

## The Fear of the Lord

"Recovering from Spiritual Amnesia"

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What I want to share with you today represents a dealing of the Lord that's been going on in my heart this past month or two.... I feel like JW saying it that way, but honestly, that's how it's felt... Kind of like God's been giving me a spiritual talking to.... Like He's been correcting me as my Heavenly Father, trying to get me to remember things I didn't know I'd forgotten.

I'm going to be mentioning few sections of scripture today, but for the sake of time, I'm going to summarize them and just explain what stood out to me when I read them. If you need a place to start reading in the bible, any of these chapters would be great.

The main one is from **1Sam 2/3** ... about Eli, his sons, and Samuel's famous "Speak O Lord, I'm listening" story. This was after the Israelites had come into the Land, but before Saul was king. This was right at the end of the time of Judges, where "every man did what was right in their own eyes."

Eli was a priest in the temple of the Lord. It says he was old and fat (which I could identify with immediately! :) and that Aaron was his dad. Eli had been around way back in the beginning.... He'd witnessed the glory days. He'd personally seen the mighty works of the Lord in his father Aaron's time, and now he was the "priest of the Lord" because of his lineage, but on the inside, he'd lost it the essence of what being priest was all about. And without that, Eli was just a tired, old man. I'm sure there was a time when walking with the Lord felt very real, but now things had become routine... He was still in the temple and perhaps still did the work of a priest, but it says he was almost blind. His sons were priests too, but they were perverse. Eli knew what they were doing and that it was wrong, but he didn't do anything about it. I think their behavior made him sad, but not sad enough to honor the view and life of the Lord above what came out from his own life and flesh—his sons. So Eli tolerated the mixture and stain they brought into Israel, even when the Lord sent someone to tell him of the impending judgment coming upon his house. Verse 3:1 sums up the life in the temple and in Israel nicely when it says, "And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision."

Samuel was Eli's understudy. He had miraculous beginnings, and because of those miraculous beginnings, he was brought to the temple when he was a little child, and was expected to live his whole life serving the Lord. He was young and fresh and

willing to be taught, which seems to contrast the condition of his heart with Eli's somewhat complacent one.

And we all know of that familiar story where Samuel was lying down in the temple, and heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him 2 times but he didn't recognize it was the Lord. Thinking it was Eli, he ran to Eli to see what he wanted, and Eli discerned it was the Lord speaking to Samuel and told him what to do the next time he hears His voice. Long story short, the Lord tells Samuel the exact same word of judgment against Eli and his house that the prophet had brought to Eli earlier.

Now Eli had grown too dull to hear the Lord speaking to him directly, but he still wanted to know what the Lord had to say, so he asked Samuel to tell him everything and to not hold anything back. So Samuel repeated the message the Lord had given him, word for word, even though it didn't leave Eli and his sons smelling like roses!

Two things stood out to me about that: The Lord didn't have anything new to say to Eli. What He said the second time around was the same thing He said the first time around... In fact, it was the same thing the Lord had spoken for as long as Eli could remember... Everything the Lord had to say proclaimed the destruction and end of everything that fell outside of the boundaries of the Law He'd established for Israel to live within. And even though they were priests of the Lord, if the house of Eli failed to walk in the ways of the Lord, they would be judged and destroyed too.

And the second thing that stood out to me was how Eli received the news. First, though Eli was old, tired, full of mixture and practically blind, he was able to recognize that the word of judgment Samuel brought him was indeed the Lord. Perhaps that was because Eli remembered the times he'd heard and seen the Lord in the past; perhaps he remembered what the Lord always said, and how He never waffled or waived or watered down the testimony of the Law like Eli himself was so prone to do. I like to think somehow it comforted Eli's lukewarm heart to know that there was someone in life (the Lord) who was so completely consistent and would never change, even if though it was Lord's very consistency that demanded the end of Eli's life.

The other thing that stood out to me was how Eli received the word of the Lord... First, he recognized it; second, he knew it was righteous, and therefore he accepted it as the true judgment of the Lord and bowed to it. He didn't make excuses for himself or for his sons...He didn't run or hide from the word of judgment that was being brought to him. He let the judgment of the Lord have its way in him. You know, even though Eli may not have been a great specimen of a man, I still give him credit because when push came to shove, He let the Lord deal with him as He saw fit.

So I was reading that story and started to recognize that I kind of felt blind and like I had a lukewarm heart just like Eli. There was a bit of a famine of the word of the Lord going on in me too.

