

# Acts 9:31: Part III

## Introduction

We read that the early church was going in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

In the course of making their way through life, it's on these two characteristics of the faith that they went.

Some suffered under persecution that caused them to move away from their home lands. But they continued on with their lives. They worked, played, married, had children, and dealt with all the other normal vicissitudes of life. These Christians were going about their daily lives as they were able, just like you and I do. And while they lived and died, their faith was anchored in and constructed upon 1) the fear of the Lord, and, 2) the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

How does one put these two things together? The fear of the Lord **or** the comfort of the Holy Spirit would seem to make more sense.

We are going to look at each of these two characteristics of faith and then I will show you how they are intimately connected to each other.

## Fear of the Lord

Principle 1: God is worthy of fear.

### Kinds of Fear

There are various sorts fear.

- There is abject terror. The unexpected sound of a gunshot, or an irrational fear of spiders or snakes, or the sudden expectation of death evoke this kind of fear. It is unreasoning and visceral and can be paralyzing.

- There is rational fear that protects us from danger. Hearing a rattlesnake on your path, or suddenly realizing that the road is icy can make us afraid and lead us to caution.
- There is fear that we might call nervousness. These are the butterflies that one gets before a job interview, or asking someone out on a date for the first time, or when getting ready to propose marriage. These occur because we don't want to be rejected; we don't want our hopes to be dashed.

## **Objections to Fear**

But some would say that “fear” and “faith” should never mix. There are several objections to the fear of the Lord, especially for the Christian.

### **Awe and Reverence**

Sometimes the fear of the Lord is characterized as respect, reverence, and awe. This quote from the website of a well-known evangelical television and radio preacher is an example.

“If God is love, then why does He command us to fear Him? The fear of the Lord isn't about being afraid of God; it's about revering Him above all else. When we do that, we position ourselves to receive all the benefits that come with putting God first in our lives.”<sup>1</sup>

Aren't reverence and awe derivatives of true fear? Would we hold someone in reverence who does not have a power to threaten, destroy, reject, or judge?

### **Old Testament Only**

Others will characterize the fear of God is an Old Testament concept. The Old Testament has to do with judgment and fear; the New Testament is about grace and mercy. Even a quick summary of the NT would show this to be false.

### **No Fear for Christians**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.intouch.org/watch/the-fear-of-god](http://www.intouch.org/watch/the-fear-of-god)

Then again, some will cite the text “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear”.<sup>2</sup> If that’s true—some would argue—why should a Christian walk in the fear of God? Fear, they might say, is only for the unbeliever. But they haven’t looked at the context of this verse.

The problem with these sorts of objections is that they are not accurate. Some contain a measure of biblical truth. But they aren’t the whole truth.

## **The Object of Fear**

We fear rattlesnakes, because of their venom. We fear a job interview, because the interviewer has the power to reject us. We fear the Lord because of his sovereign power and holiness.

### **Power of Life and Death**

Remember in chapter 5 that Ananias tried to lie the church about his generosity. Peter confronted him and ...

“... as [Ananias] heard [Peter’s] words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.”

Later, Ananias’s wife came and continued the fraud. Peter’s response to her ...

“Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.” And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.<sup>3</sup>

The power of life and death caused people to be afraid.

### **Eternal Consequences**

Jesus talks about fear often. Jesus is primarily speaking to his disciples when he says:

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:18.

<sup>3</sup> See Acts 5:5, 9–11.

“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 tell you, fear Him!”<sup>4</sup>

### **Holy Perfection**

In the parable of the talents in Luke 19, Jesus told of the strict master who distributed his wealth among various servants for the purpose of investment during an absence.

The servant who did not invest the master’s money says of the master: “Master ... I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man ...”

The master replied:

‘By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? ...’ Then he said to the bystanders, ‘Take the mina away from him ... I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.’<sup>5</sup>

### **Judgment**

Paul wrote, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”.<sup>6</sup>

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men”.<sup>7</sup>

### **Discipline**

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 12:1, 4-5 and Matthew 10:28.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 19:20-27.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10:31.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10-11.

