

Healthy Vs. Unhealthy Fear of God

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

I. WHY THE FEAR OF GOD IS IMPORTANT

- A. To be civilized and remain so, every society needs to instill in its citizens a healthy fear of the law, which means fear of the consequences of uncivilized and harmful behavior.
 - 1. While different societies may have different systems of law for instilling such fear, one system that has worked the best throughout history is a healthy fear of God.
 - 2. Why is fear of human law insufficient and less effective than fear of God? Human law is fallible and malleable.
 - 3. Fallible because human leaders make mistakes.
 - 4. Malleable because it can be usurped and misused by the powerful and malicious.
 - 5. This is why governments and citizens must be informed and guided by the fear of God.
- B. Whether governments or citizens realize or accept it, we all are accountable to God who sees everything and is powerful enough to discipline everyone.
 - 1. This fear inspires deference and deterrence.
 - 2. Deference means respect for principles of civilized living: orderliness, truthfulness, mercy, and temperance.
 - 3. Deterrence means that humankind dreads the consequences of giving in to the uncivilized urges that tempt the human heart.
- C. While fear of God is healthy, when misinformed or misunderstood, it becomes unhealthy making us paranoid or paralyzed.
 - 1. How can we ensure that our fear of God doesn't become unhealthy?
 - 2. Develop a proper knowledge of God's will and benevolence.
 - 3. By cultivating a healthy fear of God and afterward growing toward love for God, we can be inspired to bring out the best within us for ours and the world's good.
 - 4. Fear of God is healthy when it inspires deference and deterrence, but becomes unhealthy when it incites paranoia and paralysis.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE FEAR OF GOD

- A. A healthy fear of God disciplines our minds and regulates our lives
 - 1. It does not overrule or interfere with any other emotion that we feel toward God, including love, reverence and adoration, but rather it completes our relationship with Him
 - 2. It motivates sound, zealous works of righteousness and encourages initiative in duty, rather than debilitating the will or paralyzing reason
- B. The fear of God is often misrepresented and more often misunderstood than any other Bible principle
 - 1. The religiously ignorant and spiritually dysfunctional use fear as their prime motivator and instrument of control

2. Every matter emphasized out of Biblical proportion causes harm, and that includes fear
- C. The dangers of an unhealthy fear of God
 1. Ignorance of how God thinks and feels about us - Luke 15:18-22
 2. Going to extremes of worship not specified in scripture - Acts 17:22-25
 3. Fear of making a mistake in service - Matt. 25:24-25
 4. Serving with wrong motivation
 5. Ritualized and quantified religion - What does God require of me and how much? (Going through the motions)
 6. Good works done to "appease" God
 7. Overactive external conscience (God's gonna get me) leads to the lack of development of a healthy conscience (I will do this because God said it is good)
 8. The belief God is untouchable, unreachable, and malignant
 9. Over-reacting to the misguided teaching and belief by rejecting all Bible teaching on the fear of God
- D. An unhealthy fear of God causes one to live under the bondage of a clouded image of Him fabricated in our minds.

III. UN-CLOUDING IMAGE OF GOD IN OUR MINDS

- A. God's desire to forgive us
 1. Eph. 1:7; Psalm 103:12; Isa. 38:17; Micah 7:18-19; Col. 2:13-14
- B. Peace with God
 1. Col. 1:19-21; Rom. 5:1-2
- C. God loves His children
 1. John 13:1; Jer. 31:3; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4-7; 1John 3:1
- D. God keeps His children safe
 - A. Psalm 91:4, 125:2
- E. God will always be there for us - Rom. 8:37-39