

## Facing Times Of Stress: Fear Of The Future

A Spirit of Power, Love and Sound Mind

Martin G. Collins

Given 12-Sep-09; Sermon #956

On the website Feeding America, found under the link, "The Land of Plenty," it was as of 2007 that one in eight Americans face a growing hunger, and it is not just the poor and unemployed. They are often the "hard-working adults, children and seniors who simply cannot make ends meet" who regularly have to forego meals, even for days.

Here are some American Hunger and Poverty remarks:

- \* 36.2 million Americans are food insecure, including 12.4 million children
- \* They comprise 13 million or 11.1% of households
- \* 4.7 million households experience "very low food security," meaning that hunger is a persistent problem

This is one of the many serious problems that some Americans face every day.

How much worse is this problem in other countries, especially those in the third world countries? It is unimaginable, and we have no idea how many are dying, but I know that it is in the tens of millions.

Anxiety and stress is ever present in the world today. Where will our next meal come from? How will I pay my bills? Where am I going to get the money to fix the roof over my head? What if I get laid-off, or my wages shrink, how will I take care of my family?

These are very real and serious questions most people ask themselves regarding their future. It is natural for a human being to have at least some 'fear of the future' when disaster seems to be looming on the horizon. There is almost no end to the ways that we have to face in these times of stress.

Our adversary, the devil, is subtle, and can even transform himself into an angel of light; but it is equally true to describe him as absolutely relentless. He does not cease or give up. He does not care what methods he uses as long as he can bring us down and discredit the work of God; and he is not concerned about consistency. He will use any method or tool at his disposal to reach us and tempt us and deceive us.

He does not hesitate to vary his approaches either. He does not hesitate to contradict what he had said to us previously. He has just one objective and one self-concern, which is to bring into disrepute the name and the work of God with regard to our redemption through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When God originally made and created this world, we are told that 'God saw everything that He made, and, behold, it was very good.' He was exceptionally pleased with it; it was perfect—as only God can do!

And it was because of this that the devil in his jealousy and his malice was determined to ruin and destroy that work, and to concentrate his efforts especially on the supreme work of God which was the creation of mankind and our ultimate salvation and eternal life. If only he could bring down mankind, then the very zenith of creation would be ruined. So he concentrated on the woman and beguiled her and she in turn misled her willing husband. And so, mankind began his rebellion against God.

But thankfully, the story of humanity does not end at this point. God had purposed and planned a great way of redemption, which shows the outstanding glory of God. Redemption is a greater work even than God's magnificent physical creation; it involves the spiritual creation. This is especially true when we consider the way that God is achieving it—by sending His only begotten Son into this world in all of the marvel and the wonder and the miracle of the Incarnation, but above all in delivering Him up to His death on the stake and subsequent resurrection to eternal life.

This is the important thing—sinful and guilty mankind can be redeemed and restored, which will ultimately culminate in the restoration of the whole of creation. Obviously then, the main concern of our adversary, the devil, is to bring this work of God to discredit and to dishonor.

To this end he makes a special effort of attacking the heirs of salvation—the Elect of God—true Christians. There is nothing that suits Satan's purpose as to depress us and to bring us down, to give the impression that this boasted salvation is but a figment of the imagination, and that we who believe it have believed 'cunningly devised fables.'

And what better way of doing that than to bring us into such a condition that we become depressed, burdened and miserable? One of the ways Satan seeks to depress us is by getting us to concentrate on and fix our eyes on the past, so that in dwelling on the past we become cast down, especially of past sins committed. But if that fails, we should anticipate that he will change his procedure entirely and begin to make us look at the

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

future in a skewed way.

This is exactly what he does, and that is what the apostle Paul is writing about to Timothy:

**II Timothy 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Consider the case of those who are suffering during these times of stress because they are afraid of the future—'fear of the future.' People are afraid of many things—the dark, the unknown, heights, other people, failure, not making it into God's Kingdom, and many other such things. Our minds and bodies cannot be at rest when fear is pumping adrenalin into our system signaling us to fight or flee.

Most fears can be traced to spiritual problems because the ultimate cause of fear is sin. We do not want to face God in prayer when we have sinned against Him. We are afraid because we have not done what we know we should have done. Many people approach God in prayer in a fearful way.

This fear of the future is a very common condition. It is extraordinary to notice the way that the enemy often produces this condition in people by these apparently diametrically opposed methods of fear of the past, and fear of the future.

