

# The Fear Of God

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.  
Copyright 1998, 2017 by J. W. Jepson

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

(NKJV) Scripture quotations from The Holy Bible, New King James Version are copyright © 1990 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.  
Used by permission.

(NIV) Scripture quotations from the Holy Bible, New International Version are copyright © 1973, 1978, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

(NASB) Scripture quotations from the New American Standard Bible are copyright © 1972, The Lockman Foundation.

< >

A carload of young people drive by and gun down a pedestrian.

A man living with a woman and her daughter abuses the girl sexually.

A corporate executive conceives a scheme to swindle hundreds of people out of their life savings.

A college professor ridicules a Christian student in front of the class.

Someone publicly spues out a stream of blasphemy and obscenity, then walks away laughing.

A judge arrogantly strikes down a law that defends genuine, traditional marriage and mandates relationships that mock God's holy institution.

A prominent couple in a church divorce; each marries someone else in the congregation; then they act (and expect others to act) as though it was nothing.

These true-life scenarios and many others like them all have something in common. They are fruit of a common root. They are glaring proof that something is fundamentally wrong with our culture's perception of reality. An essential component is missing from human thinking.

What is it?

We find it at the conclusion of the analysis of the human spiritual and moral condition recorded in Romans 3:10 - 18—"there is no fear of God before their eyes" (from Psalm 36:1).

People who are not afraid to sin have no proper regard for God. They do not love and reverence Him because they do not know Him. They do not know Him because "they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD" (Proverbs 1:29).

As he went to live in Gerar, Abraham was worried. Later he confessed: "I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place." Genesis, Chapter 20 gives us the whole story.

In Exodus 1:17 we read that because the midwives feared God, they would not kill the newborn baby boys. What would have happened to those children had the fear of God been missing from those women's hearts? Does this say something to us today?

Why do people kill, steal, lie, curse, commit immoral acts, perpetrate injustices, and practice every kind of evil? *Because they do not fear God.* "Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God" (Psalm 55:19.)

What *is* the fear of God, and what does it mean to fear God?

God must be taken seriously because of who He is. He deserves reverence and awe. He requires it. Reason demands it. Divine revelation commands it. God's own self-revelation shows us that He is not someone to be trifled with or dismissed lightly, but to be held in the highest awe and reverence.

The fear of God can be, and often is, the guilty fear of divine consequences on oneself. That is the very first fear experienced by man. After Adam sinned, God called to him: "Where are you?" We notice the progression in Adam's pathetic response: "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself?" (see Genesis 3:9, 10).

"Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you" (Psalm 90:11 NIV).

In Genesis 31:42 and 53 God is called "the Fear of Isaac."

Moses said to the people, "The LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you" (Deuteronomy 7:21). "The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, awesome and mighty" (Deuteronomy 10:17)

Nehemiah addressed Him: "LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God." (Nehemiah 1:5).

"With God is awesome majesty" (Job 37:22).

"The LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2).

This Hebrew word for "awesome" is also translated "terrible," "dreadful," "fearful," "reverend."

If we are morally obligated to love other human beings as ourselves because their intrinsic value is equal to our own, then we are morally obligated to love above all others (including ourselves) the one Person whose intrinsic value is infinitely greater than that of any other being (including ourselves).

Also, God created us as moral beings and therefore morally-*obligated* beings. As such, we need moral governance and guidance. This necessity is the basis of God's right and also His moral obligation to provide that governance and guidance.

Further, because of the qualities of His being, God is the one and only Person qualified to govern and guide us with ultimate authority. This is also the reason for our moral obligation to obey Him. In this, both God and man are obligated by love—a commitment to the highest good of all.

As the supreme ruler and universal moral authority, God's own honor and our well-being depend on our willing obedience to the universal moral law and moral obligations that He has revealed to us and that He administers over us for our good.

For these reasons God has the right to exercise moral authority and maintain moral order—including just and appropriate rewards and penalties—and we have the moral obligation to obey.

So then, for the well-being of all—and also because of who God is—all moral beings are obligated to love God; to honor Him; to hold Him in the highest respect, reverence and awe; to take seriously His moral authority; to realize the magnitude of His love in His opposition to evil, His outrage at sin, and the wrath of His love; and to recoil in horror at even the thought of dishonoring or disobeying Him.

The wholesome fear of God is a reverential awe of Him and His authority. People who love God have a healthy fear of Him born out of a desire to please Him coupled with a corresponding abhorrence of disobeying Him. They hate sin. Even the thought of sinning scares them. "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 3:18).

Also, the fear of God includes reverence for His name. "Holy and awesome is His name" (Psalm 111:9). We must be careful how we use the words "God" and "Lord" in daily conversation.

This is the fear of God.

#### A divine command and a universal moral obligation.

Over thirty times in The Scriptures we are commanded to fear God. This universal moral obligation is based on: (1) who God is, (2) His moral authority, and (3) our need of Him and His moral governance and guidance.

It should be self-evident that the fear of God is a universal moral obligation. This obligation is stated, reiterated and emphasized throughout The Scriptures. Here are samples of the biblical commands.

"Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him" (Deuteronomy 8:6. See also Deuteronomy 10:12, 13).

"You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him" (Deuteronomy 13:4).

"Commandments" means *commands*. People take the word "commands" more seriously than

"commandments." "The general has issued a command" carries far more weight with the troops than "the general has issued a commandment."

"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11). Our rejoicing in God must never be frivolous; our God is an awesome God.

"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" (Psalm 33:8).

Under both law and grace we are to maintain a healthy fear of God. This is an essential part of our love for Him. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all who are around Him" (Psalm 89:7). God is held in reverence by the angelic host around Him; therefore He most certainly must be feared among believers

Peter wrote, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

"Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth" (Psalm 96:9).

"Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always" (Proverbs 23:17 NASB).

"The LORD of hosts, Him shall you hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13).

"Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due" (Jeremiah 10:7).

Jesus said, "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:4, 5).

Paul warned the gentile believers not to "boast" against unbelieving Jews. Using the metaphor of the olive tree and its branches, he wrote, "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear" (Romans 11:20).

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13).

Believers are to submit themselves to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21). The fear of God replaces pride with humility and fosters mutual submission in love.

Many early Christians were slaves with harsh task-masters. How did the fear of God relate to their situation, and what applications can we make to employer-employee and other relationships today?

Here is what Colossians 3:22 says: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God" (See also Ephesians 6:5). A proper, healthy fear of God is liberating. The fear of God transcends, overcomes and displaces all selfish fears. It overcomes the slave's fear of his master and the employee's fear of "the boss." It provides the right motive for serving and inspires God-given confidence, releasing us to serve joyfully in love

"Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

### A universal necessity.

The fear of God is also a universal necessity.

We hear it said that society is changing. So it is, but not in all ways for the better. Also, the change is not taking place peacefully. People who demand freedom to do as they please are deliberately assaulting the spiritual, moral and cultural foundation of a stable, free and blessed society. People who are awake to the danger must rise up and defending that foundation. It is the age-long war of good against evil.

Liberty and freedom are not exactly the same. Liberty to do what we *ought* is *not* the same as freedom to do whatever we *want*. Liberty will not survive where there is unconstrained freedom. For society to have liberty, freedom must be constrained by morality. Liberty must have mutually recognized and mutually supported spiritual and moral constraints. Where the fear of God is absent, unconstrained freedom will degenerate into anarchy, and anarchy will bring about stern law—and that will be the end of both liberty *and* freedom. Only the Judeo/Christian revelation provides the morality that will support and guarantee liberty.

It is folly to believe that we can have a strong structure of economic liberty built on a corrupt and weak moral foundation. Moral collapse will result in the collapse of liberty, including economic liberty. The person who supports economic liberty but says "I don't care who people sleep with" is deluded.

### The absence of the fear of God.

What happens to a society where the fear of God is absent? That society degenerates spiritually, morally and culturally. Remember, the analysis of the human moral condition recorded in Romans 3:10 -18 states the cause: "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

"The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes" (Psalm 36:1 KJV).

"Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God" (Psalm 55:19).

God said to the apostate people of Judah in Jeremiah's day, "Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and the fear of Me is not in you" (Jeremiah 2:19). "Do you not fear Me?" says the LORD? "Will you not tremble at My

presence...?" (Jeremiah 5:22). Because they refused to fear God, they suffered the bitter consequences.

We began with a sampling of the daily doings of people who have no fear of God. No doubt you can add to the list from your own experiences and observations. The Scriptures also give us some instructional examples.

### *Violence and anger.*

"God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them'" (Genesis 6:13).

Where God is not recognized as our Creator, human life is at risk. If you live with apprehension in a crime-ridden section of a major city, think of living in Noah's day in the constant, daily dread of either being killed yourself or killing someone else in self-defense.

When Abraham went south to sojourn in Gerar, he was so afraid that someone might kill him to get his wife that he said that she was his sister (a "half-truth"). When asked why he did this, he confessed, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place" (Genesis 20:11).

In Exodus 1:16, 17 (also verse 21) we read that the Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the midwives to kill all the newborn Hebrew baby boys. "But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive." Think what would have happened to the nation of Israel had the fear of God been absent from the hearts of those midwives. Does this speak to us today?

Physicians and others in the health professions need to stand together against the growing pressures to engage in practices that violate the Hippocratic oath and that disregard human exceptionalism, even if it calls for mass non-compliance. They deserve our prayers and support.

Moses said to a new generation of Israelites, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:18).

Where the fear of God is absent human life itself is devalued. We see this happening from the womb to the tomb. Abortion, infanticide, murder, genocide, "quality of life" versus "sanctity of life" rationalization, euthanasia, suicide.

Knowingly, willingly and deliberately choosing to end one's own life is the ultimate act of defiance. It is saying to God, "I will have the ultimate say in my own life." People who say "whose life is it, anyway" do not want to know the answer. Yet some people who publicly end their own lives are celebrated by a godless society.

