

# Holy Fear

Key Verse: Hebrews 12:28 NLT - *Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.*

Introduction: If God is so loving, kind, and compassionate, why does Scripture say we should "fear" Him? What exactly is the fear of the Lord? Too often, texts like these, as well as religion in general, have been used to instill an unhealthy fear inside of people in the name of God. As a result, people are often tormented by fear and/or so often turned off by fear-mongering people.

At the same time, there are so many in the church that treat God's Word and His presence in their life with disrespect and contempt.

We need to live in "holy fear," but holy fear is a very particular kind of fear that should not be confused with fear as we normally understand it.

*What is "holy fear"? What kind of fear is healthy? What kind of fear triggers wisdom?*

One reason why many people don't understand the fear of the Lord is because in Scripture, there are primarily two types of "fear of the Lord" listed.

## Two types of Fear

### 1) Terrifying Fear

"terror of the Lord" and/or the "dread of Lord"

- a) The first fear of the Lord is the abject terror of an unrepentant sinner or a rebellious person who stands before the justice of God.
  - i) When Israel's new King, Saul was forced to raise an army for his first battle against the Ammonites, he scared the nation into action.

1 Samuel 11:6, 7 NIV - *When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. v.7 He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out together as one.*
  - ii) Regarding the coming judgment on the rebellious nations in the last days, Isaiah 2:17-19 (NIV) says, "The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day, v.18 and the idols will totally disappear. v.19 Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth."

Isaiah 33:14 NLT - *The sinners in Jerusalem shake with fear. Terror seizes the godless. "Who can live with this devouring fire?" they cry. "Who can survive this all-consuming fire?"*

- b) The Hebrew Language: The original Hebrew word being used in all these instances and many more is ***pahad***, which always indicates a terrifying fear and/or dread.
  - i) The book of Revelation contains a parallel passage (6:15-17), in which evildoers try to hide in caves and rocks from the terror of God's justice.
  - ii) This is what Paul was talking about when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:11 NKJV, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."

Hebrews 11:31 - *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

- c) Ultimately, God will have to judge those who do evil and refuse to repent at His loving call. Such people have every reason to dread that day.

In light of this, how shall we live? Should we live in the dread of the Lord being terrified of God due to our past and present shortcomings? No! For those who are in Christ are "... not destined for wrath..." (1 Thessalonians 5:9 ESV). As long as we remain in a state of grace through faith, we will not become children of wrath, but we will be celebrated as children of God. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Our Jesus suffered and took on Him the punishment of our sin so we would not have to live in dread of the severe judgment of God.

## 2) Holy Fear

Holy fear is healthy fear; holy fear is love's fear!

- a) The holy and healthy fear of the lord is mentioned over and over in Scripture, the New Testament and the Old alike.
  - i) New Testament:
    - (1) Acts 9:21 - *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*
    - (2) 1 Peter 1:14-17 NIV - *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. v.15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; v.16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." v.17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.*
    - (3) Hebrews 12:28 NLT - *Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshipping him with holy fear and awe.*
  - ii) Old Testament:

(1) *The fear of the Lord is clean and enduring...* - Psalms 19:9

(2) *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...* - Psalms 111:10

(3) The fear of the Lord brings a blessed life.

Psalms 128:1 - *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!*

(4) The fear of the Lord brings a closeness and intimacy with God.

Psalms 34:7 - *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

b) The Hebrew Language: In these Old Testament Scriptures and many others, the Hebrew word used for this fear is not **pahad**, instead it is **yirah**.

i) The usage of Yirah:

(1) While *yirah* may refer to fear in the natural sense, such as fear of “briars and thornbushes” (Isaiah 7:25), the overwhelming majority of the time, this noun either refers to a sense of proper reverence for God or the sense of fear at the awesome power of God.

Also, the repeated statements that the “fear” of God is the central aspect of wisdom and knowledge all come from the use *yirah*. There is most often a blessing being indicated for those people fear God in this manner.

(2) Yirah is almost always used for reverential fear and never used for terror or dread.

ii) An exegesis: Exodus 20:20 - *Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”*

(1) “do not fear” **Yare** is used in the sense of being frightened, or the feeling of great distress, deep concern or being in pain.

(2) “that the fear of him may be in you” is our wonderful word **Yirah**, which is this beautiful, respectful, reverential honor that brings us close and intimate with God.

So when God speaks from the mountain in His awesome voice, revealing His power, He was not using a scare tactic in order to dominate their will. He just wanted them to know whom they were dealing with so they would not disobey!

He was not being a terrestrial bully as some think. It was for their own good, that God would have them respect Him and live with Him in holy fear! He would have them live in a relationship with Him that was in perfect order. God would be their God and they would love Him as such. So, He wanted them to know how powerful and awesome He is.

## Holy Fear is Love's Fear

1) Holy fear is love's fear because it is inspired by love.

- a) There is a kind of fear that is inspired by love. It's a fear based upon reverence and loving respect for a person or a thing we love.
- b) When we genuinely love another person we will live with a healthy anxiety and concern that our actions should never grossly disappoint, disrespect, or violate the other person.

This is why, in the Old Testament, the prophets use the analogy of Yahweh's marriage to Israel.

*Hosea 2:19, 20 - And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. v.20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.*

A wife and a husband will find their marriage prosper in the boundaries of the anxiety of love's fear.

2) Holy fear is love's fear because it is anxious not to betray a trust.

- a) We live in holy fear when we are anxious not to betray a trust or disrespect the person you love.
- b) But this is very different from the fear of being punished.

Holy fear says, I won't gaze lustfully, I won't touch, I won't flirt with other lovers, because the holy fear of hurting my spouse and destroying the preciousness of the relationship is too frightening.

3) Holy fear is love's fear because it seeks to guard the purity and innocence of a holy relationship.

- a) When we were building this church I found myself often working on site around a bunch of unsaved men who had filthy and disrespectful mouths. I can remember being a little anxious and a little worried one time when Kerri decided to come for a visit. The respectful fear I had for our marriage caused me to worry that I would have to punch somebody in the mouth. So, I warned them! My wife is coming.... you do not disrespect her with your words. If you do, I will hit you very hard! LOL!
- b) Have you ever noticed how when a little baby is around, big loud boisterous men talk softly and respectfully?

There is a fear of disrespecting the innocence of that child. So we watch our words and actions around babies not because they intimidate or threaten us but rather because their innocence inspires an anxiety in us that makes us want to be at our best around them.

Conclusion: It is bad power and ungodly authority that seeks to control people through imitation and terroristic acts. God has never been that kind of God. He was not that kind of God in the Garden of Eden, He was not that kind of God on Mountain Sinai, and He was not that kind of God on Mount Calvary.

God is love and John says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. v.19 We love because he first loved us" (1John 2:18, 19). Holy fear is love's fear.

Tormenting fear is not holy fear! Holy fear is love's fear!