

FOCUS TEXTS

Proverbs 29:25 (ESV)

The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.

THE FEAR OF MAN: THE LORDS ANSWER

(1) Fear of people makes us panic about the physical or spiritual "punishment" that people can inflict, (2) but the Lord's answer is to trust and fear Him!

INTRODUCTORY

[Application]

When we talk about a "fear of man", then it doesn't just mean that you are afraid of the physical presence of people. That too, but it goes deeper and further than that.

A fear of man means, among other things:

- to worry about what other people think of you,
- that you want people to always like you,
- trusting people too much.

The secular world gives the "fear of people" all sorts of other names and calls it something like "social anxiety" or "avoidant personality disorder" etc.

Here are some characteristics of the fear of people (DSM-IV). You:

- forever feel inferior,
- are constantly anxious,
- have a fear of rejection,
- are easily hurt by criticism,
- difficulty having close friends,
- are afraid you are doing something wrong in a social environment,

- need other people to take responsibility for most important areas of your life.

We could probably add more things to the list, but this is already an accurate description for what we sometimes experience when we have a fear of people.

Most of us have experienced this fear of people to a greater or lesser extent.

Various studies show us that social anxiety and all kinds of fears are increasing more and more worldwide. People are becoming more and more fearful.

Scientists say that the higher social anxiety is probably due to the fact that people are living more and more isolated and virtual lives. Social media and technology probably contribute a lot to this anxiety for people. One also sees more and more young people with social anxiety.

Everywhere you hear the cry of need, that we must do something about this problem of fear and anxiety...but what can one do about it?!

The Lord has answers and solutions for us; for us who are so prone to fear people.

- (i) Let's first understand what this fear of people is in Biblical terms and
- (ii) then we will also hear the Lord's answer to the fear of people.

1. WHAT IS THE FEAR OF PEOPLE?

[Statement]

1.1. Fear of people is to panic about the punishment of people

Proverbs stated:

" The **fear** of man lays a snare "

Now we can conclude that this fear is not put in a positive light. It actually indicates a type of "panic" and in its worst degree can also refer to "terror".

So the fear of people, is to be panicked or even in total terror, about how people are going to act towards me, or about what they think of me and how they talk about or to me.

This panic makes me suddenly behave differently, because I am afraid of what people will think or say about me or how they will behave towards me.

The apostle John helps us to better understand this thought. John tells us: "...fear has to do with **punishment**." (1 John 4:18)

What John says there is indeed in a different context, and is not directly related to the fear of people, but it does explain an aspect of fear to us. Especially then the type of fear of which our text in Proverbs speaks.

You panic about/for/at people, when you believe they can "punish" you in some way!

Well, one can panic at people who punish you physically and one can panic at people who punish you mentally/emotionally:

...Let's take a quick look at the first type of punishment that we can panic about...

[Application]

1.2. Panic about people physically "punishing" me

We can sometimes have fear of people, because we are afraid of what they can do to us physically:

- You may be afraid of someone physically attacking and overpowering you.
- You are afraid that someone will hurt or kill you.
- As a Christian, you may be afraid of the persecution of unbelievers.

Of course, we must act responsibly and not risk our lives. But we can easily fall into a fear of people and allow that fear to take over practically my entire life!

My fear of people later determines:

- where I will live,
- where I will work and even
- when I come to church!

[Illustration]

We see many examples of this panic about people's physical punishment, in the Bible:

- Think of Aaron who meekly listened to the people of Israel when they ordered him to make a golden calf. Aaron was surely afraid that the people would do something to him if he did not make the image! So what does he do? He acts directly against God's will and helps the people to worship idols!
- Also think of the Lord Jesus' disciples who fled for fear of the Roman soldiers the night Jesus was arrested!

...But then we can also panic about the mental/emotional punishment of people...

[Application]

1.3. Panic about people "punishing" me mentally/emotionally

We think people are going to "punish" or "hurt" us on a mental or emotional level and then we act wrongly out of fear of the people's reactions:

- Instead you bend your Christian values because you are afraid you will make your friends uncomfortable,
- You'd rather say what people want to hear and not tell the truth, because you're afraid people will think you're a bit strange,
- You are not going to openly take a stand for the Lord, because this is not what the majority does and it will make you unpopular.

[Illustration]

This panic about people who can hurt me spiritually is also something we find in the Bible:

- Think of the apostle Peter. At one point he did not want to eat with the heathens because he was afraid of what the Jews would think. So out of fear of the people, he brings division in the church!
- Also Nicodemus, the great scholar of Israel came to talk to Jesus at night instead, because he was afraid of what people would think of him if he was seen with the controversial Jesus.
- In the book of John we also read that there were Pharisees who believed in Jesus, but they did not want to say it out loud, because then they would lose their reputation and they would be banned from the synagogue.

