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LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

Part 12: Fear and Paralysis

by Gary North

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that cloth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Deut. 31:6).

God here commanded Moses not to fear men. Moses, in turn, immediately passed this warning on to Joshua (Deut. 31:7). Just before the nation crossed the Jordan River to invade Canaan, God spoke to Joshua directly: the same command (Josh. 1:6-7). Joshua had said much the same thing four decades earlier, when he and Caleb recommended that Israel invade Canaan immediately. "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not" (Num. 14:9).

Moses led Israel. As a leader, he above all others was not to fear the enemies of God. Joshua was Moses' successor. He, too, was warned by Moses and then by God not to fear God's enemies. A leader must not exhibit fear. It would spread to his followers.

The best way not to exhibit fear externally would seem to be to eliminate internal fear. But God says that this is not the best way. To be **fearless** is to indulge in the sin of autonomy. Fear is an inescapable concept. It is never a question of fear vs. fearlessness. It is always a question of whom to fear: God or man? Jesus warned: "And fear not them which kill the body, but" are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). This was an extension of the Psalmist's proclamation: "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm 118:6). Jesus was well aware of what evil men can do to covenant-keepers in history, as He later experienced on Calvary. He made it very clear that what covenant-breakers will experience in eternity is far worse.

Casting Out Fear

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). But Jesus said to fear God. There is no contradiction here. The question is: Whom should I fear? God is love. His love is extended to His people through grace. One sign of this grace is the presence of the fear of God. The covenant of grace rests on fear. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25:14). The fear of God and the mercy of God are linked. "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm 147:11). "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil"

(Prov. 16:6).

Then what to do? To act ethically takes wisdom, meaning biblical understanding, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Psalm 111:10), "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

The biblical process of casting out fear is specific replacing the fear of men with the fear of God. We are to fear God more than we fear men. It is not that God expects us to exercise some extraordinary act of will in a display of self-generated courage. It is that God expects us to begin our decision-making in the fear of alienating Him.

Military Leadership

A successful military commander must understand this principle of substitution. His task is to make his men more afraid to retreat under fire than they are to die under fire. They must fear him more than they fear the enemy. But few commanders stand in the rear and threaten to shoot deserters. So, a soldier's fear is only marginally the fear of immediate execution by his commander. Furthermore, a man under fire rarely spends time calculating the risk of a successful court martial against him in order to compare this risk with the risk of getting killed by an advancing opponent. An instinctive fear of deserting must be instilled by military leaders much earlier than the face of battle. In any case, how many courts martial can any military commander conduct? Not many. Any senior commander who spends lots of time prosecuting cowards in court will be removed from command. His superiors will recognize courts martial as a failure of leadership on his part.

Military commanders, from generals to corporals, must substitute another fear: the fear of shame. To run from a battle when your colleagues remain behind is an act of cowardice. This sense of cowardice must be generated from within the soldier. Individual courage on the battlefield is to a great degree based on the systematically instilled fear of personal shame - self-imposed shame that will later be reinforced by one's colleagues.

Shame is primarily personal. It is only rarely corporate. A man fears being singled out as a coward far more than he fears being identified as a member of the legendary "Sprinting 357th." This is why military leadership must focus on how to prevent the personal acts of cowardice during battle from becoming corporate acts. One man running away faces censure, including internal censure. A thousand men running away do not face anything like the same degree of censure. A thousand men cannot be court-martialed, either.

Ironically, the most dangerous time in battle is when men turn their backs on the enemy and flee. During routs, the offense has an incomparable advantage. The risk of being killed or wounded drops radically, while the ability to select a target increases. Men usually run in a straight line. The man who stands behind another can take careful aim at a target whose future location is relatively easy to predict. It is true that a man on the attack against a stationary target also moves in a straight line, but fear disrupts the defender's aim.

Wandering In the Wilderness

Israel was condemned corporately to wander in the wilderness for an extra forty years because the nation's representatives had refused to listen to Joshua and Caleb, and had even sought to kill them for bringing back an optimistic report. This was a terrible condemnation. Only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Those who had preached victory would experience victory in the Promised Land. Those who had preached defeat would experience a life of aimless wandering on the fringes of the Promised Land.

Inheritance went to men who had publicly preached victory. They led the children of the exodus generation into Canaan to collect the long-promised inheritance.

A million adult Israelites whose representatives chose to avoid a military confrontation with the Canaanites were condemned by God to go through a series of battles with the nations outside the land. What they feared most - the threat of war - they received from God, but without any legitimate hope in the peace associated with final victory. They would not enter the land, but they would fight numerous preliminary battles outside the land. The next generation would become familiar with war, and being familiar with it, would learn not to fear it as much as their slave-mentality parents had feared it. The younger generation would also become sick of inconclusive wars that could not produce final victory.

