

## Lesson 6: A New Vision for Life

This is the final lesson on the fear of man. We have thought about the various ways that we tend to struggle with the fear of man over the last five lessons. So, is that the end of the story? See God as bigger than people, fear Him, and stop fearing them? Well, not quite, the opposite response to fearing people is not to simply stop fearing them, but to love them.

As we properly fear the Lord, we will grow in our desire and ability to love God and love our neighbors. As we consider what it means to love God and neighbor, I'd encourage you to be thinking even right now about those situations or those people you tend to fear. Be specific, don't think about different situations or people, think about one. How can you grow in demonstrating love, and not fear in that relationship or situation?

Remember, growing in the fear of the Lord and love for others is not an overnight process. What I hope you have gained from this study is that the fear of man is universal, and it can be a life-long temptation. We should seek to regularly repent, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ, confident that He will complete the work He has begun in us. With that, we see the first aspect of living with this new vision for life.

### I. A Reorientation to God that is from God

We are only able to understand what it means to love others instead of fearing them as we understand and live in the reality of our changed relationship with God. Because He loved us, we fear and love Him. Because He loved us, we need to love others; we have a debt of love towards others.

1. We need other people, but we don't need something from them: we need them so we can love them. Turn to 1 John 4:7-5:3. This is one of the crucial texts for understanding God's love towards us, our love for God, and the necessity of our love towards others and the relationship to fear. As we read this passage, think about how John describes God's love for us and the example that he provides for thinking about how to love others. Notice how important it is to understand how God has acted towards us if we are to properly relate to others. Notice the connection between love and fear.
2. God's love was costly. God's love sent Jesus to the cross to die. In His incarnation and atoning work, Jesus provides the ultimate example of one that loved others in the mostly costly, difficult and painful of ways. As we think about what it means to love others instead of fearing them, we must first learn to understand God's love.
3. As we are reoriented to God, we recognize his gracious choice to love us—this doesn't boost our self-esteem, this devastates our pride. In Ephesians 1:5-6 Paul says, **"He [God] predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."** Paul later says that because of God's gracious work in election and granting faith, we have no room to boast. If God has so acted towards us, how can we act with anything less than love towards others? If God has already accepted us in Christ, why do we still allow ourselves to be enslaved by a desire for acceptance from others? With this reorientation, we no longer look to people for acceptance,

instead we look to love others in such a way that they are pointed towards the acceptance that can only be found in Christ.

4. Finally, as we are reoriented to God, we are able to rejoice in the God that has accepted, protected, and covered us. Ed Welch says, *“God fills us. He pours out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. God actually showers us with himself. It is not available to us when we adopt the shape of a cup of psychological needs. That is, if we want to be filled so that we can feel happy and better about ourselves, then we will never be truly deluged with God’s love.”* *// The cup of our own desires is never able to catch the flood of God’s love and blessing ... When this cup of ‘I wants’ is broken, it leaves us with a number of shapes or identities that God has given us: priests, ambassadors, children of God, and Christians ... We think it safer and more effective to look to other people to relieve our emptiness ... the love that we desire, however, can only be found in the living God.”*

The love of God towards us is so radical, scandalous, free, and transformative that it not only changes our relationship with him, it also changes our relationship with others.

## II. Reorientation to other people: loving and serving, not fearing and needing

1. And because of God’s costly love towards us, we can take big risks in our relationships with other people. Why? Because Christian, you are so rooted in the love of God in Christ that acceptance and other’s approval is not the foundation on which you stand.

**This is key.** Our reorientation to God helps us see others’ true value and function. Others were not created to be feared, but for us to love. This goes contrary to what you will hear in our culture where you hear: “You need to look out for yourself first, you need to have your needs met.” The worldly definition of success is not how many people you are serving but how many people are serving you. *How contrary is this to what it means to be like Christ?*

2. So, what are some of the differences between loving/serving versus fearing and needing?
  - a. Loving others is not necessarily the same thing as being nice to others,
  - b. Loving others is not the same as sacrificing your money/time/assets for them.
  - c. Loving others sometimes means saying “no”, or saying “yes” to them. Sometimes, niceness/sacrifice/saying yes can be the clothing that our fear of man hides in. Sometimes loving others, means doing things that they will not immediately perceive as nice: loving others will mean saying no.
  - d. Loving others will certainly involve sacrifice, but as we will see later in I Corinthians 13, sacrifice alone does not necessarily equal love and is not necessarily fueled by love. So maybe you feel an intense desire to give to others and sacrifice for them, but it is done out of a desire to keep them pleased or to keep them from rejecting you. Maybe you sacrifice and give to those that should be learning to take on more responsibility; this again may be the complete opposite of what it means to love others. Pray for wisdom and seek counsel to discern the difference.

