

Fear and Fear

by Dee Bowman

Fear knows no boundaries. No matter who you are, how strong you are, or how reputed, there is something or someone you fear. Fear is part of the human psyche, part of what makes man what he is.

Fear takes different directions. It ranges from abject fright to total respect, and it has a part in all of man's activities. When we're small we fear lots of things. We don't like the dark. We don't like strange sounds in the night. We're afraid of some people who are bigger or more powerful than we are. We have lots of fears when we're little.

As we grow older the things we fear take on a new perspective, but the fears are just as real. We fear the possibility of failure, or we fear the rejection by our fellows, or we fear the testing of our abilities. Furthermore, as we mature, we begin to sense a new kind of fear, the need to respect and regard certain people because of their power or reputation, or because we admire something special about them. We fear them in a different way, the way of respect. The things we fear, no matter the time in our lives, have essentially the same effect—they make us dread things that are dangerous or not in our best interests or, in the other direction, they make us respect and revere someone worthy of our admiration.

Then there's the fear of death. All men, no matter their station in life sooner or later come face to face with the fact of their own mortality. Man fears death more than perhaps any other thing in life. And with good reason. Dead is the pale rider, the deadly robber of life, the enemy of every person. It's horrible to contemplate one's own demise. We dread it with a dread unlike any other. That's as it should be, for death spells the end of things here on the earth.

The Scriptures have a great deal to say about fear. They tell who and what to fear, and even how. For instance, we are told that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). All that life has to offer—everything of any substance, that is—begins with respect for God. Knowing His will is not only the beginning of knowledge, but it is the beginning place for a happy, profitable life. A lack thereof very often results in a shattered, unhappy life at the worst and an unsatisfied one at the best. We best begin at the beginning.

When Solomon had completed his grand experiment with life, he offered what he calls "the conclusion to the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." To respect God is to honor not only His person, but His commandments. His person is so connected to all that He said that it's actually impossible to honor Him without keeping His commandments. The wise man also concludes with another kind of fear to be considered, for, says he, "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." (Eccl. 12:13-14). Now that's a good reason for fear, don't you think?

Worship is a vital part of reverential fear. Fear prompts worship by causing us to seek after the Creator, and His favor, so that He may imbue in us His wonderful grace. In fact, there is no such thing as acceptable worship without the foundation of godly fear. The Hebrew writer tells us that, “having received a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” We even show our respect for God when we fulfill the various roles He has assigned in our lives. Paul says, “submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God,” (Eph. 5:21) after which he cites the various roles and their proper observance.

The coming of the day of judgment is reason for both fear and respect—fear and respect for God as not only the Judge—respect for Him as our Redeemer. Any time judgment is involved in a matter, fear is present—and should be. And nowhere is this more important than at the final judgment, for it is just that—final. That should send us scurrying as rapidly as possible toward proper deportment. The Hebrew writer says it well: “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26-27).

Fear is good. Especially if it causes you to do what you ought, and be all you should. Let us exercise fear—both kinds.