Many people who have been tempted to take their own lives in times of suffering and depression have been restrained from doing so by a healthy and life-saving fear of God. They

chose rather to live by faith and overcome by the grace of God. *They* are the truly brave ones.

Tyrants do not value the lives of their own people. They recklessly throw their young men into battle to be slaughtered. Wrong theology (including atheism) results in wrong anthropology with all of its cruel and dehumanized manifestations.

### *Injustice.*

We observe the absence of the fear of God in the various injustices that the ungodly perpetrate on people. If people do not have a proper regard for God, they cannot have a proper regard for their fellow human beings. It takes the fear of God to foster a proper value of human beings. It is impossible to have a high regard for humanity if we have a low regard for God. If God is not our Creator, we are only matter; and *if we are only matter, we do not matter*. We are exploitable and expendable.

God commanded through Moses, "You shall not defraud your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain all night with you until morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD. You shall do no injustice in judgment" (Leviticus 19:13 -15a).

"Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 25:17).

"I am the LORD." That is the ultimate authority that demands and defends human justice.

God spoke through the prophet Malachi and named some of the sins and injustices that result when people do not fear Him, and what will happen to the offenders. "'I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and the fatherless, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,' says the LORD" (Malachi 3:5). These sins are wide-spread in contemporary society, and for the same reason—the absence of the fear of God.

Jesus gave us an example of this in His parable of the unjust judge, recorded in Luke 18:1 - 8. It begins, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Avenge me of my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"

Although the subject of this parable is prayer, it does point out the fact that the judge did not fear God and therefore did not regard man. The connection is obvious. Where God is not regarded, human rights are disregarded. This speaks to every modern judicial system. A society that thinks low of God cannot think high of man. Justice begins with the fear of God.

Just before his death, king David said, "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God'" (2 Samuel 23:3, 4).

We notice in these commands that the focus is on the individual person. What is termed "social justice" is in reality justice to the individual, extended to all the people. We cannot truly say "the people are important" until first we have said "the *person* is important." If the person is a "zero," seven billion "zeroes" are still "zero." That is the difference between socialism and biblical principles. If social programs benefit "the people," but ignore the intrinsic value of the person as created in the image of God, the person becomes expendable. Individuals "fall through the cracks" of the collective system.

We naturally affirm our human exceptionalism and the value of each person every time we expend huge amounts of money and effort to rescue just one person who is trapped in a mine or stranded on a mountain, or to get a heart-attack victim to immediate medical help. We are affirming that each person is just as valuable as one among billions as he or she would be if that person were the only person on earth.

The intrinsic value of the individual person is not derived by dividing that person by the total number of other persons. One person among two is not half as valuable. One person among seven billion is not one seven-billionth as valuable. What humanity is, the person is. Each one carries the *Imago Dei*.

Jesus taught this in some of His parables. He focused on the *one* lost sheep, the *one* lost coin, the *one* lost son. To Him the multitudes were made up of individual persons, and He loved and related to them as such.

The preface of the United States Declaration Of Independence affirms that all human beings are created equal in our personhood and rights, and that our inalienable rights are an endowment by our Creator (not conferred on us by government). Abraham Lincoln said that any tyrants who might arise in this nation would find that "a hard nut to crack." That is the foundational truth that eventually led to the abolition of slavery and the enactment of all civil rights legislation since. It has influenced western civilization with its liberating truth.

### *Sexual immorality.*

All the sexual immorality and perversions of human sexuality that run rampant in this "adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38) are an arrogant affront to the Creator and demonstrate a complete absence of any proper fear of Him and His word.

"We will do what we will do, and we will make God, the Bible and the Church agree with us—*or else!*" That is the spirit of the age. It pervades all levels and institutions of society, infiltrating and corrupting even some in the Church

What a contrast this is to the spiritual and moral integrity of Joseph in Egypt. When Potiphar's cheating wife tried her utmost to seduce this young Hebrew house slave, his main concern was not for himself—what might happen to *him* if he were found out. Even though his natural hormones were no doubt running strong, Joseph resolutely said, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). That is what mattered to him. Joseph's value system had the essential component—the fear of God.

Later, in a different context, Joseph gave us the reason for his integrity in this and in all of his dealings. He declared, "I fear God" (Genesis 42:18).

Some Christians say, "After all, fornication and adultery are no worse than other sins." That ignores the plain statement in 2 Peter 2:9, 10, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lusts of uncleanness and despise authority." *Especially.*

I personally heard a "spiritual" woman in a church say, "The sins of the flesh don't matter because the flesh is going to be destroyed anyway." Horrible! Wrong philosophy leads to wrong theology and thus to wrong living. It is the doctrine of Balaam—so said "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 2:12, 14). The antidote for philosophical, theological and behavioral corruption is *the fear of God!*

*Confusion, deception, delusion.*

Where the fear of God is absent, an adequate epistemology is impossible. That is, without the true knowledge of God and His rightful authority, we would have no ultimate reference point for truly knowing and understanding with certainty. We would have no ultimate reference point for truly knowing what is intrinsically valuable that ought to be chosen and pursued for its own sake; therefore we would have no way of knowing by what means to pursue it.

