

## God and the idea of fear

### Part 1 of a series on: Who's afraid of God?

#### Part 1: God and the idea of fear

For a long time now I have been wondering where our fear of God came from? In this sense I mean "fear" in the negative sense i.e. scared, afraid. The Bible translators at times have "fear" and then they have "fear" as they translate some of the verses. Yes, confusing isn't it.

Without going into some deep analysis of the Greek or Hebrew language, not that I am a scholar in any of these, but the various contexts indicate that one meaning of "fear" as set in the context of Psalm 128:1-2 "Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours." (NIV) means to "respect or revere" God for who he is. Another context Exodus 20:18-20: 'When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.'" implies fear in the negative sense. Now the idea of "fear" I want to tackle in these articles is the one that refers to the negative sense i.e. "to be afraid of God" and we will explore over the next few weeks or months why we are at times afraid of God based on the picture of God we have in our minds.

God himself has recognised that we have this fear of him because many times in the Bible he tells us "fear not" or "do not to be afraid." Apparently according to some counts there are at least 365 admonitions in the Bible "not to fear" or "not to be afraid", at least one for each day of the year. It gives me the impression that something or someone has told us that God is someone to fear. I would like to think that we've got it all wrong and that God somehow wishes to address this fear of ours.

There are many reasons as to why we possibly fear God and some of them are:

- "We fear God because we sense that an all powerful God who seeks vengeance can easily destroy us."
- "We fear God because of what he may do to us, i.e. the notion of "burning in hell fire," whatever you may believe that hell fire ought to be."
- "We fear God because we believe he is an unapproachable holy God whom we have offended by our sins and God is out for retribution for the offense we have committed."
- "We fear God because we believe that sooner or later, either in this life or the next life, he will avenge his considerable wrath on us and burn us." To quote Jonathan Edwards, "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer

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eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.”

- “We fear God because we have believed the picture others have painted of him without considering and experiencing God for ourselves.”
- “We fear God because we have the wrong picture of God.”
- Or could it be that “we fear God because we simply do not trust him?” Differently stated, we don’t trust him because we don’t know him that well.

Now I am prone to believe that we possibly fear God because we don’t trust him and not trusting God is in essence results in fear. Not trusting God means you trust either yourself or some other thing or person and that in itself leaves you wide open to uncertainty. We as humans dislike uncertainty and uncertainty can lead to fear.

The following verses give an idea of this notion of sin as a distrust of God, that is, sin is more than just breaking some rules.

Numbers 20:12: ‘But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'" (NIV)

John 16:8-9: “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: <sup>9</sup> of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” (NKJV)

1 John 3:4-5: “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.” (NKJV)

Other verses that give this notion that sin is more than breaking of the rules: James 4:17 (appeals to the conscience); Leviticus 26:40 (treachery / unfaithfulness); Romans 14:23 (a lack of trust/faith); Ezra 10:2 (breaking of trust / faith).

Now one is prone to ask “What does sin have to do with fear?” I would like to suggest that sin has everything to do with the fear of God and in future articles I am going to explore this theme of distrust of God and our fears a bit further.

The next article deals with the “An angry God”