

Reverential Fear of God

Harmony M.B.C., May 3, 2009 (Morning)

Robert P. Myers

Deut. 10:12 “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,”

A primary element critical for created beings is largely lacking among the cultures of the world today. This includes much of what are known as Christian communities. That element is the fear of God in the biblical sense. David sang of this problem in Psalm 36:1 “...The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, *that there is* no fear of God before his eyes.” David’s heart was telling him that the wicked lacked fear of God. His heart was telling him this because his eyes were looking upon what the wicked dared to do in a world owned by God.

Paul mentioned this lack of fear as being an aspect of carnal man, generally: Rom 3:18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

We might assume that this lack of proper fear of God belongs only to the unregenerate, but when we explore the bible, we find that God is concerned about the lack of fear among His own people. In fact almost every mention of a need for fear of God for any community of humans in the O.T. is in reference to the Jews...the chosen people of God; or in reference to believers in the New Testament age. Now, while we know that there were unbelievers in Israel, we also know that there were believers. These were the targets for God’s advice to them about fearing Him. In addition, Christ Himself, in teaching his disciples to be bold in the face of aggressive people said to them: Mat 10:28 “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Now, we can assume that if not fearing God is not a problem with the people of God, then the Lord would have never said a word in scripture about the need for it and the pathway to it. But He did. And because He did, it is worth our time to take a long look at biblical principles behind the idea of fearing God.

I. In our first observation, we want to emphasize that humans never fear anything which doesn’t give them a reason to fear.

- How many of you are afraid of oxygen? (explain why: oxygen is just out there...we breathe it...it does us good...we can’t even see it, but we know from school that it is there...we take it for granted...it presents no threat to any form of life that we know of)
- Now let’s look at a contrast: How many of you are afraid of fire? (Explain why: it has properties which you know can burn, disfigure, kill, destroy. Under certain conditions, you can’t control it...it does what it pleases, so to speak...it can take life in a moment. Even though it obeys certain natural laws of behavior, it still has power and it shows that power from time to time in huge conflagrations that consume everything)
- What causes the difference in your attitude about oxygen versus fire?

- > It is because you have witnessed the difference between the two; you have experienced things which cause you to look at each differently.
- God in His character is like both oxygen and fire
 - > (oxygen) He gives us breath and therefore life
 - > (fire) But He can take life in a moment
 - > (oxygen) We cannot help but acknowledge that God does us good
 - > (fire) But He can send a destroyer to wreck comfort, peace, tranquility, prosperity...take it all away in a sudden flame of judgment or chastening
 - > (oxygen) We can't see God, but we know He is there
 - > (fire) On the other hand, visible evidence that He is very present can come in a moment like a huge wildfire
 - > (oxygen) We tend to take Him for granted if left to our own complacency
 - > (fire) But, like a fire in an oil refinery He can shake us out of our complacency and realize that He is a consuming spiritual fire
 - > (oxygen) In His peaceable, invisible, innocuous character He presents no definable threat to life as we know it
 - > (fire) Yet, when He speaks from heaven through the forces He has at His disposal, He can remove millions from the earth in a second
- In this same way, we need to understand that unless God gives human creatures some reason to have a reverential fear of Him, they will simply treat Him like they do oxygen in our atmosphere

II. In our second observation, we want to acknowledge that God intends for His people to fear Him

- Some facts about this fear are in order:
 - > The fear that God demands is not about fear born of hate, nor fear born of unwarranted reprisal (God never visits a human as fire without justifiable reason)
 - > The fear that God demands is presented in the bible as being connected with reverence for Him (so this fear we are speaking about is all about reverencing God)
 - Reverence (Webster Dictionary): 1: honor or respect felt or shown : deference ; especially : profound adoring awed respect
 - A study of the word אַרִי (yare; pronounced "yaw-ray") in the OT shows that in almost all uses of the word it signifies both fear and reverence, or if you will "reverent fear." The word is found in the O.T. 334 times in some form either as fear or as reverence; but I was unable to find a single time where it was used to describe what people were to feel for God that the grammatical context of it did not mean reverent fear. More specifically, a number of these times, the context demanded that it be understood as "reverence born of understanding the awesome power and character of God."
 - That's how we want to understand the kind of fear that God calls for.
- God demonstrates that humans come to fear him through observing the judgment or show of His power that comes from disobedience and rebellion against the principles of God:
 - > Both the direct action of God toward those who do evil, and the indirect action by the government of men in carrying out punishment in accordance with God's principles

achieve this end.

