

Fearing God? by Hermano

Is God a harsh Judge, or a loving Daddy? Are people to *be afraid* of Him, or to *rest* in Him?

Fear and Death

Hebrews 2:14-15

14 **Since *the children*** have flesh and blood, **he too shared in their humanity so that** by his death he might break the power of *him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—*

15 and free those who all their lives were **held in slavery by their fear of death.**

Death was not part of God's design: **the legalistic devil brought death into Creation through the open door provided by man's first sin** ([Rom. 5:12](#) and [1 Cor. 15:21-22](#)).

Early Church Fathers believed that the angels were assigned to care for man and oversee his physical environment; but that when Lucifer went off the rails, he began to maliciously corrupt nature. So, things like tsunamis, malaria, and carnivorous animals reflect the devil's meddling with nature after the Fall ([Gen. 3:17](#)), and are not part of God's original design. (Please see "Question 24: Is Satan Involved In Every Evil Occurrence?" in Richard Murray's free ebook, [God Versus Evil](#).)

Death is a long continuum with many gradations: it encompasses sadness, depression, sickness, old age, physical death, and finally, hell. People suffer all of these, but they also worry about being overtaken by additional shades of death during their short tenure on earth: such "*what if's*" as cancer, murder, rejection, abandonment, unemployment, insolvency, homelessness—and the list goes on.

Jesus came here to "break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil." He came to free those who who all their lives have been held in slavery by their fear of death, and to provide salvation from ALL of death's gradations. He came to offer abundant **life** (John 10:10).

Fear and Religious Legalism

The gospel is the great news that we can be freed from sin and death by surrendering to Jesus, and inviting him into our hearts to reign in us. Since the cross, everyone who hears and believes the gospel can freely receive a divine blood transfusion from Christ, and pass from death into his victorious life!

But the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of God's nature via "by-the-letter" religion has distilled fear into a very potent brew: what could be more frightening to

non-Christians than the prospect of not measuring up to the impossible standards of a legalistic, vindictive God, dying a failure, and subsequently being cast into a never-ending torture chamber? (Often, “evangelism” comes down to selling fire insurance: “Come to Jesus! He loves you, and doesn’t want to do all the bad things to you he’s going to do if you don’t come to him!”)

And even after we become Christians, it’s easy to stay focused on ourselves; sermons are often centered on *us* and what *we* need to do: “Seven steps to follow...” “Three keys...” “Five principles...” Just like non-Christians, we worry about demands in our lives, and how to juggle our limited natural resources (of, e.g., time, energy, money, health, love, wisdom, knowledge) so we can meet those demands—sometimes being driven to connive, and manipulate others. We clench and hoard our natural resources, saying to ourselves, “*If I share with you, then there might not be enough left for me!*”

Instead, we should be focusing on, and resting in, the gracious JESUS, letting go of our hoarded natural resources, and standing under the waterfall of his *unlimited free supply* (Lk. 15:31) of *supernatural* resources (of time, energy, money, health, love, wisdom, knowledge, et al)—resources that everyone needs. (Speaking of the “law of supply and demand” —in relation to theology instead of economics—: *grace supplies, but law demands.*)

Performance-centered Christianity (legalism) is steeped in fear. Among us evangelical Christians, fear especially comes out with daggers *if you fall into overt sin*. Choose your flavor:

-We’ve got *Calvinism*, which says that if you go seriously astray, *then maybe*—although you were our close friend at church for twenty years—you were not really predestined for eternal life by God after all? So pull yourself together and *get back to acting predestined!*

-And *Arminianism*, which says that if you go seriously astray, *then maybe*—although you were our close friend at church for twenty years—you are going to *lose* your salvation. *So shape up or ship out!*

Fear and the New Age

After leaving the New Age movement and becoming a Christian, Warren B. Smith began writing on the subject of **spiritual deception**. He has written six books and numerous booklets, but our focus is on the following booklet:

“[Fearing God in a Fearless New Age](#)”

I greatly appreciate Smith’s work in exposing the influence of the New Age in the Church, but I must disagree with him about his use of particular verses in Matthew 10 in trying to build his case in this booklet.

But let me first say that in “Fearing God in a Fearless New Age,” Smith does rightly warn that ***A Course in Miracles***—a 1975 New Age curriculum by Helen Schucman (later promoted by Marianne Williamson on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*)— **presents a false Christ who teaches that all fear is delusional, and that we are all “God.”**

Further, Smith exposes how the New Age Christ being channeled in *A Course in Miracles* teaches that, “*when humanity overcomes its ‘fear of God’ and is collectively ‘awakened’ by ‘God’s dream’ to the reality that they are God—then and only then—can inner peace and world peace be finally realized.*”

And in this booklet, Smith also aptly examines how certain Christian leaders, such as Robert Schuller, Rick Warren, Mark Batterson, and Jason Mitchell, have been influenced by the New Age idea that all fear is delusional, and that these teachers are mainstreaming this and other false New Age ideas into the Church.

