

Of Fear and Faith

By David Morsey

People are afraid; the world is afraid.

Fear clutches at the heart as tragedy follows tragedy,
And catastrophe follows catastrophe.
How do we cope with it?
Where do we turn?

It would seem obvious to turn to the Church—
The purveyors of peace and joy,
But alas, it serves only to heighten the fear,
With doomsday prophecies
And dire threats to all
Who fail to conform to preconceived
Patterns of piety and performance.
Instead of peace, the Church proclaims judgment;
Instead of comfort—guilt for needing it.

But the Bible promises deliverance from fear—
“Fear thou not, for I am with thee.”
Where is that deliverance?
Why are God's people fearful?
They are afraid of death; and the future.
They are afraid of nuclear devastation.
They are afraid of personal loss.
They are told by the Church “to have faith,”
But is not faith itself a gift of God?
To answer these questions
We must first examine what fear is,
And what we mean by faith.

WHAT IS FEAR?

In its common usage,
Fear is a response of the mind—not the spirit.
It may be described as a feeling of dread or anxiety—
A response to what is perceived to be a threat.
In that respect, it is primarily
A part of earthly, fleshly experience.

It may be reasonable, as the fear of imminent danger;
Or the fear of consequences of unsound behavior.
Or it may be unreasonable, as in the dread of nameless fears,
Or chronic, undifferentiated anxiety.
Again, it may be of the spirit,
As in reverential awe at the Deity,
Or the recognition of His authority and power,

As rightfully governing human behavior.
The concept of fear as a function of the spirit is legitimate—
In fact, essential to a proper relationship to God.

Fear, as a response to real dangers,
Is essential for survival—the proper caution
In circumstances that are potentially perilous.
Fearlessness may be false bravado,
Bordering, in fact, on folly.

Fear, as undifferentiated and uncontrolled anxiety,
Is physiological—a matter of chemical imbalance.
It is not a matter of self-discipline, or spirituality.
One must seek help on a physical basis.

Fear, as a troublesome anxiety over potential perils,
Is a normal response of the mind
To the mounting tensions and terrors of the world.
Such anxiety is a process of the mind, and not the spirit.
As such, it is directly related to one's mental grid—
The patterns of thought on the brain
That are made up of all the accumulated data
Of heredity and sense experience.

There are non-Christians who never worry;
And there are Christians who are “worrywarts.”
This has nothing to do with faith.
It is not something to feel guilty about.
But something of personality to work with.
But how do we work with it?
Where does faith come in?

WHAT IS FAITH?

We must distinguish between faith and confidence.
Faith is a gift of God to our spirits.
It is an energy process that unites us with God.
It is not dependent on our human feelings or perceptions.
Confidence, on the other hand, is an expression of the mind.
It is dependent on many variables.
Those variables have to do with the patterns of the mind—
The result of genetic traits and accumulated data.

Faith is the result of God's gift;
Confidence is the result of human thought processes.
Faith is an energy of the spirit;
Confidence is a feeling of the flesh.
Faith is dependent on the power of God;
Confidence is dependent on the capacities of the mind.

When Christ comes into our spirits,
He brings faith with Him—His faith.
That faith activates our unity with God,
And is a permanent part of us.
We become spirit in nature—
No matter what the human thoughts and feelings may be.
How the mind expresses that faith
Varies with individual mental processes.
So the reality of faith is in the spirit;
The expression of that faith is in the mind.

FEAR AND FAITH

So how do we apply faith to our fears?
First, by understanding the nature of fear;
And the nature of faith.
We must understand that faith is not the same
As human confidence.
It is an energy process from God, through our spirits,
That is constant, in spite, of the vacillations
Of our human thoughts and feelings.

It is like the electrical circuitry in a home.
The flow of energy is constant,
Even though the function of the appliances and fixtures
May vary considerably from time to time.
We cannot judge the electric circuitry by the appliances.
Just so, we cannot judge the energy of faith in our spirits
By the function of our feelings in the flesh.
We cannot judge the constancy of the faith of Christ in us
By the inconstancy of our human expressions of that faith.

