

## **The Fear of Man: Part 1 of 2** *How and Why We Fear Others*

### **I. What is the biblical understanding of the fear of man / codependency / peer pressure / people pleasing?**

Ed Welch defines it this way: The fear of man is when we “*replace God with people. Instead of a biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others.*”

The fear of man is not necessarily that we are frightened by men (though this can also be true), but it is when we are controlled by how others view us. It is when God becomes small in our lives and people become big.

### **II. Recognize that the fear of man is a major theme both in the Bible and in your own life.**

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

#### **There are three basic reasons why we fear people:**

1. We fear people because they can expose and humiliate us.
2. We fear people because they can reject, ridicule, or despise us.
3. We fear people because they can attack, oppress, or threaten us.

These three reasons all see people as bigger, more powerful, and more significant than God. By fearing people more than God, we give people the power to control us in how we feel, think, and act.

#### **1. Shame enters the world**

Being seen and intimately known by God and others was once a blessing because man was perfect and had nothing to be ashamed about, but being seen and known became a curse after the Fall. Shame and fear are now a part of all of us because of our sinful nature.

*[7] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. [8] And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, **and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.** (Genesis 3:6-8)*

#### **2. People fear rejection and ridicule**

Examples of man fearing man

[24] Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, **because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.**  
(1 Samuel 15:24)

[42] Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, **but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it**, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; [43] **for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.**  
(John 12:42-43)

[44] How can you believe, **when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?**  
(John 5:44)

[12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, **fearing the circumcision party.** [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.  
(Galatians 2:12-13)

### Exhortations to not fear man

[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. **Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,**  
(1 Peter 3:13-14)

[16] And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and **you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.**  
(Matthew 22:16)

[4] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, **so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.**  
(1 Thessalonians 2:4)

[10] For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? **If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.**  
(Galatians 1:10)

Everybody wants to be liked, admired, respected, but do we seek this affirmation from others in a way that controls how we act? Or do we show favoritism towards people? If so, we fear man above God.
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### **3. People fear physical harm**

#### Examples of man fearing man

[11] When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, [12] and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. [13] **Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.**”

(Genesis 12:11-13)

[29] Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them. [30] The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, [31] and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.’ [32] **Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God,**  
(Deuteronomy 1:29-32)

### Exhortations to not fear man

[21] See, the LORD your God has set the land before you. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has told you. **Do not fear or be dismayed.**  
(Deuteronomy 1:21)

[7] Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “**Be strong and courageous**, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. [8] It is the LORD who goes before you. **He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.**”  
(Deuteronomy 31:7-8)

[9] Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. **Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**  
(Joshua 1:9 ESV)

It’s not sinful to fear when threatened. It’s okay to fear. But the problem arises when fear overrules and consumes us in a way that we stop trusting God and start trusting in other people or other means to deliver us.

### **III. Rather than look to ourselves or culture for answers, we must seek a biblical understanding and response to the fear of man.**

1. We need to ask ourselves the right questions.
2. God must be bigger to you than people.
3. We must need people less and love them more.