

1. Response to the Gospel of the God with Holy Justice: Reverent FEAR

a. And fear came upon the church

i. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira by God was terrifying to the church itself

1. That is, those who knew of God's grace, who understood the provision and power of God's gift of His Spirit, and who understood the resurrection promise, were terrified by the reality that God takes pretense so seriously
2. This is the common response of those who get close to God and the ferocity of His power (even without judgment)
 - a. Exodus 34:6-8 – The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." ⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.
 - b. Isa 6:5; Judg 6:22; Judg 13:22
 - c. Luke 5:8

ii. We tend to think of fear as always a negative thing, a bad thing, but it is not always something to be negated

1. Fear is simply the response of a weaker, limited, being in the presence of a more powerful being
 - a. Fear does not, necessarily, question the intentions of the stronger being
 - b. Rather, fear acknowledges its own weakness before a greater power and responds with humility
2. There is, certainly, faithless fear which ascribes something other than God as most powerful, therefore ceases to trust the word of the Lord
3. But, the acknowledging “fear of the Lord” is something which is always virtuous in the Scriptures, as the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10) , a motivation for sanctification (1 Cor 7:1), of mutual submission to one another for each others' flourishing (Eph 5:21), the manner of our obedience to the Lord's Word (Phil 2:12), informing our war against sin (1 Tim 5:20)

iii. “great fear”

1. This fear which befell the Church at the expression of God's holy judgment and desire for purity was a “great” fear
 - a. It was the fear of hypocrisy, of sin, of cozying up to the things which the Lord hates and judges
 - b. Note that the Church, in its great fear, did not withdraw from God, nor hide from Him, but ran TO Him in order to eradicate the hypocrisy and pretense of the heart
2. Both in its quality (their actions were altered) and in its scope
 - a. “entire church”
 - b. This was a revival of the Church by separation from functional sin – a Scottish revival of division through judgement which purified the Church and made it more healthy than it was in totality
 - i. It may have been smaller, but it was purer in its consistency with Truth

b. There were some who responded to the gospel of grace and holiness, signified by the works of healing and the fatal judgment against pretense, with **fearful interest**

i. None of the ‘rest’ were daring to unite with them

1. These people believed in the power of God, but not in His mercy in Christ
2. The people of Jerusalem were scared of the Church
 - a. There is something about judgement which gives people pause, which we should expect when we seek to walk in holiness with our God

- b. There is something about the God who judges which gives people pause, who don't want to walk too closely, lest God judge them, too
 - c. Until people see the greatness of God's holy justice AND see the greatness of God's holy provision of grace in Christ Jesus, they will not draw too closely, but will remain outside
 - ii. but the people were "declaring them great"
 - 1. Yet, the people also respected the church and considered them something powerful, praiseworthy, and important
 - a. It wasn't marketing or spin which made such an impression on the rest
 - b. It was humble, joyful truth-speaking of God's salvation through judgment
 - i. Unless all of the above flows from a heart that is truly grace-filled, Jesus-exalting, humbly bold, it's powerless
 - 2. In fact, they could not be categorized as simply a "judgmental" church, though there was fear of that kind of thing, because they were also doing good things, bringing healing and restoration and freedom from oppressive spirits by the same power which demanded honesty about sin, repentance from self-reliance, and dependence upon Jesus alone
 - a. Isn't this the perfect example of the Church in the world?
 - b. Uncategorizable
 - i. The redemptively holy church is more deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches
 - ii. AND the redemptively holy church is more deeply and practically committed to evangelism, repentance, holiness, and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches
 - iii. This kind of church is profoundly counter-cultural and counter-intuitive the human heart
 - 1. Therefore, outsiders will have a hard time categorizing it, because it doesn't fit the normal "conservative" or "progressive" categories.
 - 2. Neither does Jesus...
 - iii. This holy fear, struck into the hearts of outsiders, keeping them at a distance, is also and fully combined with holy compassion, expressed in the healing power of the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Which leads us to the second response you will find when the gospel is believed, our lives are lived consistently with its truth, and it is proclaimed fearlessly
2. Response to the Gospel of the God with Holy Grace: Fervent Faith
 - a. and believing ones were being added to the Lord
 - i. It sounds like Luke is talking about both sides of his mouth, but he is not
 - 1. There is more than one response to the holy reverence and fear for the presence of the Almighty God amongst His people
 - 2. That's what it is: the presence of God is among His people!
 - a. Those who were trivializing this truth were staying outside
 - ii. While many potential hypocrites were staying outside, many people were being drawn to the presence of the Lord and entrusting themselves to the mercies proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - 1. Increasingly
 - 2. multitudes of men and of women
 - 3. This is what revival looks like – the Spirit of God slaying the self-reliance of man by holy fear and, oddly and counter-intuitively, drawing people closer to this holy God through the atoning death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ as our hope in His presence.

