

Pastor Don Nelson

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“WHO WILL NOT FEAR YOU?”

Revelation 15:2-4

■ **“Who will not fear you, O Lord?”** (Revelation 15:4)

Holy fear is an imperative of biblical faith. Scripture not only *describes* it as a *virtue*, it repeatedly *commands* it.

- Leviticus 25:17: **“Fear your God.”**
- First Samuel 12:24: **“Fear the LORD and serve him...with all your heart.”**
- Second Chronicles 19:7: **“Let the fear of the LORD be upon you.”**
- Proverbs 3:7: **“Fear the LORD and shun evil.”**
- Isaiah 8:13: **“The LORD almighty...he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.”**

That is just a tiny sampling from the Old Testament.

- On to Luke 12:5: **“Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell”** – Christ Jesus is not speaking of the devil, but of his Father. **“Yes, I tell you, fear him.”**
- Second Corinthians 7:1: **“Let us purify ourselves perfecting holiness out of [fear] for God.”**
- Ephesians 5:21: **“Submit to one another out of [fear] for Christ.”** Most English translations render this **“reverence for Christ”** but the Greek is φόβος [phobos], which literally means *fear*.
- First Peter 2:17: **“Love the...believers, fear God, honor the king.”**

The phrase “the fear of the Lord” appears less often in the New Testament than in the Old, but the underlying concept has not disappeared. It is just framed in different language.

■ **“Who will not fear you, O Lord?”**

Two questions: *What is the fear of the Lord?* And *do we fear God?*

The fear of the LORD has three modes.

✈ The first mode of holy fear is terror.

Someone might ask, *“Why should anyone be terrified of God? God is good!”* To which I would answer: Yes! It is precisely because God *is* good that we should sometimes be terrified of him.

■ In Revelation 15:3 the followers of Christ sing: **“Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.”**

📖 **“Just”** (the Greek δικαίος) [dikaios] means *honorable* and *righteous*. It grew out of an older adjective δική [dikay], which means *equitable*. To declare that the ways of YHWH are **“just”** is to say that everything God does is right, fair, and impartial.

The **“King of the ages”** is just! But I {Ro 3:23} **“have sinned and”** frequently **“fall short of the glory of God.”** Sometimes I catch myself thinking I am a pretty good man; but compared to what he does {Is 64:6} **“all [my] righteous acts are like filthy rags.”**

📖 And he is **“true.”** The Greek αληθινός [alaythinos] means *sincere*, *dependable*, and *in accord with reality*. It conveys a sense of *non-concealment* and *correctness*. To proclaim that the ways of YHWH

are “**true**” is to say that God exercises perfect integrity, and that all he says and does is 100% accurate.

The “**King of the ages**” is true! But my deeds do not always perfectly match my convictions. My words are not always in absolute agreement with reality. {Jer 17:9} “**The heart is deceitful above all things,**” and sometimes my heart deceives me.

It is good and necessary that the LORD our God is “**Just and true**” in all his “**ways.**” It is also terrifying.

Holy God is just, so he does not play favorites. He evaluates everyone by the same standard. He does not rebuke injustice, immorality, or idolatry in someone else and overlook it in me.

That isn’t all: since God is himself perfectly just and true, his standard is perfect justice and truth. He does not measure my attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds against those of the average Joe, much less the Colorado Shooter; he measures them against his own.

On top of that, Revelation makes it clear that God’s justice and truth are inextricably connected to his wrath and devastating punishment of sin.

No wonder the psalmist admits, {Ps 119:120} “**My flesh trembles in fear of you!**” No wonder Isaiah cries out, {Is 6:5} “**Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!**” No wonder Peter says to Jesus, {Lk 5:8} “**Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!**”

Holy terror is essential to deep conversion. The realization of the incalculable distance between his justice

and our injustice, his trueness and our falsity, iniquity drives us to profound repentance. It induces us to turn our backs away from sin and our faces toward the living God. It compels us to cast ourselves on his undeserved mercy and kindness without any pretense of worthiness on our part.