Loving others will not be easy. Welch says, *“Loving others makes life less comfortable. It means that I give up my own agenda for a Saturday morning in order to help a neighbor. It means that I get hurt when someone moves away. It means that people stay at our house when I would prefer to be surrounded with just my immediate family. Isn’t that just like God’s word? Just when we think we have adapted it to a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, it messes everything up. It tells us to love others in the same way that we have been loved by God.”*

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** From Scripture, provide a characteristic of God’s love that informs the way we should love others.

### III. Who do we need to love and serve?

Scripture provides several categories of those that we should show love towards.

1. **God:** As we have already considered the reorientation we have towards God, we are now able to do as Christ said in Matthew 22:37-38, **“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”**

Unlike the secular, therapeutic culture that we find ourselves in that knows no orientation towards God and stresses an inward orientation, “know yourself, to your own self be true.” Scripture points us another way. It says know your God, know and love your neighbor, only then will you truly know what it means to know yourself.

2. **Enemies:** These could be characterized as those that want to harm you or have harmed you in the past. In Luke 6:27-33 Christ says, **“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”**

This is a high standard. It hurts to love enemies, it isn’t safe to love enemies, and it’s scary to love enemies. Yet if we are to obey Jesus and love as He has commanded us to love, if we are to love others instead of fearing them, we will extend this love even to those that are against us.

**Ed Welch** has several excellent things to say in context of loving enemies. He says, *“When confronted with enemies, we should go directly to the Psalms if we are not sure how to feel or what to say ... When*

*we are inclined to take matters into our own hands, the Psalms teach us to trust God. When we would insulate ourselves from pain, they teach us to trust God. Instead of vowing that we will never again move close to another person, we learn to trust God. Instead of extinguishing hope, the Psalms teach us to trust God ... [in the Psalms] It was the glory of God that was David's mission, not his own vindication."*

**Welch** again goes on to describe what it looks like to love our enemies and says, *"God says that you treat enemies the same way you treat friends and family ... To love in this way, we need both power and discernment. We need power because we are incapable of loving the way Christ has loved us. We need discernment because it is sometimes difficult to know what form love should take. As a result, anytime we are aware that we have specific enemies, we should seek counsel from the church in order to discern how to express that love."*

Point 2 is an important point: love for enemies may take on different actions than love for friends. Love for an enemy may include turning them over to earthly authorities if they have broken the law, it may mean physical separation to avoid further harm. If you struggle to know what love for your enemies should look like, speak to your wiser Christian friends.

3. **Unbelievers:** Non-Christians could fit into several of these categories of people. I think it's important though to spend just a minute thinking about how to love the lost. We should pray for them. We should be prepared to speak of the hope that is within us. We should be thoughtful towards them and not treat them like Gospel projects. In a culture that grows increasingly hostile to Christians and the Gospel, our non-Christian friends, neighbors and enemies need our love not our fear of them, even when they don't perceive their need. Is there a non-Christian you need to share the Gospel with, do you need to first begin living a life of love and care towards them even as Christ has loved you?
4. **Neighbors:** In Matthew 22:39, Jesus says, **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** As Jesus teaches in the parable of the Good Samaritan, this is the catch-all category. There is no age, ethnic, socioeconomic, political, personality or other categorical boundary to whom we are expected to love as neighbor.
5. **Our physical families.** It is in the context of family that we first learn to show love and concern, and it is in this context that we often find the greatest difficulty in showing true love.
6. **Brothers and Sisters:** The New Testament is full of how we are to relate to the family of God. In Galatians 6:10 Paul says, **"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."** One of the best evangelistic tools we have is love for brothers and sisters.

Increasingly, there should be nothing of fear that is characterizing our relationships with one another. **Welch says,** *"I have spoken with many people who want to know their spiritual gifts ... My impression is that this perspective represents a breakdown in the church. It reflects a church where we are running around as self-actualizing individuals rather than uniting as a God-glorifying community."* The Church is the place where we should demonstrate to a watching world what it means to live in love and not fear.

#### IV. What shape does this loving and serving take?

I Corinthians 13 is one of the best texts to understand the shape our love and service should take towards others. Let's read 1 Corinthians 13:3-7.

