

# The Fear of Man

by Jono Sims

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*The fear of man is a snare that immobilizes and idolatry rooted in pride, leading to compromise and disobedience, but we can overcome it by putting trust in the Lord and having confidence in God as our refuge.*

**Duration:** 32:52

**Scripture:** Proverbs 29:25, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Fear Of Man", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the topic of the fear of man and its impact on our lives. He acknowledges that overcoming this fear may not happen immediately, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, it is possible. The speaker highlights four key aspects of the fear of man, including prioritizing the approval of man over God, seeking praise from others rather than from God, focusing on pleasing man rather than God, and using speech to manipulate others' opinions of oneself. The speaker encourages the audience to be transparent and honest with God, allowing Him to search their hearts and thoughts on this matter.

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## Transcript

Proverbs chapter 29 and verse number 25. I just want to read one verse tonight. Proverbs chapter 29 verse 25 in the Old Testament.

This is what the word of God says. The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe. The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.

Let me begin tonight, I want to ask you a few questions. How much time do you spend worrying about what people think about you? How often do you find yourself paying attention to the inflection of someone's voice? Or reading their body language? Do you find yourself frequently trying to read other people's facial expressions? In an attempt to find out if they're mad at you or upset with you? How often do you find yourself doing things that you really don't want to do or even feel led to do because you feel like somebody expects you to do it? Do you frequently worry about how something is going to affect your reputation? Are you disappointed when people don't notice or acknowledge the things that you do? And a follow-up to that would be, do you ever find yourself fishing for compliments? Have you ever found yourself tiptoeing around a particular person because you fear that you might lose their fellowship or their friendship? Or this might be an individual that you believe has the power to hurt you. Do you ever show favoritism toward individuals that you deem important? Do you ever avoid conflict for fear of the consequences? Let me ask you this, are you offended when you're corrected? How much time do you

spend thinking and reasoning against the correction that someone has given to you? Is anxiety a normal or a regular part of your life? Do you possess and walk in a deep abiding joy or are you uptight a lot? How you respond to those questions honestly before the Lord reveals probably that you struggle with what our Lord calls the fear of man.

It's called being a people pleaser. It's called insecurity. There are many names.

Lou Priolo calls it being, I like this, an approval junkie. I ask these questions because I've got to be honest with you, I understand them. They come from my life.

I struggle with virtually and have struggled with virtually every one of those things that I've mentioned in question form. And tonight I find myself on a pilgrimage that began way back of God setting me free from the fear of man. And I've got to be honest with you, it's been a battle.

And I really tonight don't feel qualified to preach this message but yet it's clearly what the Lord wants me to do. He wouldn't let me off the hook. I tried to get off.

The Lord wouldn't let me off the hook. So with the Holy Spirit's help tonight, I hope through the preaching of the Word of God to expose this debilitating sin so that you might begin the journey toward freedom as I have. As I've thought about the fear of man.

As I've looked at my own life and the lives of those that I've pastored for 18 years. And I've got to be honest with you, as I look at my own children and my own family. I believe that I can trace many if not most of the sins that I see in people's lives back to the fear of man.

Think with me for just a second. I know some pastors who will not practice discipline in their churches knowing it's biblical. Even admitting it.

Why? Fear of man. They fear the consequences. I know a lot of pastors who believe, as I do, the doctrines of grace.

But they won't preach them for fear of loss of reputation in our convention and denomination. You know what you call that? Fear of man. I know grown men and women in my church, a couple come to mind as I preach this.

That this very night are still crippled because they are trying to win the approval of an over-dominant mother or father. There's a lady in my church back in Shelbyville. And a grown woman with children that still is under this yoke of a dominating, an over-domineering mother.

You know what you call that? The fear of man. There's a man in my Sunday school class that won't discipline his rebellious son. And his excuse is, I'm afraid I'm going to push him away.

You know what you call that? The fear of man. There are girls in our youth group. There's probably girls and ladies and young ladies and all ladies and men too.

Here tonight and in my church. But there are women and young girls and girls who will dress inappropriately. Because they desire the approval of some boy or hope to catch some person's eye.

Or receive the approval of their peers. You know what you call that? The fear of man. There are people in this room tonight, head over heels in debt trying to keep up their image.

You call that the fear of man. I have got to have a talk with one of my daughters when I get back home. I try not to ever mention their names.

And I really try to never use my family as an illustration. But she didn't take a stand on a particular issue. And her excuse to me was, I just can't do that.

And she's just young. But you know what you call that? The fear of man. Listen to me.

