

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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The Fear of God

Benjamin Fry

Long ago, the children of Israel were given the opportunity to hear the very words of God. The Lord God Almighty spoke to them and declared to them his commandments. The mountain shook, the lightning flashed, the voice of the Lord boomed out as smoke billowed from the mountain that the people surrounded. All the people were filled with awe and they cried out to Moses, *“You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die”* (**Exodus 20:19**).

This reaction is a normal reaction, an expected reaction. In the face of the glory and power of God, these people wanted a protective barrier between them and Him. That barrier was Moses. And this very divide was immortalized by Moses having to wear a veil whenever he would come before the people, and then by the curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Tabernacle. From this point forward, God was always set apart from his people.

This attitude is a normal human reaction. We often react badly to authority figures, especially when there is the possibility of punishment. It is not unusual for my children to become very unhappy and to want to leave my presence. Job was aware of this difficulty as well, for he recognized that a man can't stand before God. Job actually says, *“If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times”* (**Job 9:3**).

This is an absolute truth. We cannot justify ourselves before God, because he does know everything that we have done, and everything we are going to do, and everything will come into judgment on the last day. Knowing all this, it is right and proper for us to fear God. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (**Hebrews 10:31**).

Fear of God can be a wonderful thing, motivating us to do the right thing. However, it should be noted that our fear should not cause us to become inactive. Excessive fear can do that! This is one of the reasons that fear is not always the best motivator. Fear can get things started, but then fear can cause inaction. It is a problem if you don't know what the right thing is, and you become afraid of doing anything because you are uncertain of what is right and what is wrong.

In this light, we consider Moses, the man in the middle. Moses was a man with whom God spoke face to face. His reaction to God's presence was very different from the rest of the people. While they are still at Mount Sinai, Moses turns to

the Lord and requests, *“Please show me your glory”* (**Exodus 33:18**). The very thing that most of the world wants to avoid, Moses desires. Even when God warns Moses that he cannot see him and live, Moses still presses forward. Moses would rather die in the presence of the Lord than to live apart from him.

Job, too, expressed this desire to be in the presence of God, even though he knew it would consume him. Just shortly after declaring that he was not, and could not be innocent before God, he then says, *“Let Him take His rod away from me, and do not let dread of Him terrify me. Then I would speak and not fear him, but it is not so with me”* (**Job 9:34-35**).

Job did not want the fear of God to overwhelm him, and Moses did not let fear stop him. Rather, they both desired to come to the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of Hosts, the one who fashioned it all. This is an attitude that we should seek to emulate. It is a reminder that though God is a truly fearsome being, he is the one thing that we should be seeking the most in this world and the next. We should not let our fear of death prevent us from going after a relationship with him.

We need to be like Moses and Job and many other of the heroes of the Bible and seek after a relationship with God. To this end, Job desired someone to stand between him and God, someone who would take the rod of God away from man (see **Job 9:32-33**). God knew of this need and made a plan from the very beginning to provide just such a person. However, this person would need to be special. He would have to be a man, so he could understand what it means to be a man, and he would need to be a God, so that they could understand what it means to be God.

To have a person who combines these two attributes seems impossible to the world and even to many who are aware of Jesus. Yet that is one of the great mysteries of who Jesus is. Jesus is man and Jesus is God. He was made human so that he could be a merciful and faithful High Priest giving aid to those who are being tempted, because he shared in their weakness (**Hebrews 2:14-18**). Yet, in doing this, it was Jesus giving up his divine nature to become human (**Philippians 2:5-7**). So then, Jesus managed to combine the two natures into one.

In this we have an opportunity of hope. We desire to be with God and now we have someone who will be able to help us stand before God and he is one who will help us in our weakness. Even more than that, he also helps to remove that fear that has prevented so many from coming before the throne of God.

In sending Jesus to us, God reminded us that he isn't just a

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fearsome deity, but also a God of love. We know what love is, because Jesus came for us and was willing to die so that we could have hope. And here's the kicker: love drives out fear (**1 John 4:16-18**). This means that we can freely approach the one who created the universe, who made the stars and who keeps everything running, and we can call him, "Father." Instead of being motivated by fear, we can be motivated by our love for him and do the things that will please him, not worrying about punishment, but rejoicing in the great gift that he has given to us.

Moses and Job would have rejoiced to hear the promise that Jesus has given to us: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne" (**Revelation 3:21**). We can not only come into his presence, but we may sit with our Father, and there may be no greater reward than that.

