

## Fear Of The Lord

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. All those who do the will of God have good understanding. Their praise of Him endures forever' (Psalm 111:10).

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but the foolish despise Wisdom and instruction' (Proverbs 1:7).

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Proverbs 9:10).

'The fear of the Lord teaches Wisdom. Humility comes before honour' (Proverbs 15:33).

If we want salvation, stability, understanding, instruction, wisdom and knowledge, then we need to fear the Lord in a reverent, worshipful, respectful and in an awe-filled manner; to the point of bowing down to Him in silent and sacred worship. How much we fear the Lord in this way, will determine the course of our lives. This is seldom mentioned or explained in churches today. There are many incorrect impressions regarding this topic. The very word 'fear' tends to produce a negative reaction, but we will endeavour to explain what the fear of the Lord is, and what it is not.

The fear of the Lord is not a natural fear. As humans, we all have a natural fear we normally experience in certain situations that are frightening. Situations like a roller coaster, or coming face to face with a savage dog, or coming across a large, dangerous Sydney funnel-web spider. Those fears are natural, nothing to be ashamed of and are a type of protective fear. To deal with those fears, we can stop going on roller coasters or escape from the dog or thump the funnel-web spider with a brick. These fears are used to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Some people enjoy being frightened by a roller coaster or abseiling off cliffs, bungee jumping, sky diving etc, but before we do those things we always take wise precautions, like making sure we have a spare parachute. It is the normal fear of harm that makes us take those sensible precautions. A soldier going into battle is naturally a little fearful of the unknown.

The fear of the Lord is not a demonic fear. There is an evil spirit that causes fear, but it does not come from God. 'The Lord has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and of a sound mind' (2 Timothy 1:7). The fullness of this verse reads: 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, cowardice, or a phobia, but what He has given us, is a Spirit of power and a Spirit of love and a calm, well-balanced, disciplined and self-controlled mind'. Any fear that causes cringing, shyness, timidity etc, never comes from God. As Christians, we have the power of God to overcome fear. The perfect love of God casts out all fear. 'There is no fear in love but perfect (God-given) love casts out all fear! For fear brings with it the thought of punishment, and so he who is afraid has not reached the full maturity of God's love' (1 John 4:18). God has given us a sound mind, and a sound mind will not have unnatural fears. These unnatural fears cause strange phobias, like the fear of harmless little spiders, claustrophobia, agoraphobia, extreme shyness, compulsive disorders, a sense of torment and any other phobia or fear that ruins a person's life. Demonic fear can hold us back from obeying God, and unnatural fears like the ones described, all come from the devil, but on a positive note, all these fears can be overcome by the power of God. The fear of the Lord is from God and it motivates us to obey Him. To deal with these demonic fears, we need to turn to God, pray and ask Him to deliver us from them, to cast the fear out, that is to take the fear away completely. The pure love of God will cast the fear out. It is written, 'Deliver us from the evil one' (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4).

The fear of the Lord is not a religious fear taught by man. 'Therefore the Lord said, "These people draw near to me with their mouths and honour Me with their lips but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear of Me is taught by the commandment of men"' (Isaiah 29:13). This kind of fear does not come from God; it is a dread or terror of Him and is more like a superstitious fear taught by men, not by the Lord; it is merely superficial. It affects only the outer conduct of the person but not the heart and therefore does not produce the kind of obedience that God requires. It produces a more slavish-like attitude, not the free obedience of God's children, which is what God desires. To deal with this religious bondage of fear, we need to repent of cultivating the false religious spirit, which is also a spirit of pride, then rebuke the spirit of religiosity. False religions usually have a religious spirit, and those people who are not born-again cannot enter heaven, so the religious spirit not only stops people from obeying God, it can keep some people out of heaven altogether. Religious people do not enjoy the peace God gives us that passes all human understanding (Philippians 4:7). Only a warm, close, intimate relationship with God through Jesus, can give us that kind of peace. It is written, 'God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble; so submit yourself to God, resist the devil and he will flee' (James 4:6 & 7). 'Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, there is no way you will enter the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 5:20).

The fear of the Lord is not the fear of man, which is another fear that does not come from God. 'The fear of man is a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe' (Proverbs 29:25). The fear of man is not the same as trusting in the Lord. This fear makes people tend to be more concerned about what other people think, than what God thinks. This fear snares us when we want to walk in the path of obedience. It keeps us from standing up and speaking out for righteousness for fear of upsetting people, and it is the opposite of trusting God. To deal with this fear, we can pray and ask God to deliver us, but this fear is easily overcome with God's help, and with our own efforts. We could take up public speaking or take up a job where we are constantly dealing with people to give us more confidence. Doing either of these two things will give us the confidence to overcome the fear of man. Spending a lot of time with the Lord will give us the Spiritual strength to speak out for righteousness.

