

What Does God's Word Say About...

Fear

There are two types of fear in the word of God. One is positive and the other is negative. On the positive side one must fear God. This kind of fear includes respect, honor, and reverence of God. This fear produces wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Psm. 111:10). It teaches us to submit ourselves to one another [in the fear of God] (Eph. 5:21), and to work out our salvation [eternal home with the Lord] with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). This kind of fear will lead us to do God's will.

Negative fear is when we allow our hearts to be filled with "fear" that involves anxiety, dread, and apprehension. God's people MUST overcome this negative fear. The apostle John wrote, "There is no FEAR in love; but perfect love casts out FEAR, because FEAR involves punishment, and the one who FEARS is not perfected in love" (1 John 4:18). Notice that the word "fear" is listed four times in this one verse. Confidence excludes fear; and since those who love have confidence, they have no fear. The one who is going to heaven loves his neighbor as himself (Matt. 22:39) and treats others how he wants to be treated (Matt. 7:12). Belief in an eternal home in heaven serves as a motivation to treat others properly according to what the word of God requires. Paul wrote, "Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Eph. 6:2-3). We are to "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). The Psalmist wrote "How blessed is he who considers the helpless; the Lord will deliver him in a day of trouble. The Lord will protect him and keep him alive, and he shall be called blessed upon the earth...The Lord will sustain him upon his sickbed; in his illness, You restore him to health" (Psm 41:1-3). Do we trust His word (John 17:17)! If we fear the day of judgment (Hebrews 9:27) we are living in imperfect love, and we have not developed the Christian characteristic of confidence, eliminating all anxiety regarding the possibility of punishment. Perfect love [the Greek word for mature or complete] casts out fear on judgment day.

It has been discouraging to watch during this COVID-19 pandemic, Christians fearing death and reacting just as the unbelievers, who should fear death. The apostle Paul was a confident and courageous man, not fearing death and he always looked forward to being with the Lord (Phil. 1:21-23). Christians should understand that through the grace of God while we are living we should not focus on the fear of dying but to always be about the work of God; helping others and spreading the seed of His word! The Hebrew writer said "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay, but My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:35-39). Our attitude should be that none of us know our appointed day of death (Eccl. 9:12) because God has ordained the number of days of our lives (Psm. 139:16). We are not able to add or subtract to the time He has appointed to us. James wrote, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like

tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

Men fear death because #1. The pain and misery which accompanies it; #2. The darkness and corruption of the grave which follows it; and #3. The uncertainty of the condition and destiny beyond it. This is why Jesus, who is God, “became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14). The Hebrew writer put it this way, “Therefore, since the children (human nature) share in flesh and blood, He Himself partook of the same (human nature as mankind), so that through death He might render powerless (make useless) him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14-15). As Christians we should not be fearful of physical death but should look forward to spiritual life eternally with Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Because of this Paul reminded us, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, (because it is by sin that death gains authority over man) and the power of sin is the law (because the law stirs up sin Romans 5:12); but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that you toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:55-58).

How can we know, when we die in the flesh, that we will be with the Lord eternally? We have been given the opportunity to hear the gospel, believe, repent, confess, and be obedient in the waters of baptism. The apostle John wrote “God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected (made complete) with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world”(1 John 4:16-17).

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