

The Fear of God & Falling Away (Q&A)

Tim Conway, Don Currin, and Mack Tomlinson | *illbehonest.com*

Michael: It seems as if all three of you had sort of hit on Gospel warnings. Now, I have one question that maybe could be in line with that thought. That question was: What does Philippians 2:12 mean and how do I apply it to the Christian? What does it mean to live with fear and trembling? Now to preface that, I think, to summarize that question maybe in a more broad sense, how do the Gospel indicatives work with the Gospel imperatives in regards to the warnings which Paul, in the same book, he will promise the Christian security in Christ while at the same time warning them if they fall away.

Mack: Do you have two hours for this question?

Michael: I know. We could go on forever about that.

Mack: Well, I'll read the verse and then these brothers can comment on it. Philippians 2:12. "Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." You shouldn't leave v. 13 out. "For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Tim: So we have this reality in Scripture. One of the promises of the New Covenant is that God would put His fear within us that we not depart from Him. You know, how does this work? The very warnings that God gives, God also puts a fear in His people that responds to those warnings to keep us back from the edge that people without that would go over. So when the Christian reads a passage like: you better cut off hands and gouge out eyes, or you go to hell, you say, wow! What's that? That sounds like works. You're saying that if I don't do these certain things, I'm going to perish. Well, Jesus talked like that all the time. There's warnings in Scripture all the time that warn us to keep back from these edges of destruction. And what happens in the Christian is there's a sensitivity to those warnings, and there is a fear and there is a trembling that says I'm getting back from that edge, whereas many people just go right over. Now, if the imperative tells us stay back from the edge, the indicative is that God puts His fear in us, and He causes us not to depart from Him through that.

Don: Joy - the joy of the Lord and the fear of the Lord are not enemies. Obviously, they complement one another. We're kept by the power of God and that's the only reason we persevere. However, we must choose in faith to fight the good fight of faith in persevering. The only reason we do is because God has put a dynamic in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit and by virtue of our divine nature. But to me, "having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It's not in my own personal experience a dread, but it is really a profound respect for God that His promises are true. They're all yes and amen in Christ Jesus. And if I do not persevere, I will perish. Now the incentive in my life is that I'm Gospel-driven in all things. So when I'm

relishing in that and I'm walking with a good conscience before God and man, then really this dread, this fear, this sense of terror does not really come into play because I delight to do His law and please Him. To me, they complement one another, Michael. As I said in the message a little while ago I believe with all my heart that the reason we're so inconsistent, whether it's our prayer life or our personal walk in holiness, is because we lack motivation and we need, as Spurgeon said, to plumb the depths of the atonement. The more and more you begin to flesh out these aspects of the atonement, propitiation, expiation, imputed righteousness, justification, the more the Spirit comes - this is passive tense Christianity - and He buoys us up and gives us motivation to live our lives to the praise of the glory of His grace. So this is a driving force in my life. This is my motivation - is Christ and Him crucified and all the beauties that can be explored as I begin to meditate and pray over these things. To me that's drawing from the wells of salvation.

Mack: There's a right kind of fear and there's a wrong kind of fear. Romans 8:15, "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry 'Abba, Father.'" Paul to Timothy: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound mind." So the wrong kind of fear is carnal fear that produces bondage that would keep you from drawing near to God. That's not of God. The right kind of fear is a godly reverence that's motivated by love. And by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. So the right fear is we live in the presence of God Who is holy and righteous and is our Father. And the fear of God is a governor to keep us from straying, sinning, because we don't want to displease Him. So that's a healthy fear. And it doesn't put us in bondage. It's filled with love and reverence.

Don: And I want to just recommend a book you know, if you don't have it, is to me is just a beautiful balance of it is by Jerry Bridges, "The Joy of Fearing God." "The Joy of Fearing God." Excellent, excellent what he brings out, the insight. Just chocked full of biblical truth. Yeah.

Michael: Now, within the Reformed community, per se, there is a knee-jerk reaction at times to when reading or even preaching through some of the warnings in Scripture, to preach what it's not saying rather than what it is saying. How would you say that a right perspective of God as Father plays in dealing with those Gospel warnings. Mack, you were hitting on it a little bit before. Rightly fearing God, recognizing Him as Father. How does then the Christian approach the warnings even in their own private devotion rightly as they consider God as Father?

Don: There's a blessing in brevity, so let me be brief before these guys wax eloquently on the subject. Brother, to me, the warnings display the mercy of God. Every warning. Everybody says, well, God is mad. God is angry. No, He's trying to protect us because of His extraordinary kindness and mercy. So what they do is they put on display the character of God, specifically His mercy.

Tim: I guess what comes to my mind is Malachi 1. Isn't it interesting in our day and age, typically, when we think "father," I don't know why it's like Pa on "Little House on the Prairie"

comes to my mind, it's the soft father, the gentle father. Isn't it interesting when God Himself brings up His fatherhood in Malachi 1, that His emphasis is honor. And you know when you think of Moses, when you think of the Mosaic Law, the first thing that you were supposed to think about when it came to your father is that you honor your father and your mother. And as you hear Him speak to Israel and to those priests, He says I'm a great King. And I think we recognize that He has been gracious with us, He has dealt graciously with us and there is a tenderness in God. But our Father is fearful beyond imagination. Have you ever looked at the cross and just contemplated what He did to His beloved Son because of sin? That can cause you to tremble. If you start to think about election and God reaching out and He pulled me out and He passed over many, I tremble at that doctrine. When you hear Christ say that if you persevere to the end, if you endure to the end, you will be saved, there is a trembling in that. There are warnings in Scripture and they are fearful. And you know, Don was just talking about a pastor that he was talking to Paul about. When I watch other professing Christians fall out, they fall out of the race, they fall out of the ministry, I tremble. Is my body physically moving? No, but there is a quaking inside. But at the same time, are there seasons where I am overwhelmed with joy and gratitude and thankfulness that He did choose me and that Christ did die that horrific, shameful death on that cross? Yes, so much so that there are times where being on my face is the most appropriate place. And I think we all have to recognize that we experience these different realities in our Christian life.

Mack: There's a hymn. If you don't know it, you should find it and sing it and introduce it to your church. Thomas Kelly: "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted." But the third stanza, just listen closely to this.

"Ye who think of sin but lightly,
nor suppose the evil great,
here may view its nature rightly,
here its guilt may estimate.

Mark the sacrifice upon it,
see Who bears the awful load,
'tis the Word, the Lord's anointed,
Son of Man and Son of God."

He's saying those that have a light view of sin, they haven't viewed the cross rightly yet. They haven't viewed the horrendous sacrifice necessary. And the more we're clear on the Gospel and it controls our hearts, we see the cross work supremely for what it is, and the One Who died there as most precious. A right view of Him and His atoning work will produce in our hearts seeing sin as very evil and a fear of God that we don't want to sin against Him.

Michael: Okay, great.