

- I. How many of you have irrational fears – fear of the dark, of snakes, spiders, heights, small places?
  - A. Sometimes we can be amused when we see someone else’s fear because it’s not something that scares us
  - B. Given the world we live in it’s actually nice to see that there’s something you are actually not afraid of
  - C. Because there is a lot to fear isn’t there? Let’s explore that a bit
- II. Are you afraid for our economic future? Or if you are secure, are you worried about the security of your children?
  - A. The stock market is at historic highs, and I’m hearing more and more people ask when the bubble’s going to burst
  - B. And when you add in the budget deficit, threats to Social Security and Medicare, global conflict that costs a lot of money, you can easily worry about whether you and yours will have a safe and prosperous future.
  - C. Political infighting is another huge category we can be afraid of, one we’re all too familiar with.
- III. At a deeper level, we can be afraid for the moral direction of the country, the world, and the church
  - A. Although we’ve made a lot of progress in areas such as racism and sexism in the last 100 years, a lot of other moral values and institutions seem to be under attack, marriage being a primary one.
    1. Pornography may well be the single biggest moral threat we face today, and it is a good reason to be afraid because it delivers horrific images aggressively and in private
    2. Attitudes toward marriage and respect for the Lord’s teachings about treating it and the opposite sex seem to be under siege.
  - B. So we can find that we’re facing fears that we, or our children and grandchildren will find decent married partners like we did
  - C. And we can feel concern for many people, institutions or programs that seem to be facing struggles at any point in time
  - D. Then there are the personal, often private, fears – fears about your marriage, about the selfish qualities you see in yourself, about the depression and pain you may feel, about standing up to your friend
  - E. In reality, all the earlier fears affect us only when they mirror some inner fear
    1. For example, some are not afraid of the economic situation because the hells have no purchase in that area. All negative fear is really about the presence of hell.
  - F. I’m listing these fairly quickly, so it’s hard to *feel* the fears associated with them, but if we were to spend time unpacking them, I think we’d find that each of us has very real fears in many of those areas, and in many others too
    1. We cope in various ways

- a. We cover them over and ignore them
  - b. We come up with reasons why they may not happen
  - c. We work hard so that we'll create a bubble of space where we can feel safe
2. But the simple reality is that the fears are there and that they affect our actions, our thoughts, and our feelings
- IV. In the Old Testament, we're told many times about the children of Israel being afraid of various enemies.
- A. A well-known example: When Goliath challenged armies of Israel to send a hero to fight him in single combat, we read, "And the Philistine said, 'I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.' When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid." (1 Sam 17:10, 11)
  - B. This is a recurring theme. Just one more: When Pharaoh's army is bearing down on the Israelites, just after they had escaped from Egypt, we read, "So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to Jehovah. Then they said to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?'" (Ex 14:10, 11)
  - C. You'll notice today that I'm giving a lot of example from Old Testament, such as a description of being safe from enemies who were going to attack
    1. It's relevant at a deeper level because the bad fear we want to get rid of is an attack by hell, just as direct and ugly as an attack by an enemy or a mugger, symbolically, that is what the Old Testament attack describes, and what safety from enemies describes, as here:
      - a. If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid. (Lev 26:3-6)
      - b. None will make you afraid. No crime, no money worries, no fear of abandonment or loneliness, of abuse.
      - c. That's the promise
    2. And the other thing that is said, even more frequently: Instead, fear the Lord!
    3. Some examples:
      - a. Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am Jehovah your God. (Lev 25:17)
      - b. Now fear Jehovah and serve Him in sincerity and truth (Josh 24:14)
      - c. And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This

is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven! (Gen 28:17)

d. The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom. (Ps 111:10)

