

SHOULD BELIEVERS FEAR GOD?

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We were talking last week about THE FEAR OF GOD. A theme or topic that crops up hundreds of times in the Bible.

There is not much around! Politics ... media ... the entertainment world ... education — even the Churches in this world.

Lots of people claim “to know God”. But what type of God do they believe they know?

Typically ... a God who loves everybody — no matter how they live. Like a sentimental old Grand-Father figure. A God who loves the sinner — but not the sin.

No wonder they don't fear such a God.

But the Bible speaks hundreds of times about the FEAR OF GOD. Only rarely about His love for the people in the world.

Yet ... the Fear of God is vital for successful living — or at least that's what the Old Testament scriptures seemed to tell us?

Deuteronomy 5:29

29 **Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments,** that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

It sounds like a plaintive cry — if only they would fear Me! Even though He knew they wouldn't.

Jeremiah 5:20-25

20 “Declare this in the house of Jacob
And proclaim it in Judah, saying,

21 **'Hear this now, O foolish people,
Without understanding,
Who have eyes and see not,**

And who have ears and hear not:

22 **Do you not fear Me?’ says the LORD.**

Will you not tremble at My presence,

Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea,
By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?
And though its waves toss to and fro,
Yet they cannot prevail;
Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.

23 **But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart;**

They have revolted and departed.

24 They do not say in their heart,

“Let us now fear the LORD our God,

Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season.

He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”

25 **Your iniquities have turned these things away,**

And your sins have withheld good from you.

Verse 22: Do you not fear Me? They never feared God. They couldn't care less about God.

And in Jeremiah's day ... they went into captivity.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

13 **Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:**

Fear God and keep His commandments,

For this is man's all.

14 **For God will bring every work into judgment,**

Including every secret thing,

Whether good or evil.

Conclusion? **Fear God and keep His commandments!!**

However ... last week we stuck with the Old Testament. Many people see the God of the Old Testament as “harsh” or “judgmental”.

“Of course you'd fear the Old Testament God” they might say. “But not the New Testament God ... or gentle Jesus meek and mild. The New Testament is about love and grace and gentleness — or is it?”

So let's review the New Testament.

Historically ... there was a well-known category of people in the New Testament who were known as God-fearers. They weren't Jews.

Acts 10:1-2

1 **There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius**, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

2 **a devout man and one who feared God with all his household**, who gave alms generously to the people, **and prayed to God always**.

Acts 10:19-22

19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

21 **Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius**, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?"

22 **And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, (a righteous man) one who fears God** and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."

Cornelius feared God.

It is almost certainly why God chose him to hear the Gospel.

Acts 13:13-16

13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

16 **Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God**, listen:

Acts 13:23-26

23 From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus—

24 after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'

26 **“Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.**

How many people — or groups — could today be accurately described as God-fearers?

Most today would claim merely that they “deeply respect” God. Do they really? Is that really the same as “Fear”?

Pray in your pyjamas? Turn up sloppily for services? Answer your cell-phone? Put off your Bible reading ... “I need to catch up on a TV programme”.

Choose to sin: “I can always repent tomorrow — or maybe the day after ...?”

Do we really Fear God? Paul did.

2 Corinthians 5:9-11

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, **to be well pleasing to Him.**

10 **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,** that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (*Greek: “bema” of Christ*)

11 **Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord,** we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. (*Terror = “fear” elsewhere*)

Though if you're on the “wrong side” in the judgment — it will be genuine “terror”. Hence ... Paul was motivated by his understanding of the fear of God — to preach repentance and salvation.

Romans 11:19-20

19 You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.”
(*The Jewish branches*)

20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, **and you stand by faith.** Do not be haughty, but fear.

Romans 11:21-23

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

22 **Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God:** on those who fell, severity; **but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness.** **Otherwise you also will be cut off.**

23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Fear! **The goodness and severity of God:** continue — or else — cut off!

The story of the New Testament is not — all gentle Jesus meek and mild.

1 Peter 1:13-16

13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

15 **but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,**
16 **because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”**

Be holy! That’s a bit of a challenge.

1 Peter 1:17-19

17 **And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;** (*are the things that you are living for — worth Christ dying for?*)

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,
19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Conduct yourselves in fear.

2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1

14 **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.** For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? **For you are the temple of the living God.** As God has said:

“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”

17 **Therefore**

**“Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.**

**Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.”**

18 “I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty.”

CHAPTER 7

1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God”. A real fear of God is an incentive ... a motivation ... to holiness: includes avoidance of what is unclean (spiritually).

Hebrews 3:7-13

7 **Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:**

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

8 **Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,**

In the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.

10 **Therefore I was angry with that generation,**

And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.’

11 **So I swore in My wrath,**

‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ”

12 **Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;**

13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” **lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**

Don’t harden your hearts. They didn’t go into the Promised Land. They didn’t enter God’s rest.

Hebrews 4:1

1 **Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.**

Let us fear — we don’t want to lose out!

Hebrews 10:26-31

26 **For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,**

27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

28 **Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.**

29 **Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?**

30 For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The LORD will judge His people.”

31 **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

It is a fearful thing to fall into God’s hands. Don’t forget the goodness and severity of God!

Hebrews 12:25-26

25 **See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.** For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, **much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,**

26 whose voice then shook the earth; **but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.”**

Hebrews 12:28-29

28 Therefore, **since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.**

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

According to what we have read in the New Testament — we should serve with Godly fear! God is a consuming fire!

We have seen the words of Paul ... Peter ... Luke. How about the Words of Jesus?

Matthew 10:22-26

22 **And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.**

23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

25 It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!

26 **Therefore do not fear them.** For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

Matthew 10:27-28

27 "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

28 And **do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**

Do not fear "them" ... the opposition that you will meet out there. But ... fear Him who can destroy the body and soul — in Gehenna.

Luke 12:1-5

1 In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known.

3 Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

4 **“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.**

5 **But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!**

This is addressed to the disciples — to believers. Fear God!

Our societies today don't fear God. They either don't believe there is a God (Churches have done a very poor job) — or they believe God is a harmless do-gooder who can be safely ignored (again... Churches have done a poor job).

There is no fear of God in the world and little fear of God in the Churches.

All people hear about is a God who comforts — but never condemns. A God who pardons — but never punishes. Who blesses — but never curses. A God who wants us to be happy — rather than holy. A totally false picture of God!

I suspect the world would be a better place if it feared God ... rather than belong lulled to sleep by this lovey-dovey sentimental version of so much of modern Christianity.

Anyway — for us — we can heed Jesus' command: FEAR HIM!

As Solomon said. THAT'S THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER!

So we must and we should.