

FEAR OF GOD

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Fear In General

The word “fear” appears 514 times in the King James Bible. It translates twenty-one Hebrew words and three Greek words. This study will be limited to the word “fear” when used in reference to God. The need for a study of the fear of God has manifested itself in view of current misrepresentations on the subject. Examples include the teaching that fear of God equals a kind of modern Phariseeism which is expressed by a legalistic bend in connection with the Scriptures. Attention to details of Scriptures is thought to force people away from the predominant themes of the Bible like the love and mercy of God. Another example of misrepresentation of the fear of God is the view that fear equals paralyzation of Christian activity and stagnation of congregational efforts. And, one last example which will emphasize a need for the study is that fear of God produces guilt. Indeed, one purpose of the law of Moses was to establish the guilt of man due to his sins. Paul wrote, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). The truth is that before a sinner can be converted he first must be convinced of his guilt. And, the school of thought which wishes to remove guilt altogether as a negative motivation from men’s lives is doing so at the expense of the fear of God. Again, Paul wrote, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:10, 18).

Fear Meaning Timid

The word “fear” in reference to God is used in two senses. One, fear meaning timorous or timid, lacking in courage or self-confidence and lacking boldness or determination. Those who are fearful in this way John placed right alongside the unbelieving, abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars, who are consigned to the infernal regions (Rev. 21:8). Love of God and keeping his commandments casts this kind of fear out. John wrote, “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. . . . For this

is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (I Jn. 4:17, 18; 5:3). Clearly, this kind of fear does not enjoy the favor of God.

Fear Meaning Reverence

A second usage of the word “fear” means profound reverence and awe toward God. Such fear is essential in finding favor with God. Concerning fear in this sense W.E. Vine wrote, “Reverential fear of God is a controlling motive of life, in matters spiritual and moral, not a mere fear of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him, a fear which banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence” (p. 84). As a summary statement the Book of Ecclesiastes has, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the duty of man” (12:13). The Book of Proverbs commends the fear of God as being fundamental to the acquiring of wisdom. Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Proverbs 14:26, 27, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” Proverbs 15:33, “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility.” Proverbs 16:6, “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.” Proverbs 19:23, “The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.” In Proverbs the wise man Solomon told what it takes to understand the fear of God, “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and lifted up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” (2:1-5).

Fear In The Gospel System

The gospel system is designed so as to include the fear of God. The Savior said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Christ’s statement about the strait and narrow way implies fear of God. Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the

gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13, 14). Jeremiah prophesied regarding the gospel system, “And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer. 32:39, 40). Perhaps this helps to understand why the day the new law went forth from Jerusalem, being the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, and 3,000 souls were added to the church Luke wrote, “And fear came upon every soul” (Acts 2:43). The early church was of one heart (Acts 4:32); they were of one way, the strait and narrow way; they had the new covenant; and they feared God. The gospel system was designed to include fear.

Fear And Salvation

God grants repentance unto life to those who fear him. The first Gentile convert was “one that feared God with all his house” (Acts 10:2). Luke recorded the observation Peter made concerning Cornelius’ conversion, “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34, 35). The point is strengthened when the example of Jesus Christ himself is considered. The Bible says, “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:7-9). Jesus was heard “in that he feared.” The penitent soul today who is seeking salvation from sin must fear God and keep his commandments.