



"Guard your thoughts, and there will be little fear about your actions."

—J.C. Ryle

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What Do You Fear? (Part Two)

Theologian Richard Halverson is quoted as saying, "Men who fear [God](#) face life fearlessly. Men who do not fear God end up fearing everything." To put it another way, fear can be broken down into two broad categories: the fear of God and the fear of everything else. If we fear God, we will not need to fear anything else. We know that God is sovereign. We know that He promises to provide for us and that He will not withhold any good thing from us. We know that He will not test us beyond what we can bear and that He is unwaveringly committed to bringing us into His Kingdom. Therefore, if we truly fear God, we know we have nothing else to fear.

The problem often arises from not fully understanding what it means to fear God. The fear of God is a topic beyond the scope of this article, but a simple definition is "giving God the respect and regard due Him in every facet of our lives." The *respect and regard* could range from a grudging reverence all the way up to sheer terror and dread such as [Moses](#), the Israelites, and Isaiah felt when in God's presence (see [Exodus 19:16-20](#); [Hebrews 12:18-21](#); [Isaiah 6:1-5](#)). The fact that it is in *every facet of our lives* means there is not a single area in which we do not take God into account.

The fear of God, then, becomes the dominant influence over our actions. [Proverbs 8:13](#) states, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil," suggesting that what we *do* demonstrates whether or not we fear God. Our respect and regard for God will influence us to rid our lives of evil, of [sin](#), and replace it with what is godly.

Immediately after God delivered the Ten Commandments to Israel, the Israelites were so terror-stricken that they begged Moses to be their representative so they would not have to deal with this awesome Being ([Exodus 20:19](#)). Their fear at the time was based on hearing His voice and witnessing Mount Sinai quake and burn—God's immediate presence (verse 18). Moses tried to turn their attention away from their terror-based fear and to redirect it toward a more useful fear. He tells them: "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that *His fear* may be before you, *so that you may not sin*" ([Exodus 20:20](#); emphasis ours). Moses—and God—intended that Israel's fear of Him would result in their obedience and refraining from sin.

So it is with us. If we have the proper fear of God—if the reality of God is continually at the forefront of our minds—we find it easier to resist sin. If we fear God, we will be departing from sin. We will be overcoming and thus eligible to "inherit all things" ([Revelation 21:7](#)).

[Proverbs 29:25](#) presents another angle on fear: "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe." In the Bible, a snare is used figuratively to convey the idea of destruction through deception. The snare itself does not destroy—it is merely a trap of some sort—but it leads to destruction.

As the proverb says, fearing other human beings, as opposed to trusting and fearing God, is a snare. The "bait" is that fearing other people comes easily to us—fearing not only what people may do to us, but also what others may think of us or how they may react to our obedience of God. This reaction is based on false reasoning, however, because the very worst that men can do to us, whether through violence or contrary viewpoint, cannot begin to compare to what [Jesus](#) tells us that God can do to us ([Matthew 10:28](#))!

As we saw in Part One, the fearful or cowardly are cast into the Lake of Fire ([Revelation 21:8](#)) because they fear other things more than they fear God. Not

only will their fear limit their usefulness to God, but it will also frequently cause them to embrace some form of sin. The flipside of [Proverbs 8:13](#)—"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil"—is that, if a person does not have the proper fear of God, he will not hate evil. He will, in effect, embrace it, and no one who feels affectionate regard for sin will be given eternal life.

The apostle Paul, in [II Timothy 1:6-7](#), shows how we can conquer our fears: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of [love](#) and of a sound mind."

In verse 7, we see fear contrasted to *power*, *love*, and a *sound mind*. Earlier in the chapter, Paul discusses another opposite of fear: [faith](#). To create a mental image of these elements, think of a pair of scales. On one side is fear, and on the other side are faith, power, love, and sound-mindedness. If a person allows fear to lead him—other than a proper fear of God—then his faith, power, love, and sound-mindedness will all decrease. Fear will undermine these qualities and keep him from maturing spiritually. Fear will inhibit the action of God's Spirit within an individual, keeping him from being effective for God's purposes. But if the faithful person fears God instead and makes use of the gifts God gives through His Holy Spirit, the fear on the other side will decrease.

Notice that these antidotes to fear derive from one of God's gifts to us. [This world](#) tells us that in order to overcome fear, we just need more self-esteem or more self-confidence. But this short passage indicates that boldness and fearlessness are products of God's Spirit, not virtues we work up within ourselves. Courage is not a matter of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, or working it up by strength of will. Our confidence and esteem should not be in the *self* but in God because we are, by definition, mortal and corrupt. By contrast, God is eternal and perfect, and everything He does always produces the best result. We can make no such claim, not by a long shot! We can be confident knowing that He always gives us what is necessary to carry out His purpose. But we still have to put it to use—to stir it up, as Paul writes in verse 6.

Some Greek manuscripts use the word for "servitude" or "bondage" instead of "fear." This change of terminology helps to clarify what sort of "power" is

being discussed in verse 7. We have not been given a spirit of *bondage*—something that restrains us and limits our range of usefulness—but of power. The Spirit God gives us allows us to break the shackles of what formerly enslaved us and held us back. We have been enabled by it to do whatever God would have us do. We have already received the ability, the might, the strength, and the abundance to carry out God's will. Sadly, our fears and lack of faith typically limit the use of these gifts within us.

In next week's installment, we will continue probing Paul's fear-conquering instruction in [II Timothy 1:6-7](#).

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Fear of God \(Part Two\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Even before we acquire the necessary motivational building blocks of faith, hope, and love, we must acquire the fear of God (spanning the emotions of stark terror to reverential awe) providing a key, unlocking the treasures of God. The process of acquiring this fear comes through a perennial sequential pattern of chaos or disorder followed by Divine order, revealing God's glory, followed by judgment in some form. The cycle takes place in our lives just as assuredly as it did in the biblical examples. Judgment is now upon the Church of God. Learning from biblical examples, we dare not treat what is holy as common, but must (with the metaphorical hills and valleys of our character leveled) maintain a steady reverential fear of God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Sin of Fear \(Part Two\)](#)

by Pat Higgins

In a world influenced by Satan the Devil, fear is a constant that we must all

deal with. We may be confused, though, because we can see two contradictory sides of fear, the good fears and the bad ones. Pat Higgins explains the paradoxes of fear, encouraging us to begin and remain in the proper fear of God.

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