

Characteristics of Sinful Fear

1. *Fear is sinful when it proceeds out of unbelief, or distrust in God.*

Peter was afraid because he doubted (Matt 14:25-31). He distrusted God because his faith was small. Which promises of God do you sometimes not believe?

2. *Fear is sinful when that which produced the fear is attributed more power than what the Bible allows.*

When do you believe that what you fear has more power than God (See Luke 12:4-5)? Make a short list of the things that you fear. Think in terms of the following categories: Your feelings, your enemies, your environment, your circumstances, your future, your finances, or the loss of your most cherished possessions.

3. *Fear is sinful when it attributes to God characteristics that are inconsistent with his nature.*

Samuel Bourn said in his discourse titled "on Religious Fear," published in 1760:

" All true fear of the Supreme being can only spring from a right knowledge of him. And it consists, first and fundamentally, in conceiving and believing him to be what he is, most powerful indeed, but at the same time, most wise, just, and benevolent... The character and title most constantly ascribed by our Savior and his Apostles to the Supreme being is The Father; and the appellation (or name) by which we are taught to address him, (is) Our Father in heaven... But if we impute to him qualities inconsistent with the parental character, and represent him to ourselves, as seeking and delighting, not only in the happiness, but the misery and ruin of his creatures; we dethrone as it were, the Father, and set up in his stead a tyrant... And the dread of such a false deity is widely different from the fear of God... producing timidity, distrust, dejection, horror and despair and leading to all the... corrupt methods, by which, men, deceiving themselves, may hope to appease his wrath and gain his favor."

Do you think you have an accurate perception of God? At what points do you believe your perception might be inaccurate?

To what extent do you really believe that the Lord will reward your faithfulness to him?

4. *Fear is sinful when we fear what God forbids us to fear.*

See Matthew 10:28, Psalm 27:1-3, Psalm 56:4, and Proverbs 29:25

If you fear God you will desire to please God. If you inordinately fear man you will inordinately fear man and you inordinately desire to please man --- you'll be easily tempted to love "the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (John 12:43). Are there people in your life of whom you are excessively fearful? Who might they be?

The bible forbids us from inordinately fearing our environment and circumstances (see Psalm 46:1-3 and Psalm 91:5-6).

By night, by day, in darkness and in light, God is your environment! He is everywhere; and everywhere he is, he is in control of your circumstances. Are there things in your environment or present circumstances about which you are afraid? What are they?

5. *Fear is sinful when it is rooted in the loss of some cherished idolatrous desire.*

a. The bible forbids us from fearing bad news (see Psalm 112: 7-8).

Fearful people often live in dread of receiving bad news... they anxiously await the hammer to fall on them. Their focus is on secondary causes... rather than on their sovereign heavenly Father who for his own eternal purposes causes all things to work together for their good. What kind of bad news are you dreading?

b. Idolatry is like a coin, it has two sides desire and fear.

Those who lust after money	typically fear poverty
Those who lust after approval	typically fear rejection and conflict
Those who lust after control	typically fear being out of control
Those who lust after intimacy	typically fear loneliness
Those who lust after pleasure	typically fear boredom
Those who love their own life	typically fear losing it

What is it that you are most afraid of losing?

6. *Fear is sinful when it is so paralyzing that it keeps us from fulfilling our biblical responsibilities (loving God and neighbor as the Bible commands).*

See the connection between fear and slothfulness in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30, Matthew 25:24-26, Proverbs 22:13, 1 John 4:17-18).

“The one who fears is not perfected in love.” To the extent that you are fearful, your love is incomplete or immature. Nowhere in the bible will you find it said that Jesus was ever afraid! Why? Because the love that he possessed for the Father was absolutely and positively without question 100 percent perfect love. This brings us right up to the next sinful expression of fear... but first, on the lines below record any biblical responsibilities you have neglected to fulfill because of your fears>

7. *Fear is sinful when it is rooted in selfishness rather than love.* (“[Love] does not seek its own” ~ 1Cor. 13:5)

There is an interesting correlation in the Bible between sinful fear and selfishness. People who are selfish are fearful. People who are fearful are necessarily selfish. According to 1 John 4:18 the opposite of and remedy to sinful fear is LOVE.

Fear is the opposite of Love
Love is the opposite of selfishness

Fear = lack of Love = Selfishness

Fear impacts the way we react to others. How do these thoughts compare with your own? What do your thoughts reveal about you? Are you more a God pleaser or a man pleaser?

Guidelines for Conquering Crippling Fear

- 1. *Learn to obey the first and second great commandments.***
- 2. *Take a scriptural tranquilizer.*** (see Psalm 119:165 and Isa. 26:3) Study, memorize scripture, and meditate on the Word. “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” ~ Psalm 56:3
- 3. *Meditate often on past occasions of God’s faithfulness to you in all of your past dangers and distresses, and anticipate God’s faithfulness being demonstrated in your present circumstances.*** (Spurgeon said, “Faith has a good memory.” A good memory is a tremendous weapon in the war against fear! Also see Psalm 77:9-12, Lam. 3:21.)

