

The Fear of God

It should be pretty obvious to even a casual observer that there is very little true fear of God in our land today. Men and women think nothing of openly blaspheming God in both word and deed. People casually joke about such fearsome subjects as the Judgment Day and hell. Many seem to think that God is somewhat like an indulgent uncle who is very tolerant and would not dare criticize anyone for anything. The greatest “sin” in our day is intolerance of the most vile and base behavior. This leads one to believe that there must be many reprobates among us. However, even those who seem to obviously be children of God do not manifest the fear of the Most High God that they should. Let us examine this subject praying that God will help us to fear Him more perfectly.

What Is It?

The fear of God is not a slavish dread that we will displease an unjust or capricious master. This is the way that pagan religions feared their “gods.” They had a horrible fear of their unjust deities and tried to appease them sometimes even with the sacrifice of their own children. However, the proper fear of the only God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not this slavish dread. The proper fear of God does not put us under bondage. In fact, the true fear of God is liberating. This can be seen in Romans 8:15, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The expression “Abba,” is an Aramaic word that is practically equivalent to “daddy” or “papa.” It is a word of endearment that a small child would use in reference to a beloved father.

The children of God fear God Who is also their heavenly Father. They fear Him because they know He will chastise them in love when they are disobedient. He is not a pushover, who will sweep sin under the rug and ignore it. He will not be mocked. The children of God also fear their Father because they do not want to lose His fellowship and smiles of approval. They dread to offend Him. The true fear of God, consequently, is a **reverential** and **filial** fear that is characterized by a **great love** for God. A very good definition of this fear is given by John Gill in his *Body of Divinity*. He says this is a “reverential affection for God, and which is peculiar to the children of God, which springs from a sense of divine goodness, is attended with holiness of heart and life, is consistent with faith, even full assurance of it, and with spiritual joy in its highest degree; it stands opposed to pride and haughtiness, and is a blessing of the covenant of grace; now this is not to be found in unregenerate men...” Gill says further, “The fear of the Lord, whose name is revered, is not a fear of His judgments here or hereafter, but of His goodness and grace; it is a reverential affection for Him, a fiducial [trusting] fear of Him, a fear of offending so good a Being as He is...”

One of the best practical definitions I have ever read of the fear of God comes from some material published by Bill Gothard. It is as follows: The fear of God is “The continual awareness that I am in the presence of a Holy and Just God, and that every thought, word, action, and attitude, is open before Him, and that He will hold me accountable for it.” One who truly fears God will make every effort to consistently obey Him. The obedient,

God-fearing man is described in Psalm 128:1 “Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.”

Those who are not born again do not fear God. The ability to fear God comes in regeneration. One of the most comprehensive passages in the entire Bible that describes the condition of those that are without Christ is found in the third chapter of Romans. There it says in Romans 3:18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

The Perfect Example

As in everything else, the Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect example as He exemplified the fear of God in His capacity as mediator. The prophet spoke of this in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:2, “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD...” The Father spoke these awesome words to the Son in Hebrews 1:9, “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” We know that Christ had a perfect love for His Father. He also perfectly obeyed Him. He always did those things that pleased the Father. As we examine the life of perfect fellowship that Jesus maintained with the Father, we can gain some idea of how we should strive to fear God.

A Commandment

Fearing God is not an option for the child of God. We are repeatedly commanded in Scripture to do this. Let us look at just a very few of these many passages: Psalm 33:8, “Let all the earth **fear** the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.” Psalm 96:9, “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: **fear** before him, all the earth.” Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:28, “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.” These are just a few of the many Scriptures in which we are commanded to fear God. To fail to fear Him, therefore, is an act of rebellion and disobedience. This is a very serious matter to which we should give due and constant attention.

Desire and Pray

Realizing what a serious matter this is should create in us a great desire to fear our God more perfectly. Considering this subject should give us a great motivation to seek to fear Him acceptably. Only those who truly fear God will be used by Him. One of the most useful of those who were used of God to bring the nation of Israel back to their homeland after a period of captivity was Nehemiah. This man had a great desire to fear God as can be seen from his prayer which is recorded in Nehemiah 1:11, “O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who **desire to fear thy name...**”

David was another one who was greatly used of God. He was even called a man after God's own heart. One essential element of this closeness with God was his fear of God. David feared God, but he wanted to fear him even more perfectly, and he prayed to this end in Psalm 86:11 "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: **unite my heart to fear thy name.**" He wanted to walk as God wanted him to, but he recognized that he was having trouble from his sinful nature. His heart was divided, so that he could not fear God with a single mind. Hence he prayed this poignant prayer. I recommend to all who read this and want to serve God more perfectly, that you also pray this prayer that David prayed. God is pleased with such aspirations.

Learning to Fear

There are many things the child of God does instinctively, that he can learn to do better as he studies the Scriptures. An example of this is prayer. All God's children pray. Praying is almost like breathing to them. In fact, according to Romans 8: 26, 27 we are often praying when our souls are groaning. However, we can and should learn to pray better. We should study how to pray by reading the great prayers of the saints, such as the prayer recorded in the ninth chapter of Daniel. In fact, when the disciples heard Jesus pray, they realized that, although they had prayed for many years, they had a great deal to learn about prayer. Hence they requested in Luke 11:1, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

The situation is the same with the fear of God. Every child of God instinctively fears God. However, by studying the Scriptures we can learn to fear Him more perfectly. There is a very interesting passage in the Old Testament that illustrates this. There were some instructions that were to be given to those who would be king over Israel. One of those instructions is recorded in Deuteronomy 17:19, "And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may **learn to fear** the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them..." The king was to make a copy of the Scriptures, and he was to read them for the express purpose of learning to fear God. We must read the Scriptures with the same goal.

