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DON'T BE A COWARD!

God has strong feelings about fear and cowardice. Very strong! He is not sympathetic, to say the least. Note the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. (A talent was a measure of money, as made clear in the NLT, which I shall paraphrase.)

“A king was going on a long trip and called his servants together. To one he entrusted five bags of silver, to one two bags, and to one one bag. The servants who received the five bags and the two bags began to invest the money and doubled the money given to them, but the other servant hid his money in the earth. When the king returned and demanded an accounting, he praised the first two servants, saying, ‘Well done, faithful servants, enter into my joy!’ But the servant given one bag of silver said, ‘Master, I knew you were a demanding king, and I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Here is your money back.’

How did the king respond? Did he say, ‘Well, bless your heart, I understand your fear of messing up and disappointing me. You probably have some sort of fear-phobia. Don’t worry about it. Come on into my kingdom and everything will be OK.’

Not exactly. He ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with ten bags of silver. **Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!**’”

Good heavens! God apparently has no sympathy, no compassion, for those who allow fear and cowardice to rule their lives. In fact, note the kindness and severity of God as described in the Great White Throne judgment scene in Revelation 21: *To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit these blessings, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars – their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*

Why such a horrific fate for cowards? I believe it is because “cowards” and “unbelievers” are linked together in this list, and you find them linked all through the Bible. Remember the occasion in Matthew 8 when a terrible storm arose on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus was asleep. When the disciples awoke Him in alarm, He said to them, *Why are you fearful. O you of little faith?* And then Jesus quieted the storm with a word. Fear is shown to be the opposite of faith in God time and again. Are we fearful, afraid, and anxious about something, about anything, today? It is because we are not trusting God. We are filled with unbelief rather than with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By the way, Jesus was not being unreasonable in expecting the disciples to trust Him in the midst of a storm. They had already seen Jesus heal a leper, a paralyzed man, Peter’s mother in law, cast demons out of many demonized people, and heal “all who were sick” in the city of Capernaum. Jesus was appealing to their minds, “Come on, guys, don’t you realize who I am....and that when you are with me you don’t have to be afraid of anything!”

Another example from the Old Testament: Abraham’s family fled to Egypt because of worldwide famine. God had prepared a place of refuge for them in the land of Goshen, and there they grew into a nation - - a nation that was enslaved by Pharaoh! After 400 years, God sent a deliverer, Moses, (a type or figure of Christ who would deliver His people from Satan) who brought them out through a series of miraculous plagues on the Egyptians. When Moses brought them to the border of the land of Canaan, which God had promised to give them, the Jews refused to enter because of the fearful report of ten spies who said it could not be done. (Numbers 14) They were afraid! They were filled with fear! They did not believe God would do what He said, although they had seen God deliver them from Egypt, seen the Red Sea miraculously part, seen miracles of provision in the desert. They refused to believe God.

God was furious! He immediately killed the ten spies with a plague. He sentenced the entire nation to wander in the desert for 40 years until all the adults who would not obey Him died. As Joyce Meyer says, “God never tells us not to feel fear. We can’t control our feelings. He tells us not to fear, which means we are not to yield to fear and unbelief.”

Jesus said to His followers, *Let not your hearts be troubled (fearful). Trust in God, trust also in me.* He said, “Let not.” It is an act of our will. We are to choose to trust God, obey Him, and do what He tells us to do in spite of any fearful thoughts or feelings.

In Revelation 2:8, God addresses the church at Smyrna that was undergoing some terrible persecution. God says to them, *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life....He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.*

I believe that we Christians in the United States are drawing ever nearer to a time of intense persecution and suffering. It does not take a prophet to see what is happening to our nation politically, economically, and morally. I believe that God has a very personal word for us through His words warning us about fear and cowardice. Our God is a mighty God. Nothing is impossible for Him. He is mighty to save. He is worthy of our faith and trust. Be not afraid! Trust in the Lord with all your heart, even unto death, and He will give you the crown of life.