Because they did not seek victory, the exodus generation could not experience peace. As men called into battle by God, Israelites could not hope to build a nomadic civilization outside of Canaan, wandering in circles through the generations. Rather, they were pilgrims: wanderers with a destination. But to reach that destination, they would have to fight. They preferred to defer that day of judgment - Canaan's judgment. But in deferring it, they substituted a series of inconclusive days of judgment. Instead of fearing the Canaanites, they had to content themselves with fearing Amalekites (Num. 14), Midianites (Num. 22), and Moabites (Num. 22). They substituted war that could not bring permanent victory for a war that would. Lesson: judgment deferred is not judgment avoided.

Defeatism vs. Triumphalism

There are three main eschatological views, Premillennialism teaches that the Church will experience long-term defeat in history until Jesus returns in person to set up His worldwide kingdom in history for a thousand years. Then will come the final judgment. Amillennialism teaches that the Church will experience long-term defeat in history until Jesus returns in person to bring final judgment and set up His worldwide kingdom in eternity. Postmillennialism teaches that the Church will experience long-term victory in history before Jesus returns in person to bring final judgment and set up His worldwide kingdom in eternity.

With "respect to what members of the Church can accomplish in history prior to the bodily return of Christ, the first two views are pessimistic regarding Christendom, i.e., worldwide Christian civilization, i.e., the civilization (kingdom) of God in history. With respect to what members of the Church

can accomplish in history prior to the bodily return of Christ, the third view is optimistic regarding Christendom.

Those who reject the first two views accuse those who adopt either of the other views as **defeatists**. Those who reject the third view accuse those who adopt the third view as being **triumphalists**. Those who hold the first two views deeply resent being labeled defeatists. They prefer the term realists. This, of course, assumes that their rival eschatologies are biblically valid, which both of them cannot be. Those who hold the third view are content with being labeled triumphalists, since they fully expect to win. Why not be a good winner?

Was Jesus a triumphalist when He accepted the cheers of the crowds as He entered Jerusalem? He had no illusions regarding the commitment of the fickle triumphalists who cheered Him; they would soon curse Him. But He did not reject their accolades. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way, And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:8-9).

Having received such accolades, Jesus then imposed negative sanctions on the leadership of Israel. "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:12-13). Then He brought positive sanctions to the lame. "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them" (v. 14).

These activities displeased the religious leaders. "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" (w. 15-16).

This triumphalism of Jesus angered the religious establishment, for they had cut a deal - a civil covenant - with the Romans. Jesus seemed to threaten this covenant, for He drew crowds filled with people who expected Him to set up a Jewish political kingdom because He had fed the multitudes (John 6:14). The religious establishment soon sought to reaffirm their covenant with Rome by demanding His execution. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Did Jesus suffer death at the hands of Rome and its Jewish allies because of His triumphalism? Of course, and so did His followers, until Rome fell to them in the fourth century. After His resurrection, He announced His total authority in history: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). He had previously announced that taking the Lord's Supper was a triumphalistic symbolic act "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30).

Triumphalism is an inescapable concept. So is defeatism. The question is: Who will be triumphant in history, and who will be defeated? The triumphalist insists that God's representatives will be triumphant culturally in history, while Satan's will be defeated. The defeatist insists that Satan's representatives will be triumphant culturally in history until Jesus returns bodily, and God's representatives will be defeated. There is no neutral position in addition to these two views. History will not produce

a stalemate. Someone will inherit the earth. 'What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth, The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant' (Psalm 25:12-14).

Fear Produces Paralysis

The covenantal curses in Deuteronomy 28 includes these: "And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see" (Deut. 28:88-87). The challenges of the day would scare them, but so would the challenges of the night.

Paralysis in the face of a challenge is a curse. Indecision is the mark of such paralysis. This does not mean that we should not count the cost; we should (Luke 14:28-30). But having counted the cost, we must decide whether to take on the challenge, prepare a while longer to take on the challenge, or find another challenge to take on. But the fearful person is unwilling to take on any challenge. This makes him indecisive. He moves only when pushed. In the morning, he prays for evening. In the evening, he prays for morning. He is in command neither day nor night.

