

Fear of Man

Intro: The Fear of Man is a concern about what others think of us; desire for human approval or fear of rejection; desire to be respected, esteemed, admired, loved, included, invited in with an accompanying fear of being overlooked, mistreated, neglected, ignored, disrespected, excluded or victimized.

These are legitimate desires and fears. They keep us from sinful and destructive behavior. When the desires go unmet or the fears are actualized there is pain, woundedness and sorrow. When desires are met and fears are escaped there is happiness and sense of pleasure and safety.

The problem is when these natural and legitimate desires become inordinate or excessive and controlling. We become consumed about what people think about us, having an excessive fixation on people's opinions (even if we don't know them). We feel we *need* the approval of someone or anyone, and we fear their rejection. We begin to define ourselves by how others are responding to us or how we perceive their perception of us.

Passages for Study: John 12:42-43; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Probing Questions that Reveal this Idol (*adapted from Ed Welch in When People are Big and God is Small*).

- Do you need something from others? Expect a lot from people?
- Do you crave compliments?
- Are you ever afraid you might be exposed as an imposter?
- Are you overly concerned with how you look, what you weigh, or how you are dressed?
- Do you think about your self-worth or self-esteem a lot?
- Do you often feel painfully unappreciated?
- Do you make excuses for your mistakes, justify bad behavior or shift blame because you can't handle the thought of failing before people?
- Do you show favoritism?
- Are you over committed?
- Do you get easily embarrassed?
- Do you compare yourself to others and feel good when you win or feel envy when you lose?

Thought Questions

1. How is the fear of man enslaving?
2. Why do we struggle with the fear of man? What is at the core of our desire for the commendation of others?
3. How does the image of people bowing down to a broken idol in need of repair relate to us in our culture?
4. How does the gospel free us from the fear of man?
5. How does freedom from this idol affect missional living?

Guide

1a) We end up enslaved to other's opinions of us or fear what they can do to us. We make all our decisions on the basis of how we will be perceived.

2a) We were made to hear the "very good" of God. Sin has robbed us of that positive verdict and we are seeking to get it everywhere else. At the core of this idol is the need to feel justified.

3a) This should foster some great conversation about the banality of our culture in its pursuit of glory.

4a) The good news in Christ – Christ had glory, laid it aside and has come, the only commendable one has become the condemned one so the condemned ones could become commendable – fully known and fully loved by God and one day have glory unfading. When the deepest awareness of ourselves is that we are sons and daughters of God fully known and fully loved by God, it displaces all other definitions of ourselves that we are trying to achieve or trying to lose.

5a) When we are liberated from the incessant need to be accepted by people because we have been accepted by the Ultimate person and we are now governed by a ruling desire to love and honor the Father, instead of being loved and honored, we are able to focus on loving people instead of using people.

Review and Reflection

We were made for the commendation of God. Sin has robbed us of it and we are seeking to recapture a sense that we are right, OK, very good. Christ has come to restore our standing with the Father, to win for us a positive verdict from God. He was condemned so that we could be commended.

What would life look like if you were content with the commendation of God? We would hold our reputations before people as of little value and finally be free to live bold, daring, future shaping lives that revel in the approval of God.

Passages to Memorize

John 12:42-43 “Yet, at the same time, many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees, would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue,; for they loved the praise from men more than praise from God”.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 “On the Contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel. We are not trying to please men, but God who tests our hearts.

Resources to Keep Digging Deeper

Books: *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch

Counterfeit Gods by Tim Keller

Beyond Identity by Richard Keyes

Online Resource: Richard Baxter on Man Pleasing:

<http://www.puritansermons.com/baxter/baxter13.htm>