- D. We modern people don't like hearing this. It conjures up images of a vengeful God, something we know is not right
  - 1. Many people come to the New Church specifically because they don't like the idea of a God who punishes.
    - a. He's supposed to be a God of love and protection!
- E. We are told in NC teachings that there are two reasons to fear the Lord
  - 1. First is that we start doing what's right simply because we are afraid that otherwise we'll be in trouble
  - 2. We don't want to catch it from boss, from spouse, from the radar gun, most of all by going to hell so we get in line
  - 3. So that's a reality. We often start doing what's right out of fear
- F. But that's not the real reason. That goes back to our reading about holy fear.
- G. Let's unpack it a bit
- H. Our reading says we are going to be afraid of something. You can't help but have fears.
  - 1. The question is what you'll be afraid of
  - 2. Good people are not afraid of going to hell. They're afraid of hurting what is good
- I. To understand this, think of the times you've gotten into an argument with someone and said truly horrible things in the heat of the moment
  - 1. We've all done it, and regretted it later
  - 2. Why do we do it? Because in the moment the desire to strike out is most important
    - a. Later we see the harm and deeply regret it
  - 3. As we grow we start to realize that there are lines you simply don't cross, even in the heat of anger
    - a. They become a no-go zone because we have a living fear of hurting that person we love by crossing that line
  - 4. The Lord is telling us that we can all come to the point of feeling that way about hurting Him or the things He teaches us
    - a. We can all come to trust that His way works
- J. Holy fear is something more too. When you fear something you pay attention to it. If you are afraid of dogs, you notice them
  - 1. Holy fear means having that care, that attention, on doing what the Lord says
    - a. It means building prayer into your life, reading the Word each day, asking for help to be better, etc.
- V. For some the idea of holy fear may be a bit much to wrap your mind around, so here is another way of looking at the same thing:
- VI. What is the opposite of fear?

- A. The obvious answer is that it is courage.
    - 1. If not afraid, then brave. Willing to take the right action even when don't feel brave. Willing to rise above your fear
    - 2. Maybe trusting would be another good answer
  - B. Today, want to focus on a different emotion: hope
  - C. Listen to this simple, one-line passage from New Church teaching: "Once fear is removed hope is at hand" (Heavenly Secrets 2694). Once fear is removed hope is at hand.
  - D. Think about it this way: Holy fear, the fear of hurting what is the Lord's, is what gives rise to hope, the hope that lasts.
    - 1. It is what causes us to turn to Him and ask for help and strength and allows Him to give us hope.
- VII. Remember I was saying that we get afraid because it's something we can't control, we are passive and waiting for something?
- A. Well if you think about it hope is also passive
    - 1. Ps 39:7, 8 And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You. Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of the foolish.
    - 2. You hope for something when you don't really have control over the outcome
    - 3. You *anticipate* something you *expect* to happen; you are *motivated* for something you think you can *make* happen. But you *hope* for something you *wish* will happen but you know you don't have a whole lot of say about
    - 4. So if fear goes away and holy fear takes its place, where's the hope?
  - B. The hope is that you have turned to a deeper place. You have decided that you are not in control of the universe, and that in many ways you are not even in control of your own life.
  - C. So you will control the things you can. You will focus on what is important – on the Lord
    - 1. You will stop worrying about what others might do to you – the enemies out there that the Lord says stop worrying about
    - 2. Instead you will concentrate on if you are doing the Lord's will
    - 3. You will bring Him into your life, because there you have a *guaranteed result*.
      - a. There you can hope in a reasonable outcome
    - 4. "The eye of Jehovah is on all who fear Him, on those who await His mercy" (Ps 33:18)
    - 5. Think of having the Lord's eye on you, of being cared for that way
    - 6. Instead of being alone, you have a constant presence that you can count on every moment of every day
- VIII. We will be afraid – about many things. We cannot help that because so many things are out of our control
- A. Our hope is to turn to the One who has the power to touch us at the

deepest level

- B. Ps 31:24 Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in Jehovah.

Lev 26:1-10 'You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am Jehovah your God. You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am Jehovah.

'If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you. For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you. You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new. I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.

'The fear of God' means worship based either on fear, or on the good that flows from faith, or ... from love. But the more there is of fear present in worship the less there is of faith, and still less of love. Conversely, the more faith there is present in worship, and even more so love, the less fear there is. Present within all worship there is fear, but this fear takes on a different form and nature; for it is holy fear. Holy fear is not so much a fear of hell and of damnation, as a fear lest anything whatever be done or thought that is contrary to the Lord and contrary to the neighbor, thus anything whatever that is contrary to the good of love and to the truth of faith. It is an abhorrence which on the one side forms the boundary of the holiness of faith and of the holiness of love. And since, as has been stated, it is not a fear of hell and damnation, it exists with those who live ... in the Lord. Heavenly Secrets # 2826:13)