

Dear Friend,

Recently I've been thinking about what keeps me from accepting other believers as Christ accepted me (Rom. 15:7) and what hinders me from loving other Christians as Christ loved me (John 13:34). I find that two powerful emotions often stand between others and me: fear and anger. When I am afraid that you will take something from me that I value, then it is difficult for me to warmly welcome you into my life or to give to you. If I am angry with you for taking something I value from me, then it is difficult for me to not judge you and to work for your good.

Let me give you an example. (Any similarity between this fictional example and real people and events is purely coincidental. ☺) A mother of a teenage son discovers that he has been lying to her. Instead of going over to his friend's house to play basketball every Thursday after school he has been going to a girl's home when her parents are not present. Immediately her heart is filled with fear and anger. What might be some of the things that she fears? She may fear that the girl is pregnant. She may fear the rejection of her son when she confronts him. She may fear what her husband will do when he finds out. She may fear how her reputation will be ruined. She may fear the impact of his behavior on her other children.

What might be some of the things that make her angry? She might be angry that she has been lied to. She may be angry that all the time and effort she has given to teach and train her son to do the right thing has been a complete waste of time. She may be angry with God for permitting this to happen. She may be angry with this young girl's parents for not having more control over their daughter. Obviously, what this young man has done is a great wrong and he needs help to turn and follow Christ. However, if her heart is ruled by fear and anger, she will not be able to love her son, to act in a way that aims at his eternal well being. She will either seek to make him pay for the harm he has done to her or will act to prevent him from taking away the things she values.

Anger and fear are in her heart due to what she believes she must have to be happy and secure. The emotions are indicators of what rules her heart. Therefore, the first work she must do is the work of finding Christ to be sufficient for her. She must, by the grace of God, find her hope and security to be in Christ. This is the fight of faith. If she does not first fight to live by faith, she will not be able to help her son to live by faith. This is why knowing the gospel and the benefits that come to us through Christ is so necessary.

She may fight for faith by remembering what Paul says in Romans 8:35, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Or she may pray with the psalmist in Psalm 118:5-9, "In my anguish I cried to the Lord and he answered by setting me free. The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid, what can man do to me? ... It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes."

On the basis of these promises she may reason with herself like this: "My son's lies and behavior, no matter what it might be or what consequences may come from it, cannot separate

me from the love of Christ. To be loved by Jesus is better than having a son who doesn't lie or sin. Therefore, I will not be afraid. I do not need to be angry with him because he cannot take anything from me that matters. I will not trust in his response to me but I will make the Lord and his love for me my refuge. I will therefore seek to help my son to escape from this trap that he has fallen into. I will discipline him and counsel him for his eternal well being, not to protect my reputation or to make him pay for what he did to me.”

In all of our relationships we are regularly confronted, in greater and lesser ways, with what we are hoping in for security, happiness, etc. It is only when we are resting in the love of God for us in Christ that we will find the ability to love those who regularly threaten to deprive us of things we value or actually do take valuable things from us. It is my prayer for us that we will increasingly be confident and secure and thus able to accept and love others, because we are loved by God in Christ and know that nothing that anyone ever does to us will be able to interfere with that love.

Fighting for faith with you,