

"FEAR THAT PLEASES OR DISPLEASES THE LORD?"-PART II
Revelation 1:5-17

(GNT): "[F]rom Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first to be raised from death and who is also the ruler of the kings of the world. He loves us, and by His sacrificial death He has freed us from our sins⁶ and made us a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father. To Jesus Christ be the glory and power forever and ever! Amen.⁷ Look, He is coming on the clouds! Everyone will see Him, including those who pierced Him. All peoples on earth will mourn over Him. . . .⁹ I am John, your brother, . . .¹⁰ On the Lord's day the Spirit took control of me, and I heard a loud voice, that sounded like a trumpet, speaking behind me. . . .¹² I turned around to see who was talking to me, and I saw . . .¹³ what looked like a human being, wearing a robe that reached to His feet, and a gold band around His chest.¹⁴ His hair was white as wool, or as snow, and His eyes blazed like fire;¹⁵ His feet shone like brass that has been refined and polished, and His voice sounded like a roaring waterfall.¹⁶ He held seven stars in His right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came out of His mouth. His face was as bright as the midday sun.¹⁷ When I saw Him, I fell down at His feet like a dead man. He placed his right hand on me and said, 'Don't be afraid! I am the first and the last.'"

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, at a zoo in Beijing, China, a 15-year-old Chinese boy named Li Xitao scaled a 4', 7" barrier surrounding an outdoor exercise area for pandas while 8-year-old Gu Gu and another panda were being fed. The boy startled 240 lb. Gu Gu by his sudden appearance and by walking up to the panda with open arms. Instead of receiving the hug Li expected from this seemingly adorable panda, Gu Gu bit him on both legs. Chunks of Li's flesh were left behind in the ambulance that took him to the hospital after zookeepers managed to lure Gu Gu away from him. What had Li forgotten? As cute and cuddly as they appear, pandas are still what? Bears!

Jabari, a 340 lb. western lowland gorilla, lived in an award-winning, two-acre, conservation area at the Dallas Zoo, surrounded by 16-foot concave walls topped by electrified wire. On March 19, 2004, two teen boys thought they were safe enough to mercilessly taunt without fear 13-year-old Jabari, in the prime of his strength. They were wrong. They so enraged Jabari that he did the seemingly impossible, scaling both walls and wire, to get at them. They learned too late a highly restrained gorilla is still not safe to provoke!

C. S. Lewis (of *Chronicles of Narnia* fame), the staunch atheist who gave his heart to **Jesus** at age 33 and became one of the 20th century's most thoughtful defenders of Christian truth, recognized the crippling mistake Christians often make today. They like to dismiss Old Testament emphases upon God's law, holiness, and judgment. They prefer to focus upon the love, privileges, and gifts of grace the New Testament's Heavenly Father bestows on us. We brought out in vivid detail last week how we distort Biblical Christianity if we lose awareness of New Testament passages like **Hebrews 12:28-29** (NRSV): "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;²⁹ for indeed our God is a consuming fire." And **Hebrews 10:31** proclaims to Christ's followers who might be tempted to believe we can "deliberately sin" or be unfaithful to **Jesus** in our hearts, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Such language sounds strange to our modern ears, as though God is portrayed as a lightning-hurling, fire-breathing tyrant. We rightfully celebrate **I John 4:16-18** (NLT): "God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face Him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love." We learn here our Heavenly Father longs for us to serve and honor Him as God purely from "perfect love" (love that is "mature" and

"fully developed") and never obey Him merely from fear of being punished. Someone quipped, "They that worship God merely from fear, would worship the devil too if he appear." John Bunyan (1628-88), early Baptist Preacher & author of the Christian classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, also wrote the book, *The Fear of God*. Bunyan wisely observed that until our love for the LORD matures, a healthy "fear" of God's judgment may keep us in line at times as Christians when nothing else will.

For most of us, losing awareness of God's terrifying majesty allows us to lose necessary restraints against doing wrong. Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother Joel were sitting together in church. Joel giggled, sang, and talked out loud; heedless of his disruptive impact. Finally, his big sister had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church." "Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel asked. Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? They're hushers." If tempted to do something even if it displeases God, we might think, "Who's going to stop me?" Would it restrain us if we viewed God as a big "husher"? Paul told the Church of Corinth that was filled with immature Joels, "Therefore, since we have these promises, loved ones, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the [love] of God" (**II Corinthians 7:1**, TLV). Except Paul wrote, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God"; not "love of God." Paul would have agreed with John. Love of God is the best motivation to obey and please our LORD and Savior. But most of us will never experience the quality of the moral life God promises to us in Christ unless a healthy "fear of God" is at work "perfecting" ("maturing" and "fully developing"; the same Greek root word for "perfect" and "perfected" in **I John 4:16-18**) our devotion to Him.

