

## Ambassador III - Character

### Ambassadors, the Fear of Man, and the Holy Spirit

*Before the review because it will seem out of place until later in the lesson...*

*White Board Exercise:*

- *Is it "fair" to command someone to do the impossible? (levitate for an "A")*
- *But did Jesus command the impossible of people? If so, name some (there are tons!)*
  - o *"Talitha Cumi"/"Lazarus, come out"*
  - o *"Come" [to Peter on the water], go catch a fish and take a coin from its mouth*
  - o *"take up your bed and walk/stretch forth your hand*
  - o *"you give them something to eat"*
  - o *[others]*
  - o *What about the command to **repent**? -- Is that something we can do on our own?*
- *What happened in each case? [provided the power to do the impossible]*

*As essential to Spiritual life as breathing is to physical life ...*

*The Cycle of Sanctification --- A life of continuous repentance and belief*



Every step of every cycle is by the power of the Holy Spirit--*impossible* in your own strength.

- *Awareness of Sin--Through the illumination of God's Word by the Holy Spirit (1Cor 2:12-14)*
- *Repentance--Granted by God by the Power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25)*
- *Faith--Believing trust granted by God by the Power of the Holy Spirit (John 6:37; 6:44)*
  - *That Christ's atonement was sufficient for this sin*
  - *That God will supply the power to repent (change)*

*No wonder "repent and believe" was the consistent message of John the Baptist, Jesus, the disciples as they were sent in the gospels, and the apostles in the book of Acts!*

### Review

Over the last few weeks we discussed how an Ambassador knows the fear of the LORD (Cor. 5). The first week we talked about the fear of the LORD as:

- Foundational (beginning of wisdom/knowledge)
- Experienced by all who encounter Him (friends and enemies alike!)
- Paradoxical for Christians--
  - base fear due to His Holiness (and our lack of it)
  - fear of what would have been--prompting proportionate love and gratitude
  - a resulting love-motivated fear of not pleasing Him ("it is our aim"- v.9)

Then we turned our attention to *Living it Out*

*Knowing the Fear of the LORD, an ambassador:*

- **would not dare to tamper with His message – the Gospel**

The second week we discussed how an ambassador, knowing the fear of the Lord, dares not tamper with the message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to him/her. Then we discussed some of the reasons why an ambassador might tamper with God's message:

- pride -- "we can do better"
  - ignorance -- "just don't know any better" (apathy?)
  - fear of man -- "what will people think?" (promised a future lesson on this--today...)
- **would not dare to misrepresent His Character or otherwise bring reproach upon Christ or His Bride by living immorally or foolishly. (ref. Piper Handout)**

The third and fourth weeks were dedicated to not bringing reproach upon God by the way we represent God's character either in what we teach or what we imply by our lifestyle. Some things Christians do are foolish to the world because the world is blind to the things of God, other things professing Christians do appear foolish to the world... because they really are foolish. Discernment is important to develop, and hope and pray that you are growing in your discernment.

This week we get to the last of our "knowing the fear of the LORD section"...

- **is growing in boldness and courage, putting to death the fear of man.**

### *Introduction*

We often fear evangelism discussion/classes/sermons because we are all so inwardly focused that we expect to walk away with little more than an increased burden of guilt on our backs and a new but shaken resolve to "do better." Today's topic could easily become the "guilt session" of Amb-III. That is not at all the direction I want to take us today.

#### THE WALL OF GUILT

Unfortunately, many believers are afraid of the subject of evangelism and may even plan to miss a church service when the announced sermon topic is outreach. Why is this? The sad truth is that frequently preaching and teaching on evangelism operate by trying to produce guilt.

Pastors can easily and with the best of intentions fall into the trap of berating their congregations with commands to evangelize or illustrations about evangelism that seek to motivate by created the maximum amount of guilt in those who hear. This may appear to be successful in the sense that everyone vows to do better in the future. Yet, after a period of carefully induced misery, everything returns to the state of minimal outreach, except that those with a tender conscience are carrying a bigger burden of guilt than before. There is an obvious problem here. Jesus promised that He came to set us free--free from sin, free from condemnation, free from a guilty conscience. It ought to be evident to anyone who teaches God's Word that laying a burden

of guilt on believers can never be the best motivation to help us make known the freedom from guilt that the Gospel of Christ grants us.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than stirring guilt and cheerleading, we are going to just step back and get a God's eye view of what it is that plagues us all--the fear of man, *and* look at God's remedies for it. We'll look at what we as ambassadors for Christ are supposed to be like, and where the power comes from to be what we are called to be.

