

THE SNARE OF FEAR
Pr 29:25
Banská Štiavnica, 19th June 2016

חֲרֵדַת אָדָם יִתֵּן מוֹקֵשׁ וּבֹשֶׁת בֵּיתוֹהָ יִשָּׁנֵב	Pr 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.
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לֹא־תִאמְרוּן קִשְׁרָה לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר הָעָם הַזֶּה קִשְׁרָה וְאַת־מוֹדָאוּ לֹא־תִירָאוּ וְלֹא תִעֲרִיצוּ ¹³ אֶת־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲתוֹ תִקְדִּישׁוּ וְהוּא מוֹרְאָכֶם וְהוּא מִעֲרָצְכֶם	Is 8:12-13 "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³ But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.
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“We fear man so much because we fear God so little.” (William Gurnall)¹

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0. INTRODUCTION

[William GURNALL] DOCTRINE, *The Christian of all men needs courage and resolution*. Indeed there is nothing that he does as a Christian, or can do, but is an act of valour. A cowardly spirit is beneath the lowest duty of a Christian...²

- Richard Baxter (1664): (1) Sinful fear of God, (2) Sinful fear of the Devil, (3) Sinful Fear of Man

[John FLAVEL] Among all the creatures God hath made (devils only excepted) man is the most apt and able to be his own tormentor; and of all the **scourges** with which he lasheth and afflicteth both his mind and body, none is found so **cruel and intolerable as his own fears**.³

0.1. THE FEAR OF GOD

- reverence; worship
- fountain of life (**Pr 14:27** The **fear** of the LORD is a **fountain** of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.)
 - ⇒ idolatry and fear...

0.2. THE FEAR OF DEATH

- **Heb 2:14-15** ...through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through **fear of death** were subject to lifelong slavery.

¹ GURNALL, W. *Christian in Complete Armour*, London : Thomas Tegg, 1845, p. 813.

² GURNALL, W. *Christian in Complete Armour*, p. 2.

³ FLAVEL, J. *A Practical Treatise of Fear*, Whole Works 3, London : Baynes & Son. 1820, p. 239.

- self-preservation instinct
- fear of eternal damnation

0.3. THE FEAR OF MAN

- חרר tremble, be terrified → trembling, fear, anxiety
- (חֲרִידַת אָדָם) → “man’s fear” or “being afraid of man” (WHYBRAY)
- [Isaac] Gn 27:33 וַיִּחַרְדּוּ יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה וְגַלְיָהּ
- [Joseph’s brothers] Gn 42:28 וַיִּחַרְדּוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו לֵאמֹר מִה־זֹּאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ
- [Sinai] Ex 19:16, 18 וַיִּחַרְדּוּ כָּל-הָעָם / וְקָל שֹׁפָר חֹזֵק מְאֹד וַיִּחַרְדּוּ כָּל-הָעָם
- [Saul/Jonathan] 1Sa 14:15 וַהֲמֹשְׁחִית חֲרָדוֹ גַם-הַמָּוָה וַתִּרְגְּזוּ הָאָרְצִי וַתִּהְיֶה לְחֲרִידַת אֱלֹהִים
- [Saul] 1Sa 28:5 וַיִּרְא שְׂאוּל אֶת-מַחְנֵה פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּרְא וַיִּחַרְדּוּ לְבוֹ מְאֹד

[FRANCKE] ...It is a reigning sin in the **unregenerate**, and as it is a weakness adhering to the **regenerate**... this fear of man, wheresoever it is found, is in itself a most heinous vice, and a kind of **idolatry**, arising from the spawn of an unbelieving heart, whereby we lay aside the fear of God from before our eyes, and think, speak, or do any evil, or leave thinking, speaking, or doing that which is good for any consideration or regard of men...⁴

- public opinion → “...bold to front danger, who would shrink from shame.” (Charles Bridges)
- fear of rejection → e.g. fear being judged by legalists (Peter in Galatia)
- “...ashamed to be found upon their knees...” (Charles Bridges)

1. THE SNARES OF FEAR

[Pr 29:25] The contrast is between "trusting" (boteah) the Lord and "fearing man" (kherdat 'adam). Such fear becomes a snare when it gets to the point of letting others control your life – their opinions and attitudes put subtle pressure on you, even hindering you from speaking the truth or doing what is right. Release from such bondage comes when people put their faith in the Lord alone.⁵

1.1. IN ACTION

- Jacob meeting Esau – returning from Laban **Gn 32:7** Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. ... **Gn 32:11** Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him,
- **1Sa 15:24** Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people (וַיִּרְאֵם אֶת-הָעָם) and obeyed their voice. → **1Sa 15:28** The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you
- Pilate condemning Jesus... (Jn 19:8,13,14)

1.2. IN SPEECH

- ...truth softened down, modified, explained away... (Charles Bridges)
- **1Cor 2:3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling → **Acts 18:9-10** And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."
- the prophets (Micha, Nathan, Jeremiah...)
- **Jn 7:13** Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him. → **confession of Jesus**
- **Mt 21:26** [the Pharisees in discussing John’s baptism:] But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

1.3. IN THOUGHTS

- **John 5:44** How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?
- **1Sa 21:12** And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.
- **1Sa 27:1** Then **David** said in his heart (וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-לְבוֹ), Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines.

