



eLesson 026

Text: Mark 4:35-41

Subject: Fear

Fear or Faith 1

What do you fear? People have many fears ... fear of the dark, fear of being alone, fear of people, fear of crowds, fear of change, fear of disapproval, fear of rejection, fear of persecution, fear of failure, fear of growing up, fear of growing old, fear of life, fear of death, fear of separation, fear of school, fear of exams, fear of getting married, fear of not getting married, fear of having children, fear of not having children, fear of a new job, fear of unemployment, fear about finances, fear of the dentist, fear of the hospital, fear of illness, fear of crime, fear of memories, fear of the future, fear of moving to a new place, fear of not moving, fear of storms, fear of holding on, fear of letting go, fear of obedience, fear of witnessing, fear of submission, fear of tithing, ... and many, many more fears. Have I mentioned any of your fears? What do you fear? Whom do you fear? Why do you fear? Is fear good? Or ... is fear wrong? Is fear a sin?

There is a good fear. However, this lesson is not about good fear. The fear of God (our fear of Him) is a good fear. *"In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death."* Proverbs 14:26-27. I have heard this good fear described as a reverential awe similar to our reaction to a beautiful sunset ... or similar to our reaction to some other scene that almost takes our breath away as we view it. However, our fear of God should be much more than that. There should be some awesome fear as we consider Him ... a fear that should cause us to fall on our faces and worship Him as the elders did in Revelation 7:11. Another good fear is that of the normal dangers in life. It is not good to be foolishly reckless. Moreover, it is especially wrong to be foolishly reckless in the name of faith. There are situations in life in which we should have fear of the normal dangers that can be avoided with caution. But this lesson is not about that fear either.

This lesson is about the bad fear that displaces faith. That bad fear causes us to flee from God's will, to disobey Him, and to lose our trust in Him. This lesson is about the fear that limits or paralyzes our walk with God. There are 13 different Greek words for this wrong fear in the New Testament ... and in it, they are used more than 150 times. This lesson will focus on one of those words. It is a word for big fear. It is used just five times in the New Testament ... in 2 Timothy 1:7, Matthew 8:26, Mark 4:40, John 14:27, and Revelation 21:8. Is it wrong to steal? Yes. How do we know? That is easy ... the Bible states, *"You shall not steal."* Exodus 20:15. Is it a sin to commit adultery? Yes ... *"You shall not commit adultery."* Exodus 20:14. Is it a sin to lie? Yes ... *"Do not lie to one another"* Colossians 3:9. Is it sinful to be fearful? Is fear a sin? What is your answer? Would you say that fear is a sin? It is obvious that murder, immorality, sorcery, idolatry, and lying are serious, big sins. However, would you go beyond saying that fear is a sin and put fear on that list of big sins? Many, if not most, Christians would not. Nevertheless, God did. His Word states, *"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and*

sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8. The word "cowardly" in that verse is one of the five uses of that word for big fear. So let me ask you again ... *Is fear a sin?* Over 100 times the Bible repeats commands like "fear not", "do not be afraid", and "do not fear". Is fear a sin? Yes it is! I know that is a difficult statement for some people. It may be difficult for you.

Where does the bad fear come from? It does not come from God. That word for *big fear* is used in 2 Timothy 1:7 ... "*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.*" That word for big fear is translated in this version as *timidity*. To me *timidity* is a word for small fear, lack of self-confidence, or lack of boldness. However, the Greek word in this verse means *big fear*. As a characteristic of one's character, it could be called *cowardice*. It would be fair to paraphrase the beginning of 2 Timothy 1:7 as, *God is not the source of fear or cowardice*. Fear is not from God. Fear is from the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is not from God. Fear is a sin. We all face situations that tempt us to fear. Sometimes we face big storms that could produce big fear. Is there a storm in your life? Are you being tempted to be fearful? Will you respond to the storm in fear ... or in faith? The disciples of Jesus faced a fear or faith test. Jesus let them get into a dangerous situation to test their faith. Their story is in Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. The word for *big fear* is used twice in their story ... once in Mark 4:40 and once in Matthew 8:26. Put this lesson down for a few minutes and pick up your Bible. Read each of these three accounts of the Disciples' test ... then come back to the lesson. I am serious about this ... read all three before continuing.

Welcome back. Did their story come alive to you as you read it? I have found that a great way to learn from the Bible is to form a mental image of what I am reading. Try it. In your imagination, put yourself into the story. Be an extra person in the boat ... or be one of the Disciples. Imagine actually being there with Jesus and His men. In your mind, walk with them in the days just before the storm. Wouldn't it have been great to hear the voice of Jesus as He taught the parable of the seed and four kinds of soil? How would you feel as you saw Him heal the sick and cast out demons? If you had been there with Him, would your faith be stronger than it is today? Jesus said to His disciples, "*Let us go over to the other side of the lake.*" Imagine hearing Him speak those simple words. The lake was the Sea of Galilee, also called the lake of Gennesaret, the Sea of Tiberias, and the Sea of Chinnereth. That was a large lake ... at the time of Jesus, possibly 8 miles (13 km) wide and 13 miles (21 km) long. That was big enough for very strong storms. The Disciples did not know that a storm was coming into their lives. They did not know that a *fear or faith test* was just a few hours away. I can imagine that everyone's enthusiasm and confidence were high that evening as they sailed away from the shore. They were with the great teacher and healer. In addition, Peter, Andrew, James, and John were in the boat. They had been four professional fishermen who had sailed and fished this sea for years. What could go wrong? What could they possibly fear? How would you have felt there in the boat with them?

