

Two Kinds of Fear

We live in a difficult time of great fear. But, the thing is—there is a certain kind of fear that some people have, but need to get rid of. And then there is another very different kind of fear that many people need today, but don't have. And with this in mind, I felt compelled to read the Book of Proverbs because this is a wonderful book that is filled with little nuggets of wisdom. And for some reason, that's where I was drawn in search of more fully developing my thoughts on these two completely opposite forms of fear. So, I started at chapter 1 and kept right on through until I reached chapter 17 and it was there that I came across a verse that I found quite troubling. It is the verse found in Proverbs 17:8 and in the *New Living Translation* it reads like this: ***"A bribe is like a lucky charm; whoever gives one will prosper!"*** Proverbs 17:8 (NLT2) Now, I know that doesn't seem to say anything about fear, but actually it does relate to the kind of fear that people lack yet need to bring into their lives. (We'll get to that in a minute.) But, when I first read this verse, I had to check to make sure that I was reading the Bible itself, and not some Mafia version of a Joel Osteen book. And no—when I checked the cover of the book in my hands, it was indeed the Holy Bible—and yes, that is what was written in Proverbs 17:8. And as you may know, King Solomon is credited with writing the Book of Proverbs and assimilating this collection of wise sayings. But, the more that I thought about this verse, I just couldn't understand what was so wise about promoting bribes. So, I decided to turn to the old *King James Version*, hoping that it would clear this up.

This is how the King James Version puts it: ***"A GIFT is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth."*** Proverbs 17:8 (KJV) Now that sounded a bit better—calling it a "gift" and not a bribe. But when I looked into the Hebrew word for "gift" as used in this context, I found that it is the word "*shokhad*" (שֹׁכַחַד). The problem is that a *shokhad* is never used in the sense of a ***disinterested*** gift. There is always a huge element of bribery connected with it, which led me right back to what the New Living Translation basically called a bribe.¹ This was all quite disturbing to me because I know that God's Word—when properly read—is never wrong. So I decided to just ***"sleep on it overnight"*** and let God show me what wisdom was being imparted here by King Solomon. And the next morning, God did exactly that.

I just *happened* upon a news article about a man in Tennessee who cleared the shelves of local stores when he bought up 17,700 bottles of hand sanitizer to sell on Amazon. You see what this man apparently intended to do was to jack up the price on this hand sanitizer while the demand was so high due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, reports have indicated that people whose minds seem to work

along the same greedy lines as this man from Tennessee were inflating the prices of health products on Amazon during this time of crisis.² In fact, some of them have been selling Purell hand sanitizer, ordinarily priced at around \$8.00 per bottle, for as high as \$50.00.³

Now, I know that **bribery** is not the same thing as the greedy **price-gouging** that this man from Tennessee apparently planned to engage in, but the two are closely related because both are forms of corruption and promote injustice. And you can tell by the way the two are presented in God's Word that both **bribery** and making a **dishonest profit** are sins in God's eyes. In fact, other proverbs tell us: **"Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live."** Proverbs 15:27 (ESV) **"Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty."** Proverbs 22:16 (ESV) And even the Psalmist tells us: **"For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD."** Psalm 10:3 (ESV)

And there are serious consequences for those who try to take advantage of others during times of disaster such as we live in today. Again, it is King Solomon who reminds us: **"Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is GLAD AT CALAMITY will not go unpunished."** Proverbs 17:5 (ESV) And that's so true—**price-gougers**, and their cousins—the **bribers**—will not go unpunished, either in this world or the next. And that's where I started to see the connection between a certain kind of fear and people like this price-gouger from Tennessee. This observation of Solomon about bribers helped me to better understand this because both the price-gouger and the briber, and anyone else who flagrantly ignores God's commands—they lack an essential kind of fear that they need to have in their lives. Appropriately enough, it is Solomon's father, King David in Psalm 36, who gives us this insight when he says: **"Sin lurks deep in the hearts of the wicked, forever urging them on to evil deeds. They have NO FEAR OF GOD to hold them back."** Psalm 36:1 (TLB) What they need, and what they lack, is **FEAR OF THE LORD.**

