

SALVATION IN SYMBOLS & SIGNS

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Corresponds to Program 61

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NKJV and KJV.

THE FIRST ANGEL'S MESSAGE STUDY GUIDE

THE FIRST ANGEL'S MESSAGE

In Revelation chapter 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 four-fold:

1. Fear God
2. Give glory to Him
3. The hour of His judgment is come
4. Worship Him that made heaven and earth

If we compare these four pronouncements with the first four commandments, we find some interesting parallels:

The first commandment is to have no other gods before God (Exodus 20:1-3). This would connect to the phrase “fear God.” When we fear God, we don’t have other gods before Him.

The second phrase calls us to “give glory” to God. Paul says in Romans that those who failed to glorify God had changed His glory into images that they then worshiped (Romans 1:21-23). That would parallel with the second commandment to avoid idol worship.

The third phrase points to the hour of God’s judgment. This parallels the third commandment, because judgment is about the character upon which God will judge us all. As Christians, we take on the name of Christ. The word “name” in this instance is synonymous with the character of Who we are trying to emulate. We are to refrain from using God’s name in vain, not just in profanity, but especially by not misrepresenting God’s character in our lives.

Finally, the fourth phrase in the first angel’s message is “worship Him.” This exact phrase is central to the fourth commandment, which calls the world to remember the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of worship of our Creator who made heaven and earth.

Let’s take a closer look at this first phrase “Fear God.”

Revelation 14:6-7

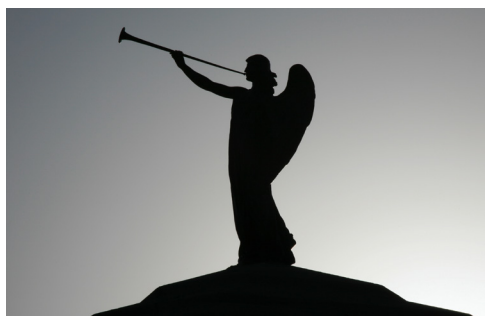
FEAR GOD: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The word fear means more than “to be afraid;” it also means to “revere or be in awe.” Notice this usage in the Bible:

Psalms 89:7

The New American Standard Bible translate this verse:

“For who in the skies is comparable to the Lord? 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 NASB).



“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel...”

REVELATION 14:6

This verse is an example of what we call synonymous poetry or parallel poetry in Hebrew writing—the same thought repeated. The word “feared” in the first half of the verse is synonymous with the word “awesome” in the second part.

We begin to see from the Biblical use of the word fear, as well as from the Greek definition of “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:

“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).

KEY SCRIPTURES

Revelation 14:7 FEAR GOD AND GIVE GLORY TO HIM

Psalms 89:6 WHO IS LIKE THE LORD

Ephesians 2:8 BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED

Revelation 14:12 HERE’S THE PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS

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.

God's love is evidenced in the fact that Adam and Eve did not taste the full consequences of their sins on 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.

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 (Psalm 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.

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.

There is natural fear and supernatural fear. Natural fear is a result of fallen sin. We naturally tend to shy away from God and hide in our sin. Supernatural fear is a result of beholding God's love, mercy, and grace. It leads us to desire to turn from sin, and be in awe of God and hope in His mercy and salvation.

We are saved by God's mercy. We see this when we go into the Sanctuary. There we find, in the Most Holy Place, the mercy seat. We are all called to be under the mercy of God—under

His mercy seat. And when in the sanctuary we stand under the mercy seat, we are standing in God's Law (Hebrews 9:4-5). As God says in the second commandment, "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:6). In being under God's mercy, we are walking in His commandments. That is why Paul says that the law shows us sin, convicts us of sin, and brings us to a place of guilt before God (Romans 7:7; 3:19). Why? So that we can be justified freely by God's grace, through the propitiation or mercy seat of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:20-25).

GIVE GLORY TO HIM

What does it mean to give glory to God in the context of the Everlasting Gospel? Let's begin by considering a bedrock text on the subject of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9

The word "boast" in this text is "glory" in the Greek. Putting that Greek translation into verse nine, it would read: "Not of works, lest any man should glory."

The second chapter of Ephesians presents a corollary to the message of Revelation's Everlasting Gospel: "give glory to Him." Here we find that no person should glory in any works they do because they are saved by God's grace, not by their works. The fact that we are saved by God's grace—since we have none of our own—should cause us to cease and desist from giving any glory to ourselves or any other person for salvation. The Everlasting Gospel calls us to give all the glory to God for salvation. This can only happen as we understand that we have been saved totally by the grace of God and not by our works. Any religious teaching that gives any degree of merit to the creature for salvation, diverts that much glory from God. To experience salvation as a gift that cannot be earned by good works is to give glory to God.

1 Corinthians 1:29-30

"Christ... is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30, NIV). For all those who accept salvation, Christ becomes their righteousness (justification), their holiness (sanctification), and their redemption (glorification). In Christ is found their title and fitness for heaven. His righteousness is everything, "That, according as it is written, 'he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:31).

A LESSON IN FAITH FROM A ROMAN CENTURION

Luke 7:2-9

Let's take a closer look at the lesson of glory from the story of the Centurion. The religious leaders of Christ's day said of the Centurion, "He was worthy." And in the eyes of the Pharisees, who based righteousness on outward conduct, he *was* worthy. But note the attitude of the Centurion himself: "...I am not worthy..." (Luke 7:6).

Here the Centurion is schooling the Pharisees. Whether we have built one church or a thousand churches; whether we have been lifelong Christians or just come to Jesus; we are unworthy sinners, one hundred percent dependent on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is no provision for self-salvation sufficiency allowed in the Everlasting Gospel.

But notice also that the Centurion says to Jesus, “But say in a word...” (Luke 7:7). The Centurion has a correct understanding of his own puny salvation merit, yet he also wholly believes in the power of God. The formula for great faith is puniness and power: self-puniness wholly reliant on God’s power. This was the formula that was missing among God’s people Israel during Christ’s time.

Remember what Jesus said: “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Luke 7:9). Why? Because Israel, God’s commandment-keeping people, through rigid obedience, had fallen into legalism. And the greatest danger to great faith in Jesus is our own hyper-obedience becoming legalism. There is a tension that must remain between those who do all that God commands and those who embrace total faith in Jesus for salvation. Notice how Revelation 14:13 reads and place emphasis on the word “AND:”

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

God is seeking to develop a people who obey Him, and still keep their faith for salvation one hundred percent in Jesus—not on their own obedience. In fact, we will find that the only way we can and will ever truly obey is when we rely on Jesus one hundred percent for salvation.

Summary

There is no greater insight into God’s 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.

This promise of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the Seed, the only way of salvation for the entire world. This issue is vital. The controversy embroils around the way of salvation: Is it by Christ alone? By something else? Or by Christ and something else? Many people imagine that they must save themselves by making themselves good. Many others think that Christ is a valuable adjunct, a good assistant to their efforts. Others are willing to give Him the first place, but not the only place. They regard themselves as good seconds; it is the Lord and they who do the work. But the Everlasting Gospel shuts off all such assumption and self-assertions. “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his offspring. He does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your offspring,’ which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16, New Heart English). Christ is the One. Give glory to God and God alone. Amen. ★