The fear of man is why this very evening, some people will not join First Baptist Church most of the shelves. They know this church is a biblical church. And they know that Brother Jeff is preaching the word of God.

They know that this church is anchored on the word of God. But they won't join this church because of things that have been said in the community. They're afraid of what people will say.

They're afraid of what their family will think. You know what you call that? The fear of man. Maybe you are beginning to get the point.

It is amazing how much we do or don't do because in our hearts we are motivated by an overwhelming desire for the approval of man. Praise God we got one scream, amen? That just about sent me into revival right there. I'm just being honest with you.

Just thank God we had some movement, man. Really, would the Holy Spirit's help. Would the Holy Spirit's help tonight.

I want to ask you to do this. If I ask you to do something, will you do it? Are you listening to me? Will you please tonight, with the Holy Spirit's help, be completely transparent and honest with God. Would you tonight open up your heart and open up your mind and allow God to search your heart and try your thoughts on this matter of the fear of man.

I just finished reading this book. I've never really been a huge book recommender. But this is one I've got to recommend.

And I hope you'll come up and take a look at it and write it down. Boy, what an apt picture on the front there. Your little dog trying to balance that ball just pleases Master.

It's called Pleasing People. How to Not Be an Approval Junkie by Lou Priolo. I learned of this through MacArthur's Grace Books International.

And it's endorsed by Stuart Scott, Martha Peace, and Wayne Mack. Every person in this room ought to read this book. Everybody ought to get it.

And everybody ought to read it. In the front of the book, he gives a little short test, which he admits is not a scientific test per se. But by answering those questions, if you're brutally honest and if you're brutally transparent, it will help you to see if you have this problem with loving approval, what the Bible calls the fear of man.

I'm only going to mention them. I've got a lot of ground to cover. In his introduction, Priolo gives ten things that identify an approval junkie.

And I'm not even going to elaborate on them. I'm just going to give them to you. I'm not even going to comment on them.

Number one, an approval junkie, someone who has the fear of man, fears the displeasure of man more than the displeasure of God. Number two, he desires the praise of man above the praise of God. Number three, he studies what it takes to please man as much or more as what it takes to please God.

Number four, his speech is designed to entice others to think well of him. Number five, he's a respecter of persons. Number six, he's oversensitive to correction or the dissatisfaction or disapproval of others.

Number seven, he outwardly renders eye service to man instead of sincere ministry to the Lord. Number eight, he selfishly uses the gifts and the abilities God has given him for God's glory, for his own personal benefit. Number nine, he spends more resources in establishing his honor instead of the honor of God.

And lastly, he says, the people pleaser is discontent with the proportion God has given him, always wanting more. I've got to be honest with you, I'm a little bit overwhelmed tonight as I think about this subject because this is something that God has been doing in me for quite some time. But at the outset, I have purposed in my heart to keep it simple.

And I'll tell you what I shared with the pastor tonight as we discuss the things of God. Who knows? I cannot see into the divine, sovereign will of God. But I think this message tonight may not just whoof, you know, result in immediate liberation.

But maybe this message with the Holy Spirit's aid and assistance tonight will do for you what it has done for me. And that is prompt you to begin this pilgrimage of freedom from the fear of man. The truth is, it's probably been in our lives so long and we've been unaware of it for so long that it's going to require some struggle.

And it's going to require some effort in order for us to be free of this sin. Now, from this text, I just want to point out four things about the fear of man. Four things about the fear of man.

If I don't tell you this now, I'll forget. Let me just tell you one practical way. I could list 50, but I just want to list one that I've struggled in this way.

I can't tell you how many times after I've preached that I just hoped and longed that somebody would come up and approve me. I can't tell you how many times after I've stepped out of the pulpit, I've been so disappointed because nobody said a word and nobody said anything. And I'd get in the van and I know my wife must think I like a broken record because I'd go fishing.

And I'd say, well, what did you think? What was the service like? Well, what did you think about the message? And I've done that so many times. And I can't tell you the numbers of times that I've left church so depressed and so dejected and so defeated in my thinking because someone didn't affirm me. In his book, Priolo said, I used to be just like that.

And he said, then one day on my pilgrimage to freedom, he said, God just spoke to my heart. He said, now I leave the pulpit, go to the front pew and say, Father, was that OK with you? Were you pleased with that? Because if you were pleased, nothing else matters. Man, that is exciting.

That is so liberating. Just that one statement was worth the price of the book and set me free in that area. So this is what I'm talking about.

The fear of man, number one, immobilizes. The fear of man can immobilize you. Notice what the text says.