In a society that is losing faith in its religious presuppositions, such afflictions become more common. The great classicist Gilbert Murray wrote a book, *The Five Stages of Greek Religion* (1925). The fifth stage he called the failure of nerve. That describes the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. It describes Western intellectuals, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Their pessimism is seeping into the general culture. Compare American movies made prior to 1988 with those made since then: the year the ratings code went into effect. This is what movie reviewer and Orthodox Jew Michael Medved does in his book, *Hollywood vs. America* (1992). The accent on despair, corruption, cynicism, violence, and moral degradation is visible on screen, especially in movies that do not make money, but which still get produced, year after year. The American viewer is not so far advanced in pessimism as the movie makers are, but a steady stream of celluloid despair is having its negative effects. In 1941, Pitirim Sorokin, the founder of Harvard University's sociology department, wrote this warning about modern citizens:

Deprived of generally accepted norms and values - whether scientific or philosophical, religious or moral, aesthetic, or of any other kind - and surrounded by a chaos of conflicting norms and values, these persons find themselves without any authoritative guide or any superindividual rule. In these conditions they inevitably become erratic, a prey to incidental individual expediencies, momentary fancies, and conflicting sensory impulses. Like a rudderless boat in a stormy sea, such a person is tossed hither and thither by the force of circumstances. He has no standard by which to discover how consistent his actions are and whither he is drifting; in brief, he becomes an inconsistent and unintegrated complex of fortuitous ideas, beliefs, emotions, and impulses. An increase of disintegration and derangement of personality is an inevitable result. Add to all this the painful shocks that incessantly impinge upon his mind and nervous system amid the chaotic and brutal struggles of the transition period. We well know that *the indispensable prerequisite of a sound and integrated mind is the presence of social*

stability and unchallenged general norms. When these begin to collapse, an increase of nervous breakdowns ordinarily ensues, and the two trends proceed *pari passu*. Nervous breakdowns are but another aspect of the collapse of socio-cultural order. (The Crisis of Our Age [Dutton, rep. 1955], pp. 206-7)

In late 20th century America, clinical depression is becoming widespread. Millions of people, male and female, are burdened by it. Books, magazine articles, and television talk shows are devoted to discussions of depression: what causes it, what its effects are, and how to get over it. Even Winston Churchill, one of the most heralded leaders in this century, suffered from it. He called it his black dog.

Depression afflicts people of all races and religions, but Americans talk endlessly about their personal problems, so they get a lot of bad publicity. Depression has physiological manifestations, but it has not been traced to a single cause, such as a vitamin deficiency or other chemical imbalance. There is no universally recognized treatment. Some people work it off but risk becoming addicted to the treatment workaholism. Others seek professional counseling. Still others turn to alcohol or drugs. When a lift, the former victim is tempted to give credit to whatever approach he was using just before it departed, but this may be an illusion.

The reality is this: clinical depression is a manifestation of a breakdown of faith in the social order. People come to the conclusion that they cannot cope with life. This fear is part of a wider fear: the fear that life is not covenantal, predictable, and essentially fair. Faith in luck or fate replace faith in God and His providence. This new faith replaces the old faith. The fear of men and events replaces the fear of God.

A Shortage of Leadership

Perhaps the most eloquent English-language historian in the late 20th century is the Englishman, Paul Johnson, author of *Modern Times*, *The Birth of the Modern*, *A History of the Jews*, *A History of Christianity*, and the much despised (by intellectuals) *Intellectuals*. Writing in the Jewish magazine, *Commentary* (July 1994), he points out what should be obvious to one and all: "A World Without Leaders." He writes: "I do not recall any point in my lifetime when leadership has been so lacking right across the international democratic spectrum."

I offer the following contrasts. In 1940, Stalin ruled the USSR, Hitler led Germany, Mussolini was the dominant force in Italy, Churchill took over as Prime Minister in Great Britain, de Gaulle was the leader in exile of the free French forces, Franklin Roosevelt was re-elected for his third term as President of the United States, Mao was continuing to build up his military forces after the Long March of 1934, and Franco was secure in Spain, remaining so for three and a half more decades. In 1990, only one internationally acclaimed leader was visible: Margaret Thatcher. Her own party threw her out of office that same year, replacing her with John Major, a truly minor figure. President George Bush won a war with a small nation through the use of high technology, but he lost his bid for re-election in 1992. The only person in national office in late 1990 who can be said to have made a significant impact on his country and the world was President Salinas of Mexico. In his six-year term, 1988-92, he accomplished what Boris Yeltsin has not since he gained power in Russia in 1991: he directed an orderly transition to something resembling free market capitalism. The meaning of Helmut Kohl's last name accurately reflects the current leadership situation: cabbage.

Johnson blames current media attacks on leaders' financial and sexual escapades. Such attacks, he argues, would have kept most of the great American presidents out of the highest office. Perhaps so, but the media were savage in the 1980's,

yet Thatcher and Reagan flourished, They had a politically unique shield: no significant moral lapses, before or in office. Mrs. Reagan had borne a child less than nine months after their marriage, but by 1980, this was within the bounds of common morality - barely. The press left the story alone: too tame. The main problem is, we do not have articulate visionaries of high moral principle, sufficient funding, and a constituency large enough and dedicated enough to insure their election. The supply of righteousness has been shrinking, paralleling the rise of cynicism toward civil government,

Thatcher and Reagan believed in something: smaller government. Reagan did little to attain it institutionally, such as vetoing state-enhancing legislation, but he did articulate his vision. Rhetoric is important. Thatcher was somewhat more successful institutionally, and she, too, possessed the gift of rhetoric, though not a par with Reagan, who was a true master of the art. But Reagan was prohibited by law from serving a third term, and Thatcher had fought the creation of the New Europe, with its transfer of national sovereignty to an international bureaucracy. For this, she was axed by the true powers that be. An important unofficial message was sent to national leaders: do not exercise independent national leadership. That message is taken very seriously by today's national leaders.

