

Do Not Fear

By Ray Ruppert



And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven (Matt 10:28-33 ESV)

Most of the “fear not” and “do not fear” passages in the Old Testament are in the

context of physical enemies, disaster, and conflicts. We claim many of those for ourselves and one of those that is often quoted is “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa 41:10 ESV). It is one of my memory verses and one that brings assurance of God’s presence whether trouble is lurking near or all is peaceful. Like most passages in the O.T., the context is God’s promise to Israel to give them victory over their enemies.

You are probably asking how this relates to the passage I selected for this article. Matthew 10:28-33 starts with a command not to be afraid of anyone who can deliver the utmost physical calamity. In this, Jesus’ “fear not” is like the O.T. passages. However, He zeroed in on what we most commonly think is the worst thing that can happen to us, death. He has purposely bypassed all the other evils that may be around and cut to the chase with what we usually fear the most.

Unlike Isaiah 41:10, there is no mention of God’s protection or deliverance from trouble or evil in Matthew 10:28-33. This stands in stark contrast to most of the “fear not” passages of the Bible. Therefore, we should stop and consider why Jesus spoke as He did. If we should not fear death, then all the other problems should have less fear attached to them. Of course, we often fear things that seem worse than death such as extended years of physical torture and pain. I think the point of not fearing people who can kill us is that it is not the worst that can happen, and we should be more concerned with eternity.

We can see this because Jesus does not follow with an assurance that God will deliver us from someone who is going to try to kill us. Rather He immediately points us to the proper person to fear and tells us what is even more fearful than death. It is death and going to hell instead of going to heaven. If our fear is one of those lesser things, then we should get a better grip on what is truly important. Paul would agree in this respect when he explained that we should regard all the suffering and trials of this world as “light and momentary” because we must be looking forward to external things

(2Cor4:16-18) so that we don't get bogged down with fear in this life.

Did you react negatively when I said Jesus did not promise protection or deliverance? Did you not ask about the sparrows? How many devotionals have you read that use this passage as assurance of God's protection? How many of them included the contextual verses before and after Jesus talked about the sparrows and the hairs on our heads? As I read this passage, Jesus did not say that God keeps the sparrows from falling to the ground but said He knows when they fall. Some of the other translations say that they do not fall without the Father's will. This is not a promise of protection. This is God's promise that He has everything in control. He knows and determines when we will die, suffer illness, be attacked, or fly above it all. He has every one of our days planned from the beginning of time (Ps 139:16). His assurance comes in His sovereignty and our value to Him, not in getting us out of our circumstances. That is the reason not to fear death or any other thing. Trusting in God's sovereignty is a might fear-reliever. Yet, without a focus on eternity and knowing Who to fear, trusting in God's sovereignty is a platitude.

Jesus makes his primary point to us in just a few words in verse 28. It is not that we should not fear men, but His point is that we should fear God. We cannot say to ourselves that death is not all that bad without acknowledging that death without a proper relationship with Jesus is going to mean an even worse outcome with eternity in hell. At some point of our lives we must have a dread, fear, horror, and even panic that God can and will kill us, then put us in hell if we do not have a proper relationship with Jesus. For a person who is truly saved, born again, regenerated, indwelt with the Holy Spirit (I'm trying to cover all the bases here to make sure that simply saying "is a Christian" is too inclusive) that may be a very fleeting moment before or even after salvation. But it still stands that Jesus said that kind of fear should appear sometime in our lives. He clarifies this point by explaining it in verses 32-33.

Note that verse 32 starts with "So" or "Therefore" (NAS). The purpose of the previous verses is to bring our attention to our relation to Jesus. If we fear men more than

acknowledging that we belong to Jesus, we will not be acknowledged before the Father. The only possibility that Jesus would not acknowledge us before the Father is that we are not saved, born again, regenerated, or indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Jesus made a similar statement in Matthew 7:21-23 to those who called Him Lord but do not do the will of the Father. They would have called themselves Christians, but they will not be allowed entry into the kingdom of heaven. These are fearsome thoughts! How can this be? It should make any Christian sit up straight and consider his or her relationship with Jesus. It should make us tremble at that thought of what our sins deserve.

The Psalmist gave us some very good advice about what to do in regard to considering our relationship with Jesus:

Serve the Lord with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are
all who take refuge in him. Ps 2:11-12 ESV

We must get our “fears” in order and our relationship with Jesus in the right perspective. Paul said, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). I am thankful that Paul didn’t stop with verse 12 but made sure that we understand that it is only because God is working in us that we can have the correct relationship with Jesus. This corresponds to the illustration Jesus provided with the sparrows; the fact that we must trust in God’s sovereignty as part of working out our salvation. With both the assurance

of God's sovereignty and a correct relationship with Jesus, then all the "fear not" passages will bring great comfort to us. With this assurance that we really do belong to Jesus and we will be able to join with Jude in his doxology:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 24-25 ESV).