When people are set right about the past, they immediately begin to talk about the future, with the result that they are always depressed in the present. Even though they may be clear about the forgiveness of their past sins, even an exceptional sin; and although they know that they have wasted previous years, they begin to talk about fears concerning the future and what lies ahead.

There is a great deal of teaching about this in the scriptures, but one of the clearest examples of this specific condition is with Timothy to whom the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle, together with the previous one. It was, without a doubt, his personal problem, and Paul wrote to him concerning it.

Timothy was very dependent upon Paul because of his fears of difficulties and dangers to come, and the whole object of both the epistles is to put Timothy right with respect to this problem of his fear of facing the future. I do not want to spend our time with Timothy. I merely refer to him as an example of one who was spiritually depressed because of his fear of the future.

What are the causes of this condition? Why do people suffer from fear of the future? What are the reasons that they give for it? What are the specific aspects of the difficulty and what are the problems that it tends to produce?

Other than sin in general, first and foremost among causes is temperament. By temperament I mean the unique make-up of a person; the constitution of a person with respect to the mixture or balance of his qualities. A synonym for temperament is 'disposition'—a person's prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination.

We are all born different. No two of us are exactly the same; we have our own particular characteristics, virtues, failures, weaknesses, and blemishes. Each human is very delicately and finely balanced.

Fundamentally we have the same general characteristics, but the relative proportions vary tremendously from case to case, and so our temperaments vary and differ. It is very important that we bear that in mind. Such differences as these do not vanish when we become Christians. There is no greater profound change in the universe than the change that is described as regeneration; but regeneration—which is the work of God by which He imparts His Holy Spirit within us—does not change a person's temperament.

Our temperament still remains the same. The fact that we have become a Christian does not mean that we cease to have to live with ourselves. We have to live with ourselves as long as we are alive. And, your self is your self and not somebody else's self.

Paul was essentially the same physical man after his calling and baptism as he was before. He did not become someone else. Granted, his old carnal way of thinking was replaced by a new spiritual way of thinking, but his temperament did not immediately change. There was definitely a change in his perspective and his outlook.

Peter was still Peter, and John was still John temperamentally and in essential characteristics. The variety in creation is clearly seen in the differences in temperament of individual human beings. Other than mankind, look at the flowers; no two kinds are identical.

It is the variety within the fundamental unity that God displays the wonders of His ways. And it is the same in the church. We are all different, our temperaments are different, and we are all ourselves.

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God distributes His gifts through His Holy Spirit in various ways, though our essential temperament remains exactly the same as it was before our conversion. By 'temperament' I mean the peculiar way that we do things.

We do the same types of things, but we do them differently after we answer God's calling. As Christians, we must all do the same essential things, but the way that we do them is different. Think of the ministers of God preaching the same Truth, and living the same Christian life. Yet, our manner of presentation is different, and is meant to be different.

God uses these differences in order to spread the gospel. He can use one man to make the message appeal to a certain type of people, while another person could not be used in that respect. Different presentations appeal to different people, and rightly so, and God makes use of it all.

So first of all we put temperament; and there are some people who by temperament are nervous, apprehensive, even frightened. Paul himself seemed to be an example of this. He was nervous and lacking in self-confidence at times. He went to Corinth 'in weakness and fear and much trembling.'

**I Corinthians 2:1-5** And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Faith and fear cannot exist together, because fear paralyzes faith.

Paul was a naturally apprehensive man, as I mentioned.

**II Corinthians 7:5** For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.

That was Paul by nature. It was also especially true of Timothy, and there are people who are born like that. Different temperaments are noticeable in early childhood, and

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

sometimes even in infancy. There are other people who are self-confident and assured; they are afraid of nothing; they will tackle anything; they will stand up anywhere. They do not know the meaning of nerves. We see that in our children. Some are very daring and they will tackle anything while other more timid children look at the other child who is bold and think that he is crazy.

Sadly though, self-confident folks are like this often to their own detriment, because this type of Christian has to battle with a greater tendency toward arrogance and self-righteousness. So with each different temperament that we have there are weaknesses that are harder to overcome. Different types of temperaments can be used toward good or they can be used toward bad. The different types of temperaments that we have are not necessarily good or bad. It is what our tendencies are, and how much self-control we have over them that matters. This question of temperament is, therefore, an important one in our consideration of the causes of this particular form of fear of the future that causes stress and anxiety.