Fear and the Proper Interpretation of Scripture

But I disagree with Smith’s use of the traditional interpretation of Matthew 10:27-28 to support his argument that being afraid **of God** is good. Smith says:

Our Spiritual Adversary, through his deceptive “God’s dream” theology, wants to redefine fear as something that is the opposite of love and not even real. He wants to eliminate fear because he does not want us to fear and revere the one true God. He does not want us to know the benefits and blessings that come from fearing God. And he most certainly does not want us to know that Jesus Christ Himself specifically taught that we should all fear God. Jesus said we are not to fear those who kill the body, but we are to “fear him” who is “able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:27-28)

I have made suggested amplifications to, and then discussed, these troubling verses in Matthew 10 [in another post](#) to show that *the devil* is the frightening one being referred to, *not God*. I will quote from it here:

[begin quote]

It’s funny about the extended version of that same warning in Matthew:

Matthew 10:26-31 (NIV)

26 **“So do not be afraid of them [MEN],** for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 **Do not be afraid of those [MEN] who kill the body *but cannot kill the soul.* Rather, be afraid of the One [SATAN] who can destroy *both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].*** 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside ***your Father’s care.*** 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 **So don’t be afraid;** you are worth more than many sparrows.

“*Both soul and body.*” Sounds like hell/Gehenna/Hades was more than merely a garbage dump outside the city wall for trash and dead bodies. Rather, it is a place with long-term implications as a postmortem POW camp, followed by both *it* (hell/Gehenna/Hades) and *death* being thrown together into the healing lake of fire (Rev. 20:14), some day in the future.

Furthermore, there are many shades of “fear.” We are to reverence God, yes. But be terrified of Him? No.

The devil is the one with the power of death, *not God.* (Hebrews 2:14, “*him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil*”). So Jesus is *not* warning readers about His Father, but about *the devil.*

Please prayerfully consider the powerful argument for this interpretation in:

“Is God the one who “destroys both body and soul in hell?”

[end quote]

And Joseph Prince has pointed out the need to correctly understand **what the “fear” of the Lord actually is,** by using *Scripture* to interpret *Scripture* (my emphasis in bold):

The “fear of the Lord” in the new covenant of grace is about honoring, worshipping, and reverencing God as God in our lives. “Fear” here does not refer to being terrified or afraid of and feeling threatened by God. Just ask yourself, which understanding of God resonates in your spirit? A loving Jesus who gave up everything for you, or an angry God looking for every opportunity to judge, condemn, and punish you? The Holy Spirit in you will point you to a God of love, while the devil will pretend to manifest the King’s wrath and find every opportunity to roar at you.

Today, the only fear God wants you to have is a wholesome fear of the Lord, which Jesus Himself defines as the worship of God.

When the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he said, “All these things [all the kingdoms of the world and their glory] I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Jesus, quoting from the book of Deuteronomy, replied, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’ ” (Matt. 4:9–10).

Now, if you do a quick check on what Jesus quoted in the book of Deuteronomy, it actually says, “You shall fear the LORD your God . . .” (Deut. 6:13). **So Jesus defined the “fear” of God as the “worship” of God. In other words, the only “fear” that you should have in your life is the worship of God. Worship Him and all your fears will fade away in the light of His glory and grace.**

I have often asserted in this forum that **God does not kill**—even in the face of Bible passages which explicitly state otherwise. I have argued that the believers who wrote the Bible occasionally misattributed to God things actually said and done by the “god” of this age, Satan; but that we *can* see “progressive revelation” in the Scriptures themselves about our unchanging God’s true nature of pure love. As Professor C.S. Cowles [has said](#),

While Jesus affirmed the Hebrew Scriptures as the authentic Word of God, he did not endorse every word in them as God’s. He rejected some Torah texts as representing the original intention and will of God, such as Moses’ divorce laws (Mark 10:4-9). He displaced Moses’ laws governing vengeance with his new ethic of active nonviolent resistance, of “overcoming evil with good” (Matthew 5:38-42; Romans 12:21). His command to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44) represents a total repudiation of Moses’ genocidal commands and stands in judgment on Joshua’s campaign of ethnic cleansing.

...

