

The Message of Fear

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**INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY
SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
REFORM MOVEMENT**
Youth Department of the General Conference

My dear youth:

We live in complex times, especially because we are being barraged by a series of unfavorable circumstances, such as the global Covid-19 pandemic and the war that has broken out between Russia and Ukraine, which brings with it uncomfortable restrictions and endangers the lives of thousands of people, testing faith to the utmost. Many in the midst of this situation take the opportunity to propagate messages that instill fear. Could it be that this is the method that Christians should follow when presenting the message of our Lord Jesus Christ?

God's character attacked

Satan has always found a way to make people believe that God is harsh and unforgiving. The first accusation had this basis: the Law of God is too strict and cannot be kept. After the rebellion was complete, the devil was cast out with the angels who followed him to this planet, where the work of disfiguring the character of God continued with great success. After inducing the first human pair to sin, the most notable sign seen in them was fear: **“So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”** Genesis 3:10. Sin robbed

them of their purity and holiness. But who were Adam and Eve afraid of? Of God. What a tremendous paradox! The first couple after sin was confused by their own reasoning and mental perceptions, and saw God as a being who wanted to punish them instead of a wonderful God who wanted to restore them in his love, as it was. This issue has been and is very recurrent since people, under the pressure of fear, accept a religion more easily because they think that it guarantees them freedom from all these things.

One important point needs to be clarified. It is not the same to feel a reverent and deep fear of God, born of our love and faith, and to live instilled in the fear that is produced in us knowing that if we fail we will be punished or destroyed. This is the part that has effectively been introduced by the enemy. The angels praise and adore God with reverent fear, but there is unspeakable joy in their hearts; they are completely happy in the presence of the One who created them. True love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

The fear that leads us to see God as someone stern and frowning, hungry for revenge, is not inspired by our Creator but by the enemy. The fact of being before an extraordinarily powerful Being, who can destroy us with a single thought and who does not do it out of love, should fill us with reverence. God wants the best for us and can give it to us if we trust in Him. We know that sometimes the Lord used fear to prevent Israel from throwing itself completely into sin, it was His pedagogy to avoid the absolute destruction of the people. But it is not what God desires most, it is like the father or mother who resorts to some drastic method to prevent the child from ending up injured or seriously damaged. Perhaps obeying out of fear can produce some good results, but it is not optimal or ideal; the best thing is to obey out of love.

In my ministry I have been able to observe this phenomenon. When people come to church and embrace faith, because they have been presented with a God who is going to punish humanity with severe plagues, they are afraid and tremble. They come to church, but not to Christ, and when that crushing sense of terror of divine retribution passes, they grow cold and leave; few are those who remain if they accept the faith for fear of divine punishment. A pandemic like the one we are experiencing, and the terrible threat of a third world war are ideal breeding grounds for people to accept anything in order to get rid of the negative effects. But when these things happen, if that is the divine will, it will be seen that the majority of those who accepted the message of salvation out of fear will abandon and leave, it may be that others remain, but they will be the minority. A war like the one that the Russian giant has now started, against small Ukraine, is causing a lot of fear in the people and even wounding and killing civilians.

It seems that God delights in these things, but this is not so, rather the opposite. Let's see what the Spirit of Prophecy says: "Satan delights in war, for it excites the worst passions of the soul and then sweeps into eternity its victims steeped in vice and blood. It is his object to incite the nations to war against one another, for he can thus divert the minds of the people from the work of preparation to stand in the day of God.

"Satan works through the elements also to garner his harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. When he was suffered to afflict Job, how quickly flocks and herds, servants, houses, children, were swept away, one

trouble succeeding another as in a moment. It is God that shields His creatures and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer. But the Christian world have shown contempt for the law of Jehovah; and the Lord will do just what He has declared that He would—He will withdraw His blessings from the earth and remove His protecting care from those who are rebelling against His law and teaching and forcing others to do the same. Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them.” *The Great Controversy*, pg. 589.

History repeats itself

When the message of the second coming of Christ spread throughout the United States of America, thousands upon thousands of people left their homes and fields to join the great Adventist movement. They left all their possessions because they were very afraid of not being one of the chosen ones and not being part of those who were going to go to heaven with Jesus. But when the appointed date arrived and Jesus did not appear, almost all of them abandoned and became staunch enemies of the faith. Doesn't this tell us that it was fear that drove these people and not a sincere love for the Lord Jesus Christ?

As parents, educators, church members, in short, people who interact with each other, we tend to instill fear in people, because someone instilled it in us. I remember that I grew up believing that if I didn't behave well God was going to punish me. Nobody taught me that it was I who decided to punish myself with the decisions I made. God does not want to see us suffer, on the contrary, He loves us so much that he has given His Son Jesus to save us and take us to heaven to be with Him. But the religion of fear has generated many desperate and unbalanced men and women who have misunderstood the character of God, and even not a few atheists who deny that there can be a Creator.

“Satan and his emissaries represent God as even worse than themselves, in order to justify their own malignity and rebellion. The great deceiver endeavors to shift his own horrible cruelty of character upon our heavenly Father... Thus he succeeds in luring souls away from their allegiance to God.” *The Great Controversy*, pg. 534.

“It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels.” *The Great Controversy*, pg. 536.

Follow God for love

It is not the best thing to agree to follow Christ because we are afraid of not doing it or because we fear the consequences of not following Him. In a mystical sonnet of an unknown author from the 16th century, we find some words that very well illustrate the thought that I want to share with you: “Move me, finally, your love, and in

such a way, that even if there were no heaven, I would love you, and Even if there were no hell, I would fear you." That is the key to follow and serve the Master: love. I don't go to Christ because he scares me with what might happen to me if I don't; I go to Christ because in Him I find everything I need to be happy, because I am extremely grateful to my Savior for having died for me. When I serve Christ I fulfill myself in life, I grow in holiness, I feel protected and loved, understood and helped. Only Christ can fill the existential emptiness of the human heart and outside of Him everything is cold and dark.

A child may obey his father out of fear or out of love. Both the first and second options produce obedience, but the one that is propelled by love is more educational, enduring, and genuine. Children who obey because they fear punishment, when they see the threat disappear, go back to their old ways. But the child who obeys out of love will do so in any circumstance, because he loves his father and does not want to offend or harm him.

How nice! I wish all parents could achieve this goal: That our children obey us because they love us. In fact, the greatest commandment that Christ teaches as is this: **“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...”** Mark 12:30. When the first angel's message says to fear God (Revelation 14:7), it is an invitation to honor Him, love Him with all our being, to revere Him deeply and to obey Him. The Bible is full of the expression “fear not.” It is the same God who addresses this invitation to us.

Conclusion

It is true that we have a warning message to present to the world, like Jonah who was to warn Nineveh, but it is also true that along with that warning message we must interweave the message of divine mercy. Perhaps it would be much better to present the door of grace open, than the door of grace closed, a God who awaits our conversion, than a God who is going to destroy us. In this work it is of vital importance to ask God to guide us.

It is true that God is going to intervene in human affairs and that he is going to put an end to sin and sinners, but the emphasis that He Himself places makes it more about His love: **“Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’”** Ezekiel 33:11. **“Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.”** Jeremiah 31:3. I invite you to go to that wonderful God full of kindness, and infinite love, and abandon yourself in His arms. May the Lord richly bless you and have a happy day. Amen.

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of the General Conference*

For personal and group reflection:

1. Define fear and why we humans experience it
2. How do we humans usually see God in general?
3. Is it good to use speech that instills fear in people? Explain your answer
4. How would you define God?