

THE SPIRIT'S SEVENTH GIFT: FEAR OF THE LORD

(Equated with "True Religion" in OT)

Is 11:1-2; Ex 18:21; Deut 10:12; Ps 18:10; Ps 22:23; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; Mt 10:28

I. DEFINITION

- A. Heb *yirat*, Gk *phobos*, L. *timidatus*—all mean "fear" or "timidity"
- B. Webster's: "unpleasant often strong emotion" re danger; "anxious concern;" "profound reverence and awe"

II. NEITHER SERVILE/HARMFUL (VICIOUS VARIETY)—thus "fear not" refrain

- A. Fear of, avoidance of, punishment (evil of such fear proceeds from self-love)
- B. Prompting cowardice—such as Peter denying Christ, unlike Declaration of Independence signers, who said: "with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."
- C. Preventing good, just, loving acts
 - 1. Such as defending innocents—both physically & verbally; N.B.: just war manifests *agape* love, whereas doctrinaire pacifism frequently shrouds servile fear (e.g. "better red than dead")
 - 2. Helping needy—as did Jesus with prostitutes & tax-gatherers; fear of public opinion, financial setback, etc. illustrates servile fear; C.S. Lewis stressed "security" temptations

III. NOR HUMAN FRAILTY/WEAKNESS ("all too human")—excusable and often inescapable, though reprehensible at times

- A. Feeling faint, weak, incapable of action (physical)
- B. Avoiding pain, disease, death, loneliness (emotional)
- C. Protecting dignity, reputation (spiritual)

IV. BUT FILIAL/HEAVENLY STRENGTH (proper fear, AWE at/of LORD)

- A. Earthly Attitude: Respect for position, accomplishment, authority
 - 1. Re father (e.g. house builder—sought & followed his advice)
 - 2. Re athletes (e.g. Michael Johnson)
 - 3. Re scholars (e.g. Victor Frankl)
 - 4. Re artists (e.g. Alexandr Solzhynitsyn)
 - 5. Re saints (e.g. Mother Teresa, Billy Graham)
- B. Heavenly Attitude: Reverential AWE
 - 1. Attention: Focus on (respect=look again), think about, listen to LORD—His Sacramental Presence & Word ever important
 - a. When epiphanies (e.g. Moses at burning bush) occur, give heed—thus Gerhard von Rad: "The experiences of the world were for Israel always divine experiences as well."
 - b. When Father (and His prophets) speak, "listen up"
 - 1. Fear of offending, displeasing through inattention, disobedience
 - 2. Thus many warnings, prohibitions, connect with fear of being apart from Him
 - b. When godless (Satan) speak, disregard
 - 2. Wonder (open my eyes) at "beauty of the Lord" and His handiwork, e.g. "mountain majesty"
 - a. Rejoice in His Creative powers (W. Chambers "experienced two of the most important things men ever know—the wonder of life and the wonder of the universe.")
 - b. Marvel at One "greater than" greatest, the "Holy Mystery"
 - c. Poets' perceptions—e.g. Browning, Hopkins
 - 3. Ecstasy: out-of-oneself openness, entering into His Presence, surrendering to His Will
 - a. Humility—down-to-earth forgetfulness of self (acknowledging others—and the Other—as more gifted, wise, etc)
 - b. Docility—willingness to be molded, as clay in Potter's hands

Aquinas re “Gift of Fear” (ST., I-II, 68)

We are speaking of fear now, in so far as it makes us turn, so to speak, to God or away from Him. For, since the object of fear is an evil, sometimes, on account of the evils he fears, man withdraws from God, and this is called human fear; while sometimes, on account of the evils he fears, he turns to God and adheres to Him. This latter evil is twofold, viz. evil of punishment, and evil of fault. Accordingly if a man turn to God and adhere to Him, through fear of punishment, it will be servile fear; but if it be on account of fear of committing a fault, it will be filial fear, for it becomes a child to fear offending its father.

It is owing to its servility that servile fear may be evil. For servitude is opposed to freedom. Since, then, “what is free is cause of itself” (Metaph. i, 2), a slave is one who does not act as cause of his own action, but as though moved from without. Now whoever does a thing through love, does it of himself so to speak, because it is by his own inclination that he is moved to act: so that it is contrary to the very notion of servility that one should act from love. Consequently servile fear as such is contrary to charity: so that if servility were essential to fear, servile fear would be evil simply, even as adultery is evil simply, because that which makes it contrary to charity belongs to its very species.

The fear of the Lord is numbered among the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost (Isaiah 11:3). Fear is of several kinds, as stated above (Article 2). Now it is not “human fear,” according to Augustine (*De Gratia et Lib. Arb.* xviii), “that is a gift of God”--it was by this fear that Peter denied Christ--but that fear of which it was said (Matthew 10:28): “Fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell.”

It follows, therefore, that the fear of God, which is numbered among the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, is filial or chaste fear. For it was stated above (I-II:68:1; I-II:68:3) that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are certain habitual perfections of the soul’s powers, whereby these are rendered amenable to the motion of the Holy Ghost, just as, by the moral virtues, the appetitive powers are rendered amenable to the motion of reason. Now for a thing to be amenable to the motion of a certain mover, the first condition required is that it be a non-resistant subject of that mover, because resistance of the movable subject to the mover hinders the movement. This is what filial or chaste fear does, since thereby we revere God and avoid separating ourselves from Him. Hence, according to Augustine (*De Serm. Dom. in Monte* i, 4) filial fear holds the first place, as it were, among the gifts of the Holy Ghost . . .

Servile fear, or fear of punishment, will by no means be in heaven, since such a fear is excluded by the security which is essential to everlasting happiness, as stated above (I-II:5:4). But regard to filial fear, as it increases with the increase of charity, so is it perfected when charity is made perfect; hence, in heaven, it will not have quite the same act as it has now.

Hence Gregory, expounding the words of Job (26:11), “The pillars of heaven tremble, and dread at His beck,” says (*Moral.* xvii, 29): “The heavenly powers that gaze on Him without ceasing, tremble while contemplating: but their awe, lest it should be of a penal nature, is one not of fear but of wonder,” because, to wit, they wonder at God’s supereminence and incomprehensibility.

Augustine says (*De Serm. Dom. in Monte* i, 4): “The fear of the Lord is befitting the humble of whom it is said: Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Poverty of spirit properly corresponds to fear. Because, since it belongs to filial fear to show reverence and submission to God, whatever results from this submission belongs to the gift of fear. Now from the very fact that a man submits to God, it follows that he ceases to seek greatness either in himself or in another but seeks it only in God. For that would be inconsistent with perfect subjection to God, wherefore it is written (Psalm 19:8): “Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will call upon the name of . . . our God.” It follows that if a man fear God perfectly, he does not, by pride, seek greatness either in himself or in external goods, viz. honors and riches. On either case, this proceeds from poverty of spirit, in so far as the latter denotes either the voiding of a puffed up and proud spirit, according to Augustine’s interpretation (*De Serm. Dom. in Monte* i, 4), or the renunciation of worldly goods which is done in spirit, i.e. by one’s own will, through the instigation of the Holy Spirit, according to the expounding of Ambrose on Luke 6:20 and Jerome on Matthew 5:3.