Then there are other things that emerge as we consider the case of the people who fear the future. We find that some are always concerned about the nature of the task confronting them in living God's way of life. It is not an easy thing to be a Christian, in that it is not just a matter of being converted, and it becomes smooth sailing the rest of our lives. Realistically, we see it as a higher calling, a fight of faith and dedication to following Christ's example.

We can read and understand our Bibles. We are intelligent. We are aware of the greatness of the work and of the calling. But in turn that tends to depress us because we are equally aware of our own smallness, and our own personal weaknesses. In other words, we sometimes have a fear of failure. We are afraid of letting down the work of God. We know we have to live Christian lives, but we know ourselves and our own weaknesses; we know the greatness of the work of God and we are acutely aware of our own deficiencies and needs, and this can sometimes depress us greatly because we know that we should be doing more, but we just cannot seem to motivate ourselves to do it.

Maybe we are just suffering from a general fear of the future, while we cannot put our finger on anything specific. What are we afraid of? Often, no specific thing comes to mind. We just do not know what is wrong sometimes.

What if it were a matter of denying your faith or giving up your child, what would you say? Do you think you would be strong enough? Do you doubt if you could have the courage to put God first at all costs, or maybe to have to suffer death if necessary? How

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

much fear of the future do you have and how much is it freezing you and slowing your progress?

But consider this: You may never be put to such a test. Nevertheless, we are conscious of the possibility, and it can depress us. Such spiritual depression is due to fear of the future, which are often imaginary fears.

The remarkable thing is that it is possible for such things to grip us so as to paralyze us completely in the present; such people are very often in danger of being so absorbed and gripped by these fears that they really become ineffective in the present. That was the essence of the trouble with Timothy.

We can look at what is happening in the news today and we can see that the news media and those behind the scenes are trying to freeze us in fear. We are constantly being fed bad news, and what is possibly going to happen. We are fed this day after day through video, television, and even in our own conversations we get into these things. Talking about these things is not necessarily wrong, but we are being fed a tremendously large diet of fear of the future. Those who want to control us know that they can freeze us into inaction by making us so fearful of the future that we cannot act. The same holds true in God's church, if we so fear the future from what we read in prophecy, we can freeze our spiritual growth, and ourselves. It is something that we have to be very careful about—that we have a balanced approach to these things.

Paul was in prison, and Timothy began to wonder what was going to happen to him self. What if Paul were to be put to death? How could he, Timothy, face alone the difficulties that were arising in the church and the persecution that was beginning to show itself, and in which he, Timothy, might be involved?

So Paul had to be quite firm with him, and he tells him what he must not do, and what he must do.

**II Timothy 1:8** Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.

Fear of the future was undoubtedly the essence of Timothy's trouble. The question for us is, "How are we going to deal with the fear?" The first thing is to discover, and to know exactly where to draw the line between legitimate forethought, which is vision and preparation, and paralyzing forethought, which is basically anxiety and fear.

We should think about the future, and it is a very foolish person who ignores it and who does not think about it at all. But what we are warned against from scripture is about being 'worried' about the future.

**Matthew 6:34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

This means, 'Do not be guilty of anxious care about tomorrow.' It does not mean that you do not have any thought at all, otherwise the farmer would not plow, till and sow.

**Proverbs 21:5** The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.

The farmer is looking to the future, but he does not spend the whole time wondering and worrying about the end results of his work. Instead, he reasonably thinks about the results and then he leaves it. He has a human faith that the normal process of the environment will produce a crop.

The whole question is where to draw the line. Where do you draw the line between fruitful planning and fruitless worrying? Thinking is the right thing to do up to a point, but if you go beyond that point it becomes worry and anxiety and it paralyzes and cripples. In other words, although it is wise to think about the future, it is foolish to be controlled by it.

The difficulty with people who are prey to these fears is that they are wringing their hands, doing nothing, depressed by fears and frozen. In fact, they are completely governed and mastered by the unknown future, and that is always wrong. To think about it is right, but to be controlled by the future is all wrong. Even people in the world have discovered this through experience. 'Do not cross your bridges until you get to them,' is a well-known saying in society.

Many scriptural statements about this have become proverbial—'Do not worry about tomorrow,' and 'Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.' Scripture raises this concept and puts it in its spiritual form. It is sound common sense.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, it is a waste of time to be concerned about the past that we cannot do anything about; but it is equally wrong to be worried about the future, which at the moment is obscure and difficult to understand.

