

Fear God

What do you think of the many New Testament verses that tell us to fear God? I have heard many people suggest that it means to reverence Him. But does this explain what the Bible means when it tells us to fear God? Let me suggest that the word *reverence* falls short of what the Bible writers were trying to convey.

The verb φοβέομαι (imperative mood /command) is used often in the New Testament and is generally translated fear, not reverence.¹ Did the translators make a mistake? I don't think so. Generally, all the translations translate this word "**fear**." They probably stuck with the word **fear** because of the strength of the Greek word that is most often used by the New Testament writers.

The writers had other Greek words they could have used if they wanted to tone down the meaning. For example, in Hebrews 12:28, we find the Greek words, αἰδοῦς and εὐλαβείας which are translated with words such as reverence and godly fear. *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28).*

This same author used the noun εὐλαβείας to depict the type of godly fear that Jesus possessed. "*who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear*" (Hebrews 5:7).

From a word search, we know that the New Testament writers could have used other words but chose not to do so. Instead, they chose to use a word that would get across the idea of being afraid or being terrorized. This is the better way to understand what it means to fear God. In a sense, we should be terrorized by Him. Does this idea conflict with your understanding of what it means to fear God? If so, let me suggest that you need to alter your understanding to bring it in line with what the Bible says rather than how your mind likes to think about it.

Below are a few verses that convey this idea of **fearing God**. Read them with that understanding rather than with the idea of mere reverence.

*"And do not **fear** those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).*

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences (2 Cor 5:11).

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

"submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21).

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. (Hebrews 4:1-2).

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear (1 Peter 1:17).

¹ The noun form is the word φόβος.

*Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. **Fear God.** Honor the king (1 Peter 2:17).*

If you have difficulty thinking that the fear of God is more than mere reverence, you are not alone. When we contemplate the finished work of Jesus on the cross, it is difficult to see why we should still be terrorized by God. After all, Jesus took all of our punishment so what is there to fear now? Let me briefly offer an explanation based upon the following verse:

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

This verse couples (a) walking in the fear of the Lord with receiving (b) comfort of the Holy Spirit. I believe that as a default, all human beings should be in complete terror of God because of the horrific judgment that is coming. I believe that this fear should be more real in us than unbelievers because we actually believe that the judgment is coming. I believe that there is only one reason for us to be comforted in light of this horrific reality. When the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are His children, then and only then can we breathe a breath of relief. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. We will not bear the wrath of God that is soon to come.

There is a condition though for receiving this comfort of the Holy Spirit. It only applies to those who are children indeed. The Holy Spirit bears His witness with our spirit only when His fruits are evident in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. In other words, we only have reason to be comforted as we walk in the Spirit in complete surrender to Him. When this is not our experience, we have no reason to be comforted because the actual evidence suggests that we are not His children. If we are not His children, then the wrath of God awaits us. So, let us fear as the writer of Hebrews warned us:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. (Hebrews 4:1-2).