

‘Encounters in Scripture’

Holy Trinity, Combe Down – Evening Worship Preaching Series, Summer 2007

SERMON FIFTEEN: Peter – Fear of Man (Galatians)

(Paul Langham 29th July 2007)

Reading – Galatians 2:1-16

FEAR OF MAN - definition

- concern about my standing or perception in the eyes of others which energizes disobedience and rebellion towards God
- being more concerned with the approval of man than the approval of God
- anxiety over the approval of man which inhibits spontaneous and joyful obedience to the Holy Spirit
- the desire to please man more than God

FEAR OF MAN – a complex issue

- Matthew 26:69–75
- Acts 4:1-22 (i.e. the same person can exhibit fear of man in one context and not in another)
- closely connected with ‘religious spirit’ – a good appearance masking a hollow reality

FEAR OF MAN – principles from Paul’s letter to the Galatians

- 1 the heart of the letter - how we handle pressure to conform to human traditions & expectations. Paul addresses the issue head on at the start of the letter (1:10)
- 2 Paul is free from fear of man and is therefore ready to confront it (1:6)
- 3 our capacity to receive fresh revelation is hampered by fear of man (1:11,12)
- 4 the enemy’s strategy is to use fear of man to limit our freedom in Christ, bringing slavery and conformity to the standards and expectations of others (2:4)
- 5 this results in spiritual deception (3:1)
- 6 Paul challenges the general mindset which elevates some people above others and leads to fear of man (2:6)
- 7 he also challenges a specific instance of this where Peter had ‘bent’ towards the powerful men from Jerusalem (2:11–13)
- 8 the pressure to circumcise new believers is rooted in the fear of man – why? Because it undermines faith in Christ alone (6:12)

Note the fear and deception that is brought to other believers through Peter (2. 13 – ‘even Barnabas’). As a church seeks to move forwards, the enemy will use men and women to oppose the leadership through appeal to tradition or expectation or cultural conformity or their own view of the way things should be done. The way of the Spirit will always confront the way of religion!

FEAR OF MAN – the consequences in a church

- 1 spiritual deception – watering down the radical nature of the gospel (3:1–5)
- 2 withdrawing from dependence on the Holy Spirit and leaning on human wisdom and good ideas (Acts 15: 28)
- 3 withdrawing from the simplicity of faith in action, into complexity and programmes
- 4 loss of joy (4:15)
- 5 division (5:14–15)
- 6 demonic enslavement (4:8–9)

FEAR OF MAN – supporting sins

- 1 insignificance / inadequacy / insecurity
- 2 pride (Genesis 11:4 'let us make a name for ourselves')
- 3 unbelief and lack of faith
- 4 moral cowardice (2:12)

FEAR OF MAN – pointers to its presence

- I worry that people won't follow my lead
- I withdraw from confronting even things which are clearly wrong
- I can't say that – people will think I'm stupid!
- I'm worried about what people will think
- No one else does that
- What if they don't like me any more?
- I'll wait til I see what he says before I say what I think
- I like feeling comfortable
- It's important that people approve of me and my opinions
- I'm conscious of wondering what people think of me
- I am anxious about being the odd one out
- I wouldn't want to offend her – she's really important
- If people get angry or upset, I rush to placate and withdraw anything which might have caused this
- I take ages to make any decision which might be provocative
- I find it hard to be spontaneous – just in case!
- I like being seen as wise, sound, balanced
- I work too hard and take on too many responsibilities
- My life is marked by confusion and exhaustion
- I live with a low level of joy
- I worry that people judge me because of the state of my church / area of ministry / career / marriage / home
- I want people to approve of me because of the state of my church / area of ministry / career / marriage / home
- I hate letting people down or disappointing them

FEAR OF MAN – the cure

- 1 **Repent** – acknowledge fear of man as sin; always call sin what it is! (Acts 3:19)
- 2 **Renounce** it – repentance is not simply a turning away from the past but a turning towards a new future
- 3 **Receive** God's forgiveness (Psalm 103:8–12; 1 John 1:9)
- 4 **Rebuke** the enemy's hold on you (Matthew 4:10; James 4:7)
- 5 **Replace** the enemy's lies with God's truth (Matthew 12:43–45; Ephesians 5:18); ask the Lord for specific opportunities to move beyond your fear

FEAR OF MAN – homework

Go through these notes in the next 48 hours, especially the 'pointers' to fear of man – ask the Lord to search and know your heart; be real about what he reveals to you, and work through the 5 'R's'. Ask the Lord for specific opportunities to overcome the ways in which fear of man manifests in your life.