

## Palisades Community Bible Church

### Online Sunday School

# When does Fear Become Sin?

December 6, 2020

As Navy SEALs, we were often asked to assist in some unorthodox jobs. A group of 100 Marine Recon Rangers was in San Diego for training in ocean survival; how to survive a sinking boat, etc. As expert swimmers, we were asked to provide both instructional and lifeguarding duties.

Once the Marines had been classroom trained, we loaded the boat and headed out of the bay, around to the training beach. We were 500 yards offshore. In groups of 20, each soldier was given a "Mae West" life jacket and lined up along the gunwale (side of the boat). On command, they were to jump into the water and link up as a group, then swim together to shore.

In each group was one or two fellas who had never been in the water....not even a swimming pool. They were petrified! They'd grab onto something and nothing could get them to turn loose. We coaxed, explained, demonstrated, and nothing could get them to release their death grip on the boat.

Their sergeant took us aside and explained that they HAD to go. No excuses. 'Do what is necessary.' So, we applied more specific motivational techniques that did the trick....then, we threw them in. Soon these guys were bobbing in the open ocean, screaming for their lives. Their heads were well above water, they were breathing just fine....hence the hollering....yet they thrashed and cavorted like Miley Cyrus on a stage.

Their fear had them doing EXACTLY the OPPOSITE of what they were trained to do! After a few minutes of their panic and bellowing, they began to tire out. Finally, they looked around and realized that good old "Mae West" was keeping them afloat and they started thinking straight. They joined their group and began working their way to shore.

Once on shore, these guys, who had been so paralyzed by fear, were the most happy and jovial of all the men on the beach. They had experienced their worst

fear and came through it just fine. They were actually anxious to go again! (little did they know that the next lesson was jumping into the ocean from a helicopter!)

No matter who we are, we all have fears. Not all fear is the same. Some folks are afraid of heights, or spiders, or flying. Some fear for their job security. Some folks are afraid to witness. Some would not speak in front of a group, even at gunpoint. Some are really afraid of this China Virus (I see people riding a bicycle with a mask on.) Some fears are healthy while some get exaggerated and become destructive.

We were created with a natural survival instinct – the inner desire not to be harmed, threatened or endangered. That’s normal...healthy....wise. But, imbalanced fear can also DO HARM. Fear can keep us from living up to our potential, following God’s urgings, or even living our life with joy.

I was a member of a church in the 1980s that had been founded in the 1800s – about 20 miles from PCBC. In the entry foyer were some artifacts of the early meetings, and some old photos. How interesting that the first outdoor services included everyone holding muskets! There was a healthy fear of hostilities, and an equally healthy remedy. Note how the fear and the remedy go together! More about that in a bit...

Some fears are 100% rational and should be respected! If someone has particular health issues, they should DEFINITELY not take chances where C19, or any infectious disease is a threat. That is a RATIONAL fear. For others, Covid could be just another virus. We must not allow ‘IRRATIONAL’ fear to control our lives.

Do NOT let fear cause us to be influenced by lies! Beware of liars:

**John 8:44 “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”**

In my profession, I work with wood, and I get onto a lot of roofs. I am very afraid of falling, or cutting my fingers off. I let those fears keep me sober and alert. They don’t paralyze me. They keep me safe while I work. I take practical steps to prevent accidents. My fear makes me approach danger safely every day.

How do we know when fear is sin and when fear is a good thing given to us by God to preserve ourselves and those around us? There is a difference between good fear and sinful fear.

We're fallen, and it's easy for us to fall into sin, but if the root of our fear is unbelief, we are treading into the area of sin. We must exercise our faith; trust and believe that God is truly in control.

Inevitably, there will be times when we are afraid. God wants us to turn and cling to Him when we find ourselves wrestling with fear. Often, we are fearful because we feel like we've lost control of our lives.

**Matthew 14 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"**

So, how do we do that? What is the practical application of the concept of turning to God and trusting Him when we are afraid? Maybe we can put 'shoe leather' to this by looking at something a bit different.

When you learned to drive a car, you went through training that taught you the laws, how to operate the car, and the DANGERS involved in driving. You drive confidently, now, even though accidents are the #3 cause of death in the USA. You don't let fear keep you from trusting in your abilities and your vehicle. So, why would you let fear of rejection keep you from sharing your faith? Why would you not get on an airplane, even though it is the most accident free form of transportation? Why would you not tithe, even though God promises that it is good? Why would you not ask God how He wants you to be serving him....without reservation? Why would you not do something good simply because you are 'afraid'?

Can it be that you are not as 'in control' as when you're driving? When you're behind the wheel, you make the decisions, you do what you think is best. In situations where you are fearful, you may not be so sure of the process, or the outcome! Those Marines who never saw the ocean were fearful of the water

because they'd never been in it. They felt out of control. Telling God you'll go where He sends you puts you out of control!

**Hymn: "Ill Go Where You Want Me To Go"**

**There's surely somewhere; a lowly place In earth's harvest fields so wide,  
Where I may labor thru life's short day For Jesus the Crucified;  
So, trusting my all unto Thy care--I know Thou lovest me  
I'll do Thy will with a heart sincere, I'll be what You want me to be.**

A feeling of lack of control leads to fear. THEN, when we see that our fear puts us back in control (avoidance), we start using fear as a crutch, a shield, a defense. Avoidance becomes our way of handling other things, too. By contrast, fearing falling off a roof by using strong and sensible safety measures is NOT AVOIDANCE, it is dealing with it head on. It's the same as those early worshippers having their muskets next to them.

