

## To Fear or Not to Fear, That is the Question

The Bible presents an interesting dichotomy when we talk about fear. We see throughout the pages of Scripture the command to fear God.



- “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you except to fear the Lord your God by walking in all his ways, to love him, and to worship the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul?” (Deut. 10:12).
- “Don’t be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil” (Prov. 3:7).

And there’s this theme that is repeated over and over:

- “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7).

At the same time, Scripture includes another theme, seemingly taking us in the opposite direction: *Do not be afraid*. But there is no discrepancy! In almost every case where people are told not to be afraid, the phrase comes with a clause: for I am with you.

- “Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).
- “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

We have every reason to fear God—not in a frightful, scared-to-death way, but in a way that recognizes that He is the sovereign Lord and Ruler over every single atom in our bodies. He is the righteous, holy God—and we are not. He has the ability to completely wipe us out—scatter every cell of our bodies to separate parts of the universe, and we humbly acknowledge that, in light of His awesome righteousness and holiness, that is what we deserve. He. Is. God.

That level of respect-filled fear is partnered with a humility before Him. That type of fear turns to Him in surrender and trust. And when we do that, we discover

we have nothing else to fear. In other words, **because we fear God, we need not fear anything else.**

In Genesis 15, God came to Abram and said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great (v. 1). Abram was told not to be afraid *because* God was his shield. Abram rightfully feared and trusted God, and because he placed himself in God’s hands, God would be with him and shield him.

The same is true for us. We have a lot of reasons to be afraid: the economy, threats from other countries, Covid issues, a culture bent on replacing Christ and any sense of morality. But we are not to fear our circumstances—we are to fear God. That expression of humble trust in Him gives us the same benefit promised to Abram: “I am your shield.”

Godly fear has a distasteful sound to our culture, but a fear of God has just the opposite effect from what the world thinks: fear of God benefits us! Instead of the world’s erroneous idea that “God wants us to fear Him so He can keep us in our place,” godly fear frees us from the anxiety and dread others experience.

- “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—whom should I dread?” (Ps. 27:1).
- “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:6).

Earlier this year, Deuteronomy 6:24 caught my attention. So much so that I have committed it to memory. “The Lord commanded us to follow all these statutes and to fear the Lord our God for our prosperity always and for our preservation, as it is today.” This verse reminds me that my fear of Him benefits me in so many ways.

God is for us! Jesus didn’t come to keep us suppressed or downtrodden; He came to set us free and give us rich, full, abundant lives. “A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10).

I love God deeply and I fear Him, knowing He is with me and He is working for my benefit.