



Conducted by
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“Who are the 'Fearful' in Rev. 21:8?”

In both the 'Authorised' and the 'Revised' versions of the New Testament the word 'fearful' is the rendering of the Greek word '*deilos*,' which occurs just three times. It is used twice to describe the mental state of the disciples of Jesus, during the storm on the Sea of Galilee and once here in the Revelation. However, the two situations in which the word is used are very different.

1st Let us remember that there are times when to be 'fearful' is a perfectly natural and understandable reaction. For instance, if we had been with those disciples in the boat that stormy night on the Sea of Galilee, I have no doubt that we would have shared their fear! (Mark 4:37-40).

2nd There are also other times when we *should* be 'fearful'; when it is *right* to be fearful. Our Lord Himself, in Matt. 10:28, tells us that we need not fear those who are able to kill our bodies, and in Luke 12:5, He even says, "*I will warn you whom to fear; fear Him, who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!*"

We understand, of course, that He is speaking about the power of God. Hence, when, in 1 Peter 1:17, we are told to '*pass the time of your sojourning here in fear*,' this 'fear' is 'reverential fear' and is very different from the physical terror felt by those men

in the boat.

These three verses alone establish the fact that to be 'fearful' is, in itself, not a sin. Everything depends on the nature of the fear. Therefore we must look more closely at the word in Rev. 20:8, to determine what it means.

Now, I think I may be correct in assuming that our questioner uses the 'King James' or 'Authorised' version. However, virtually all-later *genuine translations* of the New Testament have abandoned the word 'fearful' and render '*deilos*' differently. I use the words '*genuine translations*' to distinguish them from the numerous editions of the New Testament which, for one reason or another, are basically only modifications of the 'King James Version' and not really translations.

Twenty-two of the forty or so translations - both 'ancient and modern' - I have examined, including several foreign language translations, give the meaning of '*deilos*' as 'fainthearted,' 'timid,' and 'craven,' whilst most of them use 'cowardly.'

Something which really surprised me was the discovery that my translation of the New Testament by Nathaniel Scarlett, also uses the word 'cowardly.' This translation is dated: 'January 20th, 1798!' So, over 200 years ago, someone got it right!

Thayer's Greek Lexicon tells us that, in the verse we have under consideration, the word '*deilos*' describes '*Christians who through cowardice give way under persecution and apostatise,*' whilst Liddell and Scott's Lexicon reveals that in classical Greek, among its many usage the word even meant '*good for nothing!*'

The sum of the evidence is that, in certain circumstances, '*deilos*' carries a moral significance, as becomes quite evident when we compare verses 7 and 8.

It goes without saying that the 21st chapter of the Revelation is one, which we Christians naturally love to read, describing, as it does, the glories of the New Jerusalem. But let us also notice that it proceeds to tell us, not only who will be admitted to the 'heavenly city', but also who will be excluded.

We see that, in contrast with the 'conquerors' who are allowed to enter and who are mentioned in verse 7, the chapter refers to the 'fearful', in this 8th verse.

These are *not* non-Christians as might at first be supposed, but are members of the Church who, displaying cowardice in the time of testing, have turned and run away; or have simply given up the fight and surrendered to the enemy. They are regarded as being unfaithful and therefore listed with the various classes of immoral and unclean people, to whom entrance is denied.

It is important to listen to the warning, which sounds out from such passages as Rev. 21:7-8 and the questioner has done us a service in bringing it to our attention.

It must be obvious to any thoughtful reader, that the doctrine of so-called 'eternal security', often referred to by such expressions as '*once saved, always saved*', and '*once in grace always in grace*' is not supported by this passage, nor in fact, by any part of God's Word.

The message is clear; it is not enough to *begin* the race; we must *finish* the course.

It is not enough to *enlist* in the Lord's army; we must '*fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life*' (1 Tim.6:12). We must remain loyal to the end.

The words of Paul come readily to mind in this connection.

2 Tim. 4:7-8: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not me only but to all them also who love His appearing.*"

(If you have a question concerning the scriptures, please send it directly to:-

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