

Revivals And Church History :: The Early Church on the Fear Of The Lord

The Early Church on the Fear Of The Lord - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2011/10/6 14:07

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

And the spirit of the LORD will be caused to rest upon him; a spirit of wisdom and understanding; a spirit of counsel and strength; a spirit of knowledge and piety; a spirit of the fear of God shall fill him up. Isaiah 11:2-3 (LXX)

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 10:28

Let us be spiritually-minded: let us be a perfect temple to God. As much as in us lies, let us meditate upon the fear of God, and let us keep His commandments, that we may rejoice in His ordinances. Barnabas (A.D. 70-130) ch.4

Adorned by a thoroughly virtuous and religious life, you did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and ordinances of the Lord were written upon the tablets of your hearts. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch.2

For this reason righteousness and peace are now far departed from you, inasmuch as every one abandons the fear of God, and is become blind in His faith, neither walks in the laws of His commandments. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch.3

Let us fear the Lord Jesus , whose blood was given for us... the fear of Him is good and great and saves all them that walk therein in a pure mind with holiness. For He is the searcher out of the intents and desires; whose breath is in us, and when He wills, He shall take it away. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch.21

The Father, who is pitiful in all things, and ready to do good, has compassion on them that fear Him. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch.23

Since therefore all things are seen and heard, let us fear Him, and forsake the abominable lusts of evil works, that we may be shielded by His mercy from the coming judgments. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch. 28

You see, brethren, in proportion as greater knowledge has been vouchsafed unto us, so much the more are we exposed to danger. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch. 41

For such as walk in fear and love desire that they themselves should fall into suffering rather than their neighbors; and they pronounce condemnation against themselves rather than against the harmony which has been handed down to us nobly and righteously. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) ch.50

Brethren, we ought so to think of Jesus Christ, as of God, as of the Judge of quick and dead. Second Clement (A.D. 100) ch. 1

And we ought not rather to fear men but God. For this cause, if you do these things, the Lord said, Though you be gathered together with Me in My bosom, and do not My commandments, I will cast you away and will say unto you, Depart from Me, I know you not whence you are, you workers of iniquity. Second Clement (A.D. 100) ch.4

These are the last times. Henceforth let us have reverence; let us fear the long-suffering of God, lest it turn into a judgment against us. For either let us fear the wrath which is to come or let us love the grace which now is - the one or the other; provided only that we be found in Christ Jesus unto true life. Ignatius: to the Ephesians (A.D. 35-105) ch. 11

"Fear the Lord," said he, "and keep His commandments. So keeping the commandments of God you shall be powerful in every deed, and your doing shall be incomparable. For whilst you fear the Lord, you shall do all things well. But this is the fear wherewith you ought to be afraid, and you shall be saved. But fear not the devil; for, if you fear the Lord, you shall

be master over the devil, for there is no power in him. in whom is no power, neither is there fear of him; but in whom power is glorious, of him is fear likewise. Hermas (A.D. 150) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.2 pg.37

Fear therefore is of two kinds. If you desire to do evil, fear the Lord, and you shall not do it. If again you desire to do good, fear the Lord and you shall do it. Hermas (A.D. 150) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.2 pg. 24

Every creature fears the Lord, but not every one keeps His commandments. Those then that fear Him and keep His commandments, they have life unto God; but they that keep not His commandments have no life in them. Hermas (A.D. 150) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.2 pg. 24

But do you clothe yourself in the desire of righteousness, and, having armed yourself with the fear of the Lord, resist them. For the fear of God dwells in the good desire. If the evil desire shall see you armed with the fear of God and resisting itself, it shall flee far from you, and shall no more be seen of you, being in fear of your arms. Hermas (A.D. 150) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.2 pg.28

In fine, the system He pursues to inspire fear is the source of salvation. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 195) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.2 pg.230

By guarding against sinning, we guard against suffering. "For I would have you know," says Jude, "that God, having once saved His people from the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them that believed not; and the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He has reserved to the judgment of the great day, in everlasting chains under darkness of the savage angels." And a little after he sets forth, in a most instructive manner, representations of those that are judged: "Woe unto them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, and run greedily after the error of Balaam, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." For those, who cannot attain the privilege of adoption, fear keeps from growing insolent. For punishments and threats are for this end, that fearing the penalty we may abstain from sinning. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 195) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.2 pg.282

They say that God is not to be feared; therefore all things are in their view free and unchecked. Where, however is God not feared, except where He is not? Where God is not, there truth also is not. Where there is no truth, then, naturally enough, there is also such a discipline as theirs. Tertullian (A.D. 198) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.3 pg.264-265

Fear is the foundation of salvation; presumption is an impediment to fear. More useful, then, is it to apprehend that we may possibly fail, than to presume that we cannot; for apprehending will lead us to fear, fearing to caution, and caution to salvation. On the other hand, if we presume, there will be neither fear nor caution to save us. Tertullian (A.D. 198) Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.4 pg. 19

Re: The Early Church on the Fear Of The Lord - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 14:43

Nothing said contradicts the true Gospel. Thank you for taking the time to put this together. It did my soul well to read this.