We know some of these things *intuitively*, that is, in their own light; but without the ultimate reference point in God and His self-revelation, it is impossible to offer a logical reason for what we intuit to be intrinsically valuable.

Again, if we are only matter, we do not matter. If God is not who He is, we cannot be who we are. We know *that* we are, and we know *who* we are—only because God is who He is. What we know *intuitively* about who we are we know *factually* and therefore *reasonably* by divine revelation. Intuition, reason and fact unite in divine revelation.

In our advanced information and technology we know much about the "know *what*" and the "know *how*," but we are lacking in the know *why*. Apart from God and His self-revelation, nothing makes sense that reason tells us *ought* to make sense. The absence of the fear of God leaves society floating without an accurate compass in a turbulent sea of subjectivism and relativism.

*Confusion* leaves people open to *deception*, and *deception* leads people into *delusion*. Worst of all, the people who have been drawn into delusion are not even aware that they *are* in delusion. Many imagine that they possess advanced enlightenment. They are like the idolater who holds an idol in his hand. "He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'" (Isaiah 44:20 NIV).

The list goes on: pride, lying, cheating, war, destruction, exploitation, spiritual and moral ignorance and error, meaninglessness and nihilism, and much more—the long litany of selfish human attitudes and behavior. The effects of the absence of the fear of God are seen and

experienced everywhere, from crime and conflict in society to carelessness and corruption in the Church.

### The beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

That is why "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom" (Psalm 110:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). When we acknowledge who God is and revere Him accordingly, we have the foundation and starting point of meaningful knowledge and true wisdom. Such wisdom is "the wisdom that is from above" in contrast to "earthly, sensual, demonic" so-called wisdom (James 3:13 - 18).

The fear of God is the only correct starting point that, when followed logically and consistently, will lead of necessity to the correct conclusions. Any other starting point is "earthly, sensual, demonic," and, when followed "logically" and consistently, its trajectory will lead of necessity to wrong conclusions.

Think of the highly skilled surgeon who successfully operated on the wrong leg! *The correct starting point is absolutely essential.*

A person who does not have a reverential awe and fear of God has missed the vital and necessary key to *all* knowledge and wisdom. Such a person can have a very high I. Q., a broad knowledge of facts and philosophies and the whole range of worldly "wisdom" as described in James 3:13 - 18. Nevertheless, that person will adopt a world view that is sensual, ego-centric and demonic, and will end up with a skewed and restricted perception of reality. That person can know the *what* and *how* of many things but cannot know the ultimate *why* of anything. Set God aside, and nothing makes sense; acknowledge the centrality of God as He has made Himself known, and everything comes into focus.

Until we come to know the fear of God, we truly know nothing and we are devoid of true wisdom. We do not know the answers to the great questions of life and therefore we do not know how to live. Because this positive, wholesome reverence of God is the only valid reference point for a correct understanding of reality—*of everything*—it alone corrects and establishes our values, properly orders our priorities and produces wholesome behavior.

After asking "From where does wisdom come? and where is the place of understanding?" Job goes on to say, "God understands its way, and He knows its place." Then he says that God saw wisdom, declared it, and said to man, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:20 - 28).

Later, after a lifetime of observation, keen insight, and personal experience, Solomon wrote, "Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead" (Ecclesiastes 9:3 NASB).

Notice, the insanity is in their hearts, not their intellect. This has nothing to do with one's I.Q, education, or skill in choosing shrewd and effective means to achieve one's ends. It is not about a person's mental ability, but how one uses his or her mental ability.

Mental insanity is not usually the fault of the person. Moral insanity always is. It is choosing a totally unreasonable supreme end in life—self-gratification—and using one's intelligence to devise and carry out means to achieve that unreasonable end. It is making self the supreme being in one's self-created world, the center around which everything and everybody else ultimately revolves. This is pride. It is irrational. No one can logically defend the proposition that one's self-interest/self-gratification is more valuable, more important than the supreme honor and happiness of God and the equal well-being and happiness of others. It is contrary to fact and therefore contrary to reason; yet that is the thinking, the character and the lifestyle of every sinner.

If the end is contrary to reality and reason, all the means and actions used to achieve that end are also contrary to reason, even if they are intelligently chosen and shrewdly used to achieve it.. Sinners live as though they have lost their mind. They are "crazy in the heart." They are fully responsible for their moral madness. The sinner's first truly sane act is to repent—turn completely to God from sin—and be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

And what a blessed and delightful beginning it is!

The fear of the Lord must be learned and taught.

This new life, this new beginning of knowledge and wisdom, this fear and reverence for God and all things sacred, must be nurtured. It must be learned in its practical relationships and practical applications. To be *learned*, it must be *taught*. To be taught, it must have people willing and eager to learn. That takes persuasion, human and especially divine.

David prayed, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11).

"Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him" (Psalm 25:12 NIV).

"My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path" (Proverbs 2:1 - 10).

If you have that determination, "then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (verse 5).

The psalmist prayed, "Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You" (Psalm 119:38).