When was the last time I was struck by holy terror? Have you ever experienced it? If not, why not?

“**Who will not fear you, O Lord?**”

I am not God. You are not God. God is God. Every now and then we might need to return to that place of terror. But we must not live there!

✈ The second mode of holy fear is reverence.

■ In verse 4 the followers of Christ sing: “**For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.**”

The LORD does not desire that we should remain trapped in terror, paralyzed by dread. He intends for that terror to propel us onward and upward, toward him, in a posture of reverence.

📖 Reverence is an attitude and feeling of profound respect tinged with awe, that is (or at least, should be) reserved for the sacred or divine.

Every human being has the capacity for reverence. Our incurable religiosity is proof of that.

Still, it seems to be fading. We are so jaded by spectacle and sensory overload and high technology that many people are immunized against awe. The “oohs” of wonder and “ahs” of marvel are being

drowned out by the “been there, done that” of cynical boredom.

At the same time there is little agreement about what is, and is not, sacred. Is privacy sacred? Is marriage sacred? What about sex? How about religion and spirituality? Is life itself sacred?

North American pop culture has elevated *irreverence* to an art and a virtue. Many of our cultural heroes are iconoclasts who go out of their way to trash the sacred. To quote Norman Mailer, **“In America few people will trust you unless you are irreverent.”**

Many in the Church lack reverence. They have traded terror, not for reverence, but for a casual appreciation of God.

They are not necessarily irreverent. But going by their words and actions they visualize God as a glorified friend, a buddy, a pal, or even a boyfriend. They respect him more than anyone else; yet they are so relaxed in his presence it is though they are unaware of his overwhelming holiness, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, beauty, and eternity.

Sometimes, that description fits us. This is not as it should be!

{Rev 4:8, 11} **“Worthy”** is God the Father, **“the Lord God Almighty”** **“to receive glory and honor and power.”**

{Rev 5:12, 9-10} **“Worthy is”** God the Son, **“who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”**

Worthy is God the Spirit, whose name is Holy, to receive {Rev 7:12} **“praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength”!**

How can we make reverence our firmly established attitude? We cultivate reverence:

✓ 1st, By worshipping together and alone. Psalm 22:23: **“You who fear the LORD, praise him!”**

✓ 2nd, By honoring his Name. Exodus 20:7: **“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.”**

I try to limit my use of God’s names to prayer and to intentional, respectful preaching, teaching, and conversation.

✓ 3rd, By talking about his works and 4th, being mindful of his deeds. Psalm 64:9: **“All [humanity] will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done.”**

✓ 5th, By treating the things of God in a respectful manner. Leviticus 19:30, **“Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary, I am the LORD.”**

✓ 6th, By remembering that our reconciled relationship with God is an unearned gift, pure and simple Ephesians 2:8-9: **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this”** –even our faith in Jesus – **“is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”!**

This is not a hard assignment. If we do these things, our reverence for the Living God will grow.

“Who will not fear you, O Lord”?

✎ The third mode of holy fear is love for God.

There is no terror in love for God. First John 4:18: **“fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”** Yet those who love God best are unusually aware of the huge gulf between God’s justice and their injustice, God’s trueness and their falsity.

There is reverence in love for God. Yet love surpasses reverence. It also involves gratitude, humility, delight, passion, and joyful obedience.

There is an element of mystery in this mode of holy fear. It is the kind of thing that is difficult to put into words, but you know it as it happens.

I love God the Father, Son, and Spirit more purely, more consistently than I used to. But I do not love him nearly as well as I used to assume. {Mk 9:24} **“Lord, I [love you]; help my [lack of love]!”**

“Who will not fear you, O Lord”?

When Christ Jesus is revealed in the future as {Rev 19:16} **“King of kings and Lord of lords,”** every human being will either fear, reverence, or love him. Until then, many do not.

What about us, here and now? *Do we fear the Lord?* Oh that we would!