

He had the right to ask God to forgive those who sinned, because the sin was against Him. Christ had taken the wages of our sins upon Himself. He was crucified for us all and, therefore, by us all. As a result, Christ purchased the *right* to extend forgiveness to every member of the human family without imperiling the justice of God in the least bit, because justice had been served on Christ.

At the same time, Christ cannot and will not violate our freedom of choice. He will not force us to be forgiven. Our response to His love will determine whether or not this prayer of Christ's will be eternally answered for us individually.

The revelation of divine love precedes any response on our part. God first brought forgiveness to us through the cross. This forgiveness has the power to bring awe and reverence to the hardest human heart. Notice its effect on the Roman centurion.

"And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, *heard His cry and saw how He died*, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39, NIV).

Perhaps this soldier was one who had mocked Christ. He may have been one who had spit in His face or had crushed that crown of thorns deep into His brow. Yet now, in witnessing a firsthand demonstration of God's love, in stark contrast between man's hate and God's forgiveness, his heart was touched.

The good news or gospel message carried by the messenger of Revelation 14 has the power to cause the hardest sinner to be in "awe or reverence" of God. Every human heart is drawn to Christ's death on the cross, to God's love personified. And if we do not resist this drawing, our hearts will experience an awe of God that will lead us to turn from sin.

"And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11).

These good tidings are for you, friend. They are for all people everywhere. The wisdom of this world is foolishness; but "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of the Lord is knowledge of who God is. It is insight into the true character of the Holy One. Christ reveals this wisdom to us. He shows us the Father (see John 14:9). Jesus thus begins our journey into true wisdom; He is our wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 1:30).

Summary

The psalmist declared, "the fear of [reverence for] the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10). True wisdom begins when we catch a glimpse of the heart of God.

There is no greater insight into His character than to consider how

He has dealt with sin and sinners. God has not counted our sins against us. He has taken them to Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ reveals the Father's heart of love by His life and death. This knowledge induces the human heart to "Fear God;" that is, to hold God in such awe and reverence that we fear losing Him more than we fear losing anything else this world has to offer.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, the Bible has good news for you. Do not be afraid of God; but rather be in awe, filled with reverence and respect in the light of His goodness and grace. You have a Savior. He was born, He lived, and He died for your sins. He is risen from the dead and ever lives for your eternal salvation. He loves you more than life itself. Amen.

STUDY 2 OF 13

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GOD'S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WORLD

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In Revelation 14 we find messengers heralding the everlasting gospel that is to be preached to the entire world before Jesus returns. The word *gospel* means "good news" or "glad tidings." Under this everlasting gospel proclamation we find three successive angels, each bearing a message. The first pronouncement of these messages is "Fear God." Consider the text in question:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters'" (Revelation 14:6-7).

Now, you might wonder how such a message could be good news. How can a message calling the world to "Fear God" be glad tidings? What does the everlasting gospel mean when it calls us to "Fear God?"

Fear God: What does it mean?

Actually the word *fear* means more than to be afraid; it also means to "revere or be in awe." Notice this usage in the Bible:

"God is greatly to be *feared* in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in *reverence* of all them that are about Him" (Psalm 89:7).

Or, in the more contemporary language of the New American Standard Bible, "Who among the sons of the mighty is like the Lord, a God greatly *feared* in the council of the holy ones, and *awesome* above all those who are around Him?" (Psalm 89:6-7 NAS).

So we begin to see from the Biblical use of the word *fear* as well as from the Greek definition, to "revere or be in awe," that there is *more to fearing God than being afraid of Him*. In fact, as we study this further we find that being afraid of God is a natural consequence of sin. Notice what happened with our first parents in the garden of Eden.

Fear God

Revelation 14 Study Guides

In our daily lives we try to drown out God's gentle, beckoning voice that draws us to Him. Why are we hiding from God?

“And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, ‘I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself’” (Genesis 3:9-10).

Adam and Eve became afraid of God as a result of the fall. They hid from Him, and we, like our first parents, have been hiding from God ever since. We hide in the world, pursuing the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life (see 1 John 2:15-17). In our daily lives we try to drown out God's gentle, beckoning voice that draws us to Him. Why are we hiding from God? Why were Adam and Eve hiding? One reason is that they were told what would happen to them if they took the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

Adam and Eve suddenly remembered that disobedience was to be swiftly followed by death. They may even have thought that God Himself would carry this out. Yet they were to find out that death was the consequence of sin, not an arbitrary act of God (see Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:32). God knew they had eaten of the forbidden tree. He searched them out to help them realize their own depravity, evidenced by their unwillingness to face Him and their inability to confess their wrongs. Their fall was further accentuated by a newborn tendency to blame everyone but themselves for their misdeed, including blaming God—another form of hiding (see Genesis 3:12-13).