TWO KINGDOMS

Several years ago Bill McCartney was football coach at Colorado University, and he started a Christian men’s renewal movement called Promise Keepers. One of the things they did was to have testimonies and speakers in football stadiums around the country. A pastor wrote about how one of those meetings affected him, and his story gave me a lasting memory.

It was a stormy, windy night, and at the conclusion of the evening they had a candle light service. Everyone had been given a small candle, the lights were turned off, and in the pitch black night a single candle was lit, and the light was passed up the aisles to the different sections of that massive stadium so that it was filled with light. But the wind was so strong that it would blow out the candles in whole areas, and then they would pass the lights up and across the aisles once again.

This vivid image is a picture of our world. The world was locked in darkness, pitch black, and winds of evil were blowing. A Light came into the world. He passed that light to a few, then to others, then to many. And now you and I and all who believe are the light of the world, because His light in us is lighting up the darkness. God sees every carrier of His light. They are a part of His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

DON’T JUDGE OTHERS?

In the sermon on the mount (Matthew 7), Jesus states, *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* This is a spiritual law, and God warns us not to have a harsh, judgmental attitude toward others or it will come right back to us. We are to look upon others with love, kindness, and charity, as God looks upon us. But this is not as clear cut a teaching as many people think it is. Jesus goes on to say that, *First, take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.* So we are to help get the specks out of our brothers’ eyes, which means we are encouraged to gently and kindly judge their wrong conduct and assist them to repent. *Jesus goes on to say, Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.* Whoa! If we are going to obey Jesus’ admonition here, we have to decide, evaluate, judge, who is a dog and a pig!

It gets more confusing. In 1 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul orders the church at Corinth to kick a certain man out of the church until he repents! (The guy was sleeping with his mother in law.) Then Paul says that we, the church, are not to judge the people of the world but that we have an obligation to judge every person who calls himself a believer. In fact, Paul states, *You must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.* I think it is very important that all of us read, meditate, and pray about Chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians. I don’t know of any church that obeys this part of God’s word. We skip over it and pretend it is not there. Knowing our own weakness and fallibility, we would feel like hypocrites to start judging and shunning certain “sinners” in the church. Right? Probably this speaks to the terrible situation of compromise in today’s church. We simply don’t have an expectation of holiness in the church and separation from the world, so we tolerate all kinds of compromise in ourselves and in others. Am I seeing it right, or do you perceive it differently?

In his letter to Timothy, Paul instructs his young protégé to, *Hold onto faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.* Wow! Paul publicly names two men who have been excommunicated from the church for

the sin of blasphemy. And in the little letter of 3 John, the Apostle John publicly exposes the sins of a leader in the church named Diotrophes. John says that this man loves to be first, that he is gossiping maliciously about John, and that he is sinning against brothers in the church. Because of these sins, John is telling the church not to have anything to do with him.

What is the purpose of judging those in the church, as demonstrated by these examples? So that these sinners will repent! So that they will not be judged by God! Jesus and Paul are warning us that when we accept Christ as our Savior He will not only give us forgiveness for our past sins, but He will give us power over our sins so we can live holy lives. (See Romans 6) This does not mean that we will be perfect, but it does mean that we will no longer be ruled and controlled by the practice of sin. (See following article.)

WAKING UP THE CORINTHIANS (and us)

On Paul's second missionary journey he started a small church in Corinth in the nation of Greece. Years passed, the church grew, but it had many serious problems. It was trying to be a Christian church in the midst of some overwhelming circumstances. Consider the following:

Corinth had a population of about 250,000 free persons, plus as many as 400,000 slaves!

Corinth was a crossroads for travelers and traders, with thousands of ships and sailors and people of every nationality passing through.

There were at least 12 temples in Corinth. Among temples dedicated to various Greek gods was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose worshipers practiced religious prostitution. At one time 1,000 sacred prostitutes served the temple.

