

WHEN THERE IS NOT YET LOVE THERE MUST BE FEAR

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on December 1, 1968 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

In 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president of the United States. The crash of 1929 had become a real panic by early 1933. There was a period of 100 days at the beginning of the Roosevelt administration when this nation reached bottom. In one of his famous fireside chats Roosevelt spoke during that critical time of "four freedoms"--one of which was "freedom from fear." One of his sentences has been often quoted, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I have no doubt that in that emergency situation when the nation was economically paralyzed Roosevelt was right in calling the people back to confidence and away from fear.

Today, however, three and one-half decades later I feel that one of the problems that plagues our nation is "freedom from fear." Children, for example, often do not fear their parents, and consequently do not behave in the manner that they should. Parents have been too permissive and too indulgent. Children as a result do not have the disciplined self-control that people must have in order to be happy and in order for society to function properly. Again, citizens do not fear law enforcement in our day. A period of lawlessness has resulted, with the crime rate rising eight times as fast as the population growth. Yet again, mankind in our day does not fear God. There seems to be little concern on the part of many about a day of judgment in which man must give an account to God for everything that he has done, said, and thought. Our age is one in which there is less fear of parents, of law enforcement, and of God, with consequent problems for our nation.

What is fear? Webster starts us on a meaningful definition: "A painful emotion marked by alarm; dread; disquiet; anxious concern; solicitude." We would add that it includes feelings of uncertainty, lack of self-assurance, and implies a need for help beyond one's self. Fear is one of the most common human emotions, along with love, joy, hate, envy, resentment, and guilt. In the minds of most people it is considered to be undesirable or even bad. But is it really undesirable and bad?

Created To Feel Fear

God equipped man to feel fear when he created him in the beginning. All of us have known fear. For example, as children we were afraid of the dark or of the large dog next door. As adolescents we were afraid of not being accepted by our peer group. As young adults we feared not being successful, by which we meant not getting a job or not being able to marry. In the middle years of life we feared loss of possessions, loss of loved ones, sickness and death. In the older years of life we feared poverty, loneliness, sickness and death. In every stage of life we have felt fear. God created man so that he had the capacity for fear and this must mean that fear has some purpose.

Fear often serves a good purpose. When children fear parents they are well-behaved. When students fear teachers they are well disciplined. When drivers fear accidents they drive more carefully. When citizens fear law enforcement officers they do not commit crimes as readily. When men fear poverty they prepare for old age through hard work and savings. When people fear health hazards they leave of smoking, drinking, and the use of drugs. When nations fear their enemies they prepare for war. When nations fear atomic destruction they sit down at the peace table. When men fear God they live more righteously.

Fear can be a powerful motivational force. A lackadaisical boy in school can be turned overnight into a fine student when he becomes afraid of failure or of other dire consequences of inattention to his studies. A lazy employee can be turned into a zealous worker if he suddenly becomes aware that he is about to lose his job. The fear of failure has driven many a person on to success. Most of us at one time or another have felt stage-fright. What actually happens is this. The adrenal glands exude adrenalin, and this flows into the bloodstream as a result of our feeling of fear. We are then super-charged and are enabled to make a supreme effort. This means a better speech. It also is the kind of thing that happens to every good athlete when he faces an important game. Without fear the whole process would not begin. With fear we are enabled to do a far better job than we would otherwise be able to do.

Fear Often Precedes Greatness

It is quite interesting to notice that many of the characters in the Bible who are most outstanding felt fear just at the turning point in their lives. As an example we might refer to Moses who at the age of eighty was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness of Midian. The ambition that he had felt at the age of forty had been tempered through forty years of mellowing in the lonely wilderness. It was at this stage, when he did not feel pride or egotism in his own abilities, that God could use him in the important role of deliverer of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Accordingly, God came to Moses in the wilderness and showed him a bush which burned but which was not consumed. As Moses came out of curiosity to see the bush, he was told that he was standing on holy ground and was told to take off his shoes. At that point we read, "And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." (Ex. 3:6)

When God then called Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage Moses made excuses. Ultimately God persuaded him and then used him to be one of the most outstanding leaders in history. It seems significant that just at this crucial turning point in his life he was afraid, and out of that fear moved on to greatness.

A second example is to be found in the person of Esther, who was selected to be queen to King Ahasuerus of Medo-Persia. As you recall the story, the Jews were under sentence of destruction when Mordecia sent word unto Esther and said, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then will release and deliverance arrive to the Jews from another place, but thou and thou father's house will perish." Notice the threat that fell upon Esther. Her uncle then went on, "And who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther after careful meditation sent back a note of reply saying, "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:13-14, 15). In the face of real danger this young Jewess felt fear, but she was stimulated to take the steps that ultimately freed her people from the threat of destruction.

