

THE FEAR OF MAN AND THE SNARE IT BRINGS

Sunday, September 2nd, 2012, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1589

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John 5:33-47 - "You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. [35] He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light [speaking of John the Baptist - see 43b]. [36] But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. [37] And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, [38] *and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.* [39] *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,* [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. [41] *I do not receive glory from people.* [42] *But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.* [43] I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him [John the Baptist - see 35b]. [44] *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?* [45] Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. [46] If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

John 12:42-43 - "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; [43] *for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*"

Proverbs 29:25 - "The fear of man lays a *snare*, but whoever trusts in the Lord is *safe*."

Proverbs 27:21 - "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and *a man is tested by his praise.*"

Romans 2:29 - "But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. *His praise is not from man but from God.*"

If you are going to fail the Lord in some overt fashion this coming week, the most likely *reason* for that failure is found in these verses. Let me try to quickly pull together some of the important thoughts:

1) **THE LOVE OF REPUTATION AMONG MY PEERS IS THE GREATEST TOOL OF THE DEVIL IN MY LIFE**

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?"

One of the outstanding features of the Gospel is its revelation of God's love to the most unworthy people. Jesus didn't just embrace good people. He showed a particular interest in bad people - undeserving people - people like you and me.

With the coming of Jesus there was linked the coming of fresh hope for all. He didn't hob-knob with proper people. He reached out to improper people. While He never excused their sin, He reached out to thieves, prostitutes, swindlers and low-lives and made them all candidates for the forgiveness of Father God.

In fact, this was what was so upsetting to the church of Jesus' day. He had time and compassion for people they didn't think qualified for His grace. If He were truly God, He wouldn't have time for them either.

But Jesus just reached out to them anyway. Nothing could stop Him from His eternal quest to put broken lives back together again. And that's why it should be very significant to us when Jesus labels anybody as being *hopeless* - unable to find help in Him - totally incapable of believing in Him in any saving way. Jesus rarely spoke words like that.

Yet, listen to the desperation in His voice as He throws up His hands and asks, "How *can* you people ever believe in Me?" (**John 5:44**) Think of it. There was hope for the woman caught in adultery, for the crook executed on the cross, for Peter who would deny he knew Him and curse His blessed Name. There was hope for the demon possessed. All of these could be reached and salvaged with the incredible sin-bearing grace of God the Son.

But here, Jesus addressed a group of people whom He puts in a totally different class. Imagine. He actually said there was nothing He could do for them.

The reason? They were more concerned about what people thought of them than what God thought about them. What Jesus meant by that was these people would change their behavior to please *people* long before they would change their behavior to please *God*. They would walk over hot coals to please people but wouldn't get out of bed to please God. They wanted their boss to be proud of them. Or their spouses to be proud of them, of their friends to like them, but could ignore the voice of the Lord.

So, in these verses Jesus sharp-shoots. And He says the *fear of man* keeps people out of the Kingdom of God. And by "*fear of man*" He doesn't mean afraid of them like people are afraid of disease. Jesus meant they were afraid of others in the sense of *not being admired and accepted* by them. There's another strong point in these verses:

2) **PEOPLE WILL ABANDON CONVICTIONS BEFORE THEY WILL ABANDON THEIR REPUTATION BEFORE MEN**

John 12:42-43 - "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; [43] *for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*"

And we're meant to take note of those two **comparative words** - "**more than**"(43). Now, these were all good people. The text makes it clear that these were people who believed in Jesus. Not just one or two - "**many**" leaders believed in Him. But they had a love for Jesus that never got off the ground. They had dreams and aspirations that never materialized. They wanted to live for their Lord, but never put legs on their convictions. They lived with the pain and regret of knowing they were selling out their Lord.

Here's what did them in. They had good positions in society. They were leaders. They were up there on the upper crust. They were respected, at least by those who counted.

And yet for all of that, they were very small people in one sense. They were so influenced by the opinions of their associates that they would go against the voice of conscience and conviction in their hearts. They would snuff out the inward voice of the Spirit of Christ when it meant saving face.

Here's the life lesson here: ***The one you seek to please has the power over your life.*** Always. And that's the issue Jesus drills down into in these verses. The issue in these verses is the control of your life. There are words from Jesus about your **freedom**. And they're all about what causes spiritually developmentally handicapped disciples.

The "**fear of man**" - the love of praise from any source other than God - the shoring up of your own image in the eyes of the crowd - will keep you from receiving the glory that comes from God alone. You'll be led around by the crowd. Your own convictions won't keep you spiritually sane. Your Bible knowledge won't filter into your actual life-style. You'll know all about the **conviction** of the Holy Spirit, but nothing of **walking** in the power of the Holy Spirit.

All of God's good influences - prayer - His Word - the fellowship of the church - the accumulated wisdom of friends who try to help you out spiritually - none of those things has enough weight to over-rule the fear of man.

3) **THE FEAR OF MAN IS A SNARE BECAUSE ITS DOMINION IS HIDDEN FROM THE VIEW OF OTHERS**

Proverbs 29:25 - "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe."