So we have to live in the present to the maximum, and not let our future mortgage our present, any more than we should let our past mortgage our present.

Now let us go back to what Paul says:

**II Timothy 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

He raises the reasoning to a higher level and gives us specific teaching of a two-fold lesson in verse 7. First of all, it is a reprimand, and secondly it is a reminder. Both of these are absolutely vital and essential.

The first thing Paul does is to reprimand Timothy. He points to him and says, 'For God has not given us a spirit of fear.' That is a reprimand. Timothy at that moment was guilty of the spirit of fear, he was gripped by it; so Paul reprimands him, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

The principle here is that our essential trouble, if we suffer from this specific manifestation of fear and anxiety and of spiritual depression, is our failure to realize what God has given us—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That was really the trouble with Timothy, as it is the trouble with all fearful Christians. It is a failure to realize what God has done for us, and what God is still doing in us. In fact, we can use words that Jesus Christ once used in a different connection.

In answering James and John, who wanted to call fire from heaven to consume certain of the Samaritans, Christ had to rebuke their attitudes.

**Luke 9:51-55** Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of."

There in Luke 9:55, it was negative. But in II Timothy 1:6, it is positive; Paul has to tell Timothy to 'stir up the gift of God.' In this other case, they had the wrong spirit stirred up in them.

Paul, who was facing certain death as a prisoner in Rome, wrote to Timothy an exhortation that applies to each and every one of us. Paul's words are encouraging to anyone who has fear about the future. Timothy did not need any new spiritual ingredients in his life to curb his fear; all he had to do was 'stir up' what he already had.

Paul had written and urged Timothy in his first letter, 'Do not neglect the gift that is in you.' Then in his second letter he added, 'stir up the gift of God.'

**II Timothy 1:6-7** Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Our fears are due to our failure to stir up—our failure to think—our failure to get a grip on ourselves. We find ourselves looking to the future and then we begin to imagine things fearfully, and we say, 'I wonder what is going to happen?'

And then our imagination runs away with us. The thing grips us; we do not stop to remind ourselves of who we are, and what we are. This thing overwhelms us and down we go to despair. So the first thing that we have to do is to get a grip of ourselves, to pull ourselves up, and to stir ourselves up. We have to stir up the Holy Spirit within us to give us the power, and of course prayer is involved in that.

The apostle Paul puts it, 'remind yourselves' of certain things. In effect, Paul is saying to Timothy, "Timothy, you seem to be thinking about yourself and about your life and all you have to do as if you were still an ordinary worldly person. But Timothy, you are born from above and the spirit of God is in you. You are facing all these things as if you are still what you once were, an ordinary person."

And that is the trouble sometimes with all of us in this connection. Though we are truly Christian, though we believe the truth, and though we have been born from above, and though we are certainly children of God, we lapse into this condition in which we again begin to think as if none of these things had happened to us at all—baptism, receipt of the Holy Spirit, and our overcoming sin.

Like the worldly person, we allow the future to dominate us, and we compare our own

weakness and lack of strength with the greatness of our calling and the tremendous responsibility before us. We are thinking from the perspective of an ordinary worldly person. We do not have the strength within us, so God must give it to us. There is no human strength capable of handling the things that we go through.

And so, down we go, as if we were still our natural carnal selves. Paul says to Timothy, the thing to do is to remind your self that we have been given the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and to realize that because of this our whole outlook on life and the future must therefore be essentially different from that of the world. So when we are looking to the future, we are not looking towards the future that the world is, but we are looking to the future that God has provided for us.

We have to learn to say that what matters in any of these situations, conditions or positions is not what is true of us, but what is true of God the Father and Jesus Christ. We may by nature be weak and the enemy is powerful, and the responsibility is great, but we should not think of ourselves as alone or of the situation in terms of ourselves. God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power.

So as we look to the future, we should not be looking at it and seeing ourselves placed under duress, or under any type of persecution, or anything like that. We should be looking at the future, not dwelling on ourselves, but looking at how we can help others, and knowing that God is helping us.

Let me emphasize again that all of our temperaments are different. But, although our temperaments are different, our temperaments should not make any difference regarding our responsibility—our duty. Although one may be bold, while another one may be timid, both have similar responsibilities in carrying out God's will.

