

Fear of Man

C.J. Mahaney

"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."
Proverbs 29:25

I. Definition

- A. An excessive (sinful) concern about what others think of us.
- B. An inordinate desire for human approval or an intense fear of being rejected.

"Fear of Man. *This can take many forms. Sometimes it involves an actual fear of what others can do to us (Prov. 29:25; Luke 12:4-5), but it is most commonly seen as an excessive concern about what others think about us. This can lead to a preoccupation with acceptance, approval, popularity, personal comparisons, self-image, or pleasing others (John 9:22; 12:42-43; Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4). This idol can make us reluctant to confront serious sin. The constant desire for approval and acceptance can cause us to gossip or keep us from speaking out on moral issues. It can also make us do things we really know are not right, eventually leading to guilt and resentment. Furthermore, if we fear what others may think of us, we may also be reluctant to admit our wrongs or ask for help, which often prolongs conflict."* **Sande**

- C. It is biblical to serve and please others as long as this is not the primary motive or purpose of our actions, but is an expression of our love for God and in obedience to the second great commandment "to love our neighbor..."

"To desire the approval of others is not necessarily wrong... This desire allows you to more readily sense the shame and reproach associated with your sin. To experience no desire for approval is to experience no sense of shame. To desire approval from others is not necessarily wrong. It is the love of such approval that is sinful."

Priolo

- 1. Parent

Eph 6:1-3 - "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' - which is the first commandment with a promise - 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'"

- 2. Spouse

1 Cor. 7:33-34 - "But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world - how he can please his wife... a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world - how she can please her husband."

3. Church

Rom. 15:1-2 - "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

4. Pastors

Heb. 13:17 - "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

5. Government

1 Peter 2:13 - "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men..."

6. Culture

Proverbs 22:1 - "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver and gold."

1 Tim. 3:7 - "He must have a good reputation with outsiders..."

"The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. To desire the esteem of others for the sake of it's effects is not only allowable but in many cases is our duty, and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure is so far from being a virtue that it is a real deficit in character." Blair

II. Discerning the Fear of Man

A. You value and desire the approval of man more than the approval of God.

John 12:43 - "For they loved the praise from men more than praise from God."

"They were bound by the golden shackles of earthly honours and thus kept from honouring God." Calvin

B. You are a respecter of persons.

James 2:1 - "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."

"The sin of judging by accidentals and externals." Motyer

"A biased judgment based on external circumstances such as rank, wealth, or race, disregarding the intrinsic merit of the person involved." **Wolff**

"Treating people in different ways according to their outward appearance." **Good News Bible**

- C. You are oversensitive to correction and react sinfully when corrected.

Proverbs 9:8 - "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you."

Proverbs 27:6 - "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." (N.A.S.)

Proverbs 15:31 - "He who listens to a life giving rebuke will be at home among the wise."

Proverbs 12:1 - "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid."

"Wisdom is for the humbly eager... It is not for the man 'wise in his own eyes': he thinks he has arrived - and indeed he has, for he will never get a step further...the wise man is teachable to the end (9:9), open to God's commands (10:8) and chastening (3:11) and to human advise and criticism (12:10;17:10); for he values truth enough to pay the price of having it (23:23)." **Kidner**

- D. You avoid correcting others.

1 Samuel 2:12-26 - Eli's failure as a father to confront and train his sons.

Prov. 27:5 - "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted (Faithful are the wounds of a friend), but an enemy multiplies kisses."

*"What is the friend, who will be a real blessing to my soul? Is it one, that will humour my fancies, and flatter my vanity? Is it enough, that he loves my person, and would spend his time and energies in my service? This comes far short of my requirement... The friend for my case is one, who will watch over me with **open rebuke**; but a reprover, when needful; not a flatterer. The genuineness of friendship without this mark is more than doubtful; its usefulness utterly paralyzed. That **secret love**, that dares not risk **a faithful wound**, and spares **rebuke**, rather than inflict pain, judged by God's standard, is hatred. (Lev. 19:17) Far better the wound should be probed than covered. **Rebuke**, kindly, considerately, and prayerfully administered, cements friendship, rather than loosens its. The contrary instances only prove that the union had never been based upon substantial principle."* **Bridges**

Col. 3:16 - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..."

