

Fear Is For Children

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | May 30, 2008



Recently I have heard a number of sermons which describe God as angry, which present Him as wrathful, threatening, and punishing. These sermons talk about God killing, God raining down fire, God burning people, and God slaying people.

They talk against God's loving, forgiving, and gracious heart. Several people have emailed me and told me that such sermons incite fear and make them afraid of God.

In response to this I know some who talk against the idea of God raising His voice, against God threatening, and make it appear that God never acts in ways to incite fear. Yet there are numerous texts which use this powerful language. Where is the balance? How can we reconcile the reality that "God is love" and "Love seeks not her own, keeps no record of wrong" and "gives his life for a friend" with statements in the Bible where God threatens to kill, punish, and destroy?

It is very simple really, love always does what is designed to heal, save, and protect and sometimes that means raising the voice, threatening, and even inciting fear.

Recently, I was counseling an adolescent young man who was struggling with powerful sexual desire and had been acting on these desires. As we talked and I tried to explore God's principles

and reasons for abstinence until marriage it became clear that he simply could not appreciate any benefit in waiting. His mind was overcome with powerful feelings of lust. Reason and evidence just were not having an impact on him. He was not mature, he was not healthy, he was not capable of functioning on the level God has designed us to operate. So I met him where he was and incited fear. I presented the truth about sexually transmitted diseases. I showed pictures of what these diseases do. I explored scenarios and situations in which he could suffer from these diseases and he became anxious, uncomfortable, and afraid. He was actually upset with me and said, "But now I just can't go pick anyone up."

It was then I realized fear is for children. Why does a child not cheat on an exam? Fear of getting caught. Why do childlike people not drink and drive? Fear of arrest. Why do children pick up their toys, make their bed, and do their chores? Fear of punishment.

How much more might a parent "threaten" if their child was engaged in something dangerous and not listening? If your child was riding their bike toward an oncoming car that was hidden from the child's view and if your child didn't stop when you told them, would you threaten them and raise your voice in an angry tone? Might you say, "If you don't stop right now I will beat your bottom raw" or some other threatening statement in order to get them to stop? If your child didn't stop and was hit by the car would you then get out your belt and beat them?

This is how God operates. God is love. God is working to heal and protect, working to save and restore. But sometimes, when his earthborn children are heading off into self-destruction, He raises His voice and threatens to destroy, to inflict a severe punishment, hoping we will stop and listen and be saved. But if we don't, God will sadly let us go. Just like a child who gets hit by the car after ignoring their parent's threatening warning, God doesn't have to use His power to kill or destroy, because "sin when it is full grown brings forth death" James 1:15.

Sadly, too many Christians and far too many pastors fail to recognize God is our loving Father and as our loving Father He will meet us where we are. If we are too childlike to listen, too childlike to reason or follow the truth or intelligently implement His methods, then rather than watch us die God lovingly threatens, thunders, and shouts, even inciting fear, in order to get our attention and save us from ourselves. But if we refuse to listen, if we insist on going our own way, then eventually God sadly lets go and we die. But before He lets us go our gracious God is so awesome that, like any loving parent, He will raise His voice, He will scream for us to stop, He will even threaten us with harm all designed to save us from ourselves. Yes, God does sometimes use methods designed to instill fear, but fear is for children - God is waiting for us to grow up and come to know Him as He really is. And when we do that, then we will know as Moses did at Sinai, when all the people trembled in fear, that in truth "there is no reason to be afraid." Exodus 20:18-20.