Be well today,
Doug

Re: - posted by ThyKingCome (), on: 2011/10/6 15:06

This is priceless...

Thank you so much dear brother for posting.

...it would be interesting to continue this study through history and watch the time gaps get broader and broader...who is there left to quote these days?

May the Lord restore His Holy Fear to His people and may He use the simulcast as a volcano of life and explosion to such an end!!!

Re: The Early Church on the Fear Of The Lord, on: 2011/10/6 16:14

While I agree that a right fear of the Lord is necessary, I often get the sense that for many of these early Fathers (and I have read their works) that for them, salvation meant walking a tightrope of strict morals while God (metaphorically speaking) holds a gun to your back. One slip and your out (if you don't believe me just read works such as the Shepherd of Hermas, or Tertullian's views on there being no forgiveness for certain pots-baptismal sins).

We should fear the Lord. However, if it is the kind of fear in the same way that one would fear a grumpy, strict, unforgiving school master then I'm not sure I could also love a God like that.

I do not wish to dishonour these early heroes of the faith but I would bank on this: If I (and probably most folks that visit this forum) were judged by their standards then I would be on my way to hell, simply for not being holy or righteous enough.

Re: Butters - posted by Renoncer, on: 2011/10/6 16:43

Butters,

You wrote, "If I (and probably most folks that visit this forum) were judged by their standards then I would be on my way to hell, simply for not being holy or righteous enough".

Could you give examples (i.e., specific quotes from early church fathers), and explain exactly how you fail these standards? I would like you to be specific if possible. Now, of course, we understand that it is not our righteousness, but Christ's righteousness that get us into heaven. However, I am interested to know what you are referring to.

In Christ,
Renoncer

Re: - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 17:27

Dear Butters,

You wrote:

"While I agree that a right fear of the Lord is necessary, I often get the sense that for many of these early Fathers (and I have read their works) that for them, salvation meant walking a tightrope of strict morals while God (metaphorically speaking) holds a gun to your back. One slip and your out (if you don't believe me just read works such as the Shepherd of Hermas, or Tertullian's views on there being no forgiveness for certain pots-baptismal sins)."

Certainly, the "Fathers" were just men; they were not perfectly inspired. However, in general, we should take their writings in the context of their day, if we are to properly appreciate them. They appear very strict to us, but realize what they were up against:

They encountered a constant influx of Greek and Eastern heresies that required constant attention. They lived under a constant military occupation/police-state. Their property could be stolen from them by the State at any time.

Added to this, they lived in the midst of an unspeakably wicked culture and society.

At times they faced the daily prospect of waking up in the morning and not knowing whether they would be alive by sundown.

In many ways, the world they lived in was very different than the one we live in, (but that is changing...) So, while I can't vouch for every single thing the Church Fathers said, I believe their general word to us, and the spirit of their message to us today is a great blessing and is of inestimable value to the Church today.

Re: The Early Church on the Fear Of The Lord - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2011/10/6 21:03

Thanks for posting this, Greg.

I have witnessed the downfall of people who substituted the word fear for love, believing you cannot love something you are scared of. They embarked on a path of apostasy because God is love and he would not expect people to do this or that or whatever....after all, we are living in a different era! If this is to be believed one must assume the Holy Spirit retired and went back to heaven and left us to fend for ourselves!

BTW, if one looks up the word fear in Strong's it does define it as "being scared of."

Yes, one can love something you fear. It may begin with fear but will with time evolve into love. Much like a teen's attitude towards his parents...

God bless...

Re: - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 21:22

Great points ginnyrose

You wrote:

"BTW, if one looks up the word fear in Strong's it does define it as "being scared of."

Yes, one can love something you fear. It may begin with fear but will with time evolve into love. Much like a teen's attitude towards his parents..."

I was teaching my children firearm safety the other day. I told them "You need to fear it, if you break its law, it will kill you..." One said to me, "Like God, Dad, right?" And I thought... well, yes.

God is serious. God is deadly. Our God is deadly serious. This is not only in the Old testament:

"For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God!" Deuteronomy 4:24

but also in the New:

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

For our God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28-29

"Our God is a consuming fire." If you break his law he will kill you!

It is just that context that makes the Gospel, and being safe in the Saviour, such an incredible wonder and joy and consolation.

Be well,
Doug

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2011/10/6 23:15

Quote:
-----While I agree that a right fear of the Lord is necessary, I often get the sense that for many of these early Fathers (and I have read their works) that for them, salvation meant walking a tightrope of strict morals while God (metaphorically speaking) holds a gun to your back. One slip and your out (if you don't believe me just read works such as the Shepherd of Hermas, or Tertullian's views on there being no forgiveness for certain post-baptismal sins).