- b. The Apostles were working “ministries of mercy to the afflicted”
 - i. The HOLY Spirit was working through the Church to bring healing, restoration, and wholeness to the entire city
 - 1. Thus, what we see here is that when God purifies His people through discipline, separating the believers from the pretenders, He moves in power to show, again, His gracious purposes for life
 - 2. Within the context of His holiness, purity, and authority, is abundant mercy
 - ii. People were coming from far and wide, carrying their loved ones on pallets and couches, anything they could find, just to get close enough to the apostles to be healed
 - 1. The “shadow” narrative is about getting close, but not too close, I believe
 - iii. “And they were all restored”
- c. The gospel of Jesus Christ ALWAYS results in acts of mercy and grace, the desire and purposeful activity to alleviate suffering, affliction, and to see life flourish in every way!
 - i. The Church was walking in holy fear AND in merciful acts of kindness, not only to one another, but also to outsiders
 - ii. They understood God’s mercy towards them in Christ Jesus and worked to both proclaim the mercy of the holy God and to act accordingly in such mercy and holiness
- d. The God of the Scriptures is the God who saves through judgment, whose mercy is expressed through justice, redemption through wrath
 - i. We see it in the way that He expressed His very name to Moses: “showing lovingkindness to thousands, but will not leave the guilty unpunished to the 3rd and 4th generations”
 - 1. Both mercy abundant (thousands) AND just wrath (3rd and 4th)
 - 2. If God had wanted to show how omnibenevolent He was, He wouldn’t have mentioned the guilt part, but He did
 - 3. If God had wanted to show how absolutely just He is, He wouldn’t have mentioned the mercy part, especially in such grandly huge terms (thousands)
 - ii. If we don’t believe in God’s mercy, we will never run to Him when we see His holy justice!
 - 1. Repentance and humility, by their nature, run TO the Lord for mercy because we believe Him to be merciful
 - iii. This is seen in its most glorious expression at the Cross of Christ Jesus, where the just wrath of God against sin was poured out AND God’s great and abundant mercy was poured out *at the same time*.
 - 1. Salvation for us through judgment upon Him
- e. and many signs and wonders were being done among the people
 - i. These “signs” were signs of the authority of Jesus Christ, the resurrected one
 - 1. As such, they displayed the power of God in both a beneficial way (healing) and a fearful way (holiness)
 - 2. Note that they people wanted to get close enough for Peter’s shadow to fall on them, but not close enough to be touched by him
 - ii. “through the hands of the apostles”
 - 1. The apostles were the one through whom the Spirit was doing signs and wonders, not the entire Church
 - 2. This verified the apostles as the bearers of the ministry of Jesus and thus their gospel witness to His resurrection as valid
- f. and they were being one-minded
 - i. the whole of them (*apas*)
 - 1. They were united in their purpose, their efforts, their endeavors to testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His authority over all things, including sin and death, and the hope of all who repent of their self-reliance and entrust themselves to Him
 - 2. It was the fear of the Lord which made the generosity of the Lord so impressive to the Church

- a. They were renewed in fellowship, unity, and power because they were reminded by the Lord of His severe mercies and the greatness of His grace in the light of the greatness of His holiness
 - 3. Sometimes we don't fellowship with the Lord, we don't know or seek the delight of His presence, because we functionally have forgotten how great He really is and that we are joyfully called into His presence, fully qualified and made presentable by Christ Jesus
 - a. We know, intellectually, what the Bible has taught us about Him, but we have forgotten, experientially, how great that love really is, so we don't walk in expectancy of His great works in us or through us to the benefit of the world around us
 - b. This is why Paul prays the way that he does in Ephesians 3:14ff
 - ii. They were continuing to meet publicly, peaceably, without pretense or hiding or conspiracy
 - 1. in the portico of Solomon
 - a. Solomon's porch was a pillared covered area on the east side of the Temple complex...it was huge and open to all
 - 2. There is something to be said about the necessity and truthiness of this kind of transparency
 - a. The Church was not contained within the walls of a building, doing its works quietly, cautiously, or selfishly
 - b. They were out in the world, publicly, transparently, fearlessly proclaiming the good news of the authority of Jesus, the holiness of God, the greatness of His grace towards us in offering salvation to those who will repent of their evil and entrust themselves to the resurrected Christ
 - i. How different than the hidden dealings of the cults, the politicians, and the religious cowards who bear the name of Christ!
 - ii. How different than the cowardice of you and me, who speak freely and boldly here on Sunday but are silent in the marketplaces, the schools, the workplaces, and the soccer fields!
 - 3. They were bold because they had fellowship with the risen Christ!
3. Response to the Gospel of the Exclusive Savior: Escalating FURY
 - a. BUT The high priest and his crew "rose up"
 - i. That is, they stood up to execute judgment and authority for themselves, to take action
 - 1. having been filled with ardent activity (zeal)
 - ii. The arrested and *publicly* imprisoned them
 - b. The gospel of Jesus Christ will produce fury in the hearts of many who are opposed to Him
 - i. They will seek to coerce and violently silence the message that we are sinners in desperate need of God's mercy and that Jesus Christ is the only one capable of rescuing

These three responses are the same responses that Jesus receives: Fear, Faith, and Fury. As His Body, declaring His message, we should expect to receive the same responses as we preach the message and pursue to live accordingly holy and gracious lives.

You know what response is lacking here? Indifference. Why is this? Well, the only time one sees indifference in response to the ministry and words of the church is when the church is not doing one of these things: preaching the whole gospel or living accordingly. It is the juxtaposition of purifying judgment and holy compassion, of discipline and deliverance, which places people in a position where indifference doesn't make the cut of emotional responses. Fear? Yes. Faith? Certainly! Fury? Absolutely. But indifference? Never.