However, everything was about to change for them. Our circumstances can change so quickly. Storms can rush in suddenly. Jesus had not gone to the bow (front) of the ship to guide them. He went to the back of the boat and slept on a cushion. I can imagine the Disciples looking back at the sleeping Jesus and thinking how glad they were that He was getting some rest after His busy schedule. However, any such approval would have been short-lived. Jesus knew that a storm was coming. He knew that it would test the Disciples' faith. While Jesus was sleeping, a fierce gale of wind came upon the sea. A great shaking storm engulfed that little boat. The surging waves broke over the bow. The boat began to fill with water. In your mind, are you still in the boat with them? What are you doing in the boat? Are you straining at the oars? Are you frantically pulling down the sails? Are your arms aching as you labor to bail the water from the boat with an old wooden bucket? Are you being tossed from side to side? What are you now thinking as you look back at the sleeping Jesus? Are you still glad that He is sleeping? Are you wondering how He could sleep through this storm? Are you wondering why He is not helping? Are you wondering if He even cares that you are perishing? Would you wake Jesus? If you did, what would you say to Him?

The Disciples woke Jesus. Two of them spoke to Him ... one from fear ... the other from faith. One asked, "*Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?*" Mark 4:38. What was the tone of that statement? Was it sarcastically disapproving? Was it filled with anger? The other said, "*Save us, Lord; we are perishing!*" Matthew 8:25. Do you see the difference in the two statements? Which came from fear? Which came from faith? One called Jesus "*Teacher*" ... the other called Him "*Lord*". One disapprovingly asked, "*Do You not care?*" The other pleaded, "*Save us*". The storm was severe. Some of our storms are severe. Jesus was with the Disciples in their storm. He is with us in our storms. He was sleeping in the back of their boat ... but since He is God, He knew exactly what was happening at every moment. In His deity, in His all-knowingness, He never sleeps. "*Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*" Psalms 121:4. Never think that Jesus does not know about your storm. He knows exactly what you are going through. Moreover, He is with you. Never question His love for you. He cares for you. What will you say to Jesus when the next storm engulfs you? Will you call Him *teacher* or will you call Him *Lord*? Will you fearfully and angrily ask, *Don't you care that I am perishing?* Or will you simply plead in faith, *Lord, save me ... I am perishing?*

We all experience temptations to fear. However, it is not a sin to be tempted. Temptation gives us a choice to obey God ... or to disobey Him. For the Disciples, the storm was their source of temptation. They chose to fear and not trust God. Their temptation to fear was not sin. Their choice of fear and their rejection of trust was sin. The loss of employment is a temptation to fear ... as is the death of a spouse or parent ... as is a medical operation or the diagnosis of a serious illness. However, the temptation to fear is not sin. If we surrender to the temptation of fear and therefore do not trust God ... then it is sin. Which will you choose ... fear or faith? Which do you choose in your storm of today?

(This lesson is the first of a two-part eLesson)



Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. What fear is a good fear?
2. What are the benefits of the fear of the Lord?
3. What does the bad fear cause us to do?
4. How many Greek words for this wrong fear are used in the New Testament ... and how many times are they used?

5. What serious sins are listed in Revelation 21:8?

6. Is fear on that list ... and where?

7. Is disobeying a command in the Bible a sin?

8. How many times in the Bible are we commanded not to fear?

9. Is it a sin to disobey that much-repeated command?

10. Where does that bad fear not come from ... and what verse states that fact?

11. Where does that bad fear come from?

12. What was Jesus doing when the storm came?

13. Did He know about the storm ... and why?

14. What two names did the Disciples use when they woke Jesus?

15. What did they say to Him?

16. Is the temptation to fear a sin?



Personal Reflection

No answers provided for these questions.

1. What fears do your friends and family have?
2. What fears do you have?
3. How have your fears tempted you to flee from God's will, disobey Him, or lose your trust in Him?
4. Have you known that fear is a sin? If not, why?
5. Where have your bad fears come from?
6. How would you have reacted to Jesus sleeping, if you were on that boat?
7. What would you have said if you were the one to wake Him?
8. What storms might be coming toward your boat?



Answers to Study Questions

1. What fear is a good fear? **The fear of God is a good fear.**
2. What are the benefits of the fear of the Lord? **In it, there is strong confidence ... a refuge for us ... a fountain of life ... and help to avoid the snares of death.**
3. What does the bad fear cause us to do? **Flee from God's will ... disobey Him ... lose our trust in Him.**
4. How many Greek words for this wrong fear are used in the New Testament ... and how many times are they used? **13 different words ... used more than 150 times.**
5. What serious sins are listed in Revelation 21:8? **Fear (cowardice), unbelief, abominations, murder, immorality, sorcery, idolatry, and lying.**
6. Is fear on that list ... and where? **Yes ... first.**
7. Is disobeying a command in the Bible a sin? **Yes.**
8. How many times in the Bible are we commanded not to fear? **Over 100 times.**
9. Is it a sin to disobey that much-repeated command? **Yes!**
10. Where does that bad fear not come from ... and what verse states that fact? **Not from God, 2 Timothy 1:7.**
11. Where does that bad fear come from? **The world, the flesh, and the devil.**
12. What was Jesus doing when the storm came? **Sleeping.**
13. Did He know about the storm ... and why? **Yes ... He is God.**
14. What two names did the Disciples use when they woke Jesus? **Teacher and Lord.**
15. What did they say to Him? **One said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" The other said, "Lord, save us ... we are perishing."**
16. Is the temptation to fear a sin? **No.**

.....

This Acts One Eight eLesson, copyright 2004, is provided for your personal or group study. You may copy it, unchanged, for free distribution ... but only with this copyright statement attached. Bible quotations are from the New American Standard unless otherwise noted. Visit www.eLessons.org for your own free e-mail subscription, to update your subscription, or to tell a friend about the eLessons. Additional lessons and info on other ministry resources are available on that site. Send questions and comments to questions@eLessons.org.