Write down a list of those times in the past when the Lord delivered you from the same or a similar set of fear-evoking circumstances and carry it with you so that you may have it

always at your side as a “memory jogger”. Start now... write the first three “divine deliverances” that come to mind.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4. ***Clear your conscience from all unresolved conflicts with others (both God and man).*** (see Proverbs 28:1, Genesis 3:8-11, 1 John 4:17-18)

5. ***Consider the miseries and consequences associated with a life that is paralyzed in sinful fear.*** Every sin both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so to make subject to death, will all miseries spiritual, temporal and eternal. (from The Westminster Confession of Faith) See Gal. 6:7, Proverbs 14:14)

Here are a few miserable side effects for you to consider as further deterrent to giving into fear:

- a. It is a sin that offends your loving heavenly Father.
- b. It produces guilt, anxiety, and depression.
- c. It damages your body.
- d. It hinders your witness for Christ.
- e. It causes you to waste time and lose eternal rewards.
- f. It robs you of confidence, faith, love, thankfulness, peace, joy, happiness, and sleep.
- g. It keeps you from fulfilling your biblical responsibilities.
- h. It hastens the very thing that is feared.

List some of your own:

6. ***Identify and remove idolatrous lusts from your heart.*** John Flavel said, “The more you are mortified, the less you will be terrified... It is the strength of our affections, that put so much strength into our afflictions.”

As there are two sides to a coin, there are too two sides to idolatry. The first involves neglecting God, the other involves replacing him with a cheap substitute. The “heads” side says, “Inordinate Desire for Something.” The “tails” side says, “Inordinate Fear of Losing Something”. Scripture in 1 John 5:21 cautions us, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols”

Review your list of things you fear the most of losing... prayerfully read the inventory below and circle any desires that have enticed you to sinful fear:

I want to be healthy

I want to be safe

I want to be clean

I want to be comfortable

I want to be happy

I want to enjoy myself

I want to feel important

I want to have a good reputation

I want to be successful

I want to be perfect

I want others to be perfect

I want to have wealth

I want to have peace

I want to have comfort

I want to be alone

I want to be thin

I want to be in control

I want companionship

I want others to look up to me

I want him/her to be my friend

I want to avoid conflict

I want everyone to like me

I don't want to be labeled

I don't want to be rejected

I don't want to face his/her anger

I don't want people to know I'm such a sinner

I don't want to have a panic attack

I don't want to die

I don't want to be sick or be in pain

I don't want to lose my spouse/children/family

I don't want _____ (fill in your own as you are led)

7. Remember that whatever makes you afraid has no power independent of God and therefore is powerless to do anything without his permission. (See John 19:10-11, Psalm 76:10) John Flavel put it this way, "Enemies, like wild horses, may prance around and tramp up and down the world, as though they would tread down all that were in their way; but the bridle of providence is in their mouths, and upon their proud necks, and that bridle hath a strong curb [restraint]."

That which you fear is in God's control:

Your Enemies: see Psalm 23:5

Your Authorities: see Proverbs 21:1

Trouble and Affliction: see Psalm 34: 19

Trials and Temptations: see 1 Corinthians 10:13

Poverty: see Psalm 34:9-10

Physical Harm: see Psalm 91:5-7 and 10-12

Loss of a Loved One: see 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

8. Contrast the faithfulness of God with that of your dearest and most faithful friend.

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." ~ Proverbs 18:24

Reflect and describe the one person in your life who over the years has been your dearest and most faithful friend.

Now evaluate the extent to which you could trust your friend with your life or welfare were it totally in his hands.

Next, answer this question, "To what extent can I depend on my friend to help me when I am in need, in prison, in sickness, in pain, in distress, or in danger?"

Finally, compare the love, loyalty, resources and wisdom of your dearest friend with that of your heavenly Father.

Do you REALLY believe that your most faithful friend, the sinner that he is --- is worthy of more trust than your loving heavenly father?

9. **Learn to distinguish between fear of the object and fear of the experience.** (see Proverbs 2:3-5) Rather than perceiving the fear for what it is in truth (a creation of his own imagination that is triggered by the thought or sight of some object, for which he is responsible), the fearful person perceives what it is in error: a monster over which he has no control that seizes him from the outside of his body and paralyzes him with debilitating horror. The truth is that you do have the ability to control what you think. Controlling fear involves controlling thoughts.

10. **Consider the connection between fear and undisciplined thinking.** "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound [disciplined] mind." ~ 2 Tim. 1:7

11. **Start fulfilling those responsibilities you have been neglecting because you have been so preoccupied with fear.** Go to Paul's list in Philippians 4:8-9. When you honestly can think this way without becoming anxious, you'll know a change has been made. Ask God to help you refocus upon those things – go to your responsibilities list. Revisit the things that you have been neglecting because of your sinful fear. Invest your time and effort into fulfilling them.

12. **Learn to live in fear of the Lord.** (see Psalm 34:11) Deuteronomy 31:11-12 gives us insight into how to fear our Lord: "When all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read his law in front of all Israel in their

hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law.

Read Psalm 19:7-11.

The fear of God is the one fear that removes all others!!

“I say to you, My Friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear; fear the One who after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I will tell you, fear Him!” ~ Luke 12:4-5