

## The Spirit's Work in Ministers (3): Courage

### 1. Courage is necessary for Ministry

2 Tim. 1:7-8

1 Cor. 16:13 lit. *Be men* – 'Quit you like men' KJV, 'Play the man' (Moffatt), 'Be courageous' (RSV). See link to courage in OT occurrence of 1 Sam. 4:9.

### 2. Courage flows from Fear of the Lord

Prov. 1:7

Eph. 5:21

'In Habakkuk 3 we see a prophet whose heart trembled greatly at God's Word when he heard it. In verse 16, he says, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself." You might think, "Surely Habakkuk was a very fearful man." However, you will discover that he was not a fearful man. He had a strong and courageous spirit, and this trembling at God's Word actually strengthened his spirit and **made him courageous** in the face of outward afflictions.

In verse 17, he declares, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls." This refers to a dreadful famine and a dire situation. Yet, his heart, which had experienced such fear before, now fears none of these things. Many of you do not tremble at God's Word, but you tremble at the fear of any loss. You tremble at people, but not at the Word of God. However, true and gracious trembling at God's Word strengthens the heart against other fears.' Jeremiah Burroughs<sup>1</sup>

Mat. 10:28 – 'Have a care you never fear any man, be he armed with never so much power and rage: as if the power of making or marring you for ever were in his hands, as if you lay at the feet of his will and pleasure to be saved or ruined for ever: fear not him that can only touch your bodies, as if he could damn your souls; invest not any creature with the sovereign and incommunicable power of God.' John Flavel<sup>2</sup>

2 Cor. 5:11

### 3. The Spirit creates Fear of the Lord

'Filial fear is a holy inclination of the heart, generated by God in the hearts of His children, whereby they, out of reverence for God, take careful pains not to displease God, and earnestly endeavour to please Him in all things. It is a motion of the heart. The soul is gifted with emotions, and dependent upon what the objects are, is moved to either joy or sorrow, love or hatred, fear or fearlessness. As far as the fear of God is concerned, man is insensitive, hard, and without emotion. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18). **In regeneration, however, the heart of stone is removed and a heart of flesh is received**, which is soft and pliable, and is very readily moved upon beholding God, dependent upon the measure in which God reveals Himself to the soul. If God is perceived as being majestic, a motion immediately arises within their soul—a motion which is befitting to the creature, in respect to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Fear*, Sermon 2.

<sup>2</sup> John Flavel, *A Practical Treatise of Fear*, Chapter 2.

It is a holy motion ... God generates this holy motion. By nature man is totally unfit for any good work. He finds no delight in God and has no desire to fear the Lord. He may be terrified of God, but he cannot fear Him rightly. However, God enables His own people to fear Him. "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer. 32:40). The Holy Spirit is therefore called "the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2).<sup>3</sup> Wilhelmus A'Brakel<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. The Spirit uses the Word to nurture Fear of the Lord

Ps. 19:9 – 'This word FEAR is sometimes to be taken for THE WORD, the written Word of God; for that also is, and ought to be, the rule and director of our fear.' John Bunyan<sup>4</sup>

Isa. 66:2

'Fear causes the eye to be fixed. When someone has a fearful apprehension of something, it causes their gaze to be fixed upon it. Similarly, when there are many among the audience who tremble at God's Word, it captivates their attention. Their thoughts are directed towards it in a solemn manner, and they dare not allow themselves to be distracted, not even with wandering thoughts or looking around. They are attentive, eager to hear what God has to say to them.' Jeremiah Burroughs<sup>5</sup>

#### 5. Fear of the Lord is beautiful

Acts 9:31

'That fear that is degenerate and servile, doth merely arise from guilt. Guilt first brought fear into the world; when Adam was convicted of his disobedience, then he feared and hid himself. See an eminent example of this in Acts 24:25. When the apostle Paul was called before the governor Felix, you shall find the prisoner at the bar, by the help and advantage of conscience, made the governor to tremble. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled." But now a gracious soul, his fear doth not arise merely from guilt, but it is a fear of reverence in reference to God's perfections, it ariseth **from the knowledge of God's excellency, it shall continue in heaven itself**, when we are confirmed in glory; when there will not remain the least degree of guilt, then shall we most fear God.' William Bates<sup>6</sup>

'This gracious trembling at God's Word is joined with love. It is a combination of fear and love. It trembles at the Word, yet it loves the Word. It remains committed to hearing the Word, even though it trembles. It stands by the Word, even if others speak against it. Typically, people who are feared are not loved; they are hated by those who fear them. However, a sincere disposition desires to be both loved and feared. An hypocrite may be brought to fear and tremble at God's Word, but they never love it. Fear and love do not coexist within them. They fear God's Word, but they hate it. They wish there were no such Word of God, and that it was not as strict and holy as it is. In other words, they wish God were not so holy, which is essentially wishing there were no God at all.' Jeremiah Burroughs<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wilhelmus A' Brakel, *The Fear of God*: <https://www.apuritansmind.com/the-christian-walk/the-fear-of-god-by-wilhelmus-abrakel/>

<sup>4</sup> John Bunyan, *A Treatise on the Fear of the Lord*, Ch. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Fear*, Sermon 1.

<sup>6</sup> William Bates, *On the Fear of God*, Ch. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Fear*, Sermon 2.

Prov. 28:14 'Happy is the man who fears the Lord always'

'Joy doth characterize and evidence our fear to be of the right kind. This fear of God qualifies our joy. If you remove fear from joy, joy will become light and flippant; and if you abstract joy from fear, fear then will become slavish. Hence it is said in Psalm 2:11. "Rejoice with fear."' William Bates<sup>8</sup>

## 6. Fear of the Lord makes us take the spiritual battle seriously

'Little sins must be dreaded. There is no sin little with respect to the infinite Majesty offended, or the reward of it due by justice. A man may be drowned in a small stream as well as in the ocean. The little thief makes least noise, but opens the door to the rest. A look to Bathsheba in the end broke David's vows. Satan ruins many this way, bringing them out by little and little, who would be alarmed at gross sins, in which he appears with his cloven foot.' Thomas Boston<sup>9</sup>

'You who are in a joyful frame, join trembling with your mirth. You are in a paradise, but though you are, the serpent will conceal himself there till he turn you out of it, if you entertain not this holy fear.' Thomas Boston<sup>10</sup>

## 7. The Distinctive *Prayer* of a Courageous heart – To Fear the Lord

'It is a great mistake to think that the mere strength of natural constitution, can carry any one through such sufferings for Christ, or that natural tenderness and weakness divinely assisted, cannot bear the heaviest burden that ever God laid upon the shoulders of any sufferer for Christ. Our suffering and bearing abilities are not from nature, but from grace. We find men of strong bodies and resolute daring minds, have fainted in the time of trial.' John Flavel<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Bates, *On the Fear of God*, Ch. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Boston, *The Happiness of Fearing Alway*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Boston, *The Happiness of Fearing Alway*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> John Flavel, *A Practical Treatise of Fear*, Chapter 7.