

Fear Is A Double-edged Sword

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We are going to begin with a scripture that we use virtually every holy day when we take up an offering. So, I would like you to turn to Deuteronomy, the 14th chapter, verses 22 through 27.

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and of your new wine and of your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, or wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you."

One of the things that I touched on briefly during my offering sermonette on the first day of Unleavened Bread was that offerings give God an excellent opportunity for evaluating us as to where our heart really and truly is regarding our relationship with Him, and as being a part of the work that He has established through Jesus Christ on this earth. Now, this is primarily caused because money, which is a major form of wealth in virtually every nation, is conceived of such vital importance to daily life that even when historians write their histories, they almost unanimously conclude that almost all wars are ultimately fought over wealth in some form. And in virtually every culture, almost everybody has some, that is, money, because

money is what is used to transact the most common forms of business. And this drives money's daily importance higher and higher.

Now, because of God's requirement that we must give an offering within each festival, the Christian is then faced having to give real-time evidence that may involve a sacrifice of something very important to the everyday enjoyment of life. Fairly frequently, at some level, as the holy days approach, or when it is finally upon us, some level of concern may set in. I do not know whether you thought about this, but this is a factor that God fully intends happening.

Notice the instructions. The word tithe is the fourth word in verse 22. The offering is commanded; no options are permitted. There is no sense whatever of if we want to, or that it can be dropped because we think we have a greater need for the money elsewhere. No set level is stated regarding the amount given required, and this actually makes the decision-making a bit harder. Verses 23 through 27 add some specific instructions to this tithe's uses, thus separating it from any other tithe that may exist. So let us read them again.

Deuteronomy 14:23 And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name to abide, the tithe of your grain and of your new wine and of your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

That is a very positive command. That is part of the tithe command. You do it because He wants us to fear. Verse 24 then says:

Deuteronomy 14:24 But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe [which would be most likely vegetation of some kind], or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you, then you will exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses.

Very briefly, it is to be used to ensure that the offerer eats before the Lord in the place where God chooses to make His name dwell. If he is tithing, and he is tithing that tithe, he should have the money to get there, which is an indication that he is going to have to travel or walk, whatever, shoe leather express, to get there.

These verses then specify what tithe these commands apply to. Nothing like this exists for what we call the first tithe. This is the instruction regarding what we commonly call the second tithe, or more specifically, the festival tithe.

Now, this tithe is commanded by God to ensure that the tither has sufficient funds to travel to all the festivals, because where God places His name to dwell will not be right next door where most of the tithers live during the bulk of the year. That even took place in Palestine. And thus, this financial resource is needed seven times annually. It is to be used to cover expenses such as transportation, housing, and eating, and in addition, it can be shared with others, such as the directly-named Levites in verse 28, and widows who have either no income whatever or an insufficient amount to sustain themselves at the festival even alone.

But let us reread verse 23 once again.

Deuteronomy 14:23 And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God.

I think we can dogmatically say that because of that last statement, it tells us why God instituted this particular financial policy. The policy was instituted for our benefit. It is to learn; we have to do it in order to learn to fear God. So, the ultimate reason here is that we would learn to respectfully and even reverently fear God.

Now, I used the term "concern" a little bit earlier in this sermonette, but I believe that the term fear is more specific and appropriate to God's purpose. According to *Strong's Concordance*, the term fear is used 404 times in

Scripture, and some person counted just over 100 times it is used in a positive sense, in a context in which God is the object of the fear of some person regarding Him. However, three-quarters of that 404 still remains, and are of the concerns people had, that is, the fear is of the concerns people had of impending loss and pain if they were anticipating suffering from the hands of others.

Well, I think you should know by this time—you have been here around long enough—that biblically, fear is a major issue from beginning to end. Fear is an unpleasant emotion, regardless of whether the emotion is real or imagined. The term fear is most commonly used of a large number of synonymous terms that indicate differing levels of concern. From person to person or from occasion to occasion, it may be described by one experiencing it as strongly as terror, or more mildly as anxiety, apprehension, dread, fright, alarm, agitation, panic, trepidation, or merely simply as distress. All of these are levels of that one term.

Now, contrariwise, it can be rightly said that fear is a good gift because of the warnings it gives. The most common reaction to it is for the person to stop what he is doing and attempt to flee or change whatever is causing his feelings. But one thing all of these descriptors have in common is that not even one of them is pleasant to anticipate happening to you. Even the mildest, we would like to get rid of it. We would love to go through life and never have to face any fear whatever.