So here is part of the miracle of redemption. God gives us temperaments, and all of our temperaments are different, and that, also is of God. But we must never be controlled by our temperaments. The Spirit of God must be used to control our own temperament, and it must come in that order. Here [on one hand] are powers and capacities, and then here [on the other hand] is your individual temperament that uses them. But, the vital point is that as a Christian we should be controlled by the Holy Spirit—by the mind of God rather than human reasoning, and our own temperament.

It is a very sad condition when a Christian is controlled by his temperament. The natural human is always controlled by his temperament; he cannot help himself. But, the difference that regeneration makes is that there is now a higher control, even over our temperament.

The power of the Holy Spirit enables us to function in our own particular way through our temperament. The process of conversion is the practice of learning to control our temperament and desires. Temperament remains, but temperament no longer controls. The Holy Spirit is the controlling power.

Let us detail what we know.

God has not given us the spirit of fear. What, then, is the spirit that He has given us? Notice this again from II Timothy 1:7, 'God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power.' That power is what He puts first, and rightly so. We have a task, and we know our own weakness, and we know that we need that power.

It is God's Holy Spirit that enables us to properly serve God, and by its power we can overcome fear and weakness. The word "fear" in verse 7 means 'timidity, and cowardice.' The Holy Spirit gives power for fulfilling our responsibility to God with boldness. It does not give us power so we can just get by, but it gives us power so that we can perform the duties at hand and perform His work and His will.

Here is a power even for weaklings, and it means power in the most comprehensive sense conceivable. Paul explained to the Philippians that we must work out our own salvation.

**Philippians 2:12-13** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

The fear and trembling remain. That is partly our temperament, but we are enabled to work by the power that works in you both to will and to do. So we do not become a person who is not afraid and one who is no longer subject to fear. We still have to work out our own salvation using that power. And that spiritual power enables us to work this out in godly fear and reverent trembling.

It is the power of God working in us 'both to will and to do for His good pleasure.' But this has reference not only to the question of living God's way of life, and battling with temptation and sin, it also means power to endure, power to go on whatever the conditions, whatever the circumstances, power to hold on and to hold out.

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Imagine that! It means that the most timid and nervous person can be given power in all things, and even to die. We see this in the examples of the apostles, and we see it in a man like Peter who was afraid of death, afraid to die. So much so that he even denied his Lord because of that fear. He denied Him—not once—not twice—but three times. Had Peter looked back at that sin that he committed in denying Christ, it could have paralyzed him, and he could have been useless to God. But we cannot look back at the past and dwell on it; we have to move on once that we have repented of those past sins.

Now look at Peter afterwards in the book of Acts. The Spirit of power had entered into him, and then he became ready to die. He faced the authorities, he faced persecution and he faced death.

**Acts 4:5-14** And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

The spirit of power is one of the most miraculous things in the long annals of the history of the church, and it is still happening. Throughout church history there are stories of the martyring of Christians.

Perhaps the surprising thing is that you do not only find physically strong, courageous men; you will also find physically weak women and girls dying miraculously for Christ's sake. They could not handle such severe persecution in and of themselves, but they were given the spirit of power.

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Now that is what the apostle Paul means in II Timothy:

**II Timothy 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

We should not be talking like a carnal, natural person. We should not be talking as if we as individuals with our own power have to face it all. But God has given us the spirit of power. We have to move forward in faith, and God will be with us.

And even though it may mean facing death, you will rejoice that you have been accounted worthy to suffer shame and even death for His glorious Name's sake. The God given spirit of power will strengthen us to patiently endure anything and everything.

What you and I have to do, as we are tempted to be depressed by the things that are against us in these times of increasing stress, is to say, 'I have the Holy Spirit, and it is the spirit of power.' God has given each one of us that power and that Spirit.

Then, the next thing after 'power,' that the Apostle Paul mentions to Timothy, is 'love.'

**II Timothy 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Why would Paul put love at this point in his list? We understand that we need power; but love—why love? Why does a timid and nervous person need love in times of stress? Why does Paul put the spirit of love, second?

Paul uses great wisdom here, because what, after all, is the main cause of this spirit of fear? The answer is 'self'—self-love, self-concern, and self-protection. This takes us back to the introductory sermon I gave, "Facing Times of Stress, Love of Self."

Do you realize that the essence of this trouble is that these fearful people are too absorbed in self? "How can I do this? What if I fail?" They are constantly turning to themselves, looking at themselves and concerned about themselves.

