

THE ANSWER TO FEAR

By

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The more we know of the evil in the world, especially the evil works of those who aspire to control us, the more we are tempted to fear and worry. In times past we only heard about wars, revolution and natural disasters long after they had happened. Today, through modern technology, we are at the scene of such things every day. In fact the news media, especially television, have become fear-mongers, spreading the disease of fear and anxiety, creating for millions of people anxiety about heart disease, cancer, financial insecurity, personal safety, and impending catastrophe.

Suicide among young people is common, and one of the principle causes is their fear of the future. They are bombarded at school with false reports of the environmentalists, and are told that we may all die of air pollution, acid rain, global heating, overpopulation, flesh-eating bacteria, and on and on.

A few decades ago the fear-mongers were preaching nuclear war, and today they are preaching terrorism. Evangelists, especially TV preachers, love to take the scary scenes found in the book of Revelation and apply them to current events. With predictions of horror about to be unleashed upon us, they even had President Reagan convinced that Armageddon, with unimaginable carnage and devastation was just around the corner. (We are already engaged in Armageddon, a spiritual warfare with the anti-Christ's who control a vast amount of the news media and the financial system as well as the government.)

There is good reason to believe that our nation may already be feeling strokes of God's judgment, and this should instill fear in the unrepentant. However, the God who judges is the same God who sustains and nourishes His people. As ancient Israel was being warned of judgment, Yahweh's word to his true servants was: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God; I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10).

Anxiety is a great modern plague which grips the hearts of millions in fearfulness – fear of the world fear of one's health, fear of failure and fear of the future. Fear destroys faith, silences testimony, stunts growth, aborts plans, delays actions, and keeps Millions from moving forward in Christian living. Fear is a deadly enemy of the faith.

God does not intend for us to live in fear. "For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). The question is: How do we overcome fear in order to claim God's gifts?

It is easy enough to say "Have no fear. Don't worry." Some say that that fear is displaced by courage. Not so. Many a soldier has courageously gone into the thick of battle, all the while filled with fear. One may be courageous and still fearful.

God has given us the formula to overcome fear, and it has worked for His people through the centuries, and will still work today. Terror is not something new. Sin and evil have been with us since the first family. The first generation of Christians faced formidable foes. The religious establishment sought to destroy them; they faced the terror of the Caesars, and the impending destruction of Jerusalem.

So what was their formula? What did they do to overcome fear? They gave thanks. That seems entirely too simple. But our God delights in using simple things to confound the wise. Instead of formulating some dramatic and complicated step-by-step program to overcome fear, He simply tells us to give thanks in all things. “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

This doesn't say to give thanks *for* all things. Many things are evil and opposed to God and His purpose. God is not the author of such things, and to thank Him would be out of place. But in every situation we are still children of God, loved by God, blessed with the presence of His spirit, upheld by His mercy and assured of the blessed hope of eternal life.

Paul wrote that the power and divinity of God are clearly seen through things that are made, so that man is without excuse, “because that, knowing God they glorified him not as God neither gave thanks,” but became vain in their reasoning and extremely corrupt and vile. “Neither gave thanks!” To give thanks is to affirm that God is Creator, that we are part of His creation and His great plan for mankind. It is to acknowledge that He has a purpose and that His children are the objects of that purpose.

When we give thanks to God we are aware of His presence. Fear cannot dwell in the mind that is fully conscious of the presence of Yahweh, nor in the heart that overflows with thanksgiving.

When we pray, we do so in the name of Jesus because God has given all authority to him. The idea, promoted by man, that Satan is in control of the world, is refuted each time we give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus.

Whatever is giving us problems or pain at the moment is not hidden from Him, and in fact may be used by Him for the purpose of fitting us for the role we are to play in the great drama He is producing and directing.

Does the prospect of illness cause fear? We are all terminal! Paul did not say that he was thankful for his “thorn in the flesh” – whatever physical affliction that was – but he rejoiced that it made him depend more on the power of Christ (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Every problem, including illness, should draw one closer to the Father. Someone may say, “But what if you were diagnosed with cancer?” I would say that I have been there and done that – twice, and even now am dealing with it, while giving thanks for each day that I have to draw closer to God and do my work. At 78 I have already had 8 years beyond the allotted three-score and 10, and each day is another gift of life in which to press toward the goal of godliness. Good reason to give thanks.

Many live in fear of an economic collapse with a great depression to follow. But has the economic boom and high material standards of the past 50 years really improved our lives and made us happy? Obviously not. Rather, it has resulted in gross immorality, crime, deep anxieties, depression and deterioration of values. I am thankful that I lived during the Great Depression of the 30's; the lessons we learned about integrity and appreciation of true values have been largely missed by the present generation.

When we start out on a trip, do we fear an automobile wreck or that the plane will crash? No. we start out giving thanks for God's presence, knowing that He is with us every mile of the way. How could one say, "Thank you Father for being with me on this trip, but I'm afraid of what might happen during your presence?" If we are honest about God's abiding presence we will not fear the possibilities, for He can handle them.

Under the worst circumstances, the giving of thanks brings to our minds the fact that God has gone to the very limit to save us from sin and death. Paul wrote: "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things"(Rom. 8:32)? He gave His only Son to die in shame to meet the penalty for sin; then He raised him from the dead and made him Lord of heaven and earth! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Free from sin, guilt and condemnation. Free from fear. Thank God!

As mentioned earlier" we are all terminal. We are mortal. Immortality is yet to be conferred in the day of resurrection. Giving thanks to God for the hope of that immortality will turn one's focus from earth, with all its hazards and fears, to the assurance and comfort of God: from the dismal sorrows of the world to the joys and glories of the heavenly home. Soren Kierkegaard once wrote in a devotion, "To you, Lord Jesus Christ: we pray that you will draw us entirely to you... If only you will draw us, then indeed all is won, even if, humanly speaking, we win nothing. And nothing is lost, even if, humanly speaking, we lose everything."

As we give thanks to God He draws us closer to Himself and farther from the reach of the evil one, closer to His image and farther from the world's fashion, closer to final victory, and farther from the danger of defeat.

In everything give thanks. "For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power, and of love, and discipline." "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

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