But here is a reality: God is commanding this so that we do grow to fear Him, because fear is not entirely negative. In fact, the reality is that fear has many, many positive benefits, and we are considering one of them right at this moment.

Are you aware that God has deliberately marked in the Bible when fear began for mankind? It is in Genesis 3, verses 7 through 10. Right after their sin occurred, when Adam and Eve sinned:

Genesis 3:7-10 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam

and his wife hid themselves [Why did they hide themselves? To not be confronted by the cause of their fear.] from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

That is when fear began, when they committed sin. It was not that God was the one causing the fear—it was the sin that they committed that caused the fear.

Now, there is something to learn there. That the first reaction to people of knowledge about what sin is and what sin does, is not death. It is fear. And when the fear begins to rise, we have a choice to make. What are we going to do? Are we going to flee and get away from what is causing it? That is what Adam and Eve did. And who should they run into on the way, as they were getting out of there? It was God Himself.

Here, you are seeing a positive use for fear, and that is why God put it there. He wants us to fear the sin that causes the terrible feelings that we have within us, and not do it anymore. So fear can, if God permits it to be that means, the instrument that goes a long way to leading one to repentance, and therefore to a positive change. Fear, brethren, is indeed a wonderful and great gift of lovingkindness from our Creator.

Now, here is an example (Martin used it in his sermon just recently) and I want you to go back to I Corinthians 5, and verse 6. I am going to read this to you from the Amplified, because it involves an example of an occasion that was happening in a local congregation, and it does not involve an offering, but it does involve fear motivating a positive change that may have saved people's salvation and congregational unity. So, fear can work for good, as two sections of Paul's writings clearly show.

I Corinthians 5:6-11 (AMPC) [About the condition of your church] your boasting is not good [indeed, it is most unseemly and entirely out of place]. Do you not know that [just] a little leaven will ferment the whole lump [of dough]? Purge (clean out) the old leaven, that you may be fresh (new) dough, still uncontaminated [as

you are], for Christ our Passover [Lamb], has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of vice and malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened [bread] of purity (nobility, honor) and sincerity and [unadulterated] truth. I wrote you in my [previous] letter not to associate [closely and habitually] with unchaste (impure) people—not no [meaning of course that you must] altogether shun the immoral people of the world, or the greedy graspers and cheats and thieves or idolaters, since otherwise you would need to get out of the world and human society altogether! But now I write you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of [Christian] brother, if he is known to be guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater.

Well, the apostle Paul did not pussyfoot around. He laid his charge against them in no uncertain language. As the saying goes, he put the fear of God and the possibility of losing salvation unto them. And they were painfully chastened, and they repented, and the apostle heard of it, and a second letter arrived from him.

Now, I want you again to consider seriously the terms that he uses here in his second letter to them. He says:

II Corinthians 7:8-9 (AMPC) For even though I did grieve you with my letter, I do not regret [it now], though I did regret it; for I see that the letter did pain you, though only for a little while; yet I am glad now, not because you were pained, but because you were pained into repentance [and so turned back to God]; for you felt a grief such as God meant you to feel, so that in nothing you might suffer loss through us or harm for what we did.

They responded as he hoped that they would, and the next comment shows this clearly:

II Corinthians 7:10 (AMPC) For godly grief and the pain fear God is permitted to direct, produce a repentance that leads and contributes to salvation and deliverance from evil, and it never

brings regret; but worldly grief (the hopeless sorrow that is characteristic of the painful pagan world) is deadly [breeding and ending in death].

Would you not want to fear that? Sure you would, and get out of there. He said:

II Corinthians 7:11-12 (AMPC) . . . what eagerness and earnest care to explain and clear yourselves [of all complicity in the condoning of incest], what indignation [at the sin], what alarm, what yearning, what zeal [to do justice to all concerned], what readiness to mete out punishment [to the offender]! At every point you have proved yourselves clear and guiltless in the matter. So although I did write to you [as I did], it was not for the sake of and because of the one who did [the] wrong, . . . but in order that you might realize before God [that your readiness to accept our authority revealed] how zealously you do care for us.

Their fear led them to change their mind and to change their way. That is why God put that in the offering there in Deuteronomy 14: that you may learn to fear Me. When we begin to see how much we need to do this, and how much we lose by not doing it, are we willing to make a change?

So, I believe we can all see that fear is a double-edged sword. It may produce great discomfort, but at the same time, it plays a major role in salvation itself. So let us thank God for the level it produces in us.