And it is here that the spirit of love comes in, because there is only one way to get rid of self. There is only one cure for self. You can never deal with self by yourself. That was the fatal fallacy of those poor men who became monks, and those pitiful women who became nuns. It is also the depressing downfall of those who were called, but later

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

chose to be "independent Christians." There is no such thing as a Christian who refuses to fellowship with other members of God's church. The keyword is 'refuses'—in connection with a rebellious heart.

They could get away from the world and from other people, but they cannot get away from themselves. Yourself is inside you and you cannot get rid of him, the more you mortify yourself the more your self-will torments you.

There is only one way to get rid of self, and that is that you become so absorbed in someone or something else that you have no time to think about yourself. Only God's Spirit makes that possible. We see a world without God's Holy Spirit, and self is always the number one issue.

God not only provides 'the spirit of power,' but also 'the spirit of love.' This spirit of love means love of the great God who made us and made the way of redemption for us—for us miserable creatures that deserve nothing but death. He loves us with an everlasting love.

Think of that! And as you become absorbed in the love of God, you will forget all about yourself. The spirit of love will deliver you from self-interest, self-concern, and from anxiety, stress, and depression about self, because depression results from self and self-concern. The spirit of love gets rid of self at all points.

God the Father and His Son offered the ultimate sacrifice because of their spirit of love. They have no self-concern, but only outgoing concern. Christ died so you and I might be reconciled to God.

And then, there is also love of the brethren. Think of other people, their needs, their concerns, and their lives. The apostle Paul seems to have seen in Timothy the human tendency of his fear of the future, and the fear of death. So Paul tells him how to overcome those fears. Paul's advice, 'Think of others; consider the sad shape of those who are perishing in their sins. Forget yourself.'

Cultivate love for the brethren in the same way, and love for the greatest and noblest cause in the world —preparing the way for the kingdom of God by being a true witness of God's way of love. Work it out for yourselves, 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.' We have to have an attitude of submission and pliability.

This is what Paul means by the spirit of power and the spirit of love. If the spirit of love

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

consumes us, we will forget ourselves. Christ gave Himself for us, so that means nothing is too much for us to give.

**John 15:13-17** Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

If we have love for God's people and those who do not understand God's ways, even for our enemies, we will not fear to endure suffering to accomplish the work of God.

Selfishness, the opposite of love for others, leads to fear, because if we are selfish, we are interested only in what we will get out of serving and obeying God; and we will be afraid of losing our dignity, power, and/or money.

True Christian love, energized by God's Holy Spirit, enables us to sacrifice for others and not be afraid.

And finally, Paul tells us that God gives us 'the spirit of a sound mind,' not the spirit of fear but the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.' A sound mind is the right antidote for the spirit of fear. A sound mind is a self-controlled, disciplined, and (therefore becomes) a balanced mind.

**II Timothy 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The term 'sound mind' here is related to the words sober, sober-minded, and sobriety in many of Paul's letters. 'Self-discipline' is also a good translation of 'sound mind.' It describes men and women who are sensible-minded, who have their lives under control. The Amplified Bible reads a 'calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.'

Though we may be of a timid or nervous temperament, the Spirit that God has given us is the Spirit of control, the Spirit of discipline, the Spirit of good judgment. Jesus Christ

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

had already said all of this before Paul learned of it. Paul is just repeating and giving an exposition of Christ's own teaching.

You remember what He said to His disciples when He sent them out to teach. He warned them that they would be hated and persecuted, and that a day might come when they would have to give up their lives, or certainly be put on trial for their lives.

**Matthew 10:16-20** "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Some faithful members of God's church may be taken to court and put on trial for their religious beliefs; and the authorities will be doing everything to accuse us of hate speech and to catch us in our words and actions, but no worries!

Nothing can happen to us unless God allows it, and even then, He will give us more power, more love and a perfectly sound mind to bear up under the stress. Everything is a win-win situation when it comes to be a member of God's church. We cannot lose as long as we submit to God.

**Matthew 10:21-26** "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

Christ encouraged His faithful disciples by the assurance that God would protect them,

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and that their truth and innocence would eventually be vindicated. Christ assured them that their "innocence," their "principles," and their "integrity," although not acknowledged by the world, in due time would be revealed, and those sins of those that did persecute them be revealed as well.

God's saints have to be willing to be unknown, despised, and persecuted for the time being, with the assurance from Christ that their true character would in the future be understood and their sufferings appreciated and rewarded. We may not feel appreciated now but we will as spirit beings in God's kingdom.

