



How Can We Love God and Fear God At the Same Time?

by Sellers S Crain, Jr

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

The Bible teaches us to "love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength" (**Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27**). John reminds us that "God is love," and we should "love Him because He first loved us." (**1 John 4:8-10**) Yet, at the same time, we are told more than 500 times to fear God. How is it possible to do both of these things at the same time? Scripture is full of statements showing that fearing God is a positive and not a negative thing. (**Isaiah 41:10, 13; Mathew 10:31; John 14:27; Luke 12:32; Romans 8:15; Revelation 1:7**) Closely observing these Scriptures will enlighten us on why we should fear God and what kind of fear we are to have.

When Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, a Median priest of God, suggested to him that he needed help leading Israel, he said,

"Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place them to be rulers over thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." (**Exodus 18:17-21**)

The fear of God would cause them to do the right thing in helping Moses lead the people.

Paul wrote of those who lived rebellious lives and did not "know the way of Peace," and who had "no fear of God before their eyes." (**Romans 3:17-18**) Their lack of fearing God led them to live ungodly lives. Writing to the Christians in Corinth telling them they were the temple of God and that He dwelt among them, Paul said,

"Therefore, having these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."
(**2 Corinthians 7:1**)

Solomon wrote, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all." He then explains why we should fear Him,

For God will bring every work into judgment. Including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**)

Jesus said we should not,

"Fear those who can destroy the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
(**Matthew 10:28**)

John Witherspoon wrote, "It is only the fear of God that can deliver us from the fear of men."

Solomon gives us two possible answers for why we should fear God when he wrote,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ... [and] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (**Proverbs 1:7; 9:10**)

Knowledge leads to wisdom. The more we know about God the less we will fear Him.

Those who are unprepared to meet God in judgment have every reason to fear the terror of God. Paul wrote,

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men [and added that] we are well known to God. (**2 Corinthians 5:11**)

Is there not an indication here that those who know God and are known by Him do not have to fear God in the same way that disobedient unbelieving people do? (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**)

Fear is defined as "One of the seven universal emotions shared by all people; an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger; anxious concern." It is also defined as a "profound reverence and awe especially towards God; To have reverential awe of God; A feeling of respect and wonder of something or someone very powerful: the fear of God." The word for fear in the Hebrew is *yare* it pertains more to the idea of awe and respect. The Hebrew word for terror is *bahal*. There are numerous texts in the Old Testament that talk of not fearing the presence of God mentioned earlier. There is no positive word for fear in English. Martin Luther had a problem with this subject and had two words to describe fear. One word was servile meaning the fear of a prisoner awaiting judgment. The second word was filial relating to the fear of a family member disappointing a parent.

Many people have been raised with a paralyzing fear of God as if He were some kind of horrible monster ready to strike them down with lightning bolts, or to give them some affliction or disease at the slightest provocation. The fear of judgement can result in one believing God will snatch His blessing away from them without warning like an unhappy parent telling a child, "No more presents for Christmas." The Psalmist wrote,

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. (**Psalm 103:8**)

Does this sound like a revengeful angry God who is eager to punish us? Sin does have consequences, and some sins can result in injuries or death, but most don't. God hates sin, but loves the sinner. If we love Him as we should, we will do everything we can to keep from sinning.

Obviously, when we are talking about Christians fearing God, it is different from the fear of those who do not know God. The Christians fear of God is the reason for them walking in His ways, serving Him. and loving Him. God does not want Christians to be afraid of Him. Paul wrote that "nothing can separate us from the love of God." (**Romans 8:31-39**) John wrote,

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.
(**1 John 4:18**)

God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind. (**2 Timothy 1:7**)

God does want us to be aware of His power and to have that reverential awe and deep respect. God sent His Son to die for us to remove from us the fear of judgment. (**John 10:27-30**) If we fear judgment, it means our love for God has not been perfected.

Although we will be there, judgment is not for Christians. It will be rewards day for us those who have lived righteous lives, (**Matthew 25:31-40, 46**) Paul wrote,

Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.
(**Romans 8:1-2**)

No condemnation means there will be nothing held against us. As long as we remain in Christ and walk being guided by God's Spirit inspired word, we should have no fear of God or of the judgment.

Charles Bridges wrote concerning the fear of God, "It is the affectionate reverence by which a child of God bends himself humbly and gracefully to His father's law." Another wrote, "The fear of God means the fear of hurting our relationship with Him by breaking His heart, and not keeping the heart-to-heart relationship alive." Paul wrote,

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world leads to death.
(**2 Corinthians 7:10**)

We should have godly fear when we sin knowing we are disobeying our loving Father. (**Hebrews 12:1-11**) When we are filled with gratitude for His blessing, we will treasure loving Him, and knowing He is our Father.

When we have right kind of fear for God, we will take Him seriously. We will give Him the reverence, honor and respect that is due Him because of His person and His position. It means we will live our lives aware that because He loves us, He has the right to hold us accountable for our actions. In other words, we realize and accept that He is God, and I am not.

Some things we can do to maintain the proper reverence and respect for God.

1. Be constantly aware of God's presence and power. We have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us. (**Hebrews 13:5**)
2. Acknowledge the seriousness of sin and its eternal consequences.
(**Proverbs 16:25; Romans 6:23; James 1:13-15**)
3. Let godly sorrow continually lead you to repentance. The only sin of Christians that God will not forgive is one that they refuse to repent and turn away from.
(**1 John 1:7-10; 5:16-17**)

--- Sellers S. Crain, Jr.