamed of the Lord, nor of Paul, his prisoner.

Jesus was fearless. He spoke with authority, not as the scribes. The Scriptures teach that those who fear are not made perfect in love for perfect love casteth out fear (I Jn. 4:18). It is to be regretted that the King James Version speaks of Jesus as being heard by God because of fear (Heb. 5:7). The best manuscripts use not "phobos" but "eulabeia" and perhaps the New International Version has captured the sense by rendering it as "reverent submission." Jesus did have reverent submission, but He did not have any reason to be afraid.

Fear and timidity are so utterly out of character with the Christian life that the “fearful” are listed in Revelation 21:8 with whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars.

Paul did things which the devout Jew could not consent to or comprehend. He actually became a gentile to the gentiles (I Cor. 9:21). He could eat gentile food and do other things which the Jew understood to be in direct violation of the will of God. The reason was that Paul was “born from above.”

A caterpillar cannot fly. He is doomed to crawl along and munch a few leaves. The butterfly is a converted caterpillar. He has gone through a metamorphosis which enables him to live a transcendent life.

Heavenly Places

The expression “heavenly places” occurs five times in the book of Ephesians. The word “places” is in italics, which means that it is not in the original text. Some, therefore, render it simply as “heavenlies.” It is in the “heavenlies” that the believer reigns with Christ at the right hand of God, far above all principalities and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:20-21).

- We are blessed with spiritual blessings in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3).
- Christ reigns in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:20).
- We sit with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6).
- The church displays the manifold wisdom of God in the heavenlies (Eph. 3:10).
- We wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12).

Ephesians 1:17-23 contains a prayer of Paul for the brethren in Ephesus. He wanted them to:

- (1) Have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge about him.
- (2) He wanted them to know of the hope of their calling.
- (3) He wanted them to have their eyes opened to the exceeding greatness of God’s power to us who believe.

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He then continues to explain that this power available to us is identically the same power which was operating in Jesus when God raised Him from the dead and set Him on His own right hand in the heavenlies, which is far above any earthly rule, or authority, or kingdom.

It is here that God expects us to operate as believers.

B.C. Lives in an A.D. World

How sad it is to see believers tapping along like blind men, always hesitant and uncertain about which step to take next. Like the Ephesians of old, our eyes need to be enlightened. We need to sit with Christ in heavenly places and assume the perspective which enables us to forge ahead with fearless determination.

I heard some time ago of three congregations which were offered the privilege of operating a brand new hospital facility. They hesitantly declined, fearful that the church had no business doing such a thing.

I know of congregations where the fear mentality reigns so supreme that the custodian wouldn't dare sit down on the steps and eat a sandwich for fear that he would be in violation of a "law" in I Corinthians 11.

Some churches partition off special places and forbid common folk to violate certain boundaries. They seem not to know that Jesus has done away with Holy Places and Holy Things by making us Holy People.

Luke Perinne tells the story of a ladies' group which decided to play a game to see who could look the meanest and ugliest. The lady who won wasn't even playing.

Our legalistic approach to God has filled our congregations with frowning worshippers who are afraid to relax for fear that something which they say or do might be used against them. I even heard of one congregation where the board voted to forbid anyone from shaking hands after the meeting has officially begun.

How different is the glorious covenant which by means of the Holy Spirit replaces the slave mentality with that of a son, who transforms us from a cringing and fearful bondservant to a happy child who can rush boldly into the presence of God and fling his arms around Him crying out, "Abba, Father."

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The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might achieve the new perspective of faith and come boldly and fearlessly into the presence of God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. How can the fear of the Lord be wrong since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7)?
2. In what way does perfect love cast out fear (I Jn. 4:18)?
3. Did Jesus fear God or not (Heb. 5:8)?
4. Is the "fear of the Lord" good or bad?
5. What does it mean in II Timothy 1:7 "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear"?
6. Why were the Jewish people afraid to pronounce the name of God (Ex. 20:7)?
7. Where does the Christian get the boldness to call God "abba" or "daddy" (Gal. 4:6)?
8. Who are the fearful that will be condemned to Hell (Rev. 21:8)?
9. Why were the Jews afraid to enter into the Holy of Holies?
10. Why does the Christian have boldness to enter into the Holiest (Heb. 10:19)?