

we can be, we must.

We may for a time need to be extravagantly sensitive to the possibility of God's specific direction in the little things if we are to learn to hear and recognize His voice clearly. At the same time, being unduly concerned by our failure to be as sensitive as we think we should be might lead to living in bondage.

The secret is to commit your way to the Lord, release everything to Him, and go on your way comfortably resting in the peaceful assurance that He is, in fact, in charge. Then increasingly, restfully, allow Him to be.

Afraid of Fear of the Lord

"My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; So he feared Me, and was reverent before My name." Malachi 2:5

"Fear God." 1 Peter 2:17

"Perfecting holiness in the fear of God."
2 Corinthians 7:1

We reject the idea of fearing God as only belonging to the Old Testament under the law, when it is very much a New Testament concept as well. We reject it, thinking it is the opposite of experiencing and living in God's love. We reject it because we think the fear of the Lord would make us unhappy. The truth is that sin, pretense, and unreality cause unhappiness and distress. Just as judgment and justice are part and parcel of God's love, so is godly fear. This reality recognized and accepted gladly makes us happy and free! "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

To pretend that God is not "a consuming fire" is to play the fool, living in pretense. To imagine that the fear of God is the opposite of the love of God is to be misled indeed. To think the purpose of His fire is to make us miserable and frightened is folly. The fire of His love consumes only the destructive and hurtful to set us free, not to make us unhappy.

To accept the goodness of fearing God is wisdom indeed. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). To fear God is not, as we tend to think, the opposite of living contentedly accepted in the beloved. It is not to make us perpetually uncom-

fortable in Him. It is to know that displeasing Him is to act destructively toward ourselves, others, and all that is good. It is to know that pleasing Him is the greatest happiness we can find.

The lack of this fear of God limits our maturing spiritually. An important part of the motivation to godliness is missing, leaving Christianity emasculated, without virility and spiritual dynamic. Deep inside where our inner drives and motivations lie buried, we think we can do as we want without cost to us. In effect, we think that we can put one over on God, a god we've put in chains to a misconceived love.

To fear God is simply to recognize and live in the reality that God is both loving and just, Savior and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. It is to recall that we will answer to Him someday for the deeds done in the body. It is to know that in order to be love, He must hate sin as that which destroys. Finally He must destroy the destructive force of sin so that love may eternally reign supreme.

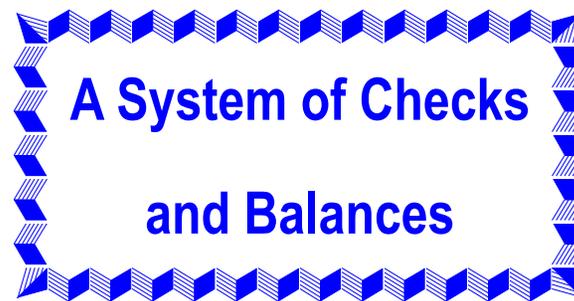
We must flee the plague of erratic swings of theology from period to period. Our present-day theology has emasculated God and made Him a softy. This is not at all necessary to maintain His limitless love. The fiercest of beasts are the most tender with their offspring. At the same time, they're capable of training and disciplining them to be strong and mature.

To fear God rightly is to see God as pure and holy, delightful, attractive and precious on the one hand. On the other, it is to accept deliverance from our desire to hide from a hideous God manufactured by the devil's lies.

He is more lovely because He is balanced and complete. If His love incapacitated Him to judge the sin and sinners that could destroy all which is good, He would be incapable of loving us enough to purge the world. He would be incapacitated to return wholeness, health, love, gentleness, kindness, beauty, and joy unlimited to His universe. He wouldn't be God!

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By: Pastor Ron Marr

"I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me." Psalm 57:2

The question is often asked whether there is a serious danger in placing all the responsibility on God for the living of the Christian life. Yes, there certainly is.

We have a great responsibility. We are to hear His call, come and look to Him, seek and worship Him, rest and remain in Him, content to have Him work in us the desire and the capacity to receive all He has to give us and allow Him to take from us all that hurts and destroys. Out of this grows the heart desire to please, obey, honor, and serve Him.

He both initiates and empowers the spiritual operations of the Christian life. But whether we hear Him, come to Him, and receive of Him still remains with us. We are also accountable for whether we will seek to please and obey, honor and serve Him.

However, to try to hear, come, receive, or obey in the energy of the flesh is self-defeating, just as any other fleshly response. We can truly respond only in the trust and faith given us by God. In this sense, all is of Him.

Any action of spiritual and eternal value that seems to be ours is simply the result or continuation of His action in us. Thus, it is more truly His action than it is ours. Unless and until we see it this way, we are stealing the credit that belongs to God.