It is that energy of faith that sustains
Our identity with God and causes us to hold to Him,
In spite of the feelings of doubt and distress
That continually creep into our minds.
The feelings of the flesh are what we call confidence.
Confidence is a term that belongs to the human psyche.
It is based upon human capacities and experiences,
And varies accordingly.
Lack of confidence in the fleshly sense
Does not reflect lack of faith—
But rather lack of the conditions
That engender confidence.
The person who has had a bad fall,
Is more likely to be fearful of heights,
Than the person who has not.
The person who has been let down by people,
Is more likely to have a problem with social relationships.

There are non-Christians who have positive attitudes of confidence,
But cannot be said to have faith,
Since they do not possess the Spirit of Christ.
Conversely, there are many Christians who
For one reason or another, lack confidence,
And yet, possessing the Spirit of Christ, have faith.
So confidence can exist where faith does not;
And faith can exist where confidence does not.
Thus, fearfulness does not necessarily mean faithlessness;
And fearlessness does not necessarily mean "faithness."

Coping with fear begins with distinguishing between faith and confidence;
And eliminating guilt feelings about it.
And then it is a matter of sorting out the kinds of fear.

Is it a physiological problem—based on chemical imbalances?
Is it a normal reaction to danger?
Is it fear of the future—of potential tragedies?
If it is physiological, one must seek assistance.
If it is the normal fear that accompanies danger,
It must be seen as part of nature's protection—
Like pain, warning of needed caution or action.
If it is fear of the future, of potential tragedy,
The important thing to remember is that God only gives grace
To deal with things as they happen.
And not to think about things that might happen.
Be assured of this—when trouble comes,
You will have the grace for it.

If it is fear of world events—
What will happen to mankind?
It is important to sort out truth from speculation.

There is much today of doomsday prophecies—
Most of it, pure speculation.
It would be well if it were presented as such;
Instead of with the air of certainty
That often accompanies it.
It is important to be careful about generalizing.
Many of the events discussed by the prophets—both in the Old and New Testaments—
Have to do with Israel and the Middle East.
The United States is never even implied,
Much less referred to directly.
So any predictions about it must be speculative.

To frighten the Lord's people with questionable predictions of doom,
Is careless, if not unconscionable.
A favorite theme of the doomsayers
Is the moral decline of America.
While there are certainly pockets of evil everywhere,
The moral fiber of America is actually far better today

Than it was at its beginnings.
Vigilante justice was rampant;
The duel code was in force.
One could be shot for insulting another.
(Today we are appalled at random shootings).
Mistresses and mischief were rife even among leaders.
Graft and corruption went unchecked—
Much of it corrected by present ethical codes.
Today, over fifty percent of Americans (according to all polls),
Profess to be Christians.
While another forty percent believe in the God of the Bible.
It is unreasonable to assume that God would wipe out
The greatest bulwark of Christianity in the world,
When He would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah
Had He found there ten righteous.

Unfortunately, the Church does more to produce fear,
Than to alleviate it (possibly for the sake of leverage).
A great many Christians today
Live in fear of the wrath of God.
And the Church seems to fan the flames.
Paul says we [Christians] are “*not appointed unto wrath.*”
And he says “*therefore comfort one another.*”

There is little comfort in the message of the second coming,
When it is so constantly identified with terror.
Both to the Thessalonians and to the Corinthians,
Paul speaks of the coming of Christ for His Church
In terms void of terror and cataclysm.
No prophecy needs to be fulfilled
Before Christ comes for His bride.
Most of the book of the Revelation
Deals with events that take place with Israel and the Middle East,
After the Church is removed.

Even so, whatever happens in the last days—
And it is all speculative—
God will give grace to His people to bear it.
But He will not give grace to think about it.
The coming of Christ should be anticipated with joy,
And not with anxieties about doom.
For the Christian, there can be joy and gladness,
If we handle the Word of God properly.

CONCLUSION

So, fear is a product of the fleshly mind.
It is common to Christian and non-Christian alike.
Even Paul confessed to inner fear.
“*When we were come unto Macedonia our flesh had no rest...*”

Without were fightings; within were fears.” (II Corinthians 7:5).

Notice it was in his flesh that these fears occurred.