Politics and Vision

The leadership shortage today offers an important opportunity to those who believe in a consistent worldview that is capable of attracting dedicated disciples. Societies cannot remain morally indecisive indefinitely. Moral gridlock - the product of religious pluralism (the myth of neutrality) - cannot become a permanent judicial framework. Compound economic growth is not a valid substitute for moral vision. The desire to get rich by creating a successful business motivates courageous entrepreneurs who are willing to risk all they own on some new venture, but the willingness to risk one's wealth is not the same as the willingness to risk one's life. In fact, the willingness to do both is rarely found in the same person today. Few men are willing to pledge their lives, their wealth, and their sacred honor in a cause, and those who are long on wealth tend to be short on sacred honor,

As the vision of a New World Order penetrates the thinking of the intellectuals, it weakens the appeal of their ideas to the masses, whose commitments are local and national. The New World Order dismisses local commitments as secondary. It affirms the one, but has no place for the many. This is the ancient humanist dream of empire: the vision of Babel. It will fail.

Politics must affirm both the one and the many. Local politics cannot rest on a base that is exclusively local, for all politics is moral, and ever since the demise of the classical city-state and the rise of empire, morality has been understood as something which transcends borders. "Think globally, act locally" has become a popular slogan among the New Age tree-huggers of America, but it was for many centuries the operational strategy of Christianity: to build the local church and thereby build Christendom. But with the demise of the Protestant ideal of Christendom since the 16th century, Protestantism has abandoned its universalist and therefore its world-transforming vision. This, too, has been a legacy of defeatist eschatologies.

A vision of victory is an antidote to fear. The Communists

appealed for a century to the inevitability of history, which supposedly made the triumph of the proletariat and its vanguard, the Communist Party, inescapable. When Communists lost faith in this premise, the system was doomed. When dedicated people ceased to believe in Communism's moral superiority and its historical inevitability, the collapse of the Soviet Union was just a matter of time. It suffered a failure of nerve. (So did its flight crews over Afghanistan after the U.S. sent Afghans Stinger shoulder-to-air missiles.)

Those who believe in the pure conspiracy view of history do not recognize the magnitude of the death of the modern god that has visibly failed. They still believe that men in conspiratorial groups shape history, irrespective of ideas. This is as erroneous as the Communists' lost faith in the impersonal historical forces of dialectical materialism. God shapes history, and He uses men, ideas, inventions, politics, markets, plagues, and every other factor to bring His will to pass.

Successful leadership requires more than a conspiracy, more than money, more than media access. It is the ability to articulate a long-term vision, motivate people to accept it, finance it, and govern their lives in terms of it. This form of leadership, as distinguished from the leadership of a monastery, calls men to work to extend this vision to the general population. Finally, effective leadership must promise success to the faithful, if not to today's participants, then at least to future generations who share their vision. Leadership that categorically denies the possibility of cultural success for the faithful is ghetto leadership or monastery leadership. Without the hope of success, people rarely bear the risks of public failure, Their fears paralyze them.

Conclusion

"Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Prov. 15:16), This is a command that has its greatest relevance at the early stages of the extension of Christendom, when the disciples are short of resources. But it does not deny this truth: "He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great" (Psalm 115:13). "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life" (Prov. 22:4). In short, "Fear God and prosper!"

The fear of man is a paralyzer. It can lead to psychological disorders as well as physical disorders. The perfect love that casts out fear is faith in the God who decrees all that comes to pass, and who orders history in terms of a law-bound covenant. God's corporate sanctions in history are predictable in terms of His law-order: blessings for covenant-keepers and cursings for covenant-breakers (Lev. 26 Deut. 26).

With respect to the individual, success is defined by Christianity in terms of the final state: eternal life rather than the second death (Rev. 20:14-15). Fear of the second death is supposed to overcome the fear of men. Even though personal success in history is not guaranteed to each covenant-keeper, his fear of God is to replace his fear of men.

Strict obedience to God reduces the possibility that covenant-keepers will suffer the misery of exposure. If our deeds can survive public exposure, our failures become mistakes rather than crimes. Leaders are entitled to mistakes. Thus, righteousness reduces fear. In a world of media exposure and large markets for the consumption of scandal, the righteous man has a political advantage.