

The Professor's Theological Home Page

"...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:31)

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Proper and Improper fear

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The Book of Proverbs deals with the subject of proper and improper fear. Let us begin by looking at the verses in Proverbs that bring out the subject of fear and make the distinction between what is proper and improper fear.

"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." (KJV Proverbs 29:25)

We see here that having fear of man can become a snare or a trap, in the sense that your actions are controlled by the person whom you fear. But what does this mean? Well, do you worry about what others think of you? You can be afraid of being rejected. This fear can cause you to do anything to gain the approval of those whom you want to be accepted by, such as in the case of peer pressure. Peers would constitute your equals in your same age group or social position.

When you are young you feel the pressure to keep your standing in your peer group. You worry about their approval or disapproval, and in turn, this alters your beliefs and your actions. You may feel pressure to dress a certain way or talk and act a certain way. The desire to do anything to gain the approval of your peers will influence your decisions. Yet, this type of mindset is a trap that will cause you to compromise the truth of the Bible and instead of measuring your life by what Scripture teaches you are concerned by the popular opinion of the day. It is when we are young during the formative years that we are the most vulnerable to this entrapment. Therefore, this is a good time to recognize the pitfall of peer-pressure and avoid it.

It is through the influence of peer-pressure that individuals with real or imagined problems end up getting involved in such things as cliques. A clique is an abnormal emotional dependence on a group, as in the case of gangs. In gangs you always have the leaders who are trying to control those who are following. The leader's lust for control and the followers lust for approval. This is not friendship at all! True friendship never involves being controlling or being co-dependant. True friends do not do this and it is the trap of the foolish, but what is the alternative?

Instead, Proverbs 29:25 tells us to put our trust in the Lord so we can see a fool for who they truly are. The foolish are exposed by their foolish talk, they are rebellious, promiscuous and their influence is to be avoided. The wise will reject the fool, yet the foolish will get entangled in this web of deception, it will always be a choice. The wise understand that the way of the fool has negative consequences, which would include such things as failure in their relationships, addiction to drugs and alcohol, depression to being anti-authority. The final destiny of such a continued lifestyle of the foolish could potentially end up in jail or death. These negative

consequences create a dysfunctional individual and there is nothing cool about such a lifestyle. All of these negative actions and consequences are part of the life of a fool according to the Bible. Although this is prevalent in our present age, there will always be those few who choose to live wisely. This will all depend on our freewill to make the right choice.

The wise are not concerned about pleasing the foolish but are concerned about doing things the right way. This is what is considered living a life of integrity. The wise are concerned about pleasing and trusting in the Lord, which is considered proper fear according to Proverbs 24:19-21.

“19) Fret (anger) not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; 20) For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out. 21) My son, fear thou the Lord and the King: and meddle not with them that are given to change:” (KJV Proverbs 24:19-21)

Therefore, according to verse 20 the wicked shall be snuffed out, like the flame of a candle. Solomon is teaching his son to fear the Lord and this is always the beginning of wisdom. So, in verse 21 we see that the ultimate fear that is proper is the fear for the Lord, which is simply a reference to having reverence or respect for the Lord that manifests itself in obedience. When you have respect for what the Bible teaches, you have respect for the Lord because these are His words, His thoughts and principles. We are commanded to live by them because it is to our benefit and when we reject them we only damage ourselves.

Apart from God’s revelation that is found in the pages of Scriptures we are basically ignorant and confused. We will be confused about knowing where we came from, where we are going, who we are, why we exist, let alone what we should be doing. Yet in our arrogance we think we know it all. This is prideful arrogance!

No human being can claim to know all the secrets of the universe. Yet, many would give everything to know all these secrets. The God of the Bible knows all the secrets of the universe and has the unlimited power to sustain the entire universe. He sustains the stars and even our heartbeat and He alone determines the time of our death. We would do well to have a respectful fear for the Lord, who can, not only destroy the body but the soul as well. This is proper fear.

Proverbs 24:21 also brings out the fact that we are to fear the king, which is a reference to civil government. Government would include such things as law enforcement and the court system of our civil government.

Thus, we see that the Lord and civil government are to be feared because they are the means of executing punishment. Government is God’s representative on earth to execute punishment to the rebellious (Rom. 13:1-4).

“1) Let every soul be subject unto the higher power. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2) Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3) For rulers are not terrors to good works, but to the evil.

Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4) For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (KJV Romans 13:1-4)

We see from these verses that the governing authorities are a terror to those who do wrong. The job of these authorities is to enforce the law by punishing criminals either through incarceration or execution. The reference about bearing the sword by these authorities teaches the principle of capital punishment. The principle for capital punishment is also taught in Genesis 9:6 and commands that if someone murders anybody they are to be executed. Therefore, capital punishment is Biblical, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, as we have seen in Romans 13:4, and this is how the victims of these crimes are honored (Pro. 28:17; Ex. 21:14).

Criminals have an arrogant mind that wants their own freedom, rights, property and life respected by others around them. Yet, they themselves are not considerate of giving the same respect to others in these areas. For individuals with such a mindset, there is an enforced humility that is designed to come from the governing authorities or the Lord Himself and, as we have seen from Proverbs 24:20, their flame of arrogance will be snuffed out as quickly as the flame of a candle!

The responsibility of the governing authorities of any nation are to protect the freedom, rights, property, and life of all individuals in that nation since criminals do not respect the freedom, property, rights and privacy of others. To maintain the stability of any society, it is imperative that the governing authorities impose punishment on those who are involved in criminal behavior through a proper system of jurisprudence, which allows for freedom while enforcing order. Jurisprudence is simply the science of law. Without the deterrent of punishment, the criminal element in any society will increase and threaten the stability for those who are law-abiding. Thus, the governing authorities have been ordained by the Lord to provide the fear of punishment to those who threaten the stability and safety of the citizens that it governs.

Therefore, the improper fear of peer pressure should be avoided, and we would do well to have the proper fear for the Lord and His ordained governing authorities. The negative effects of improper fear and the positive effects of proper fear will determine whether we live an unstable and frustrated life of the fool or instead a stable well-adjust life of the wise.

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