"The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility" (Proverbs 15:33).

First and foremost, we must be taught who God *is*. This is absolutely essential. All else depends on it. All else is determined by it. All else follows from it. All else results from it. A correct understanding of the person and character of God, if followed consistently, will lead to a correct understanding of all else. Wrong thinking about the person and character of God will lead to misunderstanding and error in all else.

How do we learn the fear of God? By what means are we taught to fear Him?

*God's creation.*

All people throughout all times and in all places have had the revelation of God's deity and power displayed in the physical creation. Romans 1:20 reminds us, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

This is called "natural revelation" and "natural theology." Looking at all of nature that surrounds us and what can be seen of the universe with the naked eye (to say nothing of what can be seen by powerful telescopes) should leave no doubt in the mind of any intelligent person that God is, that He is all-powerful, and that He possesses all wisdom and intelligence.

What is said of the macrocosm is said also of the microcosm. Both the telescope and the microscope reveal God's deity and power.

This universal display has evoked the awe and wonder of mankind throughout the millennia. It should result in the fear of God, including worship and obedience. When it does not do so, the cause is the perverse determination of the stubborn heart to hold on to one's pride and follow one's passions.

This natural recognition of God and of His power revealed in the creation is not the result of "primitive, pre-scientific ignorance." Rather, it is intelligent and demanded by reality and reason. It was perverted into idolatry by people "who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 1:25). Idolatry gave them gods of their own making that would serve their purposes and sanction their passions.

The same pride and passions are the driving force behind the stubborn refusal by modern man to recognize the theological witness of the creation. Macro-evolution and Darwinism are intellectually and morally bankrupt. Their materialistic cosmogony/cosmology collapses completely before the twin scientific impossibilities: (1) everything out of nothing, and (2) purposeful, detailed design and complexity apart from intelligent, mind-derived, organized and applied information.

Materialism makes divine creation unnecessary; scientific progress is making materialism increasingly untenable. The progress of science itself is crowding mankind into a teleological

corner, and the God-deniers are desperately and irrationally resisting the emerging realities. Their minds are blinded by the insanity that is in their hearts.

### *God's Works.*

God's sovereignty as seen in His works should instill in man a holy and healthy fear. God's works include His providences, His miracles, and His judgments. These show His power, His authority over nature and in human events, and His involvement in our personal lives. All of this should command our awe and utmost respect for Him.

In Genesis 35:5 we read an interesting comment that illustrates the divine protection that accompanied Jacob and his family in their journey from Shechem to Bethel. "As they journeyed, the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob."

We find another interesting event in 1 Samuel, Chapter 11. The men of Jabesh Gilead were in a desperate situation. The Ammonites threatened to gouge out the eyes of all the men of the city. They appealed to king Saul. Immediately the Spirit of God came on Saul and he issued a draft notice to all the men of Israel with this warning: whoever did not respond would have his oxen slaughtered. "And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent" (Verse 7). Of course, the men of Jabesh Gilead were rescued. *The fear of God gets results!*

God parted the Red Sea for Israel and closed it again against Pharaoh's army. "Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).

After the miracle of the parting the waters of the Jordan river that allowed the Israelites to cross on dry ground, Joshua said to the people, "The LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, and that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:23, 24).

The "Preacher" wrote, "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

When Israel demanded a king like all the nations, the prophet Samuel reminded them of the times that the LORD Himself had delivered them without a king, and warned them of the oppressions that a king would bring on them. But instead of waiting for God's time and God's man (David), the people insisted on having a king immediately. So God gave them Saul for the next forty years.

This was during wheat harvest. As a rebuke and chastisement for their lack of faith and reverence, "Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel" (1 Samuel 12:18).

A man named Uzzah impulsively put his hand on the ark of God. For reasons known only to the just and holy God who alone knows the human heart, "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." Immediately king David became angry because of what the LORD did, but when he had time to reflect on the matter, "David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, 'How can the ark of the LORD come to me?'" (2 Samuel 6:6 - 9; also 1 Chronicles 13:9 - 12).

In Psalm 40:1 - 3, David testified of God's mercies to him and the positive effect this would have on all who would witness it. "I waited patiently for the LORD, and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD."

See. Fear. Trust. That is the instructive process and the powerful, positive result.

In Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple recorded in 1 Kings 8:22 - 53, the king asked for God's mercies upon the people when they sin and when they face adversities of various kinds. The purpose was "that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers" (verse 40). The purpose included all foreigners who dwell among them, and also "that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You" (verses 40, 43).

"God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him" (Psalm 67:7).

"According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay. So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun" (Isaiah 59:18, 19).

In the days of Jehoshaphat, after God had given Judah victory over an invading army, "the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel" (2 Chronicles 20:29).

When the ship that was carrying Jonah went through near shipwreck because of the prophet's disobedience, the crewmen cried out to their own gods. When they found out that Jonah was the cause, then "they cried out to the LORD." "So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows" (Jonah 1:4 - 16).

When king Darius witnessed how God had protected Daniel by shutting the lions' mouths, Darius announced: "I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed, and His kingdom shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (Daniel 6:26, 27).

When Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic, the ones who witnessed the miracle "were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen strange

things today" (Luke 5:26).

The same thing happened when Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead. "Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God" (Luke 7:16).

Sometimes the works of God correct peoples' theology, including their Christology. At the cross, "when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).

At the Day of Pentecost, about three thousand were converted. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:42, 43).

When Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to the Holy Spirit, "great fear came upon the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

"Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3, 4).

All nations! The children of Israel shall "fear the LORD His goodness in the latter days" (Hosea 3:5). "So the nations shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your glory" (Psalm 102:15).

"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever" (Psalm 19:9).

### *God's word.*

So how are we taught about God's person and character? The main instructional instrument is the word of God. The Bible's special, verbal revelation is correct and undistorted. People who truly know the Bible know who God is.

The fear of God includes a fear of His word. If we take God seriously, we will take what He says seriously. The psalmist said to God, "My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws" (Psalm 119:120 NIV). "My heart stands in awe of Your word" (Psalm 119:161). God says, "But to this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household" (Hebrews 11:7). What moved Noah with godly fear? God's specific word to him. He acted in faith on God's word alone, and we are here as a result.

Back when Israel was at Horeb (Mount Sinai), God said to Moses, "Gather the people to Me,

and let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:10).

Later, a new generation of Israelites were commanded to learn the word of God so that they would learn the fear of God (Deuteronomy 6:2; 21:12). In Deuteronomy 14:22, 23 they were instructed to tithe as a part of learning to fear God.

Deuteronomy 28:58 says that Israel was to observe to do all that is written in the Law so that they may "fear this glorious and fearful name: THE LORD YOUR GOD." It also graphically describes what would happen to them as a people if they refused.

Just before his death, Moses wrote the Book of Deuteronomy and delivered it to the priests, with this command: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 31:10 - 13).

David said, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Psalm 34:11).

After the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, they brought people from other lands and placed them in the cities of Samaria. These foreigners did not know God and His word; so some of them were killed by wild beasts. That got their attention. So they asked the king of Assyria to bring back a priest from among the Jewish captives to teach them "the rituals of the God of the land." One of the priest among the captives came to Bethel, "and taught them how they should fear the LORD" (2 Kings 17:24 - 28).

When some of the Jews who returned from captivity intermarried with the ungodly pagans, Ezra went into mourning. Later he recorded the response. "Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive" (Ezra 94). What a different society we would be living in today if everyone took God's word that seriously.

Much of the absence of the fear of God, both in society and in the Church, is the result of not knowing the word of God. People who know the word of God should know the fear of God.

### *God's presence.*

The Scriptures record many events when the manifest presence of God filled people with His holy fear. At times it brought them to their knees and even prostrated them on the ground.

God appeared to Jacob in a dream as he was on his way to Haran. "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.' And he was afraid

and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'" (Genesis 28:16, 17).

When God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exodus 3:6). When Stephen was before the council, he mentioned this very event and said, "Moses trembled and dared not look" (Acts 7:32).

At the giving of the Law, the glory of God descended on Mount Sinai in all of its fearsome display. "When the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off" (Exodus 20:18). Surrounded by the awe-inspiring demonstrations of God's power, Moses exclaimed, "I am trembling with fear" (Hebrews 12:21 NIV). When he reported this to the new generation, he said, "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you" (Deuteronomy 9:19).

On a particular occasion, "Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces" (Leviticus 9:23, 24).

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, "the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying, 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever'" (2 Chronicles 7:1 - 3).

Under such a direct and awesome display of the glory and majesty of God, who would dare trifle? Who would be so reckless as to take His holy name in vain, so perverse as to utter profanity in the presence of Almighty God, the Majesty on High, the Dread Sovereign of the universe!

What a contrast to the shocking carelessness of our present rash society—blind to the glory and majesty of God, spiritually dull and insensible, self-righteous and pseudo-sophisticated—that madly plays the fool before the Majesty in the heavens!

When Elijah the prophet called down fire from heaven on the sacrifice, the people saw it and "fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!'" (1 Kings 18:38, 39).

When God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the new temple, he saw the glory of God and fell on his face (Ezekiel 43:3; 44:4).

When Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven shone on him and the men who were with him. Immediately Saul and all the rest fell to the ground (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 24:26:14).

The apostle John recorded what happened to him on the island of Patmos when he saw the glory of the risen, glorified Son of God. "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead"

(Revelation 1:17).

The *presence* of the Lord should produce in us the *fear* of the Lord. The closer we get to God and the deeper our prayer life and our personal communion with God become, the greater should be our awareness of His majesty and holiness. People who walk closely with God have learned the reverential and blessed fear of God. Only people who are not close to God yell at Him.

In summary, seeing the *works* of God should lead us to hear the *word* of God, to learn the *fear* of God, to *love* God, to live in the *presence* of God, walk in the *ways* of God, to *serve* God, and teach our children and others to do likewise.

The fear of God is for our good.