The fear of man is a what? A snare. Now, that word fear literally means anxiety. Boy, we're in an anxious world, aren't we? And I'm telling you right now, all the popping pills and psychiatry and psychology isn't helping a thing because it's a spiritual problem.

The fear of man, anxiety, the theological wordbook of the Old Testament translates this word fear as a quaking or a trembling. It literally is used in Exodus 19, 18 of when Israel quaked before the trumpet blast voice of God as the law was given on Mount Sinai. This is a kind of fear that motivates people to shudder.

This is the kind of fear that causes people to move. And fear is a great motivator. Fear can cause people to move.

It can cause people to go places. It can cause people to do things. And that's the idea here.

You say, wait, I thought you said fear immobilized. Now you're talking about movement. Yep.

But notice where it moves you to. He says the fear of man is a snare. It motivates you.

It moves you to a snare. Driver says, and I'm a hunter, I love this. Driver says this word snare in the original Hebrew is the upper jaw of a snare.

It's the movable part of the trap that comes down on the animal's leg or whatever it happens to catch. The animal steps in, it trips the trigger, and here's that huge upper iron jaw that comes clamping down. He said the fear of man is like that huge, huge iron jaw that just comes down on your life and locks you down.

Both sides of my family came from Marion County in Hamilton, Alabama. And I was out with my granddaddy. I grew up with knives and guns.

It's wonderful. And we were walking around, and I had a 20-gauge shotgun before I could breathe. And they had put beaver traps out on my great-grandmother's pond, damn, because you know what beavers can do to a pond? Just absolutely destroy it.

And so they bartered with this guy that if he'd come put the traps out, he could have the pelts, you know, how that works. And so we were out one day, and my granddad and I ran up on one of these beaver traps, and then that beaver trap was nothing but a leg. I said, what is that, papa? He said, well, sometimes if a trap only gets one leg of a beaver, he'll twist, twist, twist, turn, turn, turn, until he actually gnaws that leg completely off.

Folks, that's the desire to get free right there. There are some of you who need to be like that beaver tonight. You're in a trap.

It's called the fear of man, and you may have to twist some members off, but you've got to do everything to get yourself free before God in this area. The fear of man will immobilize you. The fear of man will absolutely shut you down.

I know people who won't witness. You know why? Fear of man. I know people that, as I've said, won't join a church because they're snared by the fear of man.

Brother David, some people won't teach small groups. You know why? Fear of man. Some people in this very room tonight may be planning on compromising their convictions because they're snared by the lust for approval.

I know people who won't tithe for fear of what their spouse will say or their family will say. And I've met young men who will not acknowledge an obvious call of God on their lives because they're snared by the approval of man. What snare do you have on your life today? What snare has channeled you, funneled you toward being immobilized? That iron jaw has come down on you, and you find yourself channeled and funneled into a trap.

The fear of man immobilizes. Number two, the fear of man is idolatry. It not only immobilizes, but it's idolatry.

Let me make a statement, and with God's help I'll try to explain it. Fear is idolatry, but its root is pride. Write that down.

Fear is idolatry, but it is rooted in pride. Now let me unpack it. First of all, fear is idolatry.

You must get this, or the message is debunked right here. I counted 48 times different passages that instruct me and you to fear the Lord. I counted 23 passages that instruct us, fear God.

I counted another 31, and I'm sure I missed some, that talk about fear of the Lord. Did you know that fear in the Bible is closely associated with worship? The word fear, again, as I've already said, was used in Exodus 19, 18, when the Israelites trembled before Mount Sinai at the giving of the law to Moses. If you're listening, would you say amen? Church, listen now.

When you fear something, it has your attention. When you fear something, it occupies your focus. When you fear something, you give respect to that thing.

You give care to that thing. When Israel was before the mount, and Moses was there, and God was giving the decalogue, and the trumpet voice of God was going out, and God warned the people not to come too close, or they would die. Man, they were focused on God.

They were intently gazing on God. God had their attention. God had their respect.

God had their devotion. When you fear man, man has your attention. Man has your focus.

Man has your respect. Man has your worship. And let me ask you a question.

When you worship anything other than God, what is that called? Bingo. Idolatry. The fear of man is idolatry, but the second thing is this.

It is rooted in pride. Think about it. Why do you fear man? Why do you flatter? Why do you kiss up, even to ungodly people? Why do you compromise? I can tell you in a minute.

Because you desire something, don't you? You hope it advances your cause. You hope to personally benefit from this action. Your own selfish pride feeds your lust for approval.