All of these fears mentioned above are not the fear of the Lord. They tend to keep us from obeying God and they do not produce peace in our hearts. What is the fear of the Lord? It is awe, respect, reverence, a humbling worship and acknowledgement of the absolute greatness of our Maker. To accept that He created us is a touch of simple knowledge. To understand fully that He made us out of the dust that He had previously created, reveals His three-step creation of mankind, made completely in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). First He created the dust of the earth (Genesis 1:1) then He created Adam out of that same dust, then He breathed life into Adam's soul, turning the lifeless form into a living breathing human, capable of walking, speech, thought and reason (Genesis 2:7). God created us for His glory (Isaiah 43:7) and because it was His desire and will (Revelation 4:11). It is His will that we are here on earth in the first place. He made us because He wants us. That acknowledgement should bring a humble sense of awe that causes us to feel like bowing at His feet. We need to learn and understand the mystery of God the Father and of Jesus, the Anointed One in Whom are hidden all the treasures of Wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2). The fear of our Maker and Father is not a terror, but rather an overwhelming desire to love Him with all our heart – all our soul – all our mind – all our strength – all our might – all our understanding, to walk in all His ways and to obey Him without question (Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12 & 13; Joshua 22:5; Mark 12:30).

The Lord proves us, tries us, tests us and purifies us to see if we will stand up and obey Him in the face of adversity (Deuteronomy 13:3; Hebrews 12:6 to 14). The fear of the Lord motivates us to obey Him and it gives us peace. To enjoy His peace we must not take a step away from God, but remain steadfast in Him. The other fears do not impart peace, but a very distinctive aspect of the reverential fear of the Lord is that it imparts peace. The fear of the Lord is awe or reverence; a deep respect for His power, creative ability, His omnipresence, His rulership, His immense vastness. It is humble obedience to the first of the Ten Commandments to love Him with our whole being. Adhering to that commandment means that we give to God total pre-eminence; that we never put anything in our lives before Him; no influence, no person, no motivation, no earthly thing between us and God. The people who made up the early church 2,000 years ago, had an unwavering fear of the Lord. 'The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace, were edified and multiplied, as they walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9:31). The church was edified and encouraged, they grew stronger and their numbers grew because of their fear of the Lord, and they had peace.

Jacob said to his father-in-law Laban, 'If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Dread and Fear of Isaac had not been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed' (Genesis 31:42). Abraham and Isaac were Jacob's grandfather and father. What does 'The God of my father and the Dread and Fear of Isaac' mean? The Dread means 'lest he should fall' and the Fear means 'lest he offend'. This capsulates the attitude towards God we all need to cultivate. What we love and fear most is our God, so if we truly love and fear the Lord, that makes Him our God.

The fear of the Lord was manifested in the earthly life of Jesus. 'In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications, with cries and tears to Him (God the Father), Who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His Godly fear. Though He was a Son, He learned obedience by what He suffered' (Hebrews 5:7 & 8). This verse is about the time when Jesus cried out to God to take the 'cup' of suffering and separation from Him, yet He said, "Not My will but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). That is the epitome of the fear of the Lord that results in obedience. We too need to have that same attitude that Jesus had. We must not let anything be more important than God's will. Nothing in our lives should ever take the place of where God should be.

If we ever have fear and we are not sure what kind of fear it is, we need to ask ourselves this question; Is this fear preventing me from obeying God? If the fear stops us from obeying God, then it is not from God. The fear of the Lord will lead us to obey God even to the point of suffering, just as it did with Jesus. The divine pre-knowledge of His suffering did not deter Jesus from obeying God and giving Him total pre-eminence in His life. Jesus, the Son of God, had the fear of the Lord that was imparted to Him by the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. If Jesus, Who was God and divine by nature, needed the fear of the Lord, then how

much more do we need it? Jesus' delight was in the fear of the Lord. We too need to delight in the Lord. Jesus is our example and when we see that Jesus needed the fear of the Lord, it should make us very aware of the depth of our need of the same.

'If you call on Him as your Father, Who without partiality, judges according to each person's work, conduct your lives in the fear of the Lord, knowing you are not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Jesus; the faultless pure Lamb' (1 Peter 1:17 to 19). This verse was directed to God's people and Peter is telling them to conduct their lives in the fear of the Lord. There are two reasons why we need to have the attitude of reverent fear; we are all going to have to give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12). There is a judgement coming to all believers (Romans 14:10). It is not a judgement of condemnation like the non-believers will experience, but we will have to give an evaluation and an account of our works (Romans 2:6), idle words (Matthew 12:36), our talents (Matthew 25:14 to 30), our faithfulness and our regard to God's people, the Jews (Matthew 25:31 to 46). And we will have to give an account to God for the things we have done in our bodies, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). That is a realisation we have to soak up into our very being and live our lives every day with that knowledge deeply embedded in our psyche. We also need to keep in mind, the price Jesus was willing to pay to redeem us. We were not redeemed with silver or gold – we were redeemed by His blood. The most precious Thing to God in the whole universe – was given to us for our salvation. Those two things should cause us to live every day in the reverent fear of the Lord. We should never do or say anything that would displease our Saviour.