In progressive revelation what we see is ... reflective of the human mediators’ growing understanding of his [God’s] character, will, and gracious saving purposes in Scripture. Isaiah, for instance, saw into the mind and heart of God more clearly than Moses when he virtually dismisses the whole sacrificial system that Moses believed to have been instituted by God, instructions that are given in great detail in Exodus and Leviticus. In contradistinction to Israel’s entire temple-cult and priestly system, Isaiah asserts that God does not require “burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals,” and that he took “no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.”

Fear and the Parables of Jesus:

But what about violence in some of the parables of *Jesus himself*? As Richard Murray says later in *God Versus Evil* (my emphasis in bold),

The teaching concept here is simple. By using comparison to that which is familiar, a conceptual bridge is built which allows us to cross over into the unfamiliar. And while these stories might be useful in a general way as a teaching tool, nobody would claim that EVERY facet of the story would have to have a precise Heavenly corollary.

The parables are often "rough-edged" and full of flawed humanity such as "wicked kings" (Luke 18) and "vengeful vineyard owners" (Luke 20) and "evil fathers" (Luke 11). To think that Jesus was trying to attribute these flaws to the Heavenly Father is unthinkable and unwarranted.

Because of their "rough-edges," scholars have long warned us to only glean broad points from the parables. In other words, we shouldn't get "hyper-literal" in thinking EVERY detail of the story lines up perfectly with Heaven. Parables are there, rather, to just get us thinking about Heavenly dynamics in new ways. They don't fill in ALL the revelatory gaps on a one-to-one ratio. We have to let the Holy Ghost do that.

We must let the Spirit translate the parable for us, helping us know which perfect facts to focus on and which flawed facts to leave behind. Like we crack the shell off of a nut before eating it, or remove the skin off an orange before consuming it, so too do we need to remove the "human husks" off the parables before we use them to define the character of God.

The fact that many parables contain violent, petty, unjust and wrathful rulers does NOT mean that God is likewise violent, petty, violent and wrathful. Jesus used flawed humanity, warts and all, to make heavenly points. Like with many Old Testament passages, we must let Jesus alone excavate, elevate and illuminate the character of God.

Jesus acknowledged that parables do NOT speak clearly to the human mind (Mark 4:10-12). So, why would we PRIORITIZE less-clear parabolic statements by Jesus over the more numerous and perfectly clear statements He makes concerning His Father's nature...

...Moreover, in other passages, such as Matthew 21:33-41 and 25:24, the violence of the king/ruler is PRESUMED by the audience but NEVER approved or endorsed by Jesus as accurate. So too today, many likewise wrongly presume a violent and vengeful image of God without actually EVER hearing from the Holy Spirit about it.

Fear and Bible Translation Biases:

And then there are sometimes even **Bible translation biases** that add to the fears of their readers. Take **John 15:1-8** (NIV), the story of the Vine and the branches, for example:

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off [**Greek: *airō***] every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If you [Greek: *tis*, an indefinite anyone] do not remain [abide, dwell, live] in me, you [3rd person singular: he/she] are *like* a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

In **John 15:2**, Strong’s G142 - *airō*, sometimes translated “cut off” or “taken away,” **would better be translated** in this verse, “**1. to raise up, elevate, lift up.**” (Note: only the *New King James Version* even acknowledges this alternative translation...as a footnote!)

So the intention of **John 15:2a** is actually **to encourage Christians!**

But later in **John 15:6**, Jesus goes on **to warn non-Christians.**

In John 15:6, when Jesus said, ‘If you do not remain/abide/dwell in me [*have a relationship with me*], you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned,’ he was **NOT** referring to unfruitful Christians: *they* are lovingly “lifted up” by the Vinedresser for better growth.

In 15:6 he was transitioning to warn those who refuse to believe that he is the Son of God. He was describing people who are looking for life *outside* himself: *branches which never were connected to the true vine.*

(For Christians worried about losing their salvation, remember: you didn’t earn salvation by your good performance, so you’re not going to lose it by your bad performance. God’s gifts, which would include the gift of salvation, [Rom. 6:23](#), are irrevocable, [Rom. 11:29](#). See grace teacher Paul Ellis’s thoughtful discussion about John 15 [here](#).)

And here is another scary example of translation bias I addressed [earlier](#) in this thread:

<begin quote>

The use of the false filter of God being bipolar is reflected more by some translators than others.

Consider Mark 3:29. The context is that Jesus had been accused by the teachers of the law of casting out demons *by the power of Satan*. So Jesus explained the illogic of that accusation: Satan would be opposing himself. In verse 29, Jesus then went on to warn against blaspheming the Holy Spirit—which people do whenever they misidentify the Holy Spirit as being Satan.

Compare Mark 3:29 in the NIV translation, vs. in the YLT translation:

Mark 3:29 NIV

but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will NEVER be forgiven; they are guilty of an ETERNAL sin.”