Believers in Christ have an awe-inspiring hope. Because we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, "let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

This fear is not the self-centered, slavish fear common to so much "religion." Rather, it is the natural outflow of a living relationship with the true and living God. It is for our good as well as for His honor and glory.

*The fear of God keeps us from sinning.*

"Tremble, and do not sin" (Psalm 4:4 NASB).

People who are not afraid to sin neither love God nor fear Him.

People who have a proper view of *both* God's holiness *and* His grace realize that sin is the worst thing that can happen, the ultimate evil (think of Adam's sin and what it caused). We will abhor and reject sin above all else. Remember Joseph: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Sin is a "great wickedness."

Job feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:8).

Moses said to the people, "God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (Exodus 20:20 NIV). We need that "Exodus 20:20 vision" of God's holiness.

"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7).

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13).

"By the fear of the LORD one departs from evil" (Proverbs 16:6).

When Nehemiah was the governor over the Jews who had returned from captivity, he saw

some of the Jews oppressing other Jews. Nehemiah "called a great assembly against them." In his rebuke he said, "Should you not walk in the fear of God?" He recalled that the former governors and even their servants oppressed the people. "But I did not do so, because of the fear of God" (see Nehemiah, chapter 5). "Social justice" begins with the fear of God.

Nehemiah wrote, "I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many" (Nehemiah 7:2). Excellent qualifications; excellent leadership choice.

The fear of God keeps people honest and prevents political corruption. How we wish that all who are in positions of authority feared God!

### The fear of God: The New Covenant.

Now, what about the New Testament? Believers have been justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Does the fear of God have any place in believers in Christ?

The Lord declared to Jeremiah the prophet that He was going to make a new, everlasting covenant with His people, and that those who are under the New Covenant will fear Him forever. He said, "They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me" (Jeremiah 32:38 - 40).

Remember, Jesus Himself said that we are to fear God rather than those who would kill us (Matthew 10:28 - 31; Luke 12:4 - 7).

Believers are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). But grace means little or nothing to the person who has not trembled at the holiness of God and the wickedness and guilt of sin. The cross stands as a permanent demonstration of the wrath of God on sin—*our* sin—and the divine penalty under which Jesus Christ suffered and died in our place.

"There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4).

Christ showed us qualities of God's character that had not been fully revealed under the Old Covenant. Indeed, those qualities are beautiful. In Christ, believers have a new relationship with God. We are justified. We have intimate fellowship with God. But the New Covenant in Christ did not change God. God is forever the same, and He is no one to trifle with.

God's grace toward us in Jesus Christ should inspire in us a holy reverence for our holy and just Judge who became our gracious Redeemer.

Every genuine spiritual awakening has two essential characteristics: the fear of God and the abhorrence of sin. Without the awareness of the majesty and holiness of God and the corresponding conviction of the evil and guilt of sin there can be no genuine revival.

Under both law and grace we are to maintain a healthy fear of God. This is an essential part of our love for Him. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those who are around Him (Psalm 98:7).

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

After a composite review of God's wonderful promises that He would walk with His people and be their Father, coupled with the divine command and necessary condition to separate ourselves from all moral corruption (2 Corinthians 6:16 - 18), the apostle Paul continues: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

When the church at Corinth finally disciplined one of its members who had committed a most perverse sin, Paul wrote: "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed after a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!" (2 Corinthians 7:11).

The apostle Peter urges us, "If you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

Believers are to submit to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21). We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

### The fear of The Lord overflows with blessings.

God said concerning Levi, "My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; so he feared Me and was reverent before My name" (Malachi 2:5). We read the results in Numbers 25:10 - 13 and Deuteronomy 33:8 - 10.

"The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14). People who stay close to God in love and reverence come to know His purposes, His plans, and all of His covenant provisions and blessings.

"Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure" (Isaiah 33:6). It is God's treasure *and ours*.

"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him." "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him." "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11, 13, 17).

"Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments" (Psalm 112:1). The LORD will bless those who fear Him, "both small and great" (Psalm 115:13).

"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Psalm 33:18, 19). They who fear the Lord lack nothing (Psalm 34:9). "He has given food to those who fear Him; He will be ever mindful of His covenant" (Psalm 111:5).

"The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7). Every one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways will be blessed and happy, have plenty to eat, and will enjoy a stable home life. It is right there in Psalm 128:1-4.

So let us who live in the wholesome fear of the Lord stop worrying and start enjoying His blessings.

To keep this in balance, consider Proverbs 15:16, "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasures with trouble."

"He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them" (Psalm 145:19).

"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones" (Proverbs 3:7, 8).

"The fear of the LORD prolongs days" (Proverbs 10:27). People who live in the fear of God tend to respect their bodies as the temples of the Holy Spirit and to be careful to glorify God in their bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). *A biblical lifestyle is a healthy lifestyle.*

"In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to avoid the snares of death" (Proverbs 14:26, 27).

"The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble" (Proverbs 19:23 NIV).

