



Berean Christian Fellowship

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Fear, the Beginning of Wisdom—Part 1

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

We are told in Scripture to fear God and yet at the same time, we are told to not fear Him. Is this a contradiction? No, for there is no contradiction in God’s Word. Much of the confusion comes from the Hebrew and Greek meaning behind the word “fear.”

Here, the Greek word “Phobos” means “to flee or withdraw” from God, either because of terror of punishment and harm, or, in contrast, because we sense our own inadequacy in His presence. Those are very different meanings!

On the one hand, all sinners should fear God and “shrink back” from His righteousness judgement, which demands justice for their evil deeds. And *“this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed”* (Jn. 3:19-20). This is to fear God as a threat to you—as your enemy. Unfortunately, man often loses his fear of God’s judgment when his sin goes unpunished due to the patience of God and he continues to commit evil with no fear.

On the other hand, every single prophet who was in God’s presence “feared the Lord,” because they knew they should not be there! They were painfully aware of their sinful inadequacy in the presence of a Holy God and it was excruciating! Most fell on their faces as if they were dead, objectively recognizing that their fallen, sinful flesh deserved judgment!

To obtain Salvation from God’s judgment, we must start with this kind of “fear of God,” which is an objective heart-understanding of our sinful inadequacy and of God’s sufficiency. This sense to “withdraw” from His holiness is an understanding or confession in the heart of the sinner that we are not worthy and

cannot measure up. When we come to this “fear of the Lord,” something wonderful happens. God does not turn us away, nor hasten our retreat; instead, He welcomes us to Him! We can take refuge from our inadequacy in His sufficiency! He will accept us, if we confess the truth of our inadequacy and “get reconciled” with Him through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our place of judgment—so making peace and covering our insufficiency with His sufficiency in the presence of God.

This is not a fear that makes you retreat from God, but a fear that makes you recognize you are inadequate and HE is adequate. It is to know you have no right to approach Him, but He has welcomed you and given you the right through Christ to find refuge in His adequacy: *“How great is Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, Before the sons of men!”* (Ps. 31:19)

You cannot take refuge in someone you consider a threat—who you fear will harm you! And this is why John teaches us that *“there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love”* (1 Jn. 4:18). God is no longer an enemy that we should fear—He is our heavenly Father who awes us by His undeserved love.

The beginning of a right relationship with God is to recognize you cannot save yourself because you are wholly insufficient without Christ’s gift of Himself in your place of judgment. It is to feel that sense of inadequacy in our relationship with God, but we press forward into Him, because Christ has covered our inadequacy by His sacrifice and His love. We are now accepted in God’s presence, not because of ourselves, but because of Jesus. We have no more fear of judgment, but we have a deep “fear of the Lord.”

This “fear” is the beginning of wisdom. *“We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”* (Heb. 10:39). Amen.