

CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMITTEE

Official Report

FAITH IN THE AGE OF FEAR (FROM FEAR TO FAITH)

No doubt about it, we live in a dangerous and uncertain world. Need proof, just turn on the television, read the newspaper or check “breaking news” on the internet. Everyday there are terrorist attacks, shootings, and criminal acts of violence. Add to this, natural disasters, financial downturns, job downsizing, accidents, accusations, diseases, and death. It is a scary world in which we live. How easy it would be to stick our heads in the sand, like an ostrich, and pretend everything is okay. Fear is a very real emotion that stalks ALL OF US at some level.

According to Andy Andrews, author and motivational speaker, “All men are driven by faith or fear – one or the other – for both are the same. Faith or fear is the expectation of an event that hasn’t come to pass or the belief in something that cannot be seen or touched” (*The Travelers Gift*, pg. 149). It seems that where our Christian faith and culture collide, the flash point ushers in fear. As Christians, we don’t want to come across as being too judgmental, too sheltered, or too hypocritical. So instead of speaking up, we tend to keep quiet, afraid to speak truth to a world that desperately needs the truth of Scripture as found in the Holy Bible.

Second Corinthians 5:7 says: “We live by faith, not by sight” (NIV). As believers, faith should always trump fear. However, that’s not always the case. So the Bible reminds us over and over again, with the most often used admonition in Scripture, to “fear not!” How do we do that in a world where fear is a very real and present reality? The only way to overcome fear and let faith come to the forefront is through the words recorded in Scripture by those who have experienced faith in the fearful times of their lives.

In Psalm 56, David writes, after being seized by the Philistines in Gath: “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” (Psalm 56:3-4, NIV). The apostle Paul writes, from a Roman prison, some of the most powerful words of faith in Philippians 4:11-13: “For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (NIV).

Faith in an age of fear will often be a struggle. This is especially true as Christianity, and in particular, the church, having seemingly become less culturally relevant, tries to reach future generations. For many Christians, doubt and anxiety arise from contact and interaction with persons of different cultures, belief systems, and lifestyles. Believers are challenged in understanding how to relate to those who have a different faith background or no faith background and those who claim some knowledge and belief in God but seem to be living contrary to what they know. Encountering such diversity challenges us in connecting Scriptures to our daily encounters with people who need to hear the truth.

As people of “The Book,” there are times when we must speak the truth into a situation where fear and confusion reign. Only the truth spoken in truth and love (Ephesians 4:15) can bring help and hope. The writer in 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear” (NIV). It is through the perfect love of God that faith overcomes fear. In order for the church to continue to reach the world, we need to be the ones who live without fear by choosing to live out the love of Christ.

How do we do this in a culture where any mention of faith in Christ often brings ridicule and scorn? From the spiritual aspect, we would do well to just follow the example of Jesus Christ. John 1 tells us that the light of God shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome the light. This light came into the world and became flesh and lived among us. When we look at Jesus, we see the One who was able to overcome all things, who walked

into places in society that others looked down upon and hung out with people that were shunned and offered them grace, acceptance and truth. As followers of Jesus Christ, we ought to seek out and welcome those who are outside the faith. As Christians we are to be light upon the hill (Matthew 5:14) demonstrating this light to others.

There are some practical ways we can be light that Jesus can use to dispel the darkness. Foremost, claim the promise of Isaiah 41:10, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (NIV). Holding on to this promise we should practice things like:

1. Being intentional in reaching out to those whom society may overlook.
2. Engage persons by talking and listening to their stories – everyone has a story.
3. Be affirming of their worth and value as a human being made by God.
4. Ask questions that are good, open-ended and genuine.
5. Avoid passing judgment. That's God's prerogative and causes people to become defensive when we do it.
6. Be ready to practice 1 Peter 3:15: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (NIV). As believers, always be ready to tell what you know about Jesus and it's amazing how awesome things can and often do happen as doors are opened and dialogue begins. Then and only then, can we speak the truth and be given a hearing.

Yes, it's true – "All men are driven by faith or fear – one or the other – for both are the same." When our faith and culture collide we don't have to be afraid. As we live in the light of Christ, we can be about the business of blurring the darkness so that the light can shine through. It is time for us to shine brightly and dispel the darkness that has the world in its grip.

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