

Ambassador III - Character

Week 1 - An Ambassador Fears God

Introduction

Warm up exercise: (5 min.)

What is the perception of “Christians” in the world today?

- Real or phony?
- Warm and engaging or distant?
- Rational or irrational?
- Morally distinct?
- Irrelevant?
- Harmless?
- Judgmental and intolerant?
- Sold out for what they claim to believe or sellouts to the culture?
- Fools for Christ, or just plain fools?

As we discussed in the “week 0” introduction to the ambassador series, an ambassador is a representative of a sovereign sent to represent that sovereign--in the case of Christian Ambassadors, we are sent to represent God to the world. You as an ambassador for Christ are the face of Christianity to the world.

Look back at our warm up exercise. How did we get here?

Are we supposed to be liked?/popular? (was Jesus? ... by whom? ...) Ought this be the way the Bride of Christ is perceived by the world?

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:11** "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you ***falsely*** on my account.

How much of this is *false*? [ref. the warm up exercise points on the board]

I'm sure this isn't the complete picture, but I believe the problem here is basically, *the wayward Church has ceased to fear God.*

- God became Santa in the sky--*concerned only for my happiness, not his own glory*
- We became apathetic and lazy.--*God doesn't care, why should I? What's he going to do about it? Why study, there's nothing I really need to know...*
- We became self-reliant--*no longer needing God (except for the occasional favor)*
- We became self-absorbed--*God is there to make my life better...*
- We don't love our neighbors--*Why should we? They are quite unlovable.*
- We came to think our circumstances were the problem, not our sinful nature--*Who needs sanctification? God loves me just the way I am.*
- The gospel became a self-improvement product to be peddled

- We became salesmen/peddlers (pragmatism---just find something that works.)
- Leadership started equipping peddlers rather than ambassadors
- Needed a way to “close the deal”--came up with “the sinner’s prayer” we could manipulate people into praying, and “decisional regeneration” to justify it.

As we look back over this list, we see that many of these are not the kind of issues addressed in a typical evangelism or apologetics course. These are character issues. Rather than just give you a bunch of knowledge and tools with a side order of guilt and sending you out, *we’re just beginning to understand the importance of the character of God’s Ambassadors.*

Who does Jesus want us to be?

"More like Jesus." --"It's too easy to jump from wanting to me more like Jesus to "What Would Jesus **Do**?" Before we jump, we should make sure we understand who Jesus would have us *be*.

Acting without a biblical understanding of who Jesus wants us to be is the reason so many become unhealthy in their spiritual lives, producing unhealthy disciples and unhealthy churches. [Stiles p. 17]

Pastoral Motivation

So why have people jumped to action, in this case evangelistic action, before being people of faith? Maybe it's because they can. ***We have not been watchful enough about the conditions of people's hearts before we ask them to act, because with the right method or program, the condition of a person's heart isn't that important.*** We have become pragmatists. [Stiles p. 19]

Pragmatic evangelism counts: converts, members, programs, but rarely counts faithfulness to the message or the faithfulness of the messenger. [Stiles p. 21]

Foundations--Faithful ambassadors know the fear the Lord

In 2 Corinthians 5, just before Paul spells out how we are ambassadors for Christ entrusted with the ministry/message of reconciliation. We find this sobering statement.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:10-11** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹ ***Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.***

It is clear here that we will be judged before Christ based on what we do. The temptation here is to immediately pour on the guilt trip. Instead, let's do a brief study of what "fear of the Lord" means and then go back and look at what Paul was saying in greater context.

The Fear the Lord

In the warm up exercise and subsequent discussion of "how we got here" we exposed a foundational flaw, not just in the world, but in the professing Church as well. Let's start at the *beginning*:

It's foundational

ESV **Psalm 111:10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom

ESV **Proverbs 9:10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

ESV **Proverbs 1:7** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

It should be taught

ESV **Psalm 34:11** Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

It is absent in all who are under sin

ESV **Romans 3** ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.... ¹⁸***There is no fear of God before their eyes.***"

Jesus not only teaches it, but amplifies it

ESV **Luke 12:4-5** "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

We see a clear expression of base fear (frightened/humbling) in those who knew him best

ESV **Mark 4:35-41** On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ ***And they were filled with great fear*** and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"

Should it surprise us that it is more frightening to have God in the boat than a storm outside the boat?

Isaiah is humbled in the presence of God's overwhelming holiness

^{ESV} **Isaiah 6:1-5** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

... and the demons were simply terrified

^{ESV} **Luke 8:27-28** When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me."

And David ... finds comfort in it?

^{ESV} **Psalms 130:3-4** If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

The Christian's fear of the Lord is deeply paradoxical. There is humility flowing from the contrast of God's holiness (justice) and our sinfulness--knowing we deserve judgment and wrath, and at the same time there is boldness flowing from knowledge of God's love for us. Tim Keller describes the Christian's fear of the Lord as "a wonder-filled-bold-humility¹."

Let's take a closer look at *the fear of the Lord* for Christians.

Even the Christian must fear God. But it is another kind of fear. It is a fear rather of what might have been than of what is; it is a fear of what would come were we not in Christ. Without such fear there can be no true love; for love of the Saviour is proportioned to one's horror of that from which man has been saved. And how strong are the lives that are suffused with such a love! They are lives brave, not because the realities of life have been ignored, but because they have first been faced — lives that are founded upon the solid

¹ http://download.redeemer.com/rpcsermons/QandA/What_does_it_mean_to_fear_God.mp3

foundation of God's grace. May such lives be ours! [J. Gresham Machen, article--*The Fear of the Lord*]

Back to our 2 Corinthians text--Look at the immediately preceding verses--*noting the positive tone of them.*

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:6-10** So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, **we make it our aim to please him.** ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Paul's concern here is how we as ambassadors might please Christ. That is our aim; that is our motivation. We know that there will be a judgment of evil (God's justice demands it), and here we also see a *positive* judgment of that which is pleasing to Christ.

The fear of the Lord motivates loving gratitude resulting in a desire to please our risen and glorified King and perfect Savior Jesus the Christ!

Breakout

1. Which of the following are found in the Bible?

___ "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge"

___ "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"

___ "The fear of the LORD adds length to life..."

___ "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life"

___ "The fear of the LORD is a bummer"

___ "Through the fear of the LORD, a man avoids evil"

___ "The fear of the LORD leads to life"

2. Do you fear God? *If you'd been asked this an hour ago, would you have said the same thing?*

3. Should you fear God? *What about Hebrews 4:16?*

^{ESV} **Hebrews 4:16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

4. How does a healthy fear of the Lord affect an ambassador's:
- ethics/morality/lifestyle?
 - view/treatment of the Gospel
 - way of thinking/decision making?
 - priorities?

[Essentially what we are looking for here is that we represent His message accurately, and that we dare not bring reproach on Christ or His Bride. How seriously does God take his own Glory? What are ways that we bring reproach? Look back at the opening exercise.]

Suggested Reading:

- Marks of the Messenger--Ch 1.

The Way Ahead--An Outline

Fear of the Lord

- Foundation (wk 1)
- Zealous for God's glory
 - not foolish, immoral, superstitious ...
 - dares not bring reproach on Christ or His Bride
- Knows God's Will (God revealed it to be known...)
- Obedient
 - Prays
 - Prepared
 - Faithful to the message (also under fruits of the Spirit)
- Courageous--diminishing *fear of man*

Cultivating/Growing in the fruits of the Spirit

- Foundation
- Humility
- Love for Neighbor