

Fear of God: An Anthropopathism for Respect and Reverence; “Holiness” Translates Setheq & Means Integrity: Righteousness & Justice, Prov 8:13a

III. Conclusion:

It is impossible for God to compromise His righteousness. Therefore, God cannot be unrighteous in dealing with any person, and He expresses it, not in terms of His character or essence, but in terms of language of accommodation:

1. Anthropopathism: Explains to us in language we can understand the divine attitude, policy, or modus operandi toward a person or persons, so that mankind can understand and adapt to the divine policy. The terms used are mental attitudes and behaviors which can be either positive or negative.
2. Anthropomorphisms: Does the same as an anthropopathism except it conveys in human language aspects of God's essence by use of human bodily parts, e.g., eyes, face, arm, hand, finger, back, and feet.
4. The first word in Proverbs 8:13 is the anthropopathism of fear, the feminine noun יָרֵא *yare'* which is best translated: respect. In many contexts the word refers to the emotion and the sin that are caused by anticipation or awareness of danger and implies loss of courage.
5. But a believer's attitude toward God is not to take on the form of sinfulness or cowardice, but rather respect. But respect is stimulated by an objective understanding of God's policies and what backs them. This excerpt sets up our analysis:

Fear of God as Fear of the Numinous [the supernatural, divine, spiritual, or holy]. 1. *Holy and Terrible*. The originally numinous nature of fear of God is still clearly visible in several Old Testament passages. This fear is evoked by an attribute of God expressed biblically by שֹׁדֶשׁ *qothesh* and its derivatives: holiness. The definition of the term and its range of meanings have been discussed by many scholars. In essence, they find a distinction between absolute holiness—(i.e., belonging to the divine realm)—and moral holiness—(i.e., responsible conduct in response to divine sovereignty).¹

6. Our stress is on the definition of fear and what about God solicits it. First of all the definition of fear in English dictionaries recognizes that emotion is not at issue but rather one's disposition toward deity:

fear 3: profound reverence and awe especially toward God.²

Fear 6. To regard with reverence and awe; to revere. Now only with God.³

¹ H. F. Fuhs, “יָרֵא *yare'*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 6:300.

² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v.: “fear.”

³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v.: “fear.”

fear. 4. Extreme reverence and awe, as toward a supreme power.⁴

FEAR. 2. To reverence; to have a reverential awe; to venerate.⁵

fear. ARCHAIC a mixed feeling of dread and reverence: *the love and fear of God.*⁶

Fear. 2. To feel reverence for; to have reverential awe of; to venerate.⁷

7. We are able to conclude that the disposition of the believer toward God is not emotional sin directed toward Him but an objective awareness of His power and authority over the person's life. But what about God solicits this disposition?
8. Fuhs writes that fear is "responsible conduct in response to divine sovereignty" while earlier stating that "fear is evoked by an attribute of God expressed biblically by **שָׁדָשׁ *qothesh* ...: holiness.**"
9. So which is it, sovereignty or holiness? The answer lies in the analysis of the word *qothesh* which is translated "holy or holiness" throughout King James's version of the Old Testament.
10. We recently noted in our study of verse 8 that the Hebrew word for righteousness, **שֶׁדָּשׁ *setheq***, is translated in the Septuagint by the Greek term **δικαιοσύνη, *dikaiousunē*** and means "the thinking of a judge." We discovered that the Jews viewed *setheq* as representing either the righteousness of God or the justice of God and therefore the Greek *diakiosunē* was used to translate both concepts in the Septuagint's Greek translation of the Old Testament.
11. When the Jews wanted to combine the two attributes into one concept they chose the word *qothesh*: holiness.
12. The problem for the twenty-first-century believer is that this word is, in the parlance of *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, archaic; it is language of the past: nebulous, ambiguous, and obscure.
13. The best modern English translation of *qothesh* is "integrity": the combination of God's righteousness and justice, combined with His love.
14. The word holiness doesn't communicate; integrity does:

Integrity. 2. The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness. 3. In moral sense. a. Unimpaired moral state; freedom from moral corruption; innocence, sinlessness. b. Soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue, especially in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, sincerity.⁸

⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v.: "fear."

⁵ *Noah Webster's First Edition of An American Dictionary of the English Language*, facsimile ed., s.v.: "fear."

⁶ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v.: "fear."

⁷ *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v.: "fear."

⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v.: "integrity."

15. God is absolute integrity. He possesses perfect righteousness and perfect justice. Perfect righteousness demands perfection and perfect justice enforces this policy by means of blessing or condemnation. Whatever righteousness approves, justice blesses; whatever righteousness disapproves, justice condemns.
16. The predominant word for fear in the Old Testament and the one used in Proverbs 8:13 is יָרֵא *yare'* and it refers to the believer's attitude toward God. The emotion of fear occurs when a person comes to realize the overwhelming power God possesses to enforce His righteous standards and the efficiency of His justice to execute punishment.
17. This type of fear recognizes personal inability to live up to God's perfect standards and thus anticipates the ultimate inevitability of His justice.
18. But this type of initial fear is replaced in the mind of the believer who has interest in discovering the personality of God and understanding His divine attributes.
19. For the Christian, this attitude is transformed into respect and reverence when he realizes that God considers us His children. Just as a father disciplines his children as a means of training him to follow righteous standards so also God disciplines us so we can come to know how He wishes us to live and function.
20. God treats us in grace and manages us in mercy because it is His desire to lead us to a way of thinking that reflects His divine viewpoint. He is training us to become honorable citizens of the heavenly community while at the same time preparing us to do battle in the Invisible War.
21. Once the believer recognizes and accepts God as his spiritual Leader, Guide, and Protector, initial fear is transformed into respect and reverence. The believer who is positive to God's instruction is distinguished by his interest in learning how God would have him think, decide, and behave.
22. It is a gradual learning process and God is longsuffering with us as we slowly but surely learn from Scripture the behavior patterns, character traits, and lifestyle that He approves. Compliance with His will brings blessings while noncompliance results in discipline.
23. But such is the nature of a process that is designed to renovate a believer's soul into a vessel of honor. Genuine humility is the disposition of the believer who is submissive to God's training and discipline. It is a prerequisite for orientation and adjustment to the rules by which God would have us play the game of life.