Mark 3:29 YLT (Young’s Literal Translation)

but whoever may speak evil in regard to the Holy Spirit HATH NOT FORGIVENESS – to the age, but is IN DANGER of AGE-DURING judgment;’

-In the NIV translation of this verse, an unbeliever is wrongly given cause to think: *“Oh no! I too have maligned manifestations of the Holy Spirit! So I am guilty of an eternal, unpardonable sin, and I can never possibly be forgiven!”*

-Whereas the YLT has Jesus saying that a blasphemer has not received forgiveness (is not yet a believer), and is ***in danger of*** a terrible, but **temporary**, judgment.

<end quote>

And finally, what is actually meant by “the wrath of God” and “the justice of God”?

Fear and the Wrath of God

As discussed by Richard Murray, in [Talmudic literature](#), the Jews equated God’s wrath with Satan’s oppression.

And in the Scriptures themselves, when we read about David’s sin of numbering the fighting men of Israel (instead of just trusting in God), in the first record of this event in [2 Samuel 24:1](#), David was said to have been incited by **“the LORD,”** whereas a later account of the same incident in [1 Chronicles 21:1](#) amends the story to say that David was incited by **“Satan.”**

But **Jesus**—who exactly represents his unchanging Father—**met this error of the misattribution of murderous wrath to God head-on** in John 10:10:

“**The thief** comes only to steal and kill and destroy. **I** came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

Make no mistake: the great harvest is coming, and the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, will sit in judgment and separate the wheat from the weeds. The unrepentant will all be cast into the agonizing lake of fire, located somewhere outside the new Jerusalem ([Rev. 22:15](#)). **However**, they will be there in the presence of our wonderful Savior and his angels during that terrible eon ([Rev. 14:10](#) and [Luke 15:10](#); compare [Daniel 3:25](#)). And eventually, in that consuming **fire** ([Heb. 12:29](#)) **of love** ([1 John 4:8, 16](#)), those captives to sin will gradually have their deceptive cords of bondage burned off—as they are willing; and eventually, each one will repent and choose to freely receive Jesus of Nazareth, God’s gift of reconciliation, and come into the City through the always open gates to receive the water of life ([Rev. 22:17](#)).

John 3:16-17

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, **but to save the world** [cosmos, universe] **through him**.

2 Corinthians 5:19

...**God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Fear and the Justice of God

Regarding what is meant by “the justice of God,” author [Steve McVey](#) has pointed out (my emphases in bold):

...[T]he God-as-Judge viewpoint does not present a biblical picture of what divine justice is about at all, but is a legalistic perspective that comes from human culture. **Biblically, to "bring justice" does not mean to bring punishment**, but to bring healing and reconciliation. Justice means to make things right. Throughout the Prophets, **justice is associated with caring for others, as something that is not in conflict with mercy, but rather an expression of it**. Divine justice is God's saving action at work for all that are oppressed, as the following verses demonstrate:

Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:17). Note what happens when one does right by seeking justice. The oppressed are encouraged and the helpless are helped.

This is what the LORD says: "Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed (Jeremiah 21:12). Justice is done when the oppressed is rescued.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: Administer true justice: show mercy and compassion to one another (Zechariah 7:9). How does one administer true justice? By showing mercy and compassion to everybody involved.

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice (Isaiah 30:18). What is the reason our Lord wants to be gracious to us? Because He is just.

If we want to understand the concept of justice as the writers of the Old Testament did, then we must see it as a "setting things right again." There is no conflict between **God's justice and His mercy**. They **both flow from His love**.

To summarize: in actuality, "the wrath of God" is rebellious people's wrath toward God, and is personified in Satan. Thankfully, however, "the justice of God" guarantees that eventually every crooked thing in Creation WILL become straight ([Luke 3:5-6](#)).

God, the Savior of ALL men ([1 Tim. 4:10](#)), is not willing to abandon even one lost sheep ([Luke 15:4](#))!

(Disclaimers about "grace teachers" I enjoy, whom I referenced or quoted above:

- Dr. Paul Ellis of *Escape to Reality*, is an annihilationist and a preterist.
- Joseph Prince, senior pastor at *New Creation Church*, while he is a futurist holding to a Pre-Tribulation rapture, nevertheless speaks in conferences alongside dominionists from Hillsong and Bethel.
- Dr. Steve McVey, president of *Grace Walk Ministries*, seems to have punted on any mention of Satan or Premillennialism, and veered off into quantum physics and mysticism.)

Note: this essay, "Fearing God," first appeared in the Comments Section after an essay called "[The Temple, the Antichrist, and the Structure of Revelation](#)"