We find a practical passage in Ecclesiastes 7:15 - 18. It teaches us to avoid extremes. One can be "overly righteous" and "overly wise" and end up harming oneself. This is the lesson of Psalm 37:8, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm." We can become so full of "righteous indignation" that we stress ourselves out. Lot was an example of this. He oppressed and tormented his righteous soul daily by seeing and hearing about the filthy conduct and unlawful deeds of the wicked people of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7, 8). People can be so outraged over evil that they over-react, even do harmful and unlawful things and suffer the consequences. Although we need to stay informed and take appropriate and timely action, we must avoid "information over-load." It is wise to stay balanced and avoid watching too much news. Also, a person who is determined to be wicked would do well to avoid dying young. *A person who fears God will stay away from all wickedness, will obey Psalm 37, and thus will escape all the consequences of either wickedness or misdirected righteous zeal.*

"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before

God" (Ecclesiastes 8:12).

Proverbs 22:4 declares that "by humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life." How many "success" manuals and seminars tell us that?

"Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble" (Proverbs 28:14 NIV).

How many glamour magazines quote Proverbs 31:30? "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (NIV).

"To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2).

"Oh, how great is Your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!" (Psalm 31:19).

David testified, "You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name" (Psalm 61:5).

"Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land" (Psalm 85:9). The people who fear God are the hope of our land.

"You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth" (Psalm 60:4).

"He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them" (Psalm 145:19).

"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy" (Psalm 147:11).

After the conversion of Saul (Paul) and his escape from a plot to kill him, "the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were edified" (Acts 9:31). The fear of the Lord is an essential feature of a healthy, growing church.

"His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

The fear of God: *it's the good life!*

It must come from the heart.

It is interesting to note that even after the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians and much of the population deported, "They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:32, 33). It is recorded that they continued "practicing the former rituals," but did not fear the LORD" (verse 34). "So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images" (verse 41).

We see here an example of two kinds of "fear." The first kind is merely the nominal and formal observance of national, cultural, and family tradition. It is cozy and comforting, and provides people with a false assurance of a religious identity. It "plays around the head but does not come near the heart." The second kind is the real reverence for God that comes from the heart and is lived out in the life.

Also, the fear that is motivated only by "enlightened self-interest" falls far short of genuine godly fear.

The positive, fear of God is a quality of love for God. Otherwise, it is "a fearful expectation of judgment" and falling into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:27, 31). It is the negative fear that comes from a guilty conscience. That fear involves torment (*echei kolasis*, punishment). When a person repents and is justified from sin by faith in Jesus Christ, perfect love drives out that fear (1 John 4:18). The heart is right and the conscience is clear.

The positive fear of God comes from the pure in heart. It is the wholesome fear that comes from the heart of the forgiven. "There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4).

People who love God desire to live in reverent fear of Him. David prayed, "unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11). A united heart is a single heart, a heart united in perfect love.

Centuries later Nehemiah prayed, "O Lord, I pray, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name" (Nehemiah 1:11).

The fear of God determines our companionships. The psalmist said, "I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep your precepts" (Psalm 119:63). People who fear God from the heart worship together and fellowship with one another.

The fear of the Lord is an essential component of true worship. God is "glorious in holiness, fearful [awesome] in praises, doing wonders" (Exodus 15:11). David wrote, "In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Psalm 5:7). "You who fear the LORD, praise Him!" (Psalm 22:23). Psalm 135:20 says "You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!" Revelation 19:5 records, "Then a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!'"

"Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the LORD and who meditated on His name" (Malachi 3:16).

### Salvation and evangelism.

The fear of God prepares people for salvation.

The fear of God should move people to repentance and prepare them for the gospel.

Nevertheless, the fear of God by itself will not save us. We find an example of this in Acts 10.

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1, 2).

In a vision, an angel told Cornelius to send for Peter (verse 6). When Peter arrived, Cornelius told Peter that the angel had instructed him to send for Peter, "who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved" (Acts 11:13, 14).

We notice that, even though Cornelius and his household were devout, feared God, and gave generously to the needy, *they were not yet saved*. Their religious devotion, their fear of God, and their gifts of charity prepared their hearts for salvation but did not provide a basis for faith for the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. *That* is provided only by the gospel—the good news that Jesus died for us and was raised up the third day, and that, "through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

When Peter said that, everything happened all at once. They received and believed the word even as it was being spoken, were saved, and were baptized in the Holy Spirit—all in rapid succession. No wonder Peter and the other Jewish believers were astonished to realize that when God poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it was on the Gentiles also (Acts 10:45; 11:18).

The fear of God is one of the most powerful motives for evangelism.

Paul affirmed this. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 11). Some versions translate "fear" as "terror," because it is indeed a terrifying fear.

"Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty" (Isaiah 2:10). "They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily" (verse 19).

Fast forward to Revelation 11:18. "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth."

This is followed by Revelation 15:4. "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested."

We are to snatch some people out of the fire, having compassion with fear (Jude 23).

The fear of God should impel people to repentance. Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. For a while both thieves verbally abused Him. Eventually one had a change of heart and

rebuked the other, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?" (Luke 23:40).

"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe in Him is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

It is time to get serious about God.