

If You Call Him *Father*...

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

1 Peter 1:14-19, ESV

Whatever happened to fear? Have you noticed its removal from our cultural dictionary while at the same time 'disrespect' has become quite a popular verb? Is it possible to have respect without fear? Modern culture seems to affirm the possibility as we remove every reason for fear in an effort to create a more respectful dialogue through treating each other with complete equality. However, is it possible for an authority to remain authoritative with the removal of every reason to fear? Can a society or any social unit peacefully exist where no one within it fears at all? Does fear provide any motivation for doing what is right? Does fear of displeasing afford obedient children any incentive for complying with parental expectations? Has the alarm of fear or the panic from displeasure no quarter in loving relationships? Do we readily please each other because it is our nature to do so? While these may be great ends to seek, for the rest of us, pleasing others usually is second to pleasing ourselves. Is it possible to have a loving relationship without pleasing other(s) in that relationship?

How does fear relate to our most important relationship—our relationship with God? If God is truly my Father, should I fear him in any way? Peter clearly states that being even a compliant child of God does not make us immune from God's impartial judgment. Peter has no intention with terrorizing his readers with the reality of hell. Instead, he points on of the reasons we call God "Father" in the first place—he is a fair, impartial judge who plays no favorites. He wants us to realize that this is a double-edged sword. Any danger must be respected for what it is. God is no different. God's goodness demands holiness. So he exacts a change in our lives—one that is for our own good. His impartiality insures that goodness, righteousness and holiness will prevail. Perhaps our reason for fearing God has been clouded over time because we have forgotten the bind sin had us in.

At one time we live in ignorance. The word ignorance has the same root as the word agnostic, but, in this instance, the original signifies want of knowledge—especially an ignorance of divine matters. Before being in Christ, we lived according to the scheme of our passions—we conformed to our whims. Now that we are in Christ, a new hope and a new mind have taken over as we set ourselves apart and dedicate our lives to the sole service of God. Our passion now is to be like our master. We do not quake in terror of his anger but confident in his justice since his love as evidenced by the shedding of Christ's precious blood. However, his grace does not excuse us from changing our lives and deeds. Far from it, his grace provides the impetus for this new life in Christ. To paraphrase Paul, "Through the fear of the Lord, we persuade others and ourselves to upright lives because Christ's love compels us to no longer live for ourselves but to live for the one who gave up so much to save us" (2 Corinthians 5:11-15).

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