

Fear is NOT an Excuse by Carl McMurray

A few years ago I listened to a lesson on fear and the power of love where the speaker illustrated his point with his own child. It seems that he was greeting folks coming into worship one day when one of the visitors leaned over and spoke to his young son. The youngster promptly ducked his head and hid behind his mother as young ones do sometimes. Dad excused himself momentarily and took his son into a nearby classroom to explain to him about 1 Corinthians 13:5; love does not “act unbecomingly” or love is “not rude.” Jesus wants us to love people, especially these visitors, he explained to his young son, not be rude to them. When an adult speaks to you, he continued, the loving and polite thing to do is to smile, shake hands, and speak back in a friendly way.

Frankly, I was amazed. This young teacher was training his son early in right actions toward others. Where I and many others would have passed off the behavior as just immature and bashful (fearful!), this young man had hit exactly on the principle Jesus taught in Matthew 25:14-30. Fear is not an excuse.

In Matthew 25 three servants are given stewardship of the Master’s money, “each according to their ability.” One is given five talents (a weight of gold or silver, i.e. a sum of money), another two talents, and yet another one talent. You know the parable. The one given five talents made five more. The one given two talents made two more. And what of the one given one talent? Verse 25 says he buried it to keep it safe and gave it back to the Master untouched and unused. He explained that it was because he was afraid, and we immediately understand how he felt.

We understand that fear paralyzes, it freezes us into immobility. We understand that fear panics. It makes us do things (like digging holes and burying talents) that we wouldn’t do if we thought about it in another situation. We understand that fear IS a sign of immaturity, like a young boy burying his head in his mother’s skirts. So we shake our heads and we understand this servant, just as we smile and excuse the youngster who hides behind his mother, and WE MISS THE POINT. Jesus was teaching that fear is not an excuse. The Master did not excuse the servant because of his fear, He labeled him. Jesus said that this servant was “wicked and lazy.” He was wicked because he didn’t do the will of the Master, and he was lazy because he didn’t do anything, and fear was no excuse.

Fear is no excuse for not greeting and thus showing love to those who visit our worship services. Fear is no excuse for failing to show hospitality. A man actively pursues his career and shows a talent for leadership, or decision making, or teaching, or accounting, or sales. Then he comes to church and sits quietly, refusing opportunities to get involved or learn new ways to serve. When pressed, he might laugh it off and talk about his fears. Jesus isn't laughing, and fear is not an excuse.

You see, love overcomes fear. It casts out fear, 1 John 4:18. To admit to fear keeping us from doing what we know is right is to admit to a lack of love. We are like the disciples who sat next to Jesus in a boat tossed by the storm, and we are fearful. Jesus said they lacked faith; fear was not an excuse for them. Do we get motivation, and love's power, and even love's definition in four different Greek words so that we can turn into wicked, lazy servants who allow fear to overcome our love? In 2 Timothy 1:7 the apostle says it is power, and love, and discipline that we have been given, not the fearful spirit of timidity.

Let me encourage you to look to Christ and what He wants of you for your motivation and do not focus on your own fears or how you may feel about something. Look for and use your talents, for this is how you love God and His son. Fear is not an excuse.