

263 *A total revelation!*

How lovely to be talking about something positive again – an utter joy. Thank you, Lord.

So, Happy Easter everyone, joy abounds in me again! Why? I've just seen something totally wonderful that I've never noticed before.

Regular readers will know that I keep banging on about: 'How come the early church totally exploded, spreading like wildfire?' and 'Why is it not like that now?'

I think 'fear' is the key: I've just scanned the New Testament for the words 'fear' and 'afraid':

- fear is most frequently *contrasted* with faith (i.e. do **not** fear, only believe)
- when people meet angels or see God at work in powerful ways: 'Do **not** fear!'
- fear of what other people will think (i.e. *don't* do that)
- people described as 'God-fearing' (a neutral term?)

Almost nowhere does Jesus tell us to fear God,¹ and almost nowhere in the rest of the New Testament is the idea of fearing God commended.²

So to whom was the New Testament first addressed? People then lived in fear of the Romans, and they also lived in fear of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were constantly saying God that would throw them into hell if they didn't obey the rules.

Now do you see why the good news was such... well... **Good News?!**

Here's the clearest statement: '*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*'^[1 Jn 4:18]

Absolutely brilliant good news!

So what's the situation today? The church holds the key to eternal life and to God's no-fear love, so how do we communicate that love? (1) We *show* them real love by caring for them, but (2) because we think that people won't appreciate the good news, we first tell them the bad news. OK, modern preachers don't bang on the pulpit and shout (out of context), 'The wages of sin is death!' – but talk about Jekyll and Hyde!

My main concern is the impression that organised Christian religion gives to the 99% of unchurched young people:^[262]

- We know what's right and what's wrong (judgemental)
- 'People today' are wrong, very wrong (judgemental)
- God frowns in anger when he sees what you're doing (judgemental)
- But Jesus loves you! Honest! And he died for you.

¹ In Lk 5:12 Jesus says, 'fear him', but I think it's said ironically, as it's followed by the command 'do **not** be afraid'.

² The only exceptions I saw were: 1 Pet 2:17, Phil 2:12, and a real 'sore thumb', Heb 10:26-31, plus the strange Acts 5 incident of Ananias and Sapphira.

OK, I may be overstating it, but can you see any similarity with Jesus' day? Today, people are living in fear of all sorts of things – global warming, wars, lack of income, broken relationships – and what we offer them is a judgemental religion that adds more fear.

And to add to the mix, let's shout loudly about gay sex being wrong. And let's split the church; then people will see what we think is *really* important.

Now can you see why (a) I'm so unhappy with the church I was brought up in (indoctrinated by)
(b) *I'm so excited once again?!*

Praise God for his wonderful love for all!

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