

Parson to Person
2 Corinthians 7 – Part 3
(The Fear of God)

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Having invested a Sunday addressing the call to *“cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness,”* and having given another Sunday to *“the promises,”* Paul mentioned when calling the believer to “cleanse” themselves, I am compelled to spend one more week on the verse and develop thoughts on *“the fear of God.”*

Scared to Rebel

The reference to the fear of the Lord can be a reminder that *“God is a consuming fire”* (Hebrews 12:29), and holds the “power to cast a soul into hell” (Luke 12:5). Therefore, a wise man or woman who recognizes God for who He is, will be reverent, submissive, and obedient to Him. God *is* to be feared.

Indeed, “the fool has said in his heart that there is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Therefore, the “fool’s” realization of and recognition of God is his or her starting place—leading to the wisdom and knowledge promised (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Oh, how foolish is the man who refuses to fear the Lord.

Literally hundreds of Bible verses refer to the fear of the Lord. Some reference the fear of God, others a command to fear God. The by-products of the fear of God provide much. Many times we learn of people fearing God, fearing His people (because they belonged to Him), and fearing the consequences of being His enemy—even when mistakenly believing they were (Revelation 1:17). However, the first

step to true rest and peace in the Lord is a holy reverential God-honoring fear—for it will lead us to biblical/spiritual wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom to respond toward God, and the knowledge of how!

Scared of Coming Judgment

My own walk with the Lord was preceded by a vision of going to hell. I was on the “easy road” to destruction, but through this dream/vision God woke me up to what could have been my future. Through this vision/dream, coupled together with other points of divine intervention, God provoked me—and I began to offer my future to Him.

Scared to Disappoint

Following my response to God through repentance and faith, I began to mature through another kind of fear. It was a step toward the fullness of the knowledge of the Lord—but not the end result. This part of my growth involved the fear of disappointing God.

I liken this to a wife, who having been newly married, does all she can to please her husband. She may fear she will be a disappointment to her new spouse in one way or another. She might suggest, “I’m afraid my husband won’t like the dinner I have made,” or “I’m afraid he will be disappointed in me.” However, I came to learn that the fear of disappointing God was a double-edged sword. On the one hand it was a trap of “performance-driven Christianity.” On the other hand, it was the schooling I needed to cause me to see that God did not love me (or save me) because of how well I had performed, was performing, or would perform.

Transformation

Early one morning in prayer I told the Lord, “I can’t do ‘this.’” To which He answered, “I know!” Moreover, it was as if the Lord was

saying, “That is the point; I was bringing you out of reliance on self to dependence on Me!”

Thereafter I recognized that the Law, a tutor designed to bring condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7–9) was not much different than the “performance-driven Christianity” I had been taught to abide. Both the Law and my self-inflicted demand for performance taught that failure was a dark room. However, it led me to run toward the open “Door” through which the light was flooding in. The “Door?”—Jesus Himself.

The Cross

I came to understand that my performance-driven Christian experience was a self-designed (or religiously generated) trap from which God had already delivered me—by way of the cross. It was as if Peter, having been set free from the prison, the shackles, and the guards, remained in the dark “hole” refusing to obey the angel who commanded him to follow him to freedom (Acts 12:5–11). The prison of self-inflicted fear was the dark room from which the Lord had delivered me. Therefore, I was called to “walk” out, through the “Door” which Jesus had opened for me—and experience the freedom of the light of the knowledge of God He has provided. I was miserable in the trap He had already broken open and needed only to stand up and experience the freedom of the love He had already provided.

The cross of Jesus is where our sins were paid for (propitiation), but my newly formed religious performance became another sin that diminished the work of the cross (Romans 4:4)—from which I still needed repentance—in order to have the personal *experience* of the atonement provided. This was the *experiential* forgiveness (expiation) from which I had fallen short. The “fear” of “disappointing” the One who knew my frailty had become a trap.

However, the prison doors had already been opened! Jesus had set me free from performance-driven Christianity.

Perfect Love—Casts out Fear

The wife who knows she is truly loved no longer “fears” the wrath or disappointment of her husband. She has grown into the inter-relational unity and peace she desired all along—the development of a healthy marriage. In fact, she can be sick, or tired, and fall short, while knowing that when her husband arrives home, nonetheless loves her, serves her, looks for the ways he can meet her needs, and reassures her that her performance is not what causes him to love her. A perfected relationship of true love casts out the “fear.”

This is the early graduation one must experience in the Lord—a move from the tormenting fear of God, to rest in Jesus.

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:17–19).

I love you all,
Pastor Paul