And all idolatry is rooted in man's own selfish pride to place himself first above God's will for his life. King Saul pridefully kept King Amalek alive, his sheep, his oxen, in direct violation of the word of God. His own reckless pride caused him to seek his will above the clearly revealed word of God.

To which Samuel responded, Hath the Lord great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fad of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and as stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

The fear of man immobilizes. The fear of man purely and simply is idolatry, which is rooted in the human heart of depravity, and it's called pride. Number three.

The fear of man immobilizes. The fear of man is idolatry. Let's establish this fact, though.

The fear of man is iniquity. It is a sin. The fear of man is a sin.

Write this down. 1 Samuel 15, 24. Again, it's the story of Saul, Samuel, and Amalek.

And after Saul kept the king, Amalek, alive and the best of the sheep and the oxen in direct violation of the word of God, Samuel, the man of God, thank God he didn't fear man, came to the king and he confronted the king and he told him the word of the Lord and he said, God has rejected you because you rejected the word of the Lord. And listen to the words of King Saul. I have sinned.

I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. You know what Saul was saying? Saul was saying, I feared man more than God. I gave allegiance to man instead of God.

I gave my devotion to man instead of God. I sought to please the people instead of the Lord of the people. The fear of man cost him his kingship.

It ultimately cost him his life. I just merely state this tonight because I hear people ignorantly say things like, well, desire for approval is innocent. Desire for approval is harmless.

Desire for approval is common. It may be common, but it's not innocent and harmless. The Bible says, purely and simply, it is a crippling sin.

And listen to me, the progress of sanctification in your life is going to be halted until you deal with this sin. This is major. This is a stronghold.

The fear of man immobilizes. It will shut you down. It will stop you dead in your tracks.

Because the fear of man is idolatry and the Lord will not walk forward with idolaters. The fear of man is iniquity. It is a sin.

And if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. Lastly, let me talk to you very quickly about freedom from the fear of man. It's a complete contradiction.

The last part of the verse is the antithesis of the first part. I mean, it's night and day. Do you understand what I'm saying? The fear of man is a snare, but... See, but marks a contrast, a change.

The fear of man over here is the iron trap that you call harmless and innocent, that has you locked down for effectiveness for the kingdom of God. But, on the opposite side of that, whoever puts his trust in the Lord will be safe. The word trust means to put your confidence in the Lord.

It literally means that the Lord is your refuge. And he adds the word, if you trust in the Lord, you will be safe. In the Hebrew, it means God will set you up on high.

He will build around you a stronghold, a military fortress. He probably sung it right here in this church. For thou hast been a shelter unto me, a strong tower from the enemy.

I will abide in your tabernacle forever. I will trust in the cover of your wings. Selah.

Psalms 61, 3 and 4. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and they are safe. What this means is this.

When you are in the Lord, who can reach you? When you are set up on his holy hill, who can hurt you? When you are exalted under the wings of the shepherd, what foe can assail you? What confidence, what boldness we have in the Lord. The book of Hebrews says, let your conversation be without covetousness. And be content with such things as you have.

For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. And I will not fear what men will do to me.

The psalmist says, the Lord is on my side. I will not fear what can men do to me. The Lord takes my part with those who help me.

Therefore, shall I see my desire upon those who hate me? It is better to put trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. But to me, the text that just absolutely is the nail in the coffin.

I, even I am the great I am. Amen. I, even I am he that comforteth you.

Who are you that will fear a man that will die? You know what the Lord is saying? I am the eternal, self-existent, ever-living God. And you are going to fear a sack of dirt with air in it? I am God. Do not you give that fear to her? Do not you give that fear to him? You give that reverence to me.

That is my property. That belongs to me. And I am jealous over it.

Put your confidence in me. Do not put your confidence in princes. Do not put it in the Republicans.

Praise God, do not put it in the Democrats. The Lord says, who are you that will fear a man that will die? And the son of man that will be made as grass. And forget the Lord your maker that stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.

And you feared every day because of the fury of the oppressor. God says, well, I have got a question for you. Where is the oppressor? He will not get to you unless he comes through me.

So let me be your confidence. Brother Jeff, I just feel inadequate because I feel like this is so incomplete. But I tell you what I am going to tell you.

Are you listening to me? That is as far as I have gotten in my pilgrimage. So here is what I want to ask you to do. Bow your heads.

And silently seek God. And ask Him, Lord, is the fear of man in me? And let God begin the pilgrimage tonight of setting you free from a snare and a trap that is not God's will for your life.

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