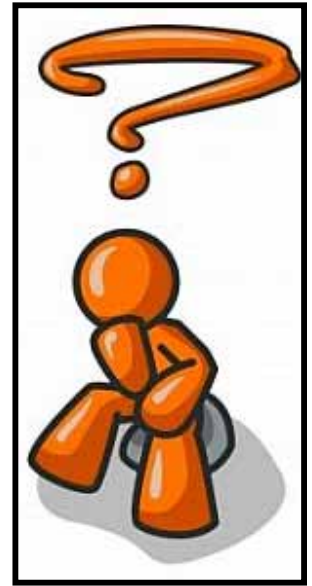


# What About ... Love and Fear?

BY DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

By my count, the fear of God is referenced 50 times in the Psalms alone. What seems strange is that David often connected the fear of God with things we do not associate with fear—like praise, trust, and love on our part, forgiveness, goodness, and lovingkindness on God’s part.

- Psalm 22:23 *You who fear the LORD, praise Him*
- Psalm 130:4 *But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared*
- Psalm 31:19 *How great is Your goodness, Which You have stored up for those who fear You*
- Psalm 33:18 *Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness*
- Psalm 40:3 *...Many will see and fear And will trust in the LORD*
- Psalm 103:17 *But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him*
- Psalm 145:19-20 *He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him... The LORD keeps all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy*
- Psalm 147:11 *The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness*



Let’s summarize these with the words *fear* and *love*.

First of all, we can’t relegate fear to awe and respect. 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). If fear meant awe and respect, then perfect love would cast out awe and respect. The difference is, I define what awe and respect look like. The one feared defines what fear looks like. John meant salvation (*perfect love*) removes the fear (being afraid) of eternal punishment for our sins. That assumes there is a fear of God which must be cast out, and *perfect love* (salvation) removes fear in one particular area, that of eternal punishment. John never said perfect love means we should not fear God. I suggest David would have very little interest in a God who did not need to be feared.

Putting fear and love together may seem strange. I certainly do not love everything I fear. I don’t love a bear chasing me in the woods. I don’t love a thief breaking into my house. I don’t love a government asking for more taxes. But sometimes love and fear **do** go together. I love flying, and I fear flying. I love to shoot handguns, and I fear handguns. I used to ride motorcycles, and I fear riding motorcycles. Actually, the wisdom is: “If you stop fearing them, then you should get away from them.” I think David would

agree that the same is true of God. David loved God and feared God, but one of the reasons he loved God (as with me and my flying, shooting, and motorcycle riding) was that God was a God to be feared. His love for God was not only inseparable from His fear of God, it was, in part, defined by it.

Our activities, which do not involve fear, do not tend to be high on our priority list. For example, it is likely you will watch television sometime today, but if I ask you what you are going to do today, you will probably not mention it. But if you are going parachute jumping, you’ll probably tell me about that. When fear increases, so does our awareness, focus, learning, and attention to details, principles, rules, wisdom, and advice. Compare these with watching TV and parachute jumping.



Many of our relationships also include fear. Our love for our parents, our spouses, our children, even our close friends, usually involve some fear because these people could do things which hurt us. Many love relationships involve giving up or giving over some control. Love without fear seems to be a lesser sort of love (or different, anyway). When I am in control of what love looks like, as is the case with respect and awe, it’s a safer but less rewarding kind of love. I suspect some parents do

not want to discipline young children, or take a stand against the sins of adult children, because they want a love relationship without fear. But I suggest that it is a lesser relationship, one where awareness, focus, learning, and attention to details, principles, rules, wisdom, and advice are diminished or fade away altogether.

There are many other examples:

- There is no fear in listening to most sermons today. How long do you remember the sermon you heard on Sunday? But when Jonathan Edwards preached the sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” people sat in fear, even wept, and they remembered it for the rest of their lives. Learning seems to increase with fear.
- We often hear pastors and priests say that young people today are not interested in commitment and submission to authority. So they teach a message without calling for those things. Well, young people seem to be willing to volunteer for sports training, which requires both commitment and submission to authority. For centuries, young men have signed up for military and combat training, which require both of those things. One huge difference is both sports and combat training include a fear of injury. Commitment seems to increase with fear.
- The evangelism which teaches a “prosperity gospel,” promotes a grace without repentance, or proclaims a message of “Love Wins” has led to congregations of Christians who know little to nothing about their faith. But what Christ and the apostles called people to was a Christianity that could cost them their lives. It was a dangerous, counter-cultural pursuit of truth and telling people about a God-Man who rose from the dead. And the Church grew, with people eager to learn, willing to be persecuted, take Christianity back to their native lands, start local churches, proclaim the Gospel, and die for their faith. Love, commitment, focus, and courage seem to increase with fear.

Of course, there is value to non-fearful activity. It can give us rest. And we all need to rest. We can rest reading a novel, going out to dinner, watching a movie, and with various hobbies. Even some relationships are rest-oriented. But our most significant relationships (and most of our favorite activities) involve some sort of fear. If you define love as something like: “Never having to say you are sorry” or “Where you are always accepted,” then you will not be likely to have very significant relationships. You may find such a “relationship” in a bar, but it will not involve much awareness, focus, learning, and attention to details, principles, rules, wisdom, and advice. And it will not define a relationship with a sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, just, holy, eternal, infinite, unchanging God.