

The Right Kind of Fear

By Carrie Cavanaugh

As difficult as the recent recession has been, God has used it for His glory by helping us see the gods we worship other than Himself. Sleepless nights over a diminished 401(k), shame over having to cut programs and paralyzing fear over possibly losing our job can all be indicators of an unhealthy reliance on things other than God.

Matthew 6:25-34 presents a comforting, but challenging proposition—we are not to worry because God will provide for our needs. Verse 34 concludes, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” I’m good at making plans and working hard, but for the things that are out of my control, it’s difficult not to worry. And yet, this is exactly where we see the extent of our faith. Do we really believe that God is sovereign? Do we really believe that He loves us? Do we really believe that He is our provider? When I stop to ask myself these questions I realize how foolish it is not to have peace regarding these things.

But I also see how foolish I am not to fear God Himself. You see, as wrong as it is to live in fear of our circumstances, it is even more sinful

not to fear our God.

This paradigm is portrayed in the book of Joshua, which begins with God encouraging Joshua and his army not to fear the battles before them because He will be with them—”Be strong and courageous.

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Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9b). But the book concludes with Joshua asking the Israelites if they really want to follow God because if they are unfaithful, they will surely know His wrath—”He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins” (Joshua 24:19b). This is a lesson in where our fear is rightly placed. There is more to reality than what we can see with the eye. And the spiritual realities are often more “real” than what we see before us in that they can have greater impact. Although the fortified cities and foreign armies must have been daunting to the Israelites, God is

greater, and this is both a comfort and a reason to be humbled before Him.

I know I’m guilty of all too often making God small in my mind. It’s easier to live that way. But really, His perfect holiness, which requires payment for sin, and His awesome power should make us fall on our faces before Him. We study and fool ourselves into thinking we understand, but compared to His understanding, we know nothing. We make plans and even try to provide for the unexpected, but our plans mean nothing if they aren’t His plans. We labor, but it is in vain if He doesn’t bless our work. We read self-help books and attempt to change ourselves, but He alone can turn a heart of stone to flesh. In the end we must recognize that He alone is worthy of our honor—our fear.

The recession has been a good reminder to us that job security and financial well-being are in God’s hands and not our own. Rather than fearing a layoff, let us trust the giver of all good gifts and instead worship out of holy fear before the maker of the universe.