### *An Ambassador Ought to be Bold*

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 6:18b-20** To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,<sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,<sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

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#### *Boldness and the Fear of Man*

##### *Paul had the fear of man.*

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<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 2:3-5** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,<sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,<sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

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Boldness is not a lack of fear. It is faith in something bigger than our fears. Confidence in something bigger than our fears gives us strength to do the right thing in spite of opposition or persecution.

If anything is needed in Christian witness today, it is boldness. We don't need bigger music ministries, longer prayer walks or nicer church foyers. We need boldness--wise boldness, gracious boldness, boldness rooted in the hope that we have in the gospel, boldness mixed with love, but boldness nonetheless.

Most Christians admire boldness in other people, and most Christians long for more boldness in their own lives. Boldness inspires us.

#### THE BASIC OBSTACLE TO BOLDNESS

So we must ask why we are timid. Why is it that we desire to have the strength to face the raised fist yet can barely face the raised eyebrow? The basic obstacle to boldness is the fear of man. It's a plague and we have a bad case. Moreover, it's deadly to healthy evangelism.

The phrase "fear of man" comes from Proverbs 29:25: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, /but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe." **The fear of man is the fear that another person might expose, shame, or harm you.** And it's the greatest single obstacle to evangelism. Fear of man replaces God and sets people as our chief end, our chief idol. Nowadays, rather than bending

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<sup>1</sup> Barrs, Jerram, *The Heart of Evangelism*, Crossway Books, Wheaton Ill. 2001. pp. 129-130.

the knee to carved wood and metal idols, we bow to people, so much so that the fear of man has become the idolatry of our age.<sup>2</sup>

Stiles says it is “a plague and we have a bad case.” How do we cure ourselves? *Does it seem kind of hopeless? ... impossible?*

Let me ask you a different question--

- How do we *save* ourselves? --**Do** we save ourselves? *Let's break salvation up in to the "already" and the "not yet":*
  - Do we *justify* ourselves before Almighty God? (Rom 8:33)
  - How do we *sanctify* ourselves?
  - How do we *glorify* ourselves?

What I'm getting at here is that we need to understand our fear of man as more than just an earthly struggle, it is a spiritual one. *It may seem impossible because it is impossible!* God is in the business of doing the impossible.

### ***Biblical Alternatives to the Fear of Man***

#### **1. The Fear of God (as Judge)**

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 9:25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?  
<sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 12:5** 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!

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We've spent weeks on how an Ambassador knows the fear of the Lord beyond just a base fear. If we live our lives in service to the idols of money or the approval of man, there will be an ultimate price to pay. This is not smiley face Christianity, but it is true. Sometimes this kind of stark realization of the big picture is what we need to motivate us. (*The proverbial stick rather than the carrot*).

#### **2. Honoring Christ's Lordship**

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<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 3:14-15** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

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<sup>2</sup> Stiles, J. Mack, *Marks of the Messenger*, IVP Books, Downers Grove Ill. 2001. pp 82-83. Stiles credits much of the content of this chapter to Edward Welch's book *When People are Big and God is Small*, P&R Publishing.

### *How do we “be prepared” to give an answer?*

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Timothy 2:15** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

*Implications: study & effort.* Biblical knowledge also helps in overcoming fear.

### *Obedience to His Lordship*

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 14:15** "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

[Have someone distinguish the call to obedience from legalism.]

Is it our first impulse to obey, even when the command is impossible? (*ref. the whiteboard exercise... what if he hadn't stretched forth his hand? ... what if they hadn't begun feeding the 5 thousand plus? ...*) Do we recognize and live in the reality of Christ's authority and preeminence over all of creation (including our heart and character? Do we respond to the call to be bold with "I can't" or do we just do it, trusting that God will provide the power?

## 3. Tapping in to the Spirit's Power

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<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Timothy 1:7-9** for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of **power** and **love** and **self-control**.<sup>8</sup> Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,<sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ...