#### In The New Testament, Too

In the New Testament we find fear present at the turning point in the life of Peter. On one occasion Jesus came along the shore of the Sea of Galilee one morning just at the time when the disciples were mending their nets. He called to Peter and asked him to put out into the deep and let down his nets. Simon answered and said, "Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing: but at thy word I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their nets were breaking; and they beckoned unto their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the boats so that they began to sink." Then just at that point Peter realized that something more significant than fishing was taking place that day. The account continues, "But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Out of his fear Peter fell down before Christ and asked Christ to go away. Jesus however responded, "Fear not; for henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their boats to land? they left all, and followed him." (Luke 5:5-11). Peter's fear is clearly recognized. It was out of this condition of fear that he turned toward Christ and followed him through a period of three years to a role of greatness.

Yet another example is found in Saul of Tarsus. In the ninth chapter of Acts we read of his going to Damascus for the express purpose of persecuting Christians. On the way the Lord appeared unto him, and Saul became a believer. After he had been struck down by the bright light and had talked with the Lord, he was blind for three days and three nights, during which time he fasted and prayed. At the end of this interval he was ready to respond when Ananias guided him in becoming a Christian. A period of fear preceded the beginning of his great and influential life for Christ.

There are many other passages which show that God has used fear in helping people to realize their own state and to do something about it before it is everlastingly too late. The 25th chapter of Matthew, for example, finds our Lord himself emphasizing the role of fear. The chapter begins with the story of the ten virgins, five of whom were foolish, and were ultimately shut out from the bridegroom's feast. The second story is of the men with varying talents. One who did not use his Lord's talent well was cast out where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25:30). In fact, it was Jesus himself who used this very disturbing expression on three different occasions, showing how terrible it would be to be lost eternally.

In the final picture to be found in the 25th chapter of Matthew we read of the judgment scene. Those righteous servants on the right hand were told, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... " Those on the left hand were told, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels ... " The chapter closes with the words, "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." Matt. 25:34, 41, 46).

In this chapter it is quite obvious that our Lord used strong appeals to fear. He who had participated in the creation of the world and of man himself, he who had left heaven and had come to earth to save man from disaster, he who loved man with an intensity impossible for us to understand was revealing to mankind the reality of the possibility of being eternally lost. All of this seems to add up to the meaning of a statement from Solomon in Prov. 1:7, "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge."

#### Conclusion

It seems obvious from our own reason and from these accounts in the scriptures that fear can serve a good purpose. It shatters man's false confidence in himself, and makes him look upward to God. Salvation today often comes when we realize how weak we are, how powerless we are to cope with life's problems, and how brief life is. Then, we yield our stubborn wills to God and allow him to save us.

But ultimately fear is not enough. There must be love. In I John 4:18 the apostle writes, "There is no fear in love; perfect love casteth out fear." Is this a contradiction with the emphasis made earlier in this message? We believe not. Rather, the scriptures would teach us that the highest motive is love, but if that one does not cause a man to come to his Lord, then the lower appeal to fear will be used lest the man be lost. Many years ago C. E. McGaughey held a meeting in which he said something like this, "I have appealed to you to become Christians out of love for your Lord. Many of you have come, but there are still others who ought to come. If the appeal of

coming to Christ out of love is ineffective upon your hearts, I am disappointed, but I do not terminate my efforts to help you find salvation. I gladly turn and appeal to fear, lest you be lost." It does appear that God is so concerned for our salvation that he turns to fear, if love is inadequate to bring men to the cross.

Something of this seems to be reflected in Paul's letter to the Romans, "Rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same; for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil ... Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Then he adds, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another ... Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." (Rom. 13:3-4, 7, 8, 10).

We began our study with this theme in mind, "When there is not yet love, there must be fear." Fear is an inferior appeal to that of love, but when love will not bring men to Christ, then the Lord is so concerned for them that he approaches them through the avenue of fear. Is it not a wonderful thing when children love their parents and obey them because of that love? Is it not a wonderful thing when citizens love their country and their fellowmen so much that they gladly obey the laws of the land? Is it not a wonderful thing when men love God so much that they gladly obey God's laws because of their love for him? This is the ideal, and nothing less than this is fully satisfying. When there is not yet love, there must be fear, but God is not really pleased until that fear is transformed into love. In our own individual lives, in the rearing of our children, in the affairs of our nation, and in our relationship to God, when there is not yet love, there must be fear.