But, just so we are all on the same page, let me define what we mean by "**fear of the Lord.**" As Paul tells us in Romans 8:15, **fear of the Lord** has less to do with being afraid, and more to do with having a loving reverence for God as our Creator and our Father.⁴ **Fear of the Lord** means that we acknowledge that, apart from God, we are nothing. Yet, if you are with Him, you are precious indeed—not because of your own goodness, but because of His. **Fear of the Lord** is realizing that your relationship with God is founded upon His love, mercy and grace and not upon any so-called "**good things**" that we have done. **Fear of the Lord** is understanding what an infinitely awesome God we have—far beyond the limits of what our own tiny minds can conceive. **Fear of the Lord** encompasses a desire to please God by obeying and trusting in Him—even during those times when we cannot

comprehend what is going on in a world that is filled with inexplicable turmoil and chaos that rages all around us. We need to have knowledge of those aspects of the **fear of the Lord**, for as Solomon tells us, **“fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”** Proverbs 1:7 (NIV) When people behave like that price-gouger from Tennessee or that briber that Solomon spoke of, they lack knowledge of any of those things because they have no **fear of the Lord**. And unless they gain that kind of fear, they will end up the way that David closes out Psalm 36—they will lie fallen, in the eternal sense, never to rise again.⁵ Thus, **fear of the Lord** is one of the most important things anyone can have—it is a fear that leads to life-saving courage and faith in Jesus Christ.

But, this other kind of fear is a life destroyer because it saps life of joy and paralyzes those who sadly submerge themselves in this deadly brand of fear. It is the fear of the lonely—for those who have no sense of God’s presence in their lives. It is the fear of the lost—for those who fail to hear God’s words of guidance and ignore His call to follow Him. It is the fear of unknown, and the fear of death, for those who have no hope. How can we be protected against such fears? One of the best answers to that question is provided by the Apostle John. John offers the following cure to such deadly fears: **“There is no fear IN LOVE. But PERFECT LOVE DRIVES OUT FEAR, because fear has to do with punishment. [And then John reveals the real problem of the fearful:] The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”** 1 John 4:18 (NIV) So there you have it—if you don’t want to live your life in a manner that is filled with fear, then you need to be made **perfect in love**. Why?—because **perfect love drives out fear**. So, what does John mean when he says that **“perfect love drives out fear.”** Well, first of all, you need to understand what he means by **“perfect love.”** And the beginning of such understanding comes with the realization that you are not capable of **“perfect love”** and neither am I. Why?—because we are human and the love of human beings is anything but perfect. **Only God’s love is perfect.** It never fails—it even protects us when we face the most fearful of situations.

For those who submit to God’s perfect love, they find that they are under the protection of the Good Shepherd.⁶ And, like David, they can say with absolute confidence: **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”** Psalm 23:4 (NKJV) That is what **God’s perfect love** does—it enables you to **“fear no evil”** even in the most dire of circumstances. And, notice that David doesn’t say that this Good Shepherd promised to show him a way **around** the valley, or some way to **avoid** the valley altogether. No, he is quite clear—this Shepherd takes you straight through the heart of the valley with all its trials and dangers lurking in every shadow. And yet, we have no reason to fear any evil consequences. Why?—because the Shepherd’s **rod and staff** are there to comfort us. What?—a little shepherd’s rod and a

mere staff—they that can offer comfort and safety? What are these things? Shepherds use their rods—which are usually short, club-like sticks—to beat away predators that come after their sheep. Their staffs are a bit longer with curved, crooked ends. And the crooks in their staffs were used by the shepherds to help pull wayward sheep back to safety. But, what kind of rod and staff could this possibly be that is effective even in the valley of the shadow of death?

They are the **rod and staff** of **God's perfect love**. It is interesting that so much of this discussion revolves around David and Solomon. For in 2nd Samuel, God made a promise to David about his son, Solomon. God promised: ¹⁴ **"I will become his father and he will become My son. When he sins, I will correct him with the rod . . ."** ¹⁵ **But my loyal love will not be removed from him."** 2 Samuel 7:14-15 (NET1) Of course, God isn't talking about using an actual physical rod to beat on Solomon. Rather, He is referring to a **figurative rod of correction**—the kind that all of us need from time to time to knock us away from our own crooked paths and back onto the **"straight and narrow."**⁷ Many times Solomon needed discipline for that purpose, and I can't tell you the number of times that I have felt that rod as well. I am sure that you have too. But, why does God do that—discipline us when we go astray? I am sure that God could be doing a billion other more important things, and yet He takes the time out of His busiest of schedules to personally attend to us. Doesn't that tell you something about **God's perfect love**? Solomon himself gives the answer in another of his proverbs: ¹¹ **"My child, don't reject the LORD's discipline, and don't be upset when He corrects you."** ¹² **FOR THE LORD CORRECTS THOSE HE LOVES, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights."** Proverbs 3:11-12 (NLT2) We walk through the valley of the shadow of death every day—it just so happens that it has taken the corona virus to awaken people more acutely to that stark reality which has always been true ever since the day you were born, actually.