And of course, since I didn't see the real problem, I blamed how I felt on the busyness and stress of the holidays and not getting to hear Jason's annual Christmas sermon this year, yet the weeks passed and things weren't getting any better...In fact, they seemed to be getting worse....Things that were normally "spiritually fun" for me started to be not so fun. Driving to Akron for groups started to seem like a "have to" and not a "want to" (notice how I always work the fact that I have to drive to get here into my messages?! :)).... I had some car trouble and the weather was bad a few times, so it made it kind of easy to hide behind those natural reasons for not going... I mean, who could argue with me or point the finger and say "Hey, is your heart ok?" when I had legitimate reasons for not being around as much, you know?

Hiding behind natural circumstances—even real ones... Have you ever done that? Have you ever been asked how you're doing by someone, let's say, and you know they mean "how are you doing with the Lord," and instead of answering *that* question, which you know is the real one being asked, you answer with information about your job...or your family...or your health...or whatever? I've done that. I've fed someone information they weren't requesting to kind of throw them off the scent that I wasn't doing very well.... And it's silly, but the whole time I know what I'm doing, and it seems like they know what I'm doing, but for some reason, we let one another do it.... It's like they let me "hide" behind what I am saying, so that next time, when they're not doing so hot, I'll "be nice" and let them hide, too.

That's the adam in us. The adam in me wants to hide and the adam in you lets me hide, because we all know how it feels to want to hide from the light, and we don't want to make each other uncomfortable. But the Lord calls us to come out of the darkness and into the Light.

Well I won't describe any more of my weirdness, except to say I didn't feel normal. I felt like I was a million miles away from the Lord because though I was still reading the bible and "trying," nothing seemed very alive.

Most of you have probably felt something like that before so I don't have to tell you it feels awful. But here's the weird Catch 22 I found myself in: I knew enough to know all of my dark thoughts were just my flesh talking... and that my confusion was because I wasn't seeing out from Faith... I was living mostly in the dark and just making "visits" into the Light now and again. I could completely *remember* what I'd seen in the Light and talk about it when I needed to, but I knew I wasn't living there.

Now that's nothing new of course. And I think it's pretty much been our experience the whole way through this journey of coming to know Christ as our Life. Flashes of Light appear in our hearts and light up the heavens and the earth and with the Light comes perspective and understanding and peace and joy....And when we are found in the Light, everything is clear and it's easy to see and walk and rejoice in it, and to love one another. But somehow we always seem to "lose the Light" and are plunged back into the swirl of our own darkened imaginations and ideas and emotions.... And wham! Everything gets crazy in the darkness.

So anyway, here was my Catch 22.... I knew I was spiritually dull-- "stuck," as we call it, but I also knew I had no excuse to be spiritually stuck because all I had to do was turn my heart to the Lord and He'd appear and I'd be able to see again... except that is exactly what I couldn't seem to do! And while I know any one of you would have taken the time to talk to me, when I tried to describe what was going on inside of me to myself, *even I could hear* what was wrong with everything I was saying!! So I reasoned if I could correct myself, my problem obviously wasn't because I didn't know the answers... So why bother talking to someone? It wasn't going to help.... I mean, it wasn't like I didn't know what to do. I just couldn't seem to DO what I should do! In hindsight I can see it wasn't a matter of having the wrong knowledge; it was a matter of having the wrong heart. I needed the heart of Samuel, but what I had was the heart of Eli- a heart that had grown dull and was full of mixture. And that tolerance to mixture was the very thing that was preventing me from hearing what the Lord was trying to say to me.

I guess I can't speak for all of you, but when I feel stuck or in darkness, though I profess otherwise, deep inside I STILL know enough to know the problem is my Flesh... and I know enough to know the answer to my Flesh is the Cross. And I know enough to know the key that unlocks the door of spiritual "stuck-ness" is to turn my heart to the Lord.....to come to Him like a child, dependent on Him for Light and Life... I know I need to come to the place in my heart where I believe I don't know anything—in spite of knowing the Lord for years, but often pride gets in the way.

You know, sometimes all the wonderful Truth we know can work against us if we don't have a soft heart that allows the Truth we know to be filled up with His Life... Even something as good as "knowing Truth" isn't a guarantee that we'll be "safe" from being spiritually stuck or from falling away, because without a humble heart and a willingness to come into the Light, I guarantee you that the very Truth that is supposed to liberate us will actually "inoculate" us and cause us to think we already know what the problem is! And funny thing, the problem always seems to be somewhere except with us!