Corinth became so widely known for immorality that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" came to mean "to practice sexual immorality."

It's no wonder that the Corinthian church was bothered with so many problems. The church was plagued with moral problems, immaturity, divisions and infighting, abuse of the spiritual gifts, and many false teachings. (As a former pastor, this sounds vaguely familiar.)

Paul starts his letter by reminding them who they were: *To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those every*

where who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours.

Paul says, You believers in Corinth have been "**sanctified**" – **set apart from the world as those who belong to God. And you have been called to be holy!** **You and all those throughout the world who call the name of Jesus Christ your Lord.** Can we pause right here and say, he is talking to you and me, brother or sister! If you and I call ourselves Christians, then this letter is addressed to us.

Paul then starts addressing all of the church's problems, one by one. But I want to move to Chapter 6, Verses 9-11, a place I have circled and underlined in every one of my bibles. It reads in the NIV: *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Let's be very clear about what Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is saying. He says that those who practice sins, such as the following list, are not going to inherit the kingdom of God; that is, they are not going to heaven:

Sexually immoral people.

Idolaters (lovers of money or of false gods)

Adulterers

Homosexuals

Thieves

Greedy people

Drunkards (and drug addicts)

Slanderers

Swindlers (whether big business men, politicians, preachers, or whatever)

Paul says that some of you people in the church used to do some of these things. That is the kind of people you were. But God rescued you by His grace and through your faith, so that is not the kind of people you are any longer!

This does not mean that God expects us to be perfect. There is only One who ever lived on this planet was and is perfect. But God does not expect us to go on living the way we were before! The little book of 1st John says that if we go on practicing our former sins then we haven't really been born again; in fact, we still belong to the devil. (Read it and see if that is not what it clearly says again and again.)

Fortunately for my sake, and maybe for yours, God is merciful, and when I failed over the years, He continued to reach out to me and pull me out of the swamp. Glory be to God! But He said to me in so many words, "Glenn, don't be deceived! You have received Christ and you can walk as a Christian if you so choose. But if you choose to go back into your old way of life, don't you dare think that there won't be consequences!"

I tell you the honest truth that that is what God communicated to me on many occasions, because I am so weak that I was tempted to fall away from Christ in many different ways over the years. What a God we have! What a marvelous Savior! Such love, patience, and kindness. Friends, we are not saved because of our love for Him, but by His steady love for us.

I want to quote the passage from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 from the NLT: *Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people - none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

FROM MAX LUCADO

A story about a father who lived in the interior of Brazil: His wife died and he was left with a daughter. He did his best, but when she became a teen she became increasingly rebellious. One morning he looked in her bed and she was gone. He felt like a failure. He felt indescribable pain and anguish.

The father went to a photo booth and made many of those strips of four pictures. He went to Sao Paulo, the nearest big city, and started taping those photos of himself to telephone poles, inside the rest rooms of night clubs, dance halls, bars, and brothels. He would tape the photo to the wall or on a mirror. After two weeks he left.

Several months passed. His daughter was in a night club and saw a faded picture of her father on the rest room mirror. There was a note written below the photo: "Honey, whatever has happened, no matter how far you have fallen, I love you. Please come home. Daddy." She did.

Jesus' photograph is waiting for you to discover. He has a note addressed to you: "Honey, whatever has happened, no matter how far you have fallen, I love you. Please come home. Jesus."

MINISTRY

We just recently concluded a ten-week "Pathway to Freedom Seminar." June Felhauer and her daughter Jolene Hansen have trained ten or twelve teams in in-depth ministry, and over 60 people have gone through the personal ministry. Praise the Lord!

Last weekend Jim Schnell and I conducted a seminar at the Delta detention facility. Not many guys attended, but we saw the Lord do some deep healing and deliverance. It is a privilege that we are permitted to go into the prisons, and we don't take it for granted.

God Bless

Glenn

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