

A Revival of the Fear of God

What the church of America desperately needs today is a revival of the fear of God.

I'm not talking about a servile fear for a petty and unpredictable deity. Perfect love casts out that kind of fear (see 1 John 4:18).

I'm talking about the reverential fear deserved by a holy and all-powerful God, the kind of fear that causes us to walk carefully in His sight. Such godly awe is sadly lacking in the body.

Today, worship must be "fun," pastors must be "cool," and every message must have some good jokes in it. We don't want to get too serious about spiritual things. That would be stiff and "religious."

No wonder we are so shallow in our convictions and so compromised in our lifestyles. A fresh encounter with God would drive out our superficial spirituality in a hurry.

How desperately we need that fresh encounter—the kind that causes us to fall on our faces in His glorious presence crying out, "Holy, holy, holy!"

When we leave a meeting like that, we are deeply (and sometimes even forever) changed.

That's what it means to walk in the fear of the Lord: We recognize who He is, and we live a life that is pleasing in His sight.

In Genesis 20, Abraham assumed that king Abimelech would likely kill him and take Sarah as his wife, since, Abraham thought to himself, "There is no fear of God at all in this place" (Gen. 20:11; see also Ex. 20:20).

When people revere God and recognize that He sees all, that He knows all, and that He is a righteous Judge, they are not prone to play games with sin.

That's why Proverbs states that, "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil" (8:13, ESV).

That's why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7).

But this is not just an Old Testament theme.

When Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead for lying to the Holy Spirit, Acts records that "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:11).

The believers understood that the One who sent His Son to die for them and who gave them His Spirit and now lived among them was holy, and He would not tolerate brazen acts of deception.

Walking in the fear of the Lord was considered a good, healthy thing. In fact, after Saul of Tarsus met the Messiah, Acts states that "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" (Acts 9:31).

Yes, peace and the comfort of the Spirit go hand in hand with the fear of the Lord, yet we often look at godly reverence as something negative, a vestige of Sinai bondage, a destructive aspect of manmade religion. Perish the thought.

After calling us to be holy since the Lord our God is holy, Peter writes, "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a

lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:17-19).

It is no light thing to call on God as Father and to be redeemed by the blood of Jesus. This should deepen our holy fear, not diminish it.

Yet so many believers today want to be completely free of the fear of God, as if they have some new and better revelation that supersedes the Word. Not a chance.

Loving God and revering God are two sides of the same coin. Being moved by love and being moved by reverence fit together like a hand in a glove.

Not only is this taught clearly in the New Testament, but the writer of Hebrews urges us to walk in a greater reverential awe than even the Old Testament believers did:

"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:25-29; the last phrase is a quotation from Deut. 4:24).

Past revivals were marked by this holy fear, as Duncan Campbell described so vividly:

"I have known men out on the fields, others at their weaving looms, so overcome by this sense of God that they were found prostrate on the ground. Hear the words of one who felt the hand of God upon him: 'The grass beneath my feet and the rocks

around me seem to cry, "flee to Christ for refuge." This supernatural illumination of the Holy Spirit led many in [the Hebrides] revival to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ before they came near to any meeting connected with the movement. I have no hesitation in saying that this awareness of God is the crying need of the church today. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'; but this cannot be worked up by any human effort, it must come down."

I am longing to see that holy presence come down in our midst, and I am urging every pastor and leader to teach and preach the truths of God's Word to help produce that reverential awe again among us.

We don't realize how badly we need it.

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