Here's a tip: No matter who you are and what you've seen in the Lord, the ONLY THING that can resist and counteract our adamic tendency to tolerate mixture and

grow lukewarm, is to have a heart that really believes that day after day after day, even after all these years, you STILL don't know anything.

I hope this is ok to say, but do you realize that if we EVER let Life in Christ become about hiding in the darkness or attempting to live in an empty memory of something True, we've basically gone back to religion and dead works? We may be experts in true doctrines and know the ins and outs of keeping the temple 'up and running,' but if our walk with the Lord as His body ever evolves into an attempt to live in something we can't currently see, it's evolved into an example of *'having the form of godliness, but denying the power of it,'* mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:5! Or of Galatians 3, *"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?"* Being a Christian isn't about knowing the right doctrines. It's about the Life of the Living Christ residing in your soul.

I "knew" Christ had done everything necessary to open the adamic prison doors and translate us out of darkness into His light... So why wasn't I able to live in the Light? That's what I started asking myself and I started to see that it was obviously not because He'd left something unfinished.... Which meant it was either that I didn't know what Christ did; Or that my heart had forgotten what He did; or that I just didn't want to be free. It was that simple.

You know, when you aren't seeing the Lord too clearly, it's usually a good idea to talk to someone who CAN see Him because they have things to say that can help cut through the fog, and not just commiserate with you about the existence of fog. It's like Eli... He couldn't hear the word of the Lord for himself, but at least he went to Samuel for help and not his sons! No one can turn your heart for you, of course, but there is something humbling about confessing our shortcomings and blindness to one another that usually turns out to be healing.

Now that I've set all that up for you, I'm going to walk you through a few portions of scripture that continued to speak to me about why I was in the pickle I was in. To boil it all down, you could say that somewhere along the way I'd developed a case of spiritual amnesia. I'd forgotten who the Lord was and what He'd done. And when you forget who He is, you automatically forget who you are, too.

And I know you know this, but these are things the Lord spoke to my heart. I can't give you my experience of seeing Him. Sometimes I wish I could, and I wish you could give your experience of seeing Him to me... But then we'd be robbing one another of our very own stories of finding Him to be our Life... He is my Life. He is your Life. And we each need to know Him in that way. We can't live in someone else's experience of the Lord, but we *can* share what He's shown us with one another, and in that way we can point and encourage each other to turn to see Him for ourselves. But I know you know that.

Ok so the other day I was reading and this verse stood out to me: Rev 22: 4, "And they will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads," and I stopped reading and took a minute to picture that and thought "Wow...that's weird... So I'll look at Him and I'll see Him..... and He'll look at me and see, ummm.... He'll look at me and see "Him," too! He'll see *His name* on me. Wait a minute...so instead of seeing the me I know, who is so full of imperfections, He'll see me as someone who belongs to Him and bears His name?"

And I let myself think about that for a little bit because it just seemed so wonderful to know that from the bottom of His heart, when He looks at me, He doesn't really see *me*, He sees a reflection of all He knows Himself to be [His name] tattooed on my forehead. And suddenly though I'd been feeling rather dark inside, I realized He didn't see me that way. And that little verse helped me remember something I'd forgotten: I'm not the strength and perfection of our union—He is. Our union doesn't consist of Julie and the Lord...*not really*.... Our union is comprised of Christ alone, where He is the life and substance of us both! And when my heart saw that, I could suddenly breathe a sigh of relief because I saw that not only am I His, but I am "of Him" and because of that, He's fully satisfied and pleased who I am... Do you understand what I mean?? The Lord and I are no longer two, but one. We share the same life... And after thinking about how wonderful that was, suddenly I wasn't so afraid to come into the Light anymore, because I saw that with Him as my life, I had no reason to hide.

Soon after that I heard someone reference John 1 about how men loved the darkness because their deeds were evil, so I decided to read it too.... And while I was reading it, my heart latched onto the words in verse 9 "He was the true Light which, coming into the world enlightens every man." And I thought about coming into the Light... and how that feels so hard to do when you're feeling dark... When you're stuck, turning your heart often seems downright impossible.

And I found myself talking to the Lord, explaining that I knew I needed to face the Cross, but doing it one more time felt so hard... And sure, I reasoned, I might be able to do it this time, but what about the next time? And the time after that? Could I face the Cross consistently for the next 20 years? I was just sure that one of those times it would feel too hard and I wouldn't be able to do it... And then I'd end up being another casualty of Truth. I'd end up being one of those who "shrink back," as Hebrews says...

