

On the Fear of God

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The 112th Psalm begins as follows: “Praise ye Jehovah. Blessed is the man that feareth Jehovah, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.” This blessing upon the God-fearer is one of dozens of Biblical statements that either commends or enjoins our fear of God. Contrary to the contentions of modernistic and liberal theologians, these appear not only in the Old Testament.

The premise of such clerics is that the two Testaments depict two different “Gods.” They allege that the “Old Testament God” is harsh, demanding, and wrathful, but the “New Testament God” is all gracious and indulgent; He is our “buddy,” “pal,” “daddy,” or “the man upstairs” – Whom we need not fear. A close companion to this view of God is the false concept that the Old Testament is a book of law, containing little or no grace, but the New Testament is a “love letter,” containing no aspect of law. Thus the modernist/liberal disparages the idea that, in the Christian age, we are to be concerned with keeping Divine commandments.

Truth be told, the Old Testament contains God’s Law for His elect people who lived **before** Calvary, revealing His wrath against the disobedient, but it also repeatedly reveals His grace and mercy. Likewise, while the New Testament is a message provoked by and filled with the love and grace of God through Christ, it is no less God’s universal Law **since** Calvary – and He still demands man’s obedience. Those who seek to rob the Gospel of its legal nature (i.e., “We are free from all law under Christ”) thereby remove the **need** for God’s grace and forgiveness because of our sins. Do these antinomians not realize that in the absence of law sin does not exist (Rom. 4:15) because the very definition of *sin* is transgression of Divine law (1 John 3:4)? Thus no law equals no sin, and no sin equals no need for God’s mercy and grace.

Fear in both Testaments may have more than one connotation (ranging from awe-inspired reverence to terror that causes trembling). The ordinary meaning of “fearing” God is obedience to God. Psalms 112:1 states as much, and this theme is borne out in other passages (e.g., Psa. 111:10; Deu. 6:2; 10:12; et al.). Fearing and loving God and His Son are thus parallel; obedience (not mere talk) is the means of demonstrating our Godward love (Mat. 7:21; John 14:15–24; 1 John 2:5; 5:3). *Obedience* implies commands/laws. Solomon was right: our “whole duty” still is to “fear God and keep his commandments” (Ecc. 12:13).

What about 1 John 4:18a: "There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear..."?
John is discussing one's attitude toward the Judgment. Christ-lovers do not tremble at it because they know they are living in obedience to Him.

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