“You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘my son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by him; for those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives.’”<sup>8</sup>

## Summation / Applications

God is worthy of fear. INCOMPLETE

# Greater Fears and Lesser Fears

Principle 2: greater fears expel lesser fears.

When Jesus tells his disciples not to fear, he never says, “don’t be afraid, because I’m not frightening person”.

- After catching an amazing load of fish, Jesus tells Peter not to be afraid, but not because nothing impressive has happened. Instead, he says “don’t be afraid, and by the way, I have a new job for you as a fisher of men”.<sup>9</sup> And they immediately obey Jesus. Why?

A startling example of what I mean is in Luke 12.

“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 tell you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”<sup>10</sup>

Fear—so that you won’t be afraid!

What’s the meaning of “don’t be afraid”, unless the one saying it is more powerful—more frightening—that whatever it is we ought not to fear?

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 5:10-11.

If there is a schoolyard bully and a little first grader comes along and tells you not to be afraid, what would that mean to you. But if your best friend who is a senior, a wrestler, and a master of Tae Kwon Do comes along and says “don’t be afraid”, that means something!

Greater fears cast our lesser fears.

## Comfort of the Holy Spirit

Now for the third principle. What if the one whom we most ought to fear loves us completely and unfailingly? If the most powerful, perfect, holy, and sovereign being, who is over all and sustains all, who can make alive and kill, create and destroy by mere thought is also our protector, lover, savior, friend, and even father, what is there to fear? Wouldn’t that be the greatest comfort of all?

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us.

By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.”<sup>11</sup>

Christ has taken on himself the punishment for us. That’s the nature of the love that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have for us. And it’s the work of the Holy Spirit to perfect that love for our comfort.

## Examples of the Spirit’s Work

### Dwells in Us

John 14:16: the helper, the spirit of truth will abide with us and be in us, so that we are not left as orphans.

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 12:4-7.

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:15-19.

## **Peace**

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” (John 14:27)

## **Keeps us from Stumbling**

John 15:26: the helper, whom the father sends, the spirit of truth, will testify about Jesus, to keep us from stumbling

## **Purifies and Sanctifies Us**

This is the spirit who purifies and sanctifies us so that we can obey Christ (1 Peter 1:2)

This is the Spirit who grants such fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22 – 23)

## **Seals our Adoption by the Father**

This is the spirit of adoption, who cries out on our behalf “father!” (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6)

## **Summation / Application**

The Spirit of God gives us comfort by working in us those things we need to keep from being afraid of the Father, or of helping us recover from those things that rightly cause fear, like disobedience and rebellion.

## **Application / Conclusion**

As many of you know, one of my sons as a police officer in Washington DC. It can be a tough place to be an officer of the law. Principle 1: DC is worthy of fear.

I once asked him about gang violence in the capital city. We chatted for a few minutes about some of the issues with gangs in Washington. And he explained how the police department how kept out major gang activity. Principle 2: bigger and badder fears expel lesser fears.

And then he closed with the statement. “Besides all that, dad, I’m part of the biggest gang in DC!” What if you are part of the biggest baddest thing that causes fear? Principle 3: what if the most fearsome thing loves you?

That doesn’t mean that he can be careless or foolish, that he doesn’t have to obey laws and policies. That would get him into trouble. Righteous fear. But it does mean that a single call on the radio that says, “officer needs assistance” would bring immediate help. Righteous comfort.

The fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit are the spiritual carrot and stick for believers.

When God says, “do not covet”, “do not commit adultery”, “honor the Lord’s Day to keep in holy”, or “don’t steal”, disobedience has consequences. God means exactly what he says and we may not trifle with him. That’s righteous fear. But when we fail and repent and seek his forgiveness, we are assured we have his forgiveness, and we are also assured of the power of the Holy Spirit to help. That’s righteous comfort.

Application incomplete.