

## How can I, “fear the Lord,” and, “be not afraid”?

The theme of Pope John Paul II’s teaching and ministry was, “*Be not afraid.*” It is precisely because he had such a strong reverential, “*Fear of the Lord,*” that he did not have to be afraid of opposition from the world. He knew he had an almighty and fearful Lord to protect him. The worst the world could throw at him was all gain in the spiritual battle. St. John (1st John 4:18) tells us, “*Perfect love casts out fear.*” The Pope also knew he had an awesomely responsible assignment from God. He knew he had to report for judgment about his job, and being a man of deep faith this must have caused him moments of fear and trembling. We all have an assignment and a day of report to God. St. Paul (Philippians 2:12) warns us, “*Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*”

Many of us have experienced a real fear at night that God, or Mary, or an angel, might appear to us. When God gets to be really real it’s kind of scary, even if we know He loves us. Deep down we know how unworthy we are. Even receiving Holy Communion should have a bit of this fear. That’s why we should never even think of receiving when in the state of serious sin.

A holy fear came upon Zachariah (John 1:12) when the angel appeared to him. Even the sinless Blessed Virgin (Luke 1:29) had a bewildering fear at the words of St. Gabriel. God is so almighty and all of us are so unworthy of His love.

When we know the awesome majesty of our God, who is burning love itself, mere human fears are cast out. When we long to walk in His ways, misfit fears disappear. By comparison our self centered fears become insignificant.

Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 tell us, “*fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;* the beginning but not the end. A holy awareness of hell often helps a person seek the love of God. Fear of our sinfulness before God is necessary for our salvation.

Deuteronomy 10:12 says, “*What does the Lord ask of you but to fear the Lord your God and follow His ways.*” Verse 22 repeats, “*The Lord your God shall you fear and Him shall you serve.*”

If we resent even thinking of fearing a God of love, we have created our own sentimental false God. God is indeed a God of love but it is a tough love. Don’t imagine the Lord saying to you, “Yes, dear.” “Whatever you say, dear.” In His eternal wisdom He knows, this would not be the loving approach. In justice we have to measure up in the end.

The Bible says the Holy Spirit is not a spirit of fear. (Romans 8:15) He gives us courage to BE NOT AFRAID of the judgments of the world as we live out the Gospel. The only necessary fear is a properly understood, FEAR OF THE LORD; the Lord of cleansing love.