To learn to rest in Christ's finished work for us and the Spirit's continuing work in us is a lifelong process. We certainly don't begin there. So, if the choice is between carelessness about the things of God and self-centered works, some of us may need to err on the side of works for a time. In God's grace, He may use even this to

A SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES

bring us finally to see the futility of our works and come to rest in His finished work and present working.

Self-discipline and Self-denial

I have just been challenged by a book on the place of discipline in the Christian life. I could respond well to it because it started out, as most do not, emphasizing the priority of our personal relationship with God and the necessity of giving Him our attention.

If this approach to living the Christian life makes God and His work in you more real and dynamic than does my approach, I am content. But at least let me insist that you need always to keep the order straight. Put God first, then you; His work, then yours; His initiative, your response; His dynamic, your acceptance of His dynamic.

Let me insist upon it being His life in you. Let me insist upon it all being in no confidence in the flesh. Let Him be first!

Then, if it helps you to emphasize the importance of a disciplined response to His in-working, if you believe that is God's voice to you, please give it heed! It is not possible to stress obedience too much. Just do not try to convince yourself that genuine spiritual obedience to God is humanly possible. Give precedence to the growing relationship of your heart and spirit to God through Christ which alone makes real heart obedience possible.

Real Danger

I hope that I have not given the impression that I advocate total passivity and no personal responsibility on the part of the believer. This is certainly not my wish.

However, this is not my greatest danger, nor is it that of most Christians I know who are seeking to learn to walk humbly with our God. We are in far greater danger of failing to rest dependently in Him to be everything we need to live in a Christianity that really works.

Do's and Don'ts

The demands of the New Testament are so many and so great that for most of my years I saw it as a book of law, of things I had to do to please God. Why, if resting in His life in us is the secret of spiritual life, should it be so?

First, the carnal Christian isn't ready to receive rest to replace self-effort. He needs external direction to keep him from straying too far from the path of right living.

Second, even external obedience has some benefits. The temporal blessings such as happier human relationships or healthier bodies are missed by those who live ungodly lives. Also, our failure to live up to our standards of obedience may finally force us to depend on the Lord and His grace.

Finally, since Christ lives in all of His own, His life all the time working in us, we should properly understand all the instructions of the New Testament as given to the new man, not I, but Christ in me. They can't be read as though the independent I were to perform them. Only the new life that is Christ, His grace, and His might at work in me is capable.

Rest versus Activity

Finding a balance between resting in the Lord and responsible activity is not easy to achieve or maintain. Perhaps it is not really a balance that is needed so much as a correct view of rest and responsibility. Living in the Lord and His peace is the golden secret of a Christianity that really works. However, some of us can easily fall into pretending to live in the Lord in peace when we are really just being lazy and unresponsive to God's working in us.

Our minds, hearts, and wills need to be trained in practical spiritual exercise to respond to the Lord's drawing. Using the faculties God has graciously provided need not be a work of the flesh, but irresponsibility, laziness, and carelessness certainly are. A supposed rest in Christ that more genuinely resembles these than it does the peace of God is a work of the flesh. However, to demand of ourselves more diligent effort than the Spirit has yet produced in us will also be fleshly.

"Where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). So we must allow ourselves to be led of the Lord in liberty, free from demands for supposedly spiritual effort on one hand or superficial quietness and rest on the other. Be free of needing to accomplish any particular thing, to feel peace, or to experience anything else in order to be content in Christ.

Here is true freedom in the Spirit: to be at His disposal, to live freely in Him as He lives in us, to rest content in Him and His peace wherever we find ourselves and so allow His life to course through us, mightily enabling us to resist the devil, to exercise ourselves energetically unto godliness, and to labor in holy fear so as to bring to completion the salvation He has freely given us. This is the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Instant Experience or Long-term Change

Whatever instant experience you lay claim to must be authenticated by changes in your life that mirror Christ. To lay claim to any experience from God without being emptied of yourself, or without even having any great wish to be, is to play word games and bring disgrace on the name of the Lord. To be pressed by people or doctrine into a premature decision or commitment is to endanger the process by which the Lord is drawing you to Himself in love. To conclude that some experience is all you need to live the Christian life satisfactorily can lead only to frustration and failure, or to living in hypocrisy.

Let any experience with God be only a step forward in your walk with Him. Let it lead to more forward steps as you live looking to Him in increasing dependence for everything.

A Matter of Scale

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Proverbs 3:5-6

The need of being led and guided by the Spirit of God in more of the details of our lives is a major part of becoming really dependent on the Lord. It is the opposite of being self-dependent. I confess I have much to learn about being sensitive to the Lord's leading in the so-called little things of life.

Often it is difficult to achieve a balance between trying too hard to know God's specific will on whether to go to the bank or the post office first, and on the other hand being insensitive to His special intervention in even such mundane matters. Often we resent the very idea of being thus dependent on the Lord. But we will surely find that to be as happy, content, and at peace as