

3. Understanding Why Many Christian Leaders Are Driven by Fear

In our last topic, we discussed why worldly leaders are driven by fear. We also saw that Christ wants to help Christians learn to act out of love. That brings us to an important question. Why is it that many Christian leaders are driven by fear? That will be the focus of our topic today. Then, in future topics, we will look at the Biblical principles to help developing Christian leaders learn to be led by the Holy Spirit, so they will lead others rather than drive them.

In Galatians 2:11-13, we see a time when Peter was driven by fear. Those verses tell us, “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ Peter became fearful of other Christians
- ◆ Peter withdrew himself from other Christians
- ◆ Peter separated himself from other Christians
- ◆ Peter was fearful of those Christians who followed the Jewish dietary restrictions
- ◆ Peter caused other Jews to also act as hypocrites

First, we see that Peter became fearful of other Christians. One of the things to notice is that it was other Christians who caused this fear, not unbelievers. Acts 15:13 indicates that James was the leader of the church at Jerusalem. The Jews in Jerusalem still followed the dietary restrictions of the Jews, even though they had become Christians. Acts 21:20 tells us, “And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.’” Notice that the Jews in Jerusalem were all still zealous for the law, even though they had agreed in Acts 15 that the Gentiles were not under the Jewish law.

Second, we see that Peter withdrew himself from the Gentile Christians and no longer ate with them. This is the same Peter who spoke to Cornelius in Acts 10:28. “Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.’” However, here we see that his fear of the Jewish brothers from Jerusalem caused him to withdraw from Gentiles. The word that is translated “withdraw” speaks of one who is timid or fearful and afraid to say what they believe. Peter was acting out his inner fears as he withdrew from the Galatian Christians.

Third, we see that Peter separated himself from the Galatian Christians. Here, we see that Peter was creating a boundary or barrier between himself and the Gentile Christians. This immediately created an “us” and “them” attitude. Later, when James wrote to the Jews who were scattered in other countries, he told them that such an attitude is sin. James 2:8-9 says, “If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” That is the reason Paul publicly rebuked Peter in Galatians 2:11.

Fourth, we see that Peter was fearful of other Christians that he thought might not accept the freedom that we have in Christ. This was true even though he was the one who had originally told the Jews in Jerusalem about the salvation of the Gentiles. In Acts 11:17-18, Peter said, “‘If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He* gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” Here, we see how easy it is for Christian leaders to act out of fear.

Fifth, we see that Peter also caused other Jews to act as hypocrites. Here, we see the impact of a leader. When a leader acts out of fear and sins, that leader will also lead others to commit sin. Even Barnabas who had already spent one ministry trip traveling with Paul was influenced to follow the example of Peter. Here, we see the tremendous negative impact of a spiritual leader who is driven by fear. It will even have a negative impact on other spiritual leaders.

Romans 7:14-25 gives us an example of what happens when Christians, including Christian leaders, act in fear because they are depending on their own strength. In those verses, we see that the words “I”, “me”, “my” and “myself” are used 37 times. This is the passage on “I” trouble. Romans 7:19 gives the summary of how we act when we depend on our own strength. That verse says, “For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.” Then, Romans 7:24 tells how we feel because of what we do in our own strength, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” It is no wonder that Christian leaders who are depending on their own strength and acting out of fear most of the time feel so discouraged.

Now, we need to go back to the question, Why are many Christian leaders driven by fear? The answer to that question is found in the teaching that Christ gave to His disciples the night before He was crucified. In John 15 Christ compared Himself to a vine and us to the branches. In John 15:4 Christ said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”

In John 18:10, Peter was standing next to Christ when the Jewish religious leaders came to arrest Christ. Because he was standing next to Christ, Peter was very bold. John 18:10 says, “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.” As Christ was arrested and led away, Luke 22:54 says, “And Peter followed afar off.” John 18:17, 25 and 27 go on to tell us that instead of Peter being bold, Peter denied Christ three times. Here, we see the results of failing to abide in Christ. When we depend on ourselves, we will always act out of fear.

That is why Christ promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to live within us. In John 14:16-17 Christ promised, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” Then, in Acts 24:49 Christ told the same disciples, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Christ knew

that the disciples would act in fear if they depended on their own strength. As Christians we are powerless in our own strength. We will only act with boldness at those times when we are yielding to the Holy Spirit.

This is seen clearly in the book of Acts. In Acts 1:8, Christ said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Here, we see that Christ was going to send the Holy Spirit to provide the power to be witnesses. We see the results of depending on the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:29-31. Those verses say, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

When we depend on our own strength, we will not act with boldness. We saw that illustrated by Peter the night that Christ was arrested. We also saw that illustrated by Peter in Galatians 2:11-13.

Paul reminded Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” Here, we see that Paul chose to remind Timothy that we do not need to act out of fear. Our human spirit will be controlled by fear when we depend on our own strength. However, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and when we yield to the Spirit and depend on the Spirit this verse says that we have:

- The Spirit of power
- The Spirit of love
- The Spirit of a sound mind (self-control)

First, when we yield to the Holy Spirit, we will be able to act in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the basic reason why Christians can act in love instead of fear. They do not have to depend on themselves. Instead, they can ask Christ to give them His power. In each situation where we pray and ask Christ to give us His power, we will act in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of our own strength.

Second, we see that we have been given the Spirit of love. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” In this verse, we see that the Spirit also gives us the power to speak the truth. The Spirit also guides us as we speak the truth so that we are able to speak the truth in love instead of fear. When we speak the truth in love, we will build bridges to others rather than barriers.

Third, we see that as we yield to the Holy Spirit that we are able to exercise self-control. This means that we ask the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom to make wise choices and then carry out those choices. Many people can talk but there are no actions to carry out what they say. In contrast, the Holy Spirit guides us to make wise choices and then gives us the power to carry out those choices.

As we can see, the Lord has not called us to develop leaders who are driven by fear. Instead, He has called us to develop leaders who are led by love. We will develop leaders who are led by love as they see our example because we are leading in love. May the Lord richly bless you as you develop leaders who are learning to be led by the love of Christ and who are acting in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of their own strength.