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In Mercy and Truth

Richard Garbi

Solomon writes in **Proverbs 16:6**, "In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity; And by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil." This proverb neatly encapsulates the core of the gospel. Everyone desiring the salvation of our Lord must obtain atonement for sin and depart from evil. Solomon here describes the mechanisms by which we may both obtain atonement for sin and depart from evil.

Solomon tells us that we obtain atonement for our sins through mercy. This is undeniable and is grounded in the axiom that we cannot save ourselves (**Ephesians 2:1-9**) and are, on our own merits, undeserving of salvation. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). Because we cannot stand on our own merits before the Lord, we have need of his mercy. Paul instructs us in the book of Titus that the mercy of the Lord was applied apart from anything we have done. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (**Titus 3:5**) He echoes these sentiments in **Romans 5:6** where he describes us as being "without strength" before the Lord. We are without strength in that we cannot save ourselves, and we need the mercy of the Lord. This part of the proverb comports quite well with the rest of the scriptures. We need mercy. What about truth? How does truth enable us to obtain atonement for sin?

Jesus describes himself in **John 14:6** as "the truth." Jesus is also described as the Word in **John 1:1**, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This

idea that the truth in the form of the Word of God allows us to obtain salvation also conforms to the rest of scripture. Jesus tells us, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (**John 8:32**). Paul exhorts the **Galatians in 3:1** to obey the truth. Doing so, he implies that the truth is the Gospel or the Word of God. So the Lord has revealed his truth in the form of his Son, and the divine revelation of his will through the word. This does not mean that by broadcasting the truth the Lord has provided for our salvation. The revealed truth of the Lord does not immediately impart salvation upon those whom it strikes. So, how is it that in truth we are saved? In truth we must respond to the truth of the Lord.

Responding to the truth in truth is key to obtaining atonement for our sins. John writes in **1 John 1:8-9** statements that strongly support this:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Here, John gives us the example of confession as a mechanism for responding in truth. In the book of **third John**, he talks about the brethren walking in the truth, "For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (**verses 3-4**). When we hear the truth and conform our lives to the truth we are walking in truth.

So when Solomon says we obtain salvation in truth, it encompasses the truth broadcasted by the Lord, and our response to that truth by conforming ourselves to him. Solomon does not leave the proverb at mercy and truth. He continues by telling us, "And by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil" (**Proverbs 16:6**).

Paul tells us in **2 Timothy 2:19** that Christians must depart from iniquity, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Solomon is instructing us in this proverb that fear is one of the keys to departing from evil. If heeded, the fear of the Lord can be a powerful tool for change in our lives.

This message resounds throughout scripture. When giving instruction to the children of Israel about the conduct of their future kings, the Lord commanded that they copy and read the law. The purpose of this was so that the king would learn to fear the Lord and thus do his will.

*"And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (**Deuteronomy 17:18-19**).*

This passage instructs us that a natural outcome of reading the

word of the Lord is a fear of the Lord, and that fearing the Lord will help us keep his commandments. Solomon tells us in **Proverbs 8:13** that *“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.”* If we fear God, we will do what he says. If we do what he says we will flee evil. In fact, Solomon tells us that we will hate evil. *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”* (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**). Fear, truth and mercy are powerful tools for the Christian. By them we have opportunity to learn about the Lord, his sacrifice for us, and are motivated flee from evil and walk in truth.

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Hate vs. Good

Kevin Crittenden

In a book that I like to refer to, namely the Bible, we find, *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good”* (**Romans 12:9**). Easy to read but so difficult to put into practice. Just HOW do we - those of us who profess a commitment to Christ, who have been transformed by the renewing of our minds (**Romans 12:2**) - just HOW do we love? How do we love those in the church, and how do we love those in the world?

It seems evident to me that, when Paul wrote these words, he had Facebook in mind. Had he logged into his account in our present time, he would have seen, as I do, no end to public vitriol. Many divisions have formed, each side claiming to be good while the other side is evil. Most of this vitriol, I feel, is born of fear, as in the days when mobs were stirred up against Paul and Barnabus in Iconium (**Acts 14:2**), and in Lystra and Derbe (**Acts 14:19**) to name a few. We think of Stephen as well.

Do you think this is what Paul was talking about: to love some people and hate other people? Can you love those in the Church and hate those in the world? By no means! You cannot love those in the Church UNLESS you can also love those in the world. The two loves complement each other.

How are we to love the Church and how are we to love the world? Paul says, *“Let love be genuine.”* The word for “love” here is “agape,” which to this point had been used in Romans only for divine love (**5:5, 8:35, 39**), but here the word indicates the kind of love that Christians (that’s you and me) are to show TO OTHERS. It’s a love that continues forward, even if rebuffed. We are called to live out the highest love and do so with the greatest sincerity.