You know that verse in Romans that says something like, "Don't say who will go up to the heavens to bring Christ down, or who will descend into the depths to bring Him up? The word is near you, even in your heart..." When you are in the dark, Christ can feel so far away that you feel like you need a miracle to close the gap that exists between you and Him. But the truth is He isn't far from you... He is in your heart.

And suddenly I felt the Lord say to me, "Why are you talking to me like you are in one place and I am in another, and there is a huge wall of flesh between us, standing in the way? What do you think I'm asking of you anyway? You are talking like you aren't brave enough to die or strong enough to jump across the Great Divide and through the fiery sword of judgment! You're already dead, remember? That's what I accomplished in My Son. I took care of the flesh that was the enmity between us, and now you are IN ME and share my Life. (read Romans 6/7) My name is tattooed on your forehead, remember?"

And I suddenly saw that He was right. I *had* been feeling like there was still a wall between us and that I was on the wrong side of it! No wonder I felt so separate from Him and from the body! I'd forgotten what Christ had done on the Cross! And I read on:

"I am the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Hmmm... He is the light which enlightens every man—not He's *going to be* the Light that enlightens every man. He is *already* the Light that is shining in me, which meant He wasn't in some distant place that was too hard to get to. This meant see the Light again didn't involve effort on my part.... Suddenly living in the Light became about *waking up to where I already am, through seeing where He already is—in ME!*

And this is important... The Cross, the Judgment and the Light aren't three separate things. We don't have to jump through the death of the Cross to experience the Judgment (the division) in order to come into the Light. The Light itself is both the Judgment of the Cross AND the thing that "performs" the work of the Cross - the cutting, the putting away of the First-- in us. And if we are in Christ, His Life in us *is* the Light that does it all.

When we turn our hearts to the Lord, we see the Light is *already* shining. And Judgment happens the moment we see by the Light because in the Light we'll see what the Cross did.... We'll see what's already happened. The Cross put away the whole First, *including* the wall of flesh that stood between God and man. And when we see that, we'll be made free by the Truth we're seeing. Christ opened the prison doors through His death and resurrection, but when our heart *sees what He did* in a real way, the Truth we're seeing becomes the key that unlocks the door and we are made free.

I know that was just a personal snapshot of how Truth worked in my soul, but I kind of hope you can see that the most helpful thing my heart saw to begin to release me from being stuck was the reality of my union with Him. When I saw where I *already* was, and that the Light of Christ was *already* shining in my soul, I realized I didn't have to do anything heroic to find the Light again. And since I

didn't have to get up the gumption to DO anything, that meant I didn't have to worry about being brave enough to jump through the death of the Cross in the future... Do you want to be free and live in the Light? You just have to desire to wake up in Him, which is where you already are. Doesn't that sound so easy?

John writes, "He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, but the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him... But to as many as received him, to them He gave authority to become children of God."

If we have received Christ, He is in us *already* as this incredible blazing, always shining Light... We just need to *receive* the One who is already in us, and when we do, we'll see Him as He is. And when we see Him, we'll see all things according to His Light and confusion will go and we'll be able to walk and rest in what we see.

There's one more thing I want to share with you this morning... I was so happy to finally be in the Light again, but I was worried I was going to "lose it" and end up back in the same boat... And I didn't want to wear out the Lord's patience!

So I asked a friend if they thought it was possible to always stay in the Light or if we're destined to keep bouncing back and forth, in and out of it forever... And their answer went something like this:

"Is it possible to stay in the Light when even someone as wise as Solomon ended up worshiping false gods? Perhaps the answer to that has to do with loving the earth and looking for pleasure there. Maybe loving the earth starts out as a subtle thing, but if we give it room in us, it will take over our mind and heart. Perhaps what we need to keep us in the Light is a healthy fear of living life without the Light... Or maybe you could say we need to have a fear of living in the darkness. Perhaps that's what the Fear of the Lord is... Maybe seeing by His Light gives us a comprehension of life lived *without* the Light... of life lived without Him.... And the very thought of the awfulness of that helps us keep our hearts turned towards Him."

So I thought about that, because it seemed reasonable. It's like the more used to living in the Light you become, the more you don't want to lose the ability to see by it.... Kind of like after having electricity, who would want to live the rest of their life without it? After walking in the Light, you start to have a healthy fear of having to walk in the darkness. Maybe that fear is what makes you want to hug the Light to yourself even harder.