1. Quality of speech/teaching doesn't matter without love.
2. Sacrifice and giving without love is worthless...in other words, sacrifice doesn't equal love.
3. Love is patient
4. Kind
5. Does not envy
6. Does not boast
7. Is not proud
8. Is not rude
9. Is not self-seeking
10. Is not easily angered
11. Keeps no record of wrongs
- 12. Does not delight in evil**
13. Rejoices with the truth
14. Always protects
15. Always trusts
16. Always hopes
17. Always perseveres
18. Never fails

This afternoon, sit down with I Corinthians 13 and a piece of paper, and start thinking about these descriptions of love, think about how you can begin applying these characteristics towards the people you fear. Write those things down. Pray these things. Ask someone to keep you accountable. Think specifically how this applies to your life in the church?

**How does this take shape in the Church and serve to show the Gospel?** If you are a member of this church, consider the covenant we have made to each other. We have committed to loving and caring for each other in the context of this particular church. **God loved us first. He loves the ones we fear!** The contours of the Christian's love for others is carefully and completely shaped and fashioned by Christ's love for us.

#### V. Developing a true servant's heart

We are called to lives and relationships that will be messy. We are not called to live in isolation. Loving and serving others will mean involving ourselves in the lives of others in ways that may be difficult and inconvenient to us.

**1. Consider** your motivation even when it comes to loving and serving others. Even in our desire to love others, sometimes our desire to love can be born out of a desire to be loved. How do you know? What is your response when someone doesn't respond to your love in the manner you'd desire? When you make a move of love towards another and they respond with indifference, or worse, with anger? If you have clear expectations for how you want a person to respond to your love, they don't respond in that

manner, and you're devastated ... There's a good chance you weren't acting primarily out of a genuine heart of love for them.

**2. Look to Jesus.** In Philippians 2:3-7, Paul says, **"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."**

Study the life of Christ, notice the ways in which He loved and served others. When we consider the ways Christ humbled Himself to love others, to love us, we are left without excuse in our relationships with other people.

Budget deficits are bad, but love deficits are good. **Welch** says, *"When the kingdom of God is ruling our hearts, we aspire more to serve than to be served, honor more than be honored, and love more than be loved. This doesn't mean that we don't care about being loved; it simply means that we always want to outdo others in love. Do we run the risk of a lopsided relationship? Absolutely. That is the relationship we have with God—he always loves first and most ... He always makes the first move. He advertises his extravagant affection for us."*

3. Learn how to regularly pray for other people, pray especially for their relationship with God. Pray that the Lord will give you a heart of love towards them, pray that He will remove a heart that is driven by fear, and enlist others to pray that you will truly love others. If you are like me and haven't loved others well, confess this to God and to other people that you don't love as you should.

4. Think about how you can minister to others in specific ways. Scheme for others good. I encourage you to sit down and plot how you can lovingly serve them. This will be good for your soul and will conversely fight pride.

As we begin to love others rather than fear them, genuine God-wrought fruit is seen.

## **VI. Results of loving and serving rather than fearing and needing**

1. **Unity:** As we seek to love and serve, versus need and fear, we are able to pursue and experience the unity that should be manifest in the body of Christ. Unity doesn't mean just getting along, it means living in such a way that we are all focused first and foremost on Christ. As we collectively fix our eyes on Jesus, we find unity with one another. It is impossible to adequately address our horizontal relationships until we have established a proper vertical relational perspective.
2. **Genuine respect and appreciation of others:** As we grow in love towards others, it means we get to know them in deeper ways. It is interesting that we often fear others we don't really know. As we seek to love others in specific ways, as we seek to learn about them more deeply so we can serve them more effectively, as we get out of our own selfish and self-protective little bubbles, we begin to see others in profoundly new ways. We begin to realize that instead of worshipping other people as false gods/idols, we start to see the ways that other people bear the

image of God. We start to see others as distinct image bearers of God that we have been called to love and care for as Christ has loved us!

3. **Peace, joy, longsuffering, gentleness—the fruit of the Spirit:** As we live in the fear of the Lord, we begin to more fully understand what it means to be controlled by the Spirit of God.

## VII. Conclusion

So are we to fear God just to fear Him? And love others just to love them? No, there are greater things at stake. The glory of God is at stake. God has created us to know Him and worship Him as the majestic King, the Lord of Glory, as the one True God and Saviour of all men. So when we fear Him, we show His surpassing greatness and supreme excellency. God is glorified when we rightly fear Him, as if we are standing overlooking the Grand Canyon full of awe. The heavenly authorities in all of the spiritual realms are informed when God's people fear God. As for love, hear these words from our savior, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples."** The public testimony of our love for each other is vindication to all that Jesus is worth living for. So Christian, are weary in doing good? Do not lose heart. Your labour honors Christ and brings fame to His name.