When we have learned to properly fear God, it is our duty and our privilege to teach others to fear Him also. David did this as we can see from Psalm 34:11, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD." We should exhort each other to fear the Lord. The apostle Paul did this in 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness **in the fear of God.**"

Not only should we teach others to fear the Lord, we should also desire to be in the company of those who do so fear. David said again in Psalm 66:16, "Come and hear, **all ye that fear God**, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." He also said in Psalm 119:63, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts."

As we study the Scriptures to learn more of fear of the Lord, we will immediately notice several of the prominent characteristics of this fear.

Hatred of Sin

It is immediately obvious that one who desires to fear the Lord must cultivate an intense and uncompromising hatred of sin. We cannot indulge in any “pet” sins if we really want to fear the Lord. We must declare a war to the death against those sins that cause us to displease our dear Master. Solomon said in Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the LORD is to **hate evil**: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” David said in Psalm 119:113, “**I hate vain thoughts**: but thy law do I love. Paul tells us in Romans 12:9 to “**Abhor** that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.” The word translated “abhor” means to have a horror of to the point of shuddering.

If we truly hate sin, we will turn from it. We will make every effort to avoid it. We will abstain from the very appearance of evil. We will not go to the places where we will be tempted. We will avoid looking at things that cause us to have sinful desires. We will avoid being with people who tempt us to sin. Solomon exhorts to this determination to shun sin in Proverbs 4:14, 15, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” We read in Proverbs 16:6, “by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” Proverbs 3:7 exhorts us to “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.”

Great Blessings

Living in the fear of God is very beneficial to the child of God. One blessing is having **peace of mind**. Proverbs 14:26 tells us that “In the fear of the LORD is **strong confidence**: and his children shall have a place of refuge.”

The fear of the Lord also tends to promote the **well being** of a child of God and even to **prolong his days**. There are many Scriptures which teach this several of which follow: Proverbs 10:27, “The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.” Proverbs 14:27, “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.”

Proverbs 19:23, “The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.”

Prosperity, along with the wisdom to use this prosperity in a proper way, often accompanies the fear of the Lord. Psalm 34:9 exhorts us, “O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.” Proverbs 22:4 “By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.” Even if we do not prosper in a material way we are much better off if we fear the Lord. Solomon makes this very plain in Proverbs 15:16, “Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.” There are many blessings that are more important than material blessings. The Psalmist says in Psalm 115:13, “He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.”

One of the greatest blessings enjoyed by those who fear the Lord is **intimate fellowship** with Him. Not only are His children His servants, they are also His intimate friends. He allows these close friends access to many of His plans and doings. He permits them the

pleasure of experiencing spiritual fellowship with Him. As David put it in Psalm 25:14, “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.”

This is just a small sampling of the Scriptures that show the benefits of fearing the Lord. To summarize, I would like to cite a few more passages that indicate that it is impossible to overestimate the blessings that come from walking in the fear of the Lord. Psalm 31:19, “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!” Psalm 103:17, “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children...”

Being Very Careful

If we really fear the Lord, we will be very careful about **every aspect** of our lives. We will carefully guard our actions, words, thoughts, and attitudes. We will not make excuses for our sins. As we have already indicated, David was just this serious about fearing God. He wanted God to govern every detail of his life. He prayed fervently in Psalm 19:14, “Let the **words** of my mouth, and the **meditation** of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” The apostle John was so serious in his desire that God’s children be serious about fighting against sin that he wrote in 1 John 2:1, My little children, these things write I unto you, that **ye sin not...**” John knew that no child of God would be able to live above sin and that each one of them would need the blessed Advocate. He was serious, however, in his desire that they try their best to sin not. Paul was equally serious in his desire that God’s children strive mightily against sin. He exhorted in Ephesians 5:3, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it **not be once named** among you, as becometh saints...”

If we really hate sin and sincerely strive against it, we will be overcome with godly sorrow when we do fall into sin, and will desire to repent and turn from our sins immediately. David, as we have seen, was a God-fearing man. However, he fell into gross sin and remained hardened in it for awhile. God sent a faithful prophet to him, and David realized the **horror** of what he had done. He experienced great **anguish of spirit**. He agonized over his condition. He fell on his face before God and begged God to forgive him and to restore him to fellowship with Himself. His regret was deep and sincere. The passion and force of this repentance is seen in Psalm 51. I recommend that each reader turn to that Psalm often and make it your heartfelt prayer of repentance. If you do not do this from time to time you have good reason to doubt whether your fear of God is genuine.

Another emotional passage concerning repentance is found in the seventh chapter of 2 Corinthians. These Christians had been condoning notorious sin in their midst. Paul was faithful to sharply rebuke them and to show them the horror of what they had done. They became genuinely sorrowful. Paul called this true sorrow “godly sorrow.” He stated that this type sorrow **always** leads to repentance. When an individual experiences this kind of sorrow, **he will find a way to repent**. He will be ingenious and creative in his efforts to turn back towards God as he turns away from his sin. He will not stop until he has gotten

back into fellowship with God. To ascertain that I am not being too strong in my assertions here, I invite you to examine 2 Corinthians 7: 9-11.

Dear reader, are you this serious about forsaking your sins and walking in the fear of God? Are you just going through the motions and serving God in a superficial way? Are you serious about controlling your thought life? How about your attitudes? Are you trying to govern your tongue?

If we ever experience the revival that many people say they are praying for, we will see multitudes of God's people who really mean business with God.

I would rather have this saying on my tombstone, than any other I can think of if it were a true saying: "Here lies the body of a **God-fearing man.**"

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