⁴ FRANCKE, A. H. *Nicodemus*, Bath : Matthews, Strand, 1801, p. 3, 4.

⁵ GAEBELEIN F. E. *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, General Editor

[CHAMBERS] Abraham (Genesis 20:11-18) ...The fear of man which had determined him earlier (Genesis 12:11-13) was awakened afresh in him by what he had so recently seen in Sodom, and he was suspicious of human nature everywhere ...We are always in danger of mistaking personal predilections for Christian perfection, and we have to learn to take the veil off our moral quirks [subtlety, shift or evasion]. Over and over again it works like this: we begin to be cunning and think – Now, if I am not careful that man will utilise my position for his own purposes. The real reason we say it is that we do not like that particular man and imagine therefore that God does not like him either...⁶

2. OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF MAN

[BAXTER] Bottom thy soul and hopes on Christ, and lay up thy treasure in heaven; be not a worldling that liveth in hope of happiness in the creature; and then thou art so far above the fear of men, as knowing that thy treasure is above their reach, and thy foundation and fortress safe from their assaults. It is a base, hypocritical, worldly heart that maketh you immoderately afraid of men! Are you afraid lest they should storm and plunder heaven? or lest they cast you into hell? or lest they turn God against you? ...No; it is their hurting of your flesh, the diminishing your estates, the depriving you of your liberty or worldly accommodations, or of your lives, which is the thing you fear. And doth not this show how much your hearts are yet on earth? and how much unmortified worldliness and fleshliness is still within you? and how much yet your hearts are false to God and heaven? Oh how the discovery should humble you!⁷

2.1. KNOW AND FEAR GOD

- **Lk 1:73** ...the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear (τοῦ δοῦναι ἡμῖν ⁷⁴ἀφόβως ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν ῥυσθέντας λατρεύειν αὐτῷ)
- “seeing the unseen” (Ps 16)
 - **Ps 16:8-9** I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being **rejoices**; my flesh also dwells secure.
 - **Ps 118:6** The LORD is on my side (יְהוָה לִי); I will not fear. What can man do to me?
 - **Is 2:22** Stop regarding man (חַדְלֵי לְכֶם מִן־הָאָדָם) in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? (כִּי־בִמָּה נִחְשָׁב הוּא)
- **Jer 1:17** Do not be dismayed by them (אַל־תַּחַח), lest I dismay you (תִּתְחַחֲנָה) before them.
- **Rev 21:8** But as for the cowardly (δειλοῖς), the faithless (ἀπίστοις), the detestable (ἐβδελυγμένοις), as for murderers (φονεῦσι), the sexually immoral (πόρνοις), sorcerers (φαρμάκοις), idolaters (εἰδωλολάτραις), and all liars (ψευδέσι), their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

2.2. ACCEPT THE CROSS

- **Lk 14:27** Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me **cannot** be my **disciple**
 - **Lk 12:4-5** "I tell you, my friends, **do** not fear those who kill the body, and after that have **nothing more** that they **can do**. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! **Mt 10:28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (ἐν γέεννη).
 - **Heb 12:2** Jesus, **the** founder and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy** that was set **before** him endured **the** cross, despising **the** shame, and is seated at **the** right hand of **the** throne of God.

[GURNALL] **Children** are afraid of bugbears, that cannot hurt them; but they can play with fire that will burn them; and no less childish is it to be frightened into a sin at the frowns of a man, who comes forth with a vizard of seeming dread and terror, but hath no power to hurt us more than our own fear gives him; and to play with hell-fire into which God is able to cast us for ever. Truly, this is to be scared with painted fire in the picture, and not in the furnace, where it really burns.⁸

2.3. WATCH YOUR OWN HEART

[FRANCKE] The first and most necessary means to cast off this fear of man, is a constant and earnest endeavour to free ourselves from the most dangerous deceitfulness of our own hearts.⁹

⁶ CHAMBERS, O. *Not knowing where*. Complete Works, Grand Rapids : Discovery House, 2000, p. 893.

⁷ BAXTER, R. *Practical Works I*, London : Arthur Hall, 1847, p. 288-9.

⁸ GURNALL, W. *Christian in Complete Armour*, p. 596.

⁹ FRANCKE, A. H. *Nicodemus*, p. 51.

- **Ps 119:161** Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words.
- **Isa 35:4-5** Say to those who have an anxious heart (לִּנְהַרְרֵי לֵב), "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
- **Ps 27:14** Wait for the LORD (אֶל־יְהוָה אֶקְוֶה); be strong, and let your heart take courage (יָחֹזֵק וַיִּאֱמֵן לִבִּי); wait for the LORD!
- **2Cor 5:8** Yes, we are of good **courage** (θαρροῦμεν), and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
 - **Acts 5:29** [Peter] ...We must obey God rather than men.
- **2Tim 1:7** for God gave us a spirit not of fear (πνεῦμα δειλίας) but of **power** and **love** and **self-control**. (δυνάμεως καὶ ἀγάπης καὶ σωφρονισμοῦ)

3. TO REMEMBER

- Ability to fear is our protection given by God, but it becomes a snare if it is mis-directed.
- We need the light of the Word to see the real motives behind our fears. (e.g. people-pleasing)
- Knowing the great fear of God sets us free from the lesser fears of unbelief.