Proverbs 28:23 - "He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue."

- E. You serve to impress others.

Matt. 23:5 - "Everything they do is done for men to see..."

Matt. 6:1-2 - "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

- F. You are ruled by a desire to be liked, appreciated and loved.

*"When one worships the feeling of being loved, one's goal is to exalt oneself and one's own desires above God. For Christians, that does not mean outright disavowal of the gospel; rather, it often takes the mode of a quiet, unspoken conviction that because God does not meet all one's needs, one can divide one's allegiances and trust in idols in **addition** to God.*

Maureen was a faithful Christian in a difficult marriage. Years of strife finally brought her to a counselor. As she reviewed her story Maureen noticed a pattern of rage followed by depression, and the trigger was always the same. The cycle of anger and despair was always preceded by her husband's ignoring her. As Maureen thought biblically about those experiences she began to realize that she had begun to worship something other than God. Her idol was the god of being loved. Like most forms of idolatry, it had a religious and pious appearance, making it more difficult to detect. Maureen had the reputation for being the self-sacrificing, exemplary wife, but her emotional cycles began to expose the fact that her love for her husband was more manipulation than godliness. She wanted to manipulate her husband-idol to give her the love, admiration, and attention she thought she must have in order to live. When her idol let her down, her life started falling apart.

Certainly nothing is wrong with being loved or wanting to be loved. It is a godly desire we all share. But with Maureen the desire had become a compulsion, a ruling lust. The result was the paradox of idolatry. On the one hand, while she was spiritually unaware, Maureen quietly set up an idol that she sought to manipulate for her own ends. In her pride, she was actually worshiping herself and demanding that others do the same. But that god would not be manipulated, and it was controlling her. Her idol, erected to provide pleasure, only led to bondage. When she could not control it she was enraged; when it mastered her she was depressed. Aware of the activity of her heart, she realized that her only path to freedom was through turning away from the goal of self-exaltation and turning to Christ in dependent faith.

*It is important to point out here that Maureen did not simply turn **from** dependence on her husband to meet the need of self-exaltation **to** Christ for the meeting of the same idolatrous 'need.' Sometimes Christian versions of codependency offer Christ as the only one who can truly meet felt needs. In that application the answer is simply to transfer dependence on a husband to dependence on Christ. In that scenario Maureen would have remained in slavery to self-worship and self-exaltation. The only change would have been in **who** was expected to give it to her! The Scriptures take another course. We must not simply exchange the manipulation of this or that person for the intended manipulation of Christ in the pursuit of getting our 'needs' met. Christ will not be manipulated; He will always resist our attempts to control Him in an effort to wrest from Him what others have failed to provide. Christ tells us what our real needs are and meets those, but He does not exist to help us exalt ourselves." **Welch***

"Consider Nancy, a 25-year-old wife and mother of two. Having grown up with a father who was often drunk and a mother who ignored Nancy's pleas for help when her father was cruel, Nancy grew up feeling worthless and empty. She came for counseling because she felt that her husband wasn't meeting her needs; as a result, she alternated between anger and depression.

While considering with Nancy what God says to those who suffer, a question or homework assignment could be, 'What do you need?' In the context of Nancy's life, the answer will most likely be, 'I need my husband to listen to me and meet my emotional needs.' This can be followed by a related question and observation: 'Nancy, have you ever noticed that we tend to be controlled by the things we need? Maybe we could ask the question, 'What do you need?' a different way. We could say, 'What controls you?' or even, 'Where do you put your trust?'