Will God ever abandon His children? Is God with us only in good times? Absolutely not! The Apostle Paul reassured the Philippian brethren of God's faithfulness.

**Philippians 1:6** Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

God will not carelessly drop us at any time. He continues His work in us until the day of Jesus Christ's coming.

Let us continue with the same thought in Paul's letter to the Corinthian brethren.

**I Corinthians 1:7-9** So that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

If we neglect fellowshiping with God's people at services and the Feast, then can we really be considered part of the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ? Only God can judge that. I would sure hate to be left out because I would not fellowship with God's people. This is a very serious thing, and this of course is not directed at any in any way who cannot get together with God's people because they are out in far-flung areas.

These two scriptures by Paul confirm that both the Father and the Son are totally and irrevocably committed to see each and every member of His church through to the return of Christ.

But does God guarantee His Kingdom only to those who make a few non-serious mistakes? Or, has God committed Himself to help us through the hard times when we

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

have sinned seriously and the door to God's grace appears forever closed?

King David's life story is a living witness to the answer. The prophet Nathan 'passed on' an important message from God to David.

**II Samuel 7:9** "And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you..."

Granted David had great things to do because God had a work for him to do. But so do each and every one of us in God's church no matter what our position or situation is. Each and every one of us has a work to do, and it is the work of being a true witness. God tells us here by extension: "I have been with you wherever you have gone, and cut off all your enemies from before you."

David allowed himself to go to a lot of places that God never would have led him. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he murdered Uriah, he numbered the people for military purposes against God's command, and he shed a lot of human blood in battle. But God never abandoned him even in his worst predicaments. After sinning, David cried out to God:

**Psalms 31:22** For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You.

David knew that God agonized along with him when he reaped the inevitable fruits of sinning. But the totally loyal and faithful God stayed with him because David always repented. David was a man after God's own heart, and from his heart he did not want to do those things, he did not want to sin, but in his weakness he did. He repented genuinely and God forgave him. Nothing could be more encouraging to each and every one of us, and that is why it is recorded in the scripture.

God is not a respecter of persons. He has a desire for the work of His hands. David writes:

**Psalms 138:8** The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands.

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God cannot lie, and everything that He tells us is a promise that we can absolutely rely on! He will finish the work He has begun in us. The road ahead may be a tough one; times of stress may be enormous. But God will not give up on us unless we rebel and quit. He will bring us into His Kingdom.

**Hebrews 13:5-6** Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

The power of God's Spirit makes it possible for us to boldly say, "I will not fear!"

This encouragement that He will never forsake us is mentioned three places in the Old Testament. Here in Hebrews it is actually a quote from several mentions in the Old Testament.

**Deuteronomy 31:6** Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

**Joshua 1:5** No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

By extension this is said to every last saint, to every last member of God's church.

**I Chronicles 28:20** And David said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God—my God—will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord.

All those who reverence and obey God are promised, "God will never leave you nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord." It is the same as saying, 'until you have finished all of the work of being a true witness of me for the service of My house.'

Even the most uneducated and the most nervous people in the church of God are given

Facing Times of Stress: Fear of the Future by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

a sound mind and the sound wisdom to be a true witness. In facing such times of stress, God will give us what to say and tell us what to do, and for some temperaments will give more self-control and restraint than for others if necessary. Whatever is necessary; and we should be sure to ask for self-control.

We must not think of ourselves as ordinary worldly people. God's people are not natural, carnal people. We are born from above by the indwelling of God's Spirit, and it is 'the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.'

So, for those who are especially prone to anxiety and depression through timid fear of the future, stir up the gift that God has given you. Ask God to remind you of what is true about your miraculous condition in His church. As long as we are still striving to overcome, God's Holy Spirit does not leave us when we stumble or fall short of what God wants. Christ promised, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever.'

Jesus Christ abides in us, and the power of the Holy Spirit strengthens us.

But God will not fill us with His Spirit—empower us with courage and love and use us—if we neglect our spiritual lives. That is why prayer and Bible study are so important. They are fuel to help 'stir up' the Holy Spirit.

The apostle John was inspired to write:

**I John 4:18** There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

Instead of allowing thoughts of the future to grip you, remind yourself of who you are, and of what Spirit is within you.

May God remind you of the character of His Spirit, and enable you to go steadily forward, fearing nothing, living in the present, ready for the future, with only one desire—to glorify God who has given us everything that we need to endure to the end.