Notice the polar opposites in this single verse. There is the fear of man and the snare it brings. And then there is the act of trusting in the Lord which brings safety. And the safety listed there isn't just the safety from flood or fire or disease. It's the safety of being kept from the huge spiritual blunders that you don't see yet (that's why these dangers are likened to a **snare**). You'll be kept safe from the kind of carelessness that you will regret down the road far more deeply than you can possibly know right now.

But here's the rub. To fear God in safety you have to go against the crowd right now. And it's usually **initially easier** to go along with the crowd's applause. You get the approval and smiles and the admiration right now. And all of those things feel great. You never have to work through the embarrassment of having your own convictions stand out. You don't lose any friends. Not now. That's what makes this snare so deadly in the church.

* ***A person practices immorality*** - Maybe they've been involved for weeks or months. Suddenly they're found out. Then they're sickened by their sin. Then they want to repent. Then they want the church to rally round in love and support.

Their sin troubles them when the crowd knows. And the person feels broken by the embarrassment of that. But God knew about it all along. That didn't trouble them at all.

* ***Or a person lies and twists the truth*** - Finally, the truth starts to come out in spite of all their deceitfulness. Then they start to feel embarrassment and remorse. They finally come clean and admit their guilt.

But until they were found out they were perfectly happy to sing and pray and worship. When the truth comes out it leaves everybody wondering, do they feel bad because they grieved the heart of God or because they've lost face in front of the crowd?

And if they feel badly because they grieved God, then why did they only repent when people found out? God was grieved a long time ago.

The writer of Proverbs says the fear of man works like a *snare*. It's effective because it's hidden. Nobody sees the damage or the bondage until it's too late. The fear of man is a sin that cuts down below the outward actions to the root that *feeds* those actions. It has as much to do with my *motives* before it has to do with my outward *actions*.

This sin - the fear of man - gets as close as you can get to the kind of inward cleanness Jesus was looking for in these searching words - **Matthew 23:25-26** - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. [26] You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean."

Notice the way Jesus calls on people to deal with this inward *motive* sin *first*. This is the only hope for an outwardly clean life. Jesus tries desperately to open us up - to *expose* to us the inward *source* of outward compromise and weakness.

4) **THE TEST OF WHO YOU ARE IS THE ONE YOU LIVE TO PLEASE**

Proverbs 27:21 - "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is *tested by his praise*."

Whose approval gives you the most delight. That's the issue. That *defines* your spiritual condition. This is the place where spirituality is tested. This is the laboratory. But let's be clear what the test *is* and what it *isn't*. The test is not professing I believe in Jesus. The test isn't even professing *love for Jesus*.

No, the real test, the furnace that melts down the gold and exposes its purity, is my readiness to lay aside the esteem of my peers, my friends, and my image in their eyes and actually live only for the smile of my Father in heaven. The test is whether I'm willing to please God at the expense of self and the acceptance of others.

That's the test. Do you live all of your life before God alone? Is every decision you make geared to His pleasure alone? Is radiating His glory the dominant concern in all your actions?

Whose praise do you live for? If God is the *only* one who knows about my sin, is that enough to make me forsake it in shame? And if God is the *only* one who smiles at my lonely trust in His will and way, is that enough to bring my whole being its deepest joy? That's the test of spiritual life.

5) **THE ESSENCE OF PRAISING IS PRIZING**

It's not what I *say* that marks my truest worship. It's the relationship I'm least willing to betray that marks who I am in Jesus Christ. This is the point Paul makes in **Romans 2:29** - "But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. *His praise is not from man but from God*."

The whole Old Testament pointed to a blessed day when the law of God - His holy will for my life - would not only be something external that I tried my best to follow. Rather, my heart would actually be transformed by the Holy Spirit to love to obey to please Him and walk in His ways. In other words, my greatest joy would be found in *pleasing* my Lord. In fact, I would gladly *displease* anyone else rather than grieve God's heart in any way.

In this verse, Paul writes of the bestowing of that new, circumcised heart. His whole point is this new heart is what makes a person a true child of God. It's not just a matter of being a decedent of Abraham. It's possessing a new heart. Then, very clearly, in the last phrase of that verse, he earmarks a very specific evidence of that new heart - "**....His praise is not from man but from God**." And there it is - the flowering of new life. The new heart beats for God's smile alone. The new heart isn't bribed. It's security isn't rooted in this world. It lives here, but it doesn't live *for* here.

Now let's apply all of this. Smart Christians are constantly on the lookout for the beginnings of this snare in their hearts. They're careful about it. They constantly check their motives. They monitor what delights and inspires them *most* in life - **Galatians 6:14** - "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Never make the mistake of thinking that those are the words of a sad man who feels he's sacrificed everything good and fun. Those are the words of a man who found the long, lost secret of freedom - the fountain of spiritual youth. Live all of your life, in public and in private, for the smile of God alone.