This is the reason why we hide from God. We are afraid of Him. We think He is out to get us, to hurt us or, at the very least, to make our lives miserable. We see Him wanting to inflict punishment upon us because of our failures. As a consequence of the fall and the lies of Satan, we fail to see God as He truly is, a merciful Father longing to bring us the assurance of His changeless love (see Malachi 3:16).

This love is evidenced in the fact that Adam and Eve did not taste the full consequences of their sins in the day they ate of the tree. And neither has any person, save One, tasted the full consequences of sin. This is because as soon as there was sin, there was a Savior, Jesus Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Jesus stepped in between humanity and the broken law of God. He took upon Himself the full consequence of our actions. This is the gospel. As our hearts and minds see and take hold of this gospel truth, we are led to an awe or reverence for God. Notice how the psalmist describes God's attitude toward sinners:

“If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.” (Psalm 130:3-4).

In other words, if God had counted our trespasses against us in Eden, no man or woman would be standing alive on the earth today. The very fact that we live is proof that God loves us. This temporal life we now

live cost God the life of His only begotten Son. The world has received immediate forgiveness or “justification of life” for the fall in Eden:

“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Romans 5:18, NAS).

This forgiveness did not come to us without a cost. God could not unconditionally pardon us without undermining His justice, creating an imbalance between justice and mercy, and bringing His entire government into question. The cost of that forgiveness was the life of the Son of God. In His life and death, Jesus met the conditions that have brought forgiveness to the entire world since sin's inception. This truth, understood and accepted, will lead us to be in awe of God. It causes us to have hope in His mercy, which is exactly what it means to fear Him:

“The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy” (Psalms 147:11).

The gospel is able to undo the effects of the fall. God employs an agent to destroy the fear that has come into the human heart as a result of the fall, and to fill us with a proper reverence. That agent is the revelation of His love. Notice how the Bible uses the word *fear* in these two different ways:

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not” (Exodus 20:20).

In other words, God does not want you to be afraid of Him, the natural consequence of the fall, but rather to be in awe of Him, which is the effect of the gospel. This is not so much a command as it is a promise. The everlasting gospel promises to fill us with an awe or reverence for God that will cause us to “sin not.” This is the power of God's love and mercy. Solomon called this wonderful truth the “conclusion of the whole matter.”

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

As we comprehend the mercy of God in contrast to our own sinfulness and unworthiness, our hearts will be filled with awe and reverence. His goodness, accepted into the heart, will become a power in our lives leading us to repent of sin (see Romans 2:4).

Forgiveness for the World

Notice also that this everlasting gospel, which calls us to “fear God,” is to be preached to those who “dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6). This is because everyone has been included in God's forgiving love. In other words, God has held back everyone's punishment for sin; He has not marked iniquities against the entire world. The Bible speaks to this truth in no uncertain terms.

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The New American Standard Bible says, “. . . not counting their trespasses against them.”

And the New International Version says, “. . . not counting men's sins against them.”

No one, whether in Noah's time or ours, has actually had to face the full and final consequences of sin. Only one Man has borne the true weight and penalty of our transgressions. Again, the Bible states:

“God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Romans 3:25, NIV).

God has not marked our sins against us, but against His Son. God let our sins go unpunished and allowed His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the judgment that belonged to us. Just before He went to the garden of Gethsemane and to the cross, Jesus proclaimed this truth:

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die” (John 12:31-33).

Notice that last sentence. Christ was speaking of the death He would die. The judgment that belonged to this world was death. Not just the first death, but the second (see Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 14). This death means being forsaken of God. And to be forsaken or given up by God is the wrath of God (see Romans 1:24, 26). Jesus tasted this wrath for the entire human family. He was cut off and, at one point, felt as if He would not come forth from the tomb. (see Psalm 88:5-7; Hebrews 2:9). On the cross, “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “‘Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46, NKJV). Christ experienced the soul anguish of eternal abandonment in Gethsemane and on the cross, for us.

“Then He said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death’” (Matthew 26:38, NAS).

If we were left to bear the burden of our sin, it would crush us; but Christ has taken our punishment. The Lord laid on Him “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). His life was crushed in our place. Christ took our penalty upon Himself so that He could bring eternal forgiveness to the chief of sinners, even those who crucified Him.

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him. . . . Then said Jesus, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’” (Luke 23:33-34).

Christ had the right to pray that prayer on two counts. First, He is the second Adam, the new head of the human race (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). He is our representative and, as such, has taken full responsibility for us—just as the president of a corporation bears responsibility for his employees or parents bear responsibility for their children. Secondly,