

Group Discussion:

The Flaming Toilet of Death

"Fear... is the beginning of Wisdom."

1. Take just a minute to go around your group, say your name, and share one thing that you're afraid of.
(I.e. "Hello my name is Bob and I'm afraid of polyester" or "Hello my name is Jill and I'm afraid of Bob" or "Hello my name is Steve and I'm afraid of relationship building small group questions.")
2. Are all fears bad? Are all fears the same? For example:
 - Fear of being found out or exposed
 - The fear you experience when you go surfing or hiking in the mountains
 - The fear you might feel on a first date
 - The fear of death
3. Can a fear be good (or at least appropriate) at one time, in one instance, and yet bad at another time or in another instance? Can you think of some examples? Think of your relationships . . . How does fear change over time?

"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom" (Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10)

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love (who is "the Lord" and "Wisdom") casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, (or is it's own punishment) and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." (1 John 4:18)

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. And Wisdom—who is our Lord—is the end of fear.

4. When and why should we fear God? And when and why should we not fear God?
5. When Jesus tells us to fear God, is it because we don't fear enough and need more fear? . . . Or because, we fear everything, but not the right thing?

Jesus said, *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna: The valley of Hinnom). Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”* (Matthew 10:28-31)

- ✓ Jesus says, “Don’t fear others... fear God... Fear not, therefore.” Does this verse make any sense to you whatsoever?

Sometimes people say, “God is Love... that’s true, but He’s also just.” They say it, as if justice is different than Love.

- ✓ Is it? Is Justice the opposite of Love?
- ✓ What is God’s Justice?

“Fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna...”

- ✓ Who made your body and soul? What did he make it out of?
- ✓ What happens to a body when it dies and rots and/or is cremated?
- ✓ Could God re-make that body if necessary?
- ✓ How does a soul get “destroyed” (*apollumi*: “perish, lose, destroy”)

Jesus told his disciples *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life (soul) will lose it (apollumi), but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* (Matthew 16:24-25)

- ✓ In the end, aren’t we all most afraid of losing our souls?
- ✓ And in the end, don’t we all long to lose our souls . . . and find them? (Ever been drunk? Ever been in Love? Ever been deliriously happy?)

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You’ve obviously been told to fear God. Think of when and how that happened.

6. Were you told to fear God because,
 - A. He loves you, or because...
 - B. He might not love you?

Scripture teaches that “*God is Love*” and that “*the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.*” “*The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever*” is one of the most repeated phrases in the Bible (42 times).

7. Why would people tell other people that God’s Mercy will come to an end and His Love may not last?

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are really only two motivators at play in the heart of every human being: Fear and Love. And suppose that:

- Fear is that thing that makes you want to run away, hide, or play it safe. Fear is the desire to “save your self”
- Love is that thing that makes you want to run toward something or someone. It’s attraction. Love is that desire that causes you to lose yourself in another self.

Think of a “*good deed*” done in fear (This should be easy)...

And now, think of a “*good deed*” done in love (This should be hard, for you weren’t thinking about your self at the time)...

8. How is a deed done in love different than one done in fear?
How is it different in you? How does it feel?
How is it different for others? How does it feel to them?
9. If you do the good, in order to save your soul from “hell” and to get into “heaven,” did you do the good... or just more evil?

Jesus said, “*Whoever seeks to save his life (soul) will lose it, and whoever loses his life (soul) will preserve it.*” (Luke 17:33)

10. If someone is converted out of fear for their own soul, are they converted... and if so, to what?

Jesus said, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell (Gehenna) as yourselves.*” (Matthew 23:15)

11. How do you make someone “twice as much a child of hell as yourself?”
12. Have you ever shared your faith out of fear?
How did it feel? How did it go? What was the effect?
Was it actually faith that you were sharing?

13. Have you ever shared your faith out of Love?
How did it feel? How did it go? What was the effect?
Was it actually faith that you were sharing?

Jesus means “God is Salvation.” If we tell people about Jesus in fear for our salvation, or their salvation, aren’t we testifying that God is not salvation... and, in fact, we are salvation—an imitation Christ, an anti-Christ?

“Do not fear.” (366 occurrences in Scripture—one for every day of the year plus leap year)

Neither can one who wills the Good do so out of fear of punishment. In essence, this is the same thing as willing the Good for the sake of a reward. The one who wills in truth one thing fears only doing wrong, not the punishment. In fact, he who does wrong, yet sincerely wills the Good, actually desires to face the consequences - so that the punishment, like medicine, may heal him. He understands that punishment only exists for the sake of the sinner. It is a helping hand. It goads one to press on further toward the Good, if one really wills it. On the other hand, the one who is divided considers punishment or hardship as a sickness. He fears all worldly setback for there is nothing eternal in him.

True, fear deceptively offers to help us. It too offers to keep us on the right track. Yet the one who strives in fear never becomes God's friend. Fear is a deceitful aid. It can sour your delight, make life arduous and miserable, make you old and decrepit; but it is never able to help you toward the Good. The Good will not tolerate any alien helper.

Those who live in fear may indeed desire heaven but not for itself. . . . Only one thing can help us to will the Good in truth: the Good itself.

- Soren Kierkegaard