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You may consider this a turning point moment in this course. For the rest of today and the following sessions we will be talking about the central role of God's Spirit in transforming us into faithful ambassadors for Christ.

### *The Promise of Power*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 1:8-9** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."<sup>9</sup> And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

➤ *No hint or room for failure ... you will have power.*

### *Power to What Ends?*

Fruit! Fruits in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8)--Genuine **internal transformation** and lasting **external Kingdom productivity** are powered solely and generously by God's Spirit.

Where do you lack power in your Christian walk? (*this will be a breakout discussion*)

## *Plugging In*

Rather than teaching you some mystic keys for plugging in, follow the Biblical pattern--pray and obey.

## *An Ambassador Prays*

Wow--this really could turn into "the guilt session" of Amb-III. We now turn to the other top guilt inducing topic in the Christian life--prayer. Since we are kind of turning the corner from the fear of the Lord and fear of man to dependence on the Holy Spirit, we'll start expanding here. An ambassador prays ...

- To a God whom he fears and holds in awe and wonder, confident in God's ability to bring it about.
- For courage!

Our best response to fears is to pray, and get others to pray for us...

Paul also asks for boldness in telling the good news. .. If Paul requests prayer to be fearless with the gospel, we should endeavor to gather prayers from others for ourselves. When was the last time you asked for prayer that you would be fearless with the gospel?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 6:19** [praying] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,<sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

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It does not help anyone to pretend that you are always a bold and ready witness, and such pretense certainly does not please God. He is delighted when we acknowledge our weaknesses to Him.<sup>4</sup>

If we confess our sins and shortcomings in the area of witness, just as in any other area of our lives, Jesus promises not only to forgive our failures and inadequacies but to come to our aid and to teach us what to say and how to say it.<sup>5</sup>

## *Courage---Step by step*

I find three general areas where we need boldness over and over again ...

First, we need boldness to simply expose our faith to others. Fear tends to isolate and compartmentalize our faith...

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<sup>3</sup> Stiles p. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> Barrs Jerram, *The Heart of Evangelism*, Crossway Books, Wheaton Ill. 2001p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Barrs p. 53.

The second area ... is when the door is opened in actual conversation. This means acting in ways that show we are unashamed of the message we bear...

Finally, we need boldness to invite response to the message once we've presented it fully. This is overcoming fear of rejection... We tend to hate putting people on the spot, but the gospel is not really the gospel without letting people know that a response is required.<sup>6</sup>

*Beyond the topic of "fear of man," the ambassador also prays for ...*

- For opportunity (open doors)

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 4:3** At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison--

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- For clarity -- the Colossians 4 text continues...

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 4:4** that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

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- For family

In every part of Scripture it is evident to us, even with the most cursory reading, that God delights in extending His kingdom through families... So we begin with prayer for those we live with and those we love.<sup>7</sup>

- For acquaintances

Our next circle of prayer will be for those whom God Providentially places in our lives at work, at school or college, in our leisure activities, in our neighborhoods ... God rules over our lives ... the people we meet during the course of our regular daily activities are not there by chance.<sup>8</sup>

**Breakout--**

- **In what areas of Christian life and ambassadorship do you sense your need the most for the power of the Holy Spirit?**
  - Fear of man--When is the last time you asked someone to pray for you to have boldness?
  - How satisfied are you with your prayer life? How confident you will want to pray as an ambassador ought to pray?
  - How easy do you find it to love your neighbor?
  - Power to resist particular sins that bring reproach
- **Apply the lesson of the white board--Can you find hope for change?**
  - Do you understand that the power for this kind of change doesn't come by sheer force of will?

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<sup>6</sup> Stiles p. 87-89.

<sup>7</sup> Barrs, p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Barrs p. 47.

**Schedule for Upcoming Sundays:**

May 15 - Wk 6 -- *Fruit of the Spirit --Love*  
May 22 - Wk 7 -- *Fruit of the Spirit - Humility I*  
May 29 - Off -- *Memorial Day weekend*  
June 5 - Wk 8 -- *Fruit of the Spirit - Humility II*

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**Suggested Reading:**

*The Heart of Evangelism- Chapters 6-8*

*Decision Making and the Will of God--Chapter 8*