"Hugging the Light" reminded me of "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."....Cleave... To hold so close as to not let the object of your desire go...

Then I got a little surprise because I decided to look the word "cleave" up in the dictionary just to see if there was any hidden meaning to it.... And I quickly wrote Jessie to tell her what I found, only to have her tell me she already knew it! darn!!  
^ But that didn't stop the Lord from speaking to me through that tiny English word anyway... Here's what I read:

Cleave: to adhere closely; stick; cling; to remain faithful

It was the definition I already knew, of course... But then I read on further and saw:

Cleave: to split or divide by a cutting blow, especially along a natural [line](#) of division, as the grain of wood.  
to cut off; sever: *to cleave a branch from a tree...* to separate...

And while I'm pretty confident I would have figured that definition out by the context if I'd read it in a book or something, because I know a butcher knife can be called a meat cleaver, the idea that one word could mean two opposite things surprised and intrigued me.

And I thought of that verse again, "For this cause a man shall leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife...." I didn't want to think of it in natural terms, like about human marriage or anything... I wanted to see Christ in the verse.

And what I saw was so beautiful and perfect and it spoke volumes to me about staying in the Light... I saw how Christ exemplified both definitions of "cleave" in Himself..... He left the Heavens, His home, to come to the earth to "cleave" to a fallen humanity... to become one flesh with us, to cling to us so closely that when He went down into the death of the Cross, He took us with Him... And there, on the Cross, He performed another great act of cleaving -- "of cutting along a natural line of separation" -- when He divided the First from the Second and forever put it away from Himself. And then He returned to the Heavens, still clinging— still cleaving-- to us.

Christ cleaved to us as a man cleaves to his wife... And not only that, He "cleaved away" everything of the old, of death and Adam, and type and shadow, forever dividing it not only from Himself, but from anyone who has been made one with Him. Isn't that amazing?

Then I looked for other places in the Bible where the word "cleave" is used and read Moses' words to the children of Israel in Deut 10: 20- You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve Him and cleave to Him, and by His name you shall swear...."

And I had this picture in my mind of the Lord, cleaving to me, clinging to me, holding me together with Him where He is... And behind me was this huge scary cliff-like chasm that dropped away to nothing which represented everything He'd "cleaved away" from Himself at the Cross. We were near the edge of the cliff, and He was cleaving to me, holding me tightly together with Him... He faced the cliff and I faced Him... And when I saw the look on His face, the immensity of what He'd done on the Cross became more real to me, and I knew that the only thing that existed behind me was a sheer drop into what was gone forever...

And the more I became aware of the gaping chasm right behind me, the more I wanted to cleave to Him as though my life depended on it, so I wouldn't even come *close* to falling down into it—to falling away from the One who was my Life. In the Light of the knowledge of the reality of the cliff, relaxing my grip on Him *even just a little* would have been absolutely foolish!

That's how it is for us when we see what He's done in the Light. The more we realize what was put away by the Cross AND what remains (Him), the more desperate we are to be found in what remains. And it started to seem like it was the seeing of the cliff that results in our desire to cling to Him... And the "seeing that results in cleaving" is the fear of the Lord working in us.

I wish I could show you how it looked in my mind, because one picture is worth a thousand words... His hold upon me was so fierce... and my hold upon Him was pretty fierce too.... Picture a drowning person clinging to their rescuer... The desperation I felt to hold on to Him reminded me of the desperation of someone who was afraid they were going to drown....

The more I think about it, the more it seems like the Fear of the Lord is necessary so we don't fall away or let Truth become a religion.

It's always hard to know how to end these talks... I guess I just want to encourage all of us to not give up or grow weary or complacent. It's way too easy to forget the nature of the relationship we've been brought into, and forgetting is dangerous. Spiritual amnesia is easy to develop, but living in the awareness of what He's done is the key to preventing it. "The fear of the Lord leads to life."

"He is the Light that enlightens every man..." The Lord is in us. He is the Light that's always ON, waiting for us to turn to see Him and come into the Light. And we are like weary travelers in the night... And this maybe slightly tacky, but I don't mean it that way, because when it came to me the other day, it helped me see Him again, and I loved it for that reason, and thought about it all day long... It's this: Christ is kind of like a heavenly Motel 6 because "He leaves the Light on for us." And the more tired you are of traveling in the dark, the more you'll welcome the Light when you see it.