

Luke 12:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

Analysis

But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell—Having minimized fear of man, Jesus maximizes fear of God. The verb hypodeixō (ὑποδείξω, I will forewarn/show) indicates solemn warning. The one to fear is He who after killing has power to cast into hell (μετὰ τὸ ἀποκτεῖναι ἔχοντα ἔξουσίαν ἐμβαλεῖν εἰς τὴν γέενναν). The word geenna (γέεννα, Gehenna) derives from the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem where child sacrifices occurred (2 Kings 23:10) and later became the city's garbage dump with continuously burning fires—Jesus' consistent metaphor for eternal judgment.

The emphatic repetition—**yea, I say unto you, Fear him**—underscores urgency. The fear commanded here is not terror that drives away but reverence that draws near, not servile dread but filial awe. Yet it remains genuine fear—recognition of God's absolute power over eternal destiny. Human authorities control temporary physical existence; God controls eternal spiritual existence. The one who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28) deserves infinitely greater fear than those who can merely kill the body. This is the calculus that makes martyrdom rational: better to fear God and suffer temporary human harm than fear man and suffer eternal divine judgment.

Historical Context

Gehenna's imagery was vivid to Jesus' Jewish audience. The Valley of Hinnom (Ge-Hinnom in Hebrew) was Jerusalem's garbage dump where fires burned continually, consuming refuse and corpses. Its association with pagan child sacrifice to Molech made it a symbol of divine judgment. Jesus used Gehenna repeatedly to describe hell's finality and horror (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43-47). First-century Jews understood this fear of God—Proverbs 1:7 declares "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." The early church maintained this healthy fear of God (Acts 5:5, 11; 9:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11), which grounded their boldness before human authorities. When God is feared rightly, all lesser fears fade.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does proper fear of God actually liberate us from unhealthy fear of man and circumstances?
2. What is the difference between the fear of God that draws us to Him and the fear that drives us away?
3. How should the doctrine of hell shape Christian witness and evangelistic urgency without producing manipulative fear tactics?

Interlinear Text

ὑποδείξω	δὲ	ὑμῖν	τίνα	φοβήθητε	φοβήθητε	τὸν	
I will forewarn	But	unto you	whom	Fear	Fear		G3588
G5263	G1161	G5213	G5101	G5399	G5399		
μετὰ	τὸ	ἀποκτεῖναι	ἔξουσίαν	ἔχοντα	ἔμβαλεῖν	εἰς	
him which after	G3588	he hath killed	power	hath	to cast	into	
G3326		G615	G1849	G2192	G1685		G1519
τὴν	γέενναν	ναί	λέγω	ὑμῖν	τοῦτον	φοβήθητε	
G3588	hell	yea	I say	unto you	him	Fear	
	G1067	G3483	G3004	G5213	G5126	G5399	

Additional Cross-References

2 Peter 2:4 (Parallel theme): For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

Matthew 10:28 (Parallel theme): And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Revelation 14:7 (Parallel theme): Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Hebrews 10:31 (Parallel theme): It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Psalms 9:17 (Parallel theme): The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

Proverbs 14:26 (Parallel theme): In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

Revelation 20:14 (Parallel theme): And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Matthew 25:41 (Parallel theme): Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

1 Thessalonians 4:6 (Parallel theme): That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

Revelation 15:4 (Parallel theme): Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

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