This panic about the punishment that people can inflict on us mentally or physically is what Proverbs is talking about.

This is the fear of people.

...From the examples we have already heard, we could very clearly hear how this fear quickly becomes a trap...

[Statement]

1.4. Panicking about "punishing" people becomes a trap

" The fear of man lays a **snare** " (Prov. 29:25a)

A snare is, as we say, a trap. One catches an animal in a trap - you first lure it with some food, until it falls into the trap and then you have it!

But the Bible warns us that one can also be caught in a spiritual trap. One can be deceived and tempted and thus be "caught"!

Something may seem right and attractive to you at first, and so you get closer and closer. If you look again, you are a prisoner!

So it is too with the fear of people.

Why does the fear of the people become a trap?

Because out of fear of people, we can sometimes reason that it is better to adjust my behaviour for a moment and do the wrong things instead.

The fear of people leads us into the trap, to choose the lie of people rather than the truth of God.

You reason that the approval of people in your situation will be better than God's approval.

You think it's smarter to now protect yourself from people's "punishments."

One is more afraid of looking stupid in front of people, than you are afraid of sinning against God.

" The fear of man lays a **snare** " (Prov. 29:25a)

That's how you get caught.

Don't miss this deep wisdom from Proverbs:

Fear of men, makes you a prisoner of men!

And that is why the fear of people is sin. It is a sin, because people become your master.

You have decided, if only for a moment, that other people have the highest authority over your life and not God.

You are in the prison of fear and so you dance to the pipes of your jailers.

People, instead of God, now determine how you think, speak and act - this is sin.

[Application]

And we have all fallen into this trap. Some of us struggle with this more than others, but we know the fear of people!

We must admit it before the Lord.

...But how can we get out of the trap? What is the Lord's answer and His solution to this people-fear?...

2. THE LORD'S ANSWER TO THE FEAR OF PEOPLE

[Statement]

2.1. Trust in the Lord

Medication can help, for those of us who suffer seriously from the fear of people. But we must remember that medication cannot address the heart of this problem.

What we deeply need most, is to trust in and fear the Lord.

Listen to our text again:

“The fear of man lays a snare, **but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.**” (Prov. 29:25)

Trusting in the Lord is nothing but faith. It is to rely faithfully on the Lord!

And then the proverb says, we who rely on the Lord for His protection:

“...whoever trusts in the LORD **is safe**”

The protection of the Lord is the exact opposite of the trap we fall into when we fear people.

The word "protection" is written here in a specific way in the original Hebrew text.

It is written in such a way, that one must understand that the protection work takes place for you and for your sake. And it happens in the present and also applies to the future!

The Lord is like a fortress, like a shield all around you! He is a shelter for you. He does the protection work.

He makes you safe now and He will also hold you safe going forward, in the future!

[Application]

Can you see the two opposites?

- You can either trust in people and fall into a trap or trust in the Lord and be protected.
- You can either fear people which leads to a life of panic or you can fear the Lord which leads to a life of trust.

...Herein lies the solution to our fear of people: trust the Lord and fear the Lord...

[Statement]

2.2. Fear of the Lord

Listen to what the Lord Jesus says about the fear of people versus the fear of the Lord:

“...And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.
Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
(Matt. 10:28)

Rather fear Him - fear the LORD!

You see, to fear the Lord means you understand that He has the final say over your body and your soul, not people.

All the panic and anxiety in our life are all symptoms of a misplaced fear!

We must fear, but we must know Whom to fear! We must fear the Lord!

He is on the throne, not people!

As soon as we no longer see the Lord on His throne, we sink into terror!

But,

If we see the Lord on His throne and fear Him, then it brings us peace.

To fear the Lord does not mean you have to panic and be terrified when you think of the Lord's punishment and judgment - not if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!:

“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have **confidence** for the day of judgement, because **as he is** so also are we in this world. **There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.**”

For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:17,18,19)

If you are forever afraid of the Lord's judgment, then you still have to grow in your understanding of the Lord's love.

Perfect love casts out fear, says John.

We are not going to fear the Lord properly, if we do not know how much He loves us!

The Lord loves us so much that He descended for us to the realm of the dead.

Christ bore the punishment of God, to body and soul for me and in my place! (HKS Q&A 44)

The Lord Jesus Christ delivered us from the reign of fear - He took the unspeakable anguish and terror of hell upon Himself, in my place! (HKS Q&A 44)

If we only realize something of this love of the Lord Jesus Christ, then it pushes the panic and the terror out of your heart!

If you fear the Lord, then you are freed from your fear of people, so that you no longer fear people, but can love them.

Love, drives the fear out.

CONCLUSION

[Application]

If you once again panic about something people might do to you physically, don't fall into the trap. Trust in the Lord for your protection.

If you panic again about the mental and emotional pain that people can inflict on you, don't fall into the trap. Fear the Lord!

AMEN!

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