



THE PREEMINENT CHALLENGE of the Christian life is to find, embrace and live the proper balance between fear and grace. For if we lean too far in one direction, the other is soon negated.

We are told in Proverbs that the “fear of the Lord” is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, and that it prolongs life. Luke, writing in Acts 9, tells us that the fear of the Lord is healthy and beneficial for the corporate church, as well.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

Acts 9:31

So we have sufficient evidence that a fear of God is not just proper, but that it also makes the transition from Old Covenant to New: it is not limited to Jews under the law, but is right and good for Christians today. And let us not delude ourselves by rounding off all the sharp corners of this uncomfortable word. It means just that. Yes, it can refer to less-uncomfortable respect or reverence, but it also can mean alarm or fright—even terror and dread.

To fear the Lord means far more than just having a healthy respect for Him. I have that for my pastor, for our church elders and deacons, for my doctor. But I do not “fear” any of them.

My fear of the Lord keeps our relative positions in alignment. He is God, and I am not. He is Spirit-kind, and I am flesh-kind. He is without bounds or limitations, but I am restricted by physical laws, and the inherent weakness of my fallen nature.

But if I let this healthy fear go to seed, if it morphs into an overwhelming, quaking terror of my God, then it has become unhealthy. My fear of Him should draw me toward Him, not send me screaming from Him. When the blinding power of His might—that of which my God is capable—becomes in my mind less a strong rock to which I run for safety, than a hateful wrath directed to consume me, then I am dangerously out of alignment.

I need grace.



I speak of God’s grace, not human graciousness of holding a door open for someone, or pulling out a dining room chair for my wife. God’s grace is the product of His Son’s atoning sacrifice for our sins, and thus untainted by human resolve. His grace is God giving us what we do not—and cannot—merit. In truth we merit only His all-consuming, hateful wrath. Instead of that, because of Christ’s sacrifice, He offers His grace. The death of Jesus the Christ stands in place of the blood and death we should rightly suffer for our sin.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:23-24

Immersed in the grace, and gracious behavior, of Father God, the Christian can, over time, become anesthetized to His unapproachable holiness. Immersed in grace we forget to fear. The mistake we make is imagining we must choose between the two; we think that in fearing holy God we must relinquish His grace,

or that by living under His grace there is no more need of fear. But He meant for both to be qualities in every believer.

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

1 Peter 1:17-19

God’s grace should ignite thanksgiving and praise in the heart of every believer. His incomprehensible love for us should not numb us to His other-worldly majesty, but fan into flame a realization of—and fear of—His immense, all-encompassing power.

Only an utterly holy, omnipotent God could manifest such grace.



God reveals His presence:

*Let us now adore Him,
And with awe appear before Him.*

God is in His temple:

*All within keep silence,
Prostrate lie with deepest reverence.*

Him alone

God we own,

Him our God and Saviour:

Praise His Name for ever!

Gerhard Tersteegen

