

“Do You Not Even Fear God?”

Fear, or the lack thereof, is very much a part of our pop-culture. Some, seemingly, are afraid of everything (but we'll save such for another time). Others at least claim **“No Fear”** of anything. It seems our society is obsessed with fear- either promoting it through intimidation, or by claiming immunity from it.

There is no doubt that believers are repeatedly urged to *“not be afraid”* or *“fear”* certain things such as *intimidation* and *persecution*, 1Pet.3:14; or even *death* and *eternal judgment*, Heb.2:15 and 1John 4:16-18. But at the same time, we are commanded to *“conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon the earth,”* 1Pet.1:17. What's the difference? While we should **not** fear Satan, his tactics, or those who are aligned with him (cf. Matt.10:26-28a), we **should** fear God. “Yes,” *fear* Him in the sense of “reverent respect,” but also *fear* His right and power to *“destroy both body and soul in hell,”* Matt.10:28b.

Let's consider a quick biblical example of one who ***should have been afraid of God, but wasn't***. The “thief on the cross” made a now-famous request of Jesus for salvation, but previously had asked a lesser-known question to his comrade in crime as they hung upon their crosses. The other criminal was hurling the same abuses at Jesus as was the crowd, Luke 23:39. In the next verse, the penitent thief rebuked him and asked, ***“Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”*** The rhetorical implication of his question is that the impenitent thief **should have been afraid of God, and hell**, but wasn't, despite the peril of his circumstance.

Perhaps this impenitent and unafraid criminal is all too representative of people today, who, despite their spiritually perilous lifestyles, have no real fear of God, or hell. Why is it that so many people seemingly have a “No Fear” audacity toward their eternal Judge and destiny? Although atheism is surely to blame, it is not solely responsible since even those who claim to believe in God, heaven, and even hell seemingly no longer *fear God*, or even live lives influenced by *reverent respect* for Him. Why is this? Here are a few possibilities...

Some have been so inundated with “grace and love” preaching/teaching that they've concluded that the concept of eternal punishment is just not possible from such a loving God. But there is a major problem here. The same Book that manifests the “grace and love” of God also reveals His justice and willingness to punish. *“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who inflict you...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,”* 2Thessalonians 1:6-9.

Some seem to think they'll live forever- or just don't want to think about dying and eternity. Regardless of whatever healthcare we do or don't have, everyone is going to die- some sooner rather than later, and harder rather than easier. Refusing to accept and prepare for this reality doesn't change it. The rich man, who *“habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day,”* died as did the *“certain poor man named Lazarus,”* Luke 16:19-20. The only difference was that the rich man's spirit went to the place of *“torment”* because of the way he chose to live his life, and Lazarus' spirit was taken to the place of comfort for the way he chose to live his, cf. vv.22ff. Refusing to accept and prepare for the realities of death and eternity don't negate them.

Some have been so influenced by PMA (Positive Mental Attitude) in thought generally, and preaching specifically, that there is a cultural bias against “negative” motivations such as fear. PMA has its place and benefits, but remember that God chose to use fear as **a** (not *the*, as in only) motivator for us spiritually. Otherwise, why are we given graphic and horrifying pictures of hell, such as: Mark 9:42, “*it would be better for him if with a heavy milestone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea;*” or v.43, “*the unquenchable fire;*” or vv.47b-48, “*cast into hell, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched;*” or Matthew 8:12, “*cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*”? Preachers that proclaim “*the gospel*” must proclaim these realities just as they do the joys of heaven, for the same Book provides them both.

We live in a “second, third, ad infinitum chance” world of endless *redemptive possibilities*. While God’s saving grace is available to “*all men*,” Titus 2:11, it comes in the form of *instructions*, Titus 2:12a, and is, therefore, only applied to those who willing to follow them, Titus 2:12b-15. Two realizations of these truths must thus be concluded: 1) God’s saving grace is applied only to those willing to obey Him; and, 2) Our opportunities to be saved by God’s grace are limited to our willingness to obey Him **now**- for it is the only time we are guaranteed, Hebrews 3:12-15. When our willingness to obey ends, or our life does, so also do our chances of redemption.

These things ought to scare us, and such fear isn’t a bad thing! “*Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men...*” 2Corinthians 5:11. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)