We often deceive ourselves into thinking that we love others, but we not only neglect them, but we also, deep down, don’t even LIKE them. I might say, “I love everyone, even homeless people.” No I don’t. I judge them. Too many are

able-bodied and ought to get a job. So I have a long way to go.

Paul tells us to go beyond pretense and sham and love sincerely. This isn’t just an optional menu item. *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins”* (**1 Peter 4:8**). *“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”* (**1 Timothy 1:5**). And let’s not forget **John 13:35**, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

We ARE to honestly examine our hearts, asking ourselves, “Do I sincerely and without reservation, or bias, or prejudice love others?” If the answer is uncertain, then it is time to ask God in prayer to pour His love into our hearts through the workings of the Holy Spirit, as outlined by **Romans 5:5**, *“and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

Paul now continues with, *“Hate what is evil.”* What I notice on Facebook today is that many people focus solely on hatred. So many posts are expressions of that hatred, which is born of fear.

When you focus only on the hate, you leave a lot of empty space where the love needs to be. Do you remember the story in **Matthew 12:43-45** about the impure spirit seeking rest? To me, this story demonstrates the progression that occurs when we focus only on our fear and hate. Our lives become fearful and depressed. Evil spirits have taken up residence with ourselves, and we lose the ability to find joy in life or even remain vital, functioning human beings. We barricade our houses against the perceived enemy, we amass the items needed for our survival because it’s only a matter of time before society falls apart.

We forget to trust God and Paul’s admonishment, “Cling to what is good.” In such a seemingly threatening world, remember to count your many blessings. There IS always good. Cling to it.

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Glory to God!

The church on **Sweeter Avenue, Novato, CA** praised God when **Luke Andrew Smith** was buried with Christ on November 26. · The angels rejoiced with the church at **Old Scotland (rural Jamesport, MO)** when **Christian Malott** was baptized on January 7. · The name of the Lord was magnified when **Micah Heartsill** was immersed into Christ on January 14 at the **Church of Christ in Vandalia, IA**. · **Jordan Rankin** was clothed with Christ on January 24 and has placed membership with **Gardner, KS**. · **Shelly Payton** was immersed into Christ on January 31 at the **Kirksville, MO** meeting house. · The

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congregation in **Kirkville, MO** rejoiced when **Tyson and Krishna Rebura** placed membership on February 4.

Blessed Are the Dead

Carroll Warren, 96, went to be with Jesus on Tuesday, February 6. Brother Carroll was a founding member of the **Pleasant Hill, IA Church of Christ** where he served as an elder for over 50 years. Carroll will be remembered for his integrity, gentleness, dedication and loving spirit to all who knew him personally or by reputation. Those left to cherish his memory include his wife of 70 years, **Betty J. (Payne) Warren** of Carlisle, two daughters, **Pam Climpson and Paula (Claude) Sampson**; son-in-law, **Lowell Hermon**; three grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Wayne Vernon Jenkins, Jr., 54, passed away unexpectedly on January 19. He moved to Kirkville in 2003, married Brandi (Bloss) in 2008 and became a Christian in 2008. He, with a friend, created the website called "Marriage Crusaders" dedicated to preserving marriages that had 1,200 followers. A godly family man, he was also a chef, photographer and a computer expert. He is survived by his wife, Brandi Jenkins, two step-children Valerie and Michael Walck and four biological children, Ashley, Michael, Keefer, Kyle Jenkins.

Special Meetings

The **Summer Study** at the **Murray Road** congregation will be held from **Saturday July 21 through Friday July 27, 2018**. Other local congregations may plan activities for the weekend following the conclusion of the meeting. Besides being just one week, the congregation is planning additional changes to past formats of the summer study. Specifically, the congregation will only be providing two meals – Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon. This is to alleviate the workload experienced by our sisters at past meetings. Along the same line, the elders at Murray Road are requesting our visitors to plan on taking care of their own lunches and dinners

for the majority of the week. Additional information about the summer study and other activities will be provided in the near future.

The **Kirkville, MO** church has committed to hosting **The Two Weekend Meeting (9 Days)** in 2020 with the theme "*20/20 Vision*." The dates are July 25-August 2.

2018 Meetings

March 17-18.....Section, KS
March 31 - April 1.....Dean Avenue, Des Moines, IA
May 5-6.....Lawrence, KS
June 18-23.....Shaver Lake, CA
July 2-6.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 21-27.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO

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