



Can you go to hell for telling a lie?

This is a sincere and honest question that displays a couple things we don't see much of any more: The Fear of the Lord and a belief that there is a hell. I'm going to answer this question in two parts. This month I'll tackle the "fear of the Lord" aspect. Next month we'll deal with hell.

For starters, maybe I need to clarify what "fear of the Lord" really is (and isn't), after all it is a pretty important thing. Many of you will remember that Martin Luther's explanation of the commandments in The Small Catechism all began with the words *We should fear and love God that...* And in His word (in the Psalms and Proverbs) God tells us "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" i.e. You can't have wisdom apart from a foundational fear of God.

So what does it mean to "fear God"? It doesn't mean you should be terrified of him like you would be of an escaped criminal who is on the loose in your neighborhood. Someone who will bring harm randomly and without provocation. No. That's not what God is like. He never randomly brings consequences unprovoked.

The fear of God is this: A healthy respect for who He is (God) and what He has the right, power and authority to do.

It's quite comparable to how we "fear" the person in the Highway Patrol car. We have nothing to fear from that person when we are obeying the law. But when we drive by that car doing 70 in a 55 zone, well, the instant sweaty palms and rapid heart rate indicate a fear of what the person in that car has the right, power and authority to do. We also find a comparison between the motivation the Highway Patrol person has for pulling us over and God's motivation for bringing consequences when we disobey His rules: Both looking out for our best interests (even though we may not think so at the time).

I was in a store this week talking with the shopkeeper when another customer came in. The topic the three of us ended up discussing was the declining state of morals in our world - and the increasing acceptance of ideas and actions God specifically denounces in the Bible. We didn't agree on the root cause of this situation (I still contend that the root cause is the same as the root cause of the original moral failure in the Garden of Eden: Satan has been successful in getting us to believe his lies). But we did all agree on this one thing: There is very little fear of God in our world these days. And without the fear of the consequences that God has the right, power and authority to bring (for our own good) we end up using "whatever feels right at the time" as a guide for our actions instead of using God's word. And our feelings serve as an ever-changing and unreliable guide as to what is the right thing to do.

I'll go into the second part of the answer in greater detail next month when I tackle the "hell" issue, (hint: contrary to popular belief there is a place of eternal suffering and separation from God) but I don't want to leave anyone in the dark on this point: On Good Friday, Jesus did *everything* that ever needed to be done to keep anyone from having to be separated from Him for eternity. He died to forgive *all* sin - including lying. And God promises that everyone who repents of their sin and trusts in Jesus and what He did on Good Friday and Easter Sunday will spend eternity in with Him in heaven. That's the Good News we celebrate every Sunday.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to <mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net>