*Gradually, as Nancy sees that the question is one of whom she will trust, her 'need for her husband' can be reconfigured into what the Bible calls 'fear of man.' Like so many Christians, **people** have become the controlling point of Nancy's life. She holds others in awe. She puts her hope in them. Furthermore, like all fear of man, there is ultimately a **self**-concern that drives it. She relies on others because they are perceived as having the power to give her what she wants. Here again is the subtlety of need psychology. It takes you back to yourself. You need people because of what you want. You fear man because you have hoped that others would fill you. Fear of man does not come out of a response to created, in-born needs. Fear of man comes out of our own sin. It is worshiping others for our own purposes. Given this core, the answer is more than simply turning to Christ to meet this need. That would be to make Jesus our personal idol who serves our purposes. The answer is to first allow God to break our selfish desires and to teach us what it means to fear Him alone." **Welch***

Your Fear Factor

As you answer the following questions give yourself the appropriate number of points:

Never or hardly ever (5 pts), **seldom** (4 pts),
frequently (2 pts) **always or almost always**
(1 pt) true of you

1. I listen with anxious attentiveness when others discuss that which pleases or displeases them.
2. I strive to be politically correct more than biblically correct.
3. I go fishing for compliments.
4. I gossip about others to people whom I believe will be pleased with me for giving them such luscious tidbits of information.
5. My desire for a good reputation is based predominantly on how such a reputation will benefit me in some way, rather than on how such a good reputation will serve as a means to a greater end such as the glory of God, the good of others, or some other similar unselfish objective or motive.
6. I value the approval of certain individuals from whom I expect to receive certain honors more than the approval of others from whom I expect not to receive such honors.
7. I worry about what people think of me.
8. I am willing to sin rather than face the rejection of certain individuals.
9. I struggle with being a respecter of persons.
10. I believe that being rejected is one of the worst things that could possibly happen to a person, one of the worst things that a person could possibly experience.
11. I avoid conflicts rather than trying to resolve them.
12. I take unnecessary precautions in order to protect my good name.

- 13. I become angry when I am contradicted by others, especially when publicly contradicted.
- 14. When meeting a new person, I spend more time thinking about how to impress him or her than how to minister to him or her.
- 15. My fear of being rejected paralyzes me to the extent that it keeps me from getting close to others.
- 16. I forget that being rejected by others is a part of the suffering for righteousness sake that is my reasonable service to God and a part of my calling as a Christian.
- 17. I long to be noticed more than I long to be godly.
- 18. I give in to peer pressure rather than standing up to what is right.
- 19. I do not witness to others as I should due to my fear of being criticized or rejected.
- 20. I over react to criticism by dwelling too long on it or allowing it to depress me unnecessarily.

Rating scale:

96-100 no problem with man pleasing

90-95 free from the inordinate love of approval

80-89 too concerned with the approval of others

70-79 probably a man pleaser

69 or below probably a besetting sin

L. Priolo

F. The root issue when we are ruled by the fear of man or lust for human approval is pride.

"There is no man who does not cherish within him some idea of his own excellence...this most noxious pest of ambition and self-love."

Calvin

"There is nothing into which the heart of man so easily falls as pride. And yet there is no vice which is more frequently, more emphatically, and more eloquently condemned in the Scripture... It is a wild, strange thing to think that a man should be proud when he has nothing to be proud of. A living, animated lump of clay- - defiled and filthy, a living hell- - and yet proud... No matter how dear you are to God, if pride be harbored in your spirit, he will whip it out of you. They that go up in their own estimation must come down again by his discipline." **Spurgeon**

III. Desiring the Approval of God

A. The Futility of Trying to Please Everyone

"Few people know the circumstances and reasons for what you do. They will presume to criticize you before they hear what you have to say. Had they done so they would have absolved you of all charges in their own mind. It is rare to meet even among professing believers who are sincerely committed to Christ those who are fearful and sensitive about sinning in this area of rash, ungrounded judging."

"Remember that men are so selfish that their expectations will be greater than you will be able to satisfy. They will not consider those things that might prevent you from giving them what they desire such as your ministry to others, your job, or your necessary diversionary activities. They want you all to themselves as though you had no one else to care for but them." **Baxter**

B. The Freedom of Pleasing God

John 5:30 - "For I do not seek to please myself but him who sent me."

"Every Christian should have a passion to please God." **Sproul**

"If you seek first to please God and are satisfied with that you have but one to please instead of multitudes. And a multitude of masters are harder to please than one." **Baxter**