- In Exodus 14, God destroys the Egyptians in the Red Sea by an awesome manipulation of the water, and in v. 31, this was the effect on the Jews: “And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD....”
- God could have simply spoken a word and made Pharoah and his hordes disappear. Why didn't He?
- In Exodus 20, the Israelites are at Mt. Sinai, they hear the thundering, see the lightning and smoke from God's presence there speaking with Moses and handing down the law and they are very scared. They ask Moses not to make them come before God, but rather to negotiate with God for them and then they will hear what God has to say through Moses' mouth. Here is what Moses had to say to them about this powerful visit from God: Exodus 20:20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that **his fear** may be before your faces, that ye sin not.
- God could have quietly called Moses up on the mountain and whispered the ten commandments to him. Why didn't He?
- Additional observation: Here is a case where the bible distinguishes between a self-induced fear...even a fear born of the recognition of the power of God...and a reverential fear that is caused by God Himself.
^ This is the difference in reverential fear of God and cringing fear that is self-induced by nightmarish imaginations of people's hearts.
- In Deut 19, God instructs Israel that if any person among them tells lies to get a fellow citizen in trouble, that the case is to be heard by judges and when they discern what the real case is then the liar is to receive the very punishment that might have been the punishment of the one he was accusing. God could have just had the judges quietly put this lying person on probation. Why didn't He?
^ His reason for having it done this way is explained in v. 20: “And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.”
- God commands Israel to publicly kill the person, whoever he is, who encourages any kinfolks or friends to worship idols (Deut. 13:6-11) His reason for doing this was explained to the people in this way: God could have had this person quietly executed in a closed room. Why didn't He?
^ (V.11) “ And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.”
- In 1 Samuel 12, Samuel gives the Jews God's message about how they are going to get into trouble having demanded that they be allowed to have a king like the nations around them. Then Samuel calls on God to send rain, thunder, etc. at a time of year when it never rains to confirm that God had given them this warning. God could

have just had Samuel given his speech and walked away. Why didn't he? He tells us in v. 18 that this extraordinary incident filled the Jews with reverential fear of God.

- One N.T. instance will sum this up: In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are donating money gotten from the sale of land to the church. They decide to keep back of the price of that land and then lie about it. Peter confronts him about it, and Ananias dies. His wife comes in a little later and lies also; Peter confronts her about it and she falls dead. The church could have just excluded these two and went on about its business. Why did the Lord kill these two? Notice what happens around there after this extraordinary incident: Acts 5:11 “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

- What do all these (and many more biblical) instances teach us about God's insights into how humans come to a reverential fear of Him? This: that He knows it takes extraordinary intervention, usually of a severe or very special kind, to lead even His people to fear Him in the proper way. And I think we should think of the workings of God to discover reasons to have a reverential fear of Him.

III. Our closing observation is this: Human societies today lack a healthy fear of God. In addition, God's people lack the reverence for God that is needed to provoke civil societies to learn to fear God.

- The one (lack of reverential fear among God's people) is the reason for the other. God is not doing amazing things in our society today because God's people are not trusting in Him to do them. We are not trusting in Him to do them because we are not fully awake about the reality of His power.
- God's people need to study how by faith we can come to reverence God.
- God is like both fire and oxygen together. And here's a little fact of physics about fire and oxygen. When fire is supplied with an enormous source of oxygen, it can burn steel...it could burn the world. When oxygen meets fire, it is consumed by the unquenchable hunger of fire for oxygen. I think this fact of physics should give us some insight into the potential of God. I believe it is one of God's ways to provide us a physical symbol of His potential.
- Last, this message from God to His chosen people: Mal. 1:6 “...if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear?”