

HEALTHY FEAR, HOLY LOVE

"I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked..." These are the first words of man recorded after sin came into the world. Fear. Specifically, a fear of God.

The scriptures tell us much about the fear of God, but as you consider the 170+ mentions of it in the Old Testament you quickly come to the conclusion that the fundamental value of this fear is to cause one to avoid sin and to obey God's commands.

It is the 'natural' result of the sense of sin. Adam said that he was afraid because he was naked, but the word he used is different from that presented previously in Chapter Two of Genesis when it says of Adam and Eve that "...they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Although both words come from the same root, the latter seems to be an 'innocent' or 'compelled' nakedness as suggested in Job 1:21, Ecc 5:15 or Isa 20:3 whereas the term used when they hid from God reflects a lewd or shameful nakedness as in Deut 28:48 or Eze 16:22. It is interesting that the word used to describe the serpent as 'cunning or crafty' is also derived from this same root. This shameful nakedness springing ultimately from his association with the serpent made Adam afraid of God, however...

I submit that man was not created to fear God. But, as a consequence of sin, that is, his sin nature, he must now fear his Creator for his

own good. In this life, in this world, the fear of God is:

- The beginning of wisdom – Psa 111:10
- Clean – Psa 19:9
- The beginning of Knowledge – Pro 1:7
- To hate evil – Pro 8:13
- That which prolongs life – Pro 10:27
- Strong confidence – Pro 14:26
- A fountain of life to depart from the snares of death – Pro 14:27
- The instruction of wisdom – Pro 15:33
- Riches, honor and life – Pro 22:4
- Quick understanding – Isa 11:3
- His treasure – Isa 33:6

Fear of God preserved Noah, the patriarchs, the saints of old and for a time, the Jewish nation. In this day and age, we have great need of this fear for sinful rebellion to God's ways has hardened many hearts. But there's a difference -- the alienated sinner fears God because of a sense of coming judgment -- that is, a punishment. This can drive some like John Newton, the author of the hymn, Amazing Grace, to salvation.

The saved fear God not because of pending judgment -- Christ took that for us -- but simply because He is Holy, Almighty, Omniscient and a Father Whom we seek to please. We fear Him because of Who He is and what He can do. Oh, how we need the fear of God! Sinners and saints!

Yet there's something we need even more.

There's an interesting transition on this subject going from Old to New Testament. Rather than fear, love

becomes far and away the predominant theme. In fact, while the OT has 173 mentions of the fear of God, it only has 25 mentions of the love of God (that is, man loving God) or about a 7:1 ratio. Conversely, the NT has some 36 mentions of man loving of God and only 23 mentions of godly fear or about a 3:2 ratio the other way. Also, the OT speaks of fear or dread some 570 times and of love some 294 times. The NT speaks of love some 289 times and of fear some 156 times. The ratios are nearly exact in opposition.

Regarding relationship, man is by far, instructed to fear God in the OT and by far, instructed to love God in the New. This is fascinating! Of course, it's not all one way or the other in either section of the Bible. However, something important is being communicated by the emphasis of repetition if nothing else.

I will submit that although loving God has always been God's desire for man -- see Deut 6:5 and 10:12 -- mankind has not been truly able to do so until the indwelling of the Holy Spirit came. Even father Abraham was tested with his son Isaac to verify that he feared God. (Gen 22:12) In fact the only saint in the OT to confess his unabashed love for God was David (Psa 18:1, 116:1?) of whom it was recorded that upon being anointed as the coming king the "...Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward." (1 Sam 16:13)

The principle part of the fruit of His Spirit is love (Gal 5:22) and the only way for man to love God with agape love is by the Spirit. Even dear Peter could not confess to loving

Christ with agape love (John 21:15-17) before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

And in heaven, there will be no more sin-based fear -- none like Adam's. Rather, an ever-deepening love. Certainly, in heaven, there shall be no sin. With Satan and his demons cleaned out (who BTW are the only spiritual beings in scripture to reflect fear -- see Luke 8:27-37) sin-fueled fear will be unknown. We will love and reverence God as our Father and Christ as our Husband and Savior. In Rev 15, we find the tribulation saints in heaven singing, "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?" but it is quite evident that they are pointing to the effects of the coming seven last plagues upon those living on the earth. They follow with, "For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested." This will certainly be fulfilled in the millennium!

In Revelation 1, when John was caught up into heaven, beholding the Lord, Jesus said, "Fear not."

In Rev 14:7, an angel circles the globe during the tribulation period announcing to the rebellious sinful world, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come;" Note, that there is no command to love God.

In Rev 19, a voice from the throne of God proclaims, "Praise our God, all you his servants, and you that fear Him, both small and great." Here it is probable that the address is to those in heaven (the servants) and as with the Rev 15 scripture above, those on earth (you that fear Him). It could be that all the saved will be, at this point, in heaven for

God has just judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth.

John recorded, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment (i.e. before God); because as He is, so are we in this world. 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 4:16-18)

In application to our day and age - in Laodecia and the world around it -- sin is being systematically erased as a concept. Sexual aberrance is termed "gay", murder is called "choice", lying is referred to as "advertising" or "spin", gossip is offered as "news", violence, terror and perversity are dubbed "entertainment"... on and on it goes. You see, no more sense of sin – no more healthy fear of God. No more fear of God – lawlessness and a sickly fear of man, death, discomfort, failure, Satan ...ye-ikes! The world under control of Satan and the Antichrist will be a world of great deception – complete redefinition. As a consequence, it will be a world without moral restraint. Satan wants a world that's angry at God for His judgments but unresponsive to His warnings.

In the Revelation, we read -- "...men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory." (Rev 16:9) "...and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their

sores, and repented not of their deeds." (Rev 16:11)

Absolutely, in this life we NEED the fear of God. Jesus said so. In speaking to his disciples, He said, "...do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Mat 10:28) It's the only way the 'old man' – the carnal nature – is kept in line. It's the only way we eschew evil. In truly fearing God, we have no fear of man or death.

We cannot afford to buy into the devil's redefinitions – he's a master deceiver. Reject sin? Yes. Reject the sense of sin? NO. And by that, I don't mean to accept the enemy's tirades of guilt and condemnation (Romans 8:1). Just go to the Lord with that sense of sin humbly -- in healthy fear and holy love. Give it to Him and be free.

For the day is coming when sin will be no more and love will fill all. In fact, I'm convinced that heaven worships our Almighty God in reverence fueled primarily by immense and ever expanding love.

And though we who are saved and thus indwelt by God's Spirit still need a healthy fear of God, we need as much if not more a genuine holy agape love for Him – THAT'S His heart's desire, that's the place of intimate fellowship, that's what He sent His Son to enable, that's what it means to "become a child of God" (John 1:12), that's what it means to be a bride and that's the fruit of His Spirit.

To paraphrase the old hymn, "In life, no guilt. In death, no fear." Hallelujah!