

**Fear and Discernment**  
Sunday School Lesson 6  
*The Fearful Christian*  
*Proverbs 3*  
5/24/2020

**Introduction:** Today, we are going to tackle the most challenging aspect of this lesson series on the fearful Christian. We are going to examine the difference between ungodly fear and discernment. Understanding this distinction is immensely important for Christians, as we do not want to be foolish with the one life that God has given to each one of us. Life is a gracious gift from God. After man sinned in the garden, God could have chosen to destroy mankind in that moment. Instead, He allowed for mankind to continue to live in this world, and He even made a way for us to receive eternal life that we will spend together with Him. Ultimately, though, we know that life on this earth will come to an end for every person, as it is appointed unto man once to die (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible tells us that our appointment with death can definitely be hastened or prolonged (1 Kings 3:14; Proverbs 3:2; Ephesians 6:1-3). Foolish behavior seems to cause some to meet that appointment earlier than expected. We've all probably heard stories of people dying due to their own carelessness. Yet, if we're being honest, we've likely all done careless things at some point in our lives, but we did not suffer a similar fate. Is it just by chance that some make a foolish decision and live, while others die? Certainly, it is not! People die because it is their appointed time (Job 14:5), or they die earlier than that appointment because of their sin (Proverbs 10:27). Knowing this, we must then consider how this is applied to fear and discernment. Does an appointed death mean a person should be as reckless as possible with his life? The answer is obviously no, but what is the right answer? That's what we are going to look at this morning.

**I. TAKING A RISK IS NOT TEMPTING GOD, AS LIFE IS FILLED WITH RISKS. (PSALM 91; 1 PETER 1:24; 2 CORINTHIANS 11:24-27; MATTHEW 4:7; HEBREWS 3:8-9; EXODUS 17:1-7)**

- A. Notice that this world is a perilous place (1 Peter 1:24; Psalm 91; 2 Corinthians 11:24-27).** Mankind is fragile, and this world is dangerous. In preparation for this lesson, I read several articles about the most prominent risks of death. It was somewhat overwhelming to see the many things that can cause life to end. There are dangers even in your own home! In 2 Corinthians, Paul listed out the many different troubles and dangers that he had faced. 1 Peter reminds us that we are like grass that will eventually wither away. David understood the dangers of this world, as he listed some of the dangers of his day in Psalm 91. As long as sin has been in the world, it has been a dangerous place. When it comes to living our life for God, we must understand that risk is a natural part of life. We cannot allow these potential dangers to paralyze us with fear and keep us from enjoying the life that God has given to us. Discernment is not about avoiding risks altogether, as that is simply impossible in this world. David gave these risks over to God, and he found shelter under His wings.
- B. Notice that you tempt God by trying to prove Him (Matthew 4:7; Hebrews 3:8-9; Exodus 17:1-7).** People often quote one of the verses about tempting God, but they rarely use it in full context. The most familiar verse is in Matthew and Luke when Jesus told Satan that He wasn't supposed to tempt the Lord thy God. In that conversation, Satan was challenging the deity of Jesus Christ. He wanted Jesus to do something to prove that He was really the Son of God. His challenge was that Jesus should cast Himself down and have the angels deliver Him in order to prove that He was really who He said He was. Jesus quoted directly from the Old Testament account of the children of Israel in the wilderness. They wanted water, so they told Moses to get them water. They demanded that the Lord prove whether He was with them or not. The point of the statement is that we ought not to demand that God prove Himself to us. Putting yourself in danger does not by itself mean that you are tempting God. If so, David tempted God when he went out to face Goliath, and three Hebrew men tempted God when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. Clearly, these men did not tempt God. They stepped out in faith and trusted that God could deliver them from their situations. They were not doing it to prove God to themselves.

**II. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT JUDGES EVERY RIGHT PATH BY USING GOD'S LEADING, REGARDLESS OF THE POTENTIAL RISKS. (PROV. 3; 1 KINGS 3:9; 1 COR. 2:14; HEB. 5:14)**

- A. Notice that "common sense" is not spiritual discernment, and the two may be at odds with each other at times (Hebrews 5:14; 1 Kings 3:9; 1 Corinthians 2:14).** There are many Christians who claim their common sense as spiritual discernment or wisdom. While common sense is not a bad thing, we know that it is a product of the natural man. It is earthly wisdom, so it has its limits. It cannot properly guide a Christian down the right path that God wants for us to go down. That's because it is limited in knowledge and understanding. What was common sense five hundred years ago is probably much different than the things that we think are common in today's society. It's the ability to judge situations

rightly, based on God's leading. There are times where people claim wisdom or spiritual discernment while they are defying God's Word. How could God possibly lead someone to a path that is inconsistent with His Word? This is a clear indicator that it is not spiritual wisdom or discernment, and we should assess each of our decisions with this barometer in mind.