We should fear the Lord. However, if it is the kind of fear in the same way that one would fear a grumpy, strict, unforgiving school master then I'm not s

ure I could also love a God like that.

God is love. Yet also He is holy and to be feared. Modern evangelicals have forgotten this and have lost the true character of God. This is proved by the very low view of sin in the church and world. Oh that the fear of the Lord would come back to the Church.

Re: - posted by menderofnets (), on: 2011/10/6 23:26

I love God because of what He has done for an undeserving sinner as myself.

I fear Him because I recognise that without Him I can do nothing (John 15:5), not even keep myself in His salvation, for which I rely on the Holy Spirit to quicken, reveal, convict and guide.

Re: - posted by beekpr, on: 2011/10/7 6:17

I learned about how fear and love exist side by side as a dairy farmer. My animals loved and trusted me. Often when I exercised them they would jostle each other to get close enough to me to be caressed. However, when a cow gave my wife a hard time while she was trying to milk it, it would stop kicking when I reprimanded it from across the barn. My wife would say "it just needed to hear the voice of authority". The fear did not diminish the love because they simply accepted the fact that I was their master. A few timely physical disciplinary actions in their past enforced in their bovine minds what my status was in the herd. Could we but be more "simple" in our faith!

Re: , on: 2011/10/7 18:51

Renoncer

From what I can see the majority of the early Fathers taught salvation by works. Here are a few of many possible quotes. (I also noticed after typing this that Greg has started another thread with a load more quotes).

"Man was not created perfect, but created suitable for acquiring virtue... For God desires us to be saved by our own efforts." -(Clement of Alexandria, ~200AD, Stromata 6.12.96)

“And we have been taught, and are convinced, and do believe, that He accepts those only who imitate the excellences which reside in Him, temperance, and justice, and philanthropy, and as many virtues as are peculiar to a God who is called by no proper name. And we have been taught that He in the beginning did of His goodness, for man's sake, create all things out of unformed matter; and if men by their works show themselves worthy of this His design, they are deemed worthy, and so we have received—of reigning in company with Him, being delivered from corruption and suffering. For as in the beginning He created us when we were not, so do we consider that, in like manner, those who choose what is pleasing to Him are, on account of their choice, deemed worthy of incorruption and of fellowship with Him." (1 Apol 10)

"The spirit must earn immortality by works of righteousness." (Lactantius : Ante Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, pg.127)

"I do not know if these commandments can be kept by man, because they are exceeding hard." and said to me, "If you say it down as certain that they can be kept, then you will easily keep them, and they will not be hard. But if you come to imagine that they cannot be kept by man, then you will not keep them. Now I say to you, If you do not keep them, but neglect them, you will not be saved, nor your children, nor your house, since you have already determined for yourself that these commandments cannot be kept by man." -(Shepherd of Hermas, ~150AD, Commandment 12.3-4)

Notice there's nothing about Christ's righteousness being imputed or even imparted or infused here — it's all stuff we have to work up. The Didache even hints on the need for perfection:

"But come together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not prof

it you, if you are not made perfect in the last time." (Did 16:2)

As for post baptismal sin, it seems that God's mercy runs out when you become a Christian, and there are only a certain amount of times you can be forgiven.

"the Lord has sworn by His glory, in regard to His elect, that if any one of them sin after a certain day which has been fixed, he shall not be saved. For the repentance of the righteous has limits. Filled up are the days of repentance to all the saints; but to the heathen, repentance will be possible even to the last day." (Hermas Vis. II.2.1-6)

Tertullian was even stricter (he even thought the Shepherd of Hermas was too soft on the matter) and clearly thought that there was no forgiveness for sins (or at least some sins) after baptism:

"With no less reason ought the unmarried also to be delayed until they either marry or are firmly established in continence: until then, temptation lies in wait for them, for virgins because they are ripe for it, and for widows because of their wandering about. All who understand what a burden baptism is will have more fear of obtaining it than of its postponement." (De Baptismo, XVIII)

I must stress again, I DO believe we should fear the Lord. It's the kind of fear that I'm questioning. I see little security or assurance in the writings of the early fathers (and if there is, it's always based on one's own near perfect conduct, not Christ's blood), just this fearful dread that we may not be good enough to make it in the end.

I find it interesting that in Psalm 130 (oh how often I pray through this psalm) it says in v4

"But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared."

I right reverent fear of God therefore comes the other side of knowing his forgiveness, it would seem.

A personal note here: I actually do have a daily real sense of the fear of God (though whether it's the right kind I sometimes doubt) and I would say I know it far more than I know the love of God, alas.

Re: - posted by Renoncer, on: 2011/10/7 21:40

Butters,

Thank you for responding with so much detail. It is interesting indeed... But, then again, this is a common trend. You'll notice that whenever there is a kind of "reformation" in the church, in a few generations, it has become corrupt. Thank God for his grace, by which He intervenes to redeem our mess!

In Christ,
Renoncer