And what does the staff of the shepherd represent? The staff with its long curved crook at one end came in handy when a sheep didn't pay attention to where he was walking and ended up falling down in a crevice between two rocks. The shepherd would skillfully reach down with this staff and dislodge the sheep—at times, despite great danger to himself—and then gently raise the lost sheep to safety.⁸ Jesus said: **"I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."** John 10:11 (NASB) And this is no small thing. In fact, it is one of the most significant signs of **perfect love**, for **"greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."** John 15:13 (NASB) The reality is that without **God's rod and staff of perfect love**, you and I would have fallen off a cliff a long time ago.⁹ And in light of this, the Apostle John tells us: **"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him."** 1 John 4:16 (NIV)

So in times like these, what are we to do? Well, the first thing to do is to get rid of one kind of fear—the fears of life, those things that hide in the shadows of the valley that we must all walk through. Cast out that kind of fear aside. But, you can only do that if you accept the other kind of fear—the **fear of the Lord** that brings true life.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He opened the eyes of the blind, He opened the ears of the deaf, and He enabled the lame to walk, skip, jump and run for joy.¹⁰ The Scriptures that tell about these things are not only speaking physical healing—bringing physical sight, or hearing or mending withered legs. Jesus did these physical healings to point to something much more important—to show us a picture of spiritual healing. You see, a person whose physical eyes are blind—they can still go to Heaven. One whose physical ears can't hear—is eligible to enter Heaven's gates. The physically disabled can still walk through the gates of Heaven. But if you are spiritually blind, then you are no better off than that that briber that Solomon spoke of in **Proverbs 17:8**, or that price-gouger from Tennessee. If your spiritual ears are deaf, then the Word of God never gets in—it just bounces off without having any effect. If you are spiritually lame, you might run around thinking you are fine, but spiritually you are just stuck there in that dark, frightful valley with no way to get out. That's where that man from Tennessee is right now. As it turns out, when everyone heard about his intentions, he was condemned by his own community and even by the country at large—not to mention the call he received from the Tennessee Attorney General's Office threatening legal action against him. And yet his reaction was this: "**That's not who I am as a person.**"¹¹ That's the way people react when their spiritual eyes don't see, their ears fail to hear and their legs only take them from one worldly scheme to another.

But for **God's perfect love**, we'd be no better off. When you accept the **love of God and the Holy Spirit** into your heart, you realize that you are just as guilty as a briber, a price-gouger or that thief on the cross, who in the end allowed Jesus to heal His eyes and let Him see his own need for a Savior. And so, when you have the **perfect love of Jesus Christ** in your heart, it empowers you to say something and to know with certainty that it is true. You can state, along with the Psalmist, in total confidence:

¹ "**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.**" Psalm 46:1 (ESV) ² **This I declare that He alone is . . . my place of safety; He is my God, and I am trusting Him.** ³ **For He rescues you from every trap and protects you from the fatal plague.** ⁴ **He will shield you with His wings! They will shelter you. His faithful promises are your armor.** ⁵ **Now you don't need to be afraid of the dark any more, nor fear the dangers of the day;** ⁶ **nor dread the plagues of darkness, nor disasters in the morning . . .** ⁹ **I choose God above all gods to shelter me.** ¹⁰ **How then can evil overtake me or any plague come near?**

Psalm 91:2-6, 9-10 (TLB) And because of that, you need never fear the things of this world again. Amen.

Let's go to God in prayer.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
March 22, 2020
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¹ See the New English Translation Bible study notes on Psalm 17:8 reads: "The term *תְּנִיחַ* (*shokhad*, 'bribe') could be simply translated as 'a gift'; but the second half of the verse says that the one who offers it is successful. At best it could be a gift that opens doors; at worst it is a bribe. The word *תְּנִיחַ* is never used of a disinterested gift, so there is always something of the bribe in it (e.g., [Psalm 15:5](#); [Isaiah 1:23](#)). Here it is 'a stone that brings favor,' the genitive being the effect or the result of the gift. In other words, it has magical properties and 'works like a charm.'"

² Jack Nicas, "The Man with 17,700 Bottles of Hand Sanitizer Just Donated Them," *New York Times*,
<https://www.nytimes.com> (March 15, 2020).

³ Kate Gibson, "A \$220 bottle of Lysol? Coronavirus leads to price-gouging on Amazon,"
<https://www.cbsnews.com> (March 12, 2020).

⁴ Romans 8:15 ¹⁵ For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, "Father! my Father!" (TEV)

⁵ Psalm 36:12 Look! Those who do evil have fallen! They are thrown down, never to rise again. (NLT2)

⁶ John 10:11 [Jesus said:] "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (NASB)

⁷ Matthew 7:13-14 ¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. ¹⁴ How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it. (HCSB)

⁸ Dictionary of Biblical Imagery.

⁹ Jack Wellman, "What's is the Difference between the Rod and the Staff? A Bible Study," www.patheos.com (July 24, 2015).

¹⁰ Matthew 11:4-5 ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. (ESV)

¹¹ Jack Nicas, "The Man with 17,700 Bottles of Hand Sanitizer Just Donated Them," *New York Times*,
<https://www.nytimes.com> (March 15, 2020).