- B. Notice that spiritual discernment is not a system for weighing risks, as it expects the Lord's safety (Proverbs 3).** Proverbs 3 is a great chapter of the Bible to read in dealing with discernment and fear. The beginning of the chapter makes it clear that following God's Word is the secret to health and safety. Verses 5 and 6 further clarify that we are to trust totally in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding. Verses 21 through 26 tell us that there is safety in spiritual discernment. It's not that we won't go through trials or hard times, but we'll have the hand of the Lord there to comfort us through everything that we face. Consequently, spiritual discernment does not have to weigh risks because it expects that the Lord will take care of us through the situation. Its priority is on making the right decision that is pleasing to the Lord. Spiritual discernment knows that if we are on the right path, then there is no reason to fear whatever may happen. In the earthly ministry of Jesus, we observe that His decision making was solely based on what pleased the Heavenly Father.

### **III. UNGODLY FEAR INCONSISTENTLY JUDGES ITS PATH BASED ON HOW IT SEES THE PRESENT RISKS IN THAT MOMENT. (GEN. 20; MATT. 25:14-30; PROV. 3:25; GAL. 2:12)**

- A. Notice that ungodly fear is very inconsistent in what it fears (Matt. 25:14-30; Galatians 2:12).** A clear indicator of ungodly fear is in its random enforcement. We must remember that ungodly fear does not come from a sound mind. Consequently, it does not apply its fear evenly across objects. In fact, it often fears the smaller object rather than the larger one. In the parable of the talents, the lazy servant was too afraid to do anything with the talents that he had received. His fear was misguided. He did not fear the master of the house, even though he knew that he would return at some point. Peter did not fear when the Lord first told him he could eat meat and that the Gentiles were to be received. However, he later feared the Jews and would not eat with the Gentiles. David showed the same problem with ungodly fear when he fled to the Philistines instead of facing King Saul. It's easy to see inconsistencies in the world's fears. A person fears flying in an airplane, but that person will drive in a car. A person fears clowns, but that person will walk through a high crime area at night.
- B. Notice that ungodly fear assesses the immediate risks and often makes an ill-informed decision (Genesis 20; Proverbs 3:25).** Proverbs 3 talks about that sudden fear. That's a good description of the ungodly fear. It lives in the moment. It's very sudden. It makes decisions before all of the information is known. Before Abraham had even arrived in Gerar, he knew what he was going to do about his wife. He feared for their safety if they passed through the town as a married couple. His ungodly fear led him to the conclusion that he would announce Sarah as his sister. He knew very little about the people of this town, but he already had his mind made up. Maybe he thought he was using some good discernment by disguising his wife. Needless to say, Abraham had totally missed the mark. The king of Gerar was a favorable man who worshipped the Lord. There was absolutely no reason for Abraham to omit that he was married to Sarah. When the king asked why Abraham had lied, Abraham told him that he thought the people in the town were godless people who would kill him and take his wife. How foolish Abraham must have felt! Also, imagine what kind of marital counseling they needed after that trip! Ungodly fear makes shortsighted risk assessments that rarely work out.

### **IV. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT COMBINES SPIRIT-LEADING WITH TRUTH WHILE UNGODLY FEAR COMBINES FEELINGS WITH FACTS. (JOHN 16:13; 1 JOHN 4:6; JER. 17:9; LUKE 21:26).**

- A. Notice that spiritual discernment seeks out the truth (John 16:13; 1 John 4:6).** When it comes to making decisions, we have the Spirit of Truth dwelling within us. The world is wicked and deceitful, and facts are routinely presented to paint a picture. Prophecy tells us that the world will be so deluded one day that it will universally believe a lie. Spiritual discernment leads the believer to the truth. How can a person make the right decision without the truth? Discernment is not just how we feel about the facts that we have. It's Spirit leading based on all we know from God's Word.
- B. Notice that ungodly fear is a feeling of the heart, so it is prone to deceit (Jeremiah 17:9; Luke 21:26).** On the other hand, ungodly fear does not concern itself with the truth. It finds facts to support its fear, but it does not consider how deceitful the heart is. If we find ourselves talking about our feelings when making a decision, that should tell us that we might be making a decision based on ungodly fear. We know what the Bible says about mankind doing that which is right in his own eyes. God gave us His Word and His Spirit to have us avoid making decisions based off of our feelings. We should listen to those sources and seek to handle every decision rightly.