



A Bible Question you may be afraid to ask:

If God Is Loving—

Why Does the Bible Say to Fear God?

Biblical Quotations

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Contact Information

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You may also send an email request to:

Oasis7@Gmail.com

Or send a written request to:

Oasis Ministries
PO Box 734
Cedartown GA 30125-0734

Be sure to include your full name and address, including ZIP code.

Why does the Bible say to “Fear God”?

A Surprising Message

Where did you get what you think or believe about God? Most people did not get all that they believe from the Bible directly, for even most people who go to church and call themselves Christians have never read the whole Bible through. Yet most people have at least some opinions about what God is like. Where did they get them?

If you're like most people, your ideas came from several sources, among them:

- What your parents or grandparents told you.
- What other relatives or friends told you.
- What you heard a minister or teacher say in church.
- What you heard a minister say on TV.
- What you heard in a Christian song or hymn.
- What you read on bumper stickers on cars.
- What you read on posters or plaques in people's homes.

One of the common statements that shows up in all these places is “God is Love.” And one of the songs almost everyone knows says, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

But how many plaques and bumper stickers have you seen that say, “Fear God”? And how many inspirational songs on Christian radio have you heard that have the message “I should fear God, this I know, for the Bible tells me so”?

Yet if you start reading through the Bible, it won't be long before that is just what you will read. Let's look at a few passages that have this theme:

Let all the earth *fear* the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. (Psalm 33:8)

Does this *really* mean *everyone* should fear God? Have you thought only evil people need to fear God? Then consider this passage:

Fear the LORD, you his *saints*, for those who fear him lack nothing. (Psalm 34:9)

This says *saints* should fear him too! But perhaps you think this is just what the Old Testament says. Many people are sure the New Testament says you don't

have to fear God any longer. But look at this passage from the New Testament written by the Apostle Peter to a Christian congregation:

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, *fear* God, honor the king. (1 Peter 2:17)

In fact, at the very beginning of the Church, right after Jesus died and was resurrected, here's what the Bible says about the first Christians:

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the **fear** of the Lord. (Acts 9:31)

So what does all this mean? Isn't God a loving God? How could God be loving and yet want us to fear Him?

The real problem here is that most people don't understand what *true love* is, and they don't understand what it means to *fear God*.

The Fear of God

If I am walking down the street and see a police car pass by, I don't feel any particular emotion: I am not *afraid* of that policeman. But if I am driving down the expressway and have not looked at my speedometer lately—and I spot a police car in my rearview mirror, I immediately feel a little funny until I can glance down at my speedometer and reassure myself that I am not speeding. I am not afraid of that policeman either, in the sense that I would be afraid of a snarling dog. But I do *fear* the *consequences* if I am speeding, and in that sense, I fear the *authority* that policeman has to give me a ticket. The policeman hasn't changed at all. What has changed is my conscious recognition of the authority he has over me.

If you are a parent of a small child, you may find that the child does not understand that running out into the street may harm her. What would you do if she continued to run out into the street after you warned her not to? Many parents would decide that it is necessary to spank the child. This decision would not be because they want to hurt her. And it wouldn't be because they want to make her afraid of her parents all the time. Since she is too inexperienced to fear the serious injury that she could get from an accident, they want her to fear the discomfort of a spanking so she will make a wise decision when tempted to run out in the street again. They don't want her mindlessly afraid of her parents, but they do want her to recognize they have the power to spank her when she seriously disobeys.

That is what the *fear of the Lord* is. It is not the kind of mindless fear you would have of a snarling dog. You don't fear God because you think he might just "zap" you at any time because of a whim He has.

The *fear of the Lord* is:

- A deep feeling of respect and reverence for Him because of who He is.
- A conscious acknowledgement of His power and authority over you.
- A conscious acknowledgement of your utter dependence on Him.

This kind of fear doesn't leave you paralyzed. It is a *healthy* fear that leads you to make wise decisions:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5)

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. (Psalms 128:1)

The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short. (Proverbs 10:27)

He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress and for his children it will be a refuge. (Proverbs 14:26)

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death. (Proverbs 14:27)

The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble. (Proverbs 19:23)

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. (Psalms 19:9)

Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil. (Proverbs 16:6)

Do you begin to see how God can be loving and yet still want us to fear Him?

Godly Love

The world has a totally misguided idea of what true love is. They think love is a warm, fuzzy feeling. A mother can love her little baby, and sometimes that love does lead to a warm, fuzzy feeling. But at 3:00 AM when the baby is crying and waking the mother up, those warm, fuzzy feelings are usually nowhere to be found! Did the mother quit loving the baby? Of course not! The real love the mother has is not an emotional feeling of the moment.

True love is:

- A *commitment* to another individual.
- A *conscious desire* to want the best for that individual.
- A *willingness to sacrifice* personal desires and personal convenience to serve that individual's needs.

The Bible says of God:

Let those who fear the LORD say: "His love endures forever." (Psalms 118:4)

And God proves that love by His actions:

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16)

God was:

- *Committed* to all mankind.
- Had a *conscious desire* to want the best for all mankind.
- Therefore he was *willing to sacrifice* His only son to save mankind.

That is Godly love. And it is the kind of love He wants us to have for Him and for others.

Godly Fear in the New Testament

There is a word in Greek that is usually translated "fear" in the King James Version of the New Testament. But the NIV translators understood that modern readers might mistake the **kind** of fear that is meant when it refers to God, so they often used the word *reverence* to translate this word. The word reverence in

the passages below is speaking of the same kind of fear that the book of Proverbs talked so much about:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. (1 Peter 1:17)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Corinthians 7:1)

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. (Hebrews. 12:28)

If you have the proper fear of God, *and* you are convinced of His love, you will take the Bible seriously. When you read about something God commands, you will know He commands it in love. But you will also know that command is backed up with His authority. You will begin to make wise decisions on obeying God, because you will be convinced He has given His commandments for **your** good.

Yes, God is a loving God who wants you to fear Him **and** love Him at the same time!

**Let those who fear the LORD say:
"His love endures forever."
Psalm 118:4**