Another way that fear may cause imbalance is the use of force. When one feels out of control, then applies excessive force, it may give them a feeling of controlling the situation (hostility). They don't think things will go their way if they don't drive everything and hostility; a lack of regard for others, becomes their main lever.

**2 Timothy 4:14 Alexander the metal-worker showed bitter hostility towards me: the Lord will requite him according to his doings.**

We put a lot of verbal real estate into trusting the One who is in control of everything. Yet, it's still a function of our flesh to make it difficult for us to be out of control and to have to trust in God, who IS in control.

There is another form of fear: not getting what we want. God created the earth and all that is in it, then stood back and called it "good." How often do we WANT something, and we fear that asking God might end up in a "NO"? Parents often must choose for their children that which is good for them – and that choice may not be what they want. Can it be any different with God, our Father?

If we let the fear of not getting what we want keep us from approaching the Throne of Grace, are we not separating ourselves from God? (sin is the separation – the distance – between man and God)

**Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."**

God sent Jesus to close the distance between us and God. Though we are forgiven, our sin nature can cause us to pull away. That separation is sin.

I recall our children wanting something, conspiring among themselves on how to get it, then trying to wrangle it out of my sight. Clearly, they knew what the answer was going to be! It made me sad, but they wanted what they wanted, NOT what was best for them! That's a function of immaturity. As maturing Christians, we should be able to discern between using fear (avoidance), fear (hostility) or fear (not getting what we want) and putting our faith in God.

"Well, what if I don't know what God really wants me to do?" We know the answer; pray and WAIT. Oh, the waiting part! UGH! Don't be in a hurry to separate yourself from God. If you are seeking God's will, do these things:

1. Pray – ask Jesus to lead, guide and convict you.
2. Read the Word – look for similar situations in the Scriptures. Look at how prayer was answered, how God's guidance was applied in similar situations. There are a good number of excellent Bible study websites where you can search topics and even ask specific questions.
3. Talk with other wise Christians – there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors. Be open to their thoughts and consider them prayerfully.

**Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.**

God isn't just in control he is good. He is for us, and he knows what's best for us, even when we don't know ourselves.

Let's look at Nehemiah when he was tempted to make a bad decision out of fear:

**Nehemiah 6: 10 Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you."**

**11 And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who**

would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" 12 Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit was on Nehemiah! He discerned the situation well.

When is fear healthy, righteous, and wise? When it keeps you or others from harm, and does not dishonor God.

**Revelation 21: 5** He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8 But the cowardly (fearful), the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

So, why are the fearful at the beginning of the list in Revelation 21:8? The New Living Translation (NLT) provides an answer to that question by stating Rev 21:8 as "**But cowards who turn away from me. . . .**" In fear, cowards run from the battle, showing disloyalty to their sovereign. In the spiritual realm, they put their self-interest above everything, including God. Every decision we make is, ultimately, either for, or against our Savior. Fear keeps our eyes on ourselves.

Irrational Fear actually violates the first commandment by not giving God the preeminence He demands.

**Exodus 20: 3** You shall have no other gods before Me. It is not surprising, then, that the first sin listed in Revelation 21:8 is the one that so directly violates this first great commandment.

**Matthew 22:36-38** 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself

When does fear become sin? When it contradicts the truth about God....when it keeps you from walking with Christ.

**Genesis 3:8** Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

To tell the truth about God is to Glorify God. A Christian’s life is to be a living testimony of the truth about God. To foment an untruth about God is to dishonor Him. To proclaim to be a Christian and then dishonor God with sinful behaviors is a violation of the Third Commandment:

**Exodus 20: 7** You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who takes His name in vain.

“Taking the Lord’s name in vain” is not simply using His name in a curse word. The Hebrew word translated “take” means to take up, or bear up. “In vain” means to do it wrongly. It’s like holding a flag, or a sign proclaiming that God is running this operation, and then behaving contrary to God’s character. In many of our studies, we have looked at cults. A cult leader violates the third commandment and fears the truth above all. Once the followers of a cult learn the truth of the Gospel, they (hopefully!) leave the cult for their Savior.

When we identify with Christ, we are to leave the ‘old flesh’ and put on the new. Can you hold up the flag of Christ, in 100% honesty, when you are fearful? If you can, your fears are healthy (like my not wanting to cut off a finger). If not, you need to turn them over to the Lord.

Let’s not end with just that admonition. Let’s go back to the example of driving for practical application. Can you drive your car while honoring God 100%? Of course! You obey the laws, drive responsibly, and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no real mystery, there. If you drive impaired (phone, alcohol, screaming kids, etc.) you are NOT honoring the law, nor God.

What if you have a fear of tithing? Suppose you are afraid to ask God if He wants you to serve in some way? What if you fear talking with someone about Jesus? What if you have a fear that's causing a negative in your life? Oh, what if you're afraid to speak with someone about your fear?

Try going back to our list on seeking God's will.

**Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**

Faith and fear cannot exist together. **Hebrews 11: 1Now faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see.** Faith is an absolute belief that God is constantly working behind the scenes in every area of our lives. On the other hand, fear is unbelief or weak belief.

The more we learn about God, the more we can see Him working in our lives and the stronger our faith grows....which drives out fear.

**Lord, Jesus, you have given us the perfect love that drives out fear.**

**Your perfect love provides forgiveness,  
that we may walk with you in confidence.**

**Bless us with your presence and give us strong faith.**

**Amen**