In the final years of Israel's Southern Kingdom of Judah, most worshiped the true God in name only. They presumed they could retain God's blessings while pursuing gods of lust, pleasure, power, and a whole host of pagan idols. In **Jeremiah 5:22** (NASB), God challenged the people by asking, "Do you not fear Me?" declares the LORD. 'Do you not tremble in My presence?'" The Hebrew word for "tremble" literally means, "to writhe in pain" or "to churn in horror," as when the horrifying devastation of God's judgment finally falls upon the stubbornly rebellious (**Deuteronomy 28:58-61**). All references to "tremble" or "trembling" in the New Testament are variations of the Greek word "tremo," from which comes our English word "tremble." Most literally, the Greek word means "to shake with fear," as in **Philippians 2:12** (NASB), "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Paul reminds us there is too much at stake for us to take lightly God's "salvation" grace to free us from sin's presence and power. A man dialed a wrong number and got the following recording: "I am not available right now, but I thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes." If the LORD chose not to respond when we call out to Him, because of our defiant lack of fear toward Him, would this not be the most terrifying thing of all? Our theme, "Fear That Pleases or Displeases the LORD?" continues to focus upon Necessary Fear.

I. NECESSARY FEAR

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the first book of the *Chronicles of Narnia* penned by C. S. Lewis to present the core truths of Christianity on a level children can grasp, Lewis writes, "People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time" (123). Four English children are getting ready to meet the mysterious and great Aslan of prophecy, who represents Christ. Two talking animals, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, prepare the children for the encounter. Lucy, the youngest child, stammers, "Is—is he a man?" "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh!" said Susan (Lucy's older sister), "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knee's knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?"

said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you" (74-76).

Two other scenes portray Aslan in stunning contrast. To convince Susan he's returned to life after he died in behalf of her brother, "Aslan stooped his golden head and licked her forehead. The warmth of his breath and a rich sort of smell that seemed to hang about his hair came all over her" (159). Soon thereafter, when he's ready to lead the battle to crush the forces of evil in Narnia, Aslan warns Susan and Lucy to "put your fingers in your ears," while he roars to herald his coming. "And Aslan stood up and when he opened his mouth to roar his face became so terrible that they did not dare to look at it. And they saw all the trees in front of them bend before the blast of his roaring as grass bends in a meadow in the wind" (161). Did C.S. Lewis draw his inspiration for how he portrayed Christ in *The Chronicles of Narnia* from the Bible or dream up these ideas on his own? In **John 10:10**, **Jesus** said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." In **Matthew 11:28-29** (NIV) **Jesus** urged, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." **Jesus Christ** our Savior is astoundingly gentle and good, as is Aslan. But as "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah" (**Revelation 5:5**) is He "safe"? Should we still retain a sense of awesome dread because of His glory and majesty?

If anyone would have felt "safe" in **Jesus'** presence, it would have been John the Apostle, "whom Jesus loved" according to Scripture, and who reclined upon **Jesus'** chest at the Last Supper. They shared such a bond of warmth and trust **Jesus** in His dying hours entrusted care of His mother, Mary, to John (**John 13:23; 19:25-27**). John believed **Jesus** to be the Son of God who chose to "empty Himself," to set aside His glory, privileges, and power, "assuming the form of a servant" as a man, so that He could become our Savior (as **Philippians 2:5-11**, CSB, describes Him). **Revelation 1:5-17**, our text for today, describes John's encounter with the fully glorified Christ, after **Jesus'** resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the throne of God. Let's reread **vss. 10-16** [read]. Did John's encounter with the fully glorified **Jesus** inspire within him a sense of awesome dread of Christ's majesty? Yes [reread **vs. 17**]! **Jesus** quickly placed His hand upon John and assured His faithful disciple of John's security within Christ's love by telling Him, "Don't be afraid!" As "King of kings, and LORD of Lords" (**Revelation 19:16**), that's Christ's prerogative. But His warnings to the churches in the first three chapters of **Revelation** remind us that Christians should never presume we are "safe" in Christ's love with no need to "fear" our awesome LORD and King!

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," as Solomon proclaimed 3,000 years ago (**Proverbs 9:10**). We have learned Biblical, God-honoring "fear of the Lord" includes three factors: Awe of God's *Power*, Reverence for God's *Person*, and a Passion for God's *Pleasure*. Should we as Christians be in awe of Christ's Power? Should Christ's majesty inspire deep Reverence for His Person? Can we honestly claim to love **Jesus** if we do not have such a Passion for our LORD that it hurts us to fall short of pleasing Him?

CONCLUSION

Peter Loughman currently serves as pastor of a church plant in Anchorage, TX, southeast of San Antonio. About 15 years ago, he joined others in prayer at a hospital bedside. While they prayed, God miraculously healed the critically ill patient; a jumping-out-of-bed, pulling-out-the-tubes-attached-to-him healing! His family called pastor Peter that afternoon filled with fear. He was dumbfounded by this! He thought they should be celebrating the marvel of his healing, not filled with fear. His family shared with him they'd grown up in the church and thought they knew all about **Jesus Christ**. It wasn't until that very day when they experienced this astonishing healing that they understood how "Real" faith in Christ is. This filled them with fear, wondering, "What would God do next?" with them. Their pastor realized they had no idea of what they'd been dealing with all these years. Do we? Necessary "fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." If we live in Awe of God's Power, Reverence for God's Person, and a Passion for God's Pleasure, there are no limits to what we can experience of the LORD's awesome Presence, Power, and Passion!