It is a malaise of the mind, and not the spirit.

It has many causes which are rooted

In the pressures and perfidies of this world.

It is not a sin to worry or to fear,

Nor is it an evidence of lack of faith.

Faith, on the other hand, is not human confidence,

But the energy of God within our spirits,

Which unites us with Him.

The effort to produce faith as a feeling of confidence,

Is itself a fleshly activity,

And is no more subject to control

Than any of our emotions.

In fact, to control the emotions

Is, in reality, a façade—

A denial of our true feelings.

Suppressing, or hiding, feelings does not resolve them.

We may control our reactions to feelings,

But not the feelings themselves.

We cannot help how we feel,

But we can help how we deal with how we feel.

Thus, we cannot deny fear,

But we can rely on the presence of Christ within,

In spite of the outward feelings.

By the same token, we cannot deny lack of confidence.

Pretending to have it when it is not there,

Does not build faith, but self-deception.

Faith comes only as a gift of God to those who seek it,

And exists whether we feel it or not.

The evidence that it is there is not feeling, but holding on.

The mind cannot be deceived into feeling what it does not feel;

Or believing what it does not believe,

Whatever the threats or inducements.

So then, where do the promises about fear come in?

What of God's promises to deliver us from fear?

“Fear thou not for I am with thee:

Be not dismayed for I am thy God:

I will strengthen thee; yea I will help thee;

Yea I will uphold thee

With the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Where does such a promise fit it?

How do we experience it?

The answer is—we already have it.

God is with us as He has promised.

For He hath said, *“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”*

“But where is He when I need Him?”

Right there with you.

“But why can't I feel Him?
Or have some evidence that He is there?”
Because you are looking for evidence in the flesh,
And not in the spirit.
You want to put God on the spot.
“If you are there, prove it!”
The evidence that He is there,
Is that you care that He is there.

“But does He not give us peace of mind?”
Isaiah gave the answer to that thousands of years ago.
*“Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace
Whose mind is stayed on thee.”*
You can have peace of mind
If you focus on Christ instead of the fears.
“And how do we do that?”
By thinking of the magnitude of Christ,
Instead of the magnitude of the circumstance.
If you look at the world or yourself or others,
You cannot help but fear.
John Bunyan's pilgrim in his Pilgrim's Progress
Is terrified by a lion on the path ahead,
But when he gets there, he finds the lion chained.
The gift of God to our spirits is the faith of Christ.
The product of our minds is anxiety and fear.
Christ is there, all right, taking care of things,
But the mind, blinded by the glare of circumstances,
Cannot see Him.

God says He will strengthen us and help us,
And uphold us with the right hand of His righteousness.
But He does not say He will work things out
According to our own notion of how things ought to be.
Unfortunately we conclude He is not helping us,
Only when they do not concur with our human notions.

So what can we expect from God?
What can we depend on?
What are we assured of?
We are assured of faith—an energy of God within us,
Uniting us forever with Him.
We are thus assured of peace in our spirits
Since we have eternal life with Him in His kingdom.
No matter what happens in the earthly realm,
We are assured of the presence of Christ within us continually.
We are thus assured of His constant flow of grace
In all our earthly circumstances.

We are not assured of human confidence or peace,
Unless we focus on Him instead of our fears.

We are not assured of personality changes
That will eliminate automatically
All genetic and physiological anxieties.
They may be part of “thorns in the flesh,”
That keep us constantly dependent on God's grace.
His strength is manifested in our weakness.
All human personalities have inadequacies
That require reliance on the grace of Christ.

The key element in eliminating fear, is acceptance.
Accepting the eternal presence of Christ in our spirits.
Accepting the circumstances of our lives
As constantly under His care,
Whatever the appearances or state of our feelings.
Accepting the truth that He is in control
Of the ultimate destiny of His creation.
Accepting the truth that His grace will be sufficient
For all our future needs and circumstances,
But not for thinking about them.

If you would live without fear,
Give up your feelings of guilt
About your fleshly reactions and personality traits.
Accept the reality of the presence of Christ within,
Working all things to His glory—
In spite of all surface appearances to the contrary.
“He will not fail you, nor forsake you.” (Joshua 1:5).