

How Can Fear Be Both Good and Bad?

Fear is natural and good; so are eating and drinking. They are normal parts of our make-up. They are also essential to human life, as is fear. But none of those is *always* good.

Some people have a compulsion to eat, some have an addiction for drink, some are obsessed with sex and some are possessed with fears. To be gluttons, drunks or immoral people means we are guilty, and we are just as guilty when we allow fears to dominate our lives.

We can be hooked on fear. What then? Only fear can get us off the hook. It is the only known antidote to the cobra's bite of obsessive alarm.

Jesus said, *"Do not be afraid; only believe"* (Luke 8:50). Why does He say *"only?"* Because that is all we can do—we can only believe when that curse threatens us. It is also all we need to do. It might be a case of great fear, and little faith leaves us in fearful danger. Fear and worry are killers.

In the Bible, we learn some fear is good and some is bad. The books of Psalms and Proverbs speak of *"the fear of the Lord"* as a virtue 14 times. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* (Ps. 111:10), *"a fountain of life"* (Prov. 14:27), and *"riches and honor and life"* (Prov. 22:4). Yet 1 John 4:18 says, *"Fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."*

In Exodus 20:20, we find both aspects: *"Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."* How can fear be both good and bad? The answer depends on what or whom we fear. To fear God is a wholesome attitude. When we fear the devil, it is a sign we do not fear God, which means we have no faith.

Analysis of Fear

The essence of fear is being faced with something greater than ourselves, some greater person or Being or intelligence or power. Our fear lies with whatever we see as the greatest thing. If we see God as the greatest, we will fear God more than the devil or men. If we fear the devil the most, we think of him as being greater than God.

The fear of the Lord is good. The Lord is great—great in significance, great in wisdom and great in power. Fear of God has a salutary effect upon our lives because it is a healthy fear, producing good. We will not put a foot wrong when we walk before the Lord. If we know He holds us in His hands, we will “*hate evil*,” as Proverbs 8:13 says. Fearing God makes us godly.

We have a healthy respect for God because of His overwhelming power, but also because of His unmovable will. Nothing changes His purposes. He is great enough to crush us, but great enough also to show us mercy. The fear of the Lord is the only good fear. Other fears are bad—worry, anxiety, dread, and panic, as well as living in mortal dread. That is a terrible state of mind, but there is an answer—to fear God and to trust Him.

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Reinhard Bonnke *is the founder of Christ for All Nations and whose ministry has led more than 70 million people to Christ.*