The following verse seems to be a paradox between fear and rejoicing. 'Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling' (Psalm 2:11). It seems as though the rejoicing is sandwiched between fear and trembling. That does not seem to make much sense to the natural mind. We may find it hard to rejoice while sensing fear and are trembling, but this statement is to be seen through the spiritual mind, not the natural. In the spiritual realm, it is the fear of the Lord, the caution we observe so we do not offend Him, and knowing we have pleased Him, releases the rejoicing.

There is a cleansing power in the fear of the Lord, and there will never be an end to it. 'The reverent fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever' (Psalm 19:9). The longer we are Christians and the more we grow in God, the more we are aware of the need for the fear of the Lord. We cannot be blasé about our salvation nor can we be blasé about the Lord Himself. It keeps us from the defilement of sin and helps us become holy and pure in heart. The longer we walk with God, the more aware we are of our sin and the more aware we become of the need for His cleansing power. The world we live in is a very spiritually contaminated world. We are surrounded by impure people who speak with unclean lips; there is uncleanness on television that wise Christians will switch off; there is corruption everywhere. The world is unclean and it breaks down moral fibre. We need Someone to protect us; to keep us from the world's contamination. The scriptures show us God's provision; the fear of the Lord keeps us clean forever.

'Come you children (that is God's children), listen to Me. I will teach you to fear the Lord. Who is the man who desires life and loves many days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Depart from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it' (Psalm 34:11 to 14). That is the Holy Spirit speaking through the scriptures to God's children and He brings out some important features of the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord has to be taught. If we are not willing to be taught then we cannot receive the fear of the Lord. The first way the fear of the Lord will be manifested will be through the tongue. We need to speak with as people with the grace of God and well chosen words; without guile, without anger, without exaggeration, without lies or idle words, without foolishness and without bitterness. We are to depart from evil and do good. That can only be achieved with the help of the Lord. 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. I (the Lord) hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, the evil way and perverted speech' (Proverbs 8:13). The fear of the Lord does not permit any compromise with evil. If we have the fear of the Lord we will not compromise our lives, we will walk uprightly and shun evil. We will hate evil and reject it. If we have the fear of the Lord we will watch what we say. 'By the fear of the Lord, men avoid evil' (Proverbs 16:6).

'Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. You will eat the fruit of your labour. Happiness will be yours and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine and your growing children will be around your table. Thus is the man who fears the Lord' (Psalm 128:1 to 4). If we study these verses closely, we will see the results of the fear of the Lord in a man's life. Blessings for the man, blessings for his wife and children, blessings in his work, blessings in his home. The promises of blessings and prosperity are given to the man who fears the Lord and walks in the ways of the Lord. It all comes from the one source – the fear of the Lord.

'They hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They wanted none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof. Therefore they will eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own schemes. The backsliding of the simple will kill them. The careless ease of fools will destroy them' (Proverbs

1:29 to 32). We can see that the ultimate end for those who reject God's wisdom is destruction. They hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. We need to fully understand, that it is our choice and our will to receive or reject the fear of the Lord. If we reject it, then we can expect destruction. Either we invite God to teach us the fear of the Lord or we reject it to our own peril.

'In the fear of the Lord is a secure fortress and He will be a refuge for His children. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning people from the snares of (eternal) death' (Proverbs 14:26 & 27). God's children, in the fear of the Lord will have confidence and will always have a place of refuge so the fear of the Lord gives us security. When we have the fear of the Lord, we can be secure in God's provision for our lives and we can be sure we can go the safe place of God's refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life; it keeps us from the snares that would entrap us. The snare of sickness, the snare of poverty, the snare of spiritual death. 'The fear of the Lord leads to eternal life, contentment and rest. He will not be touched (affected) by trouble' (Proverbs 19:23). That seems too good to be true ... but it is true. The fear of the Lord will keep us from being affected by evil. When we make the Lord our refuge, when problems arise in the natural world, it will not affect us spiritually, and He will send angels to guard us and watch over us (Psalm 91). 'The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord is riches, honour and life' (Proverbs 22:4).

The fear of the Lord should permeate our whole life and dictate our entire life-style. The fear of the Lord is not something we put on moments before we go to church so we can act all pious and religious. It should fill our whole life, our being, our attitude, our walk with God and our relationships with fellow believers. There is a hereafter for everybody whether we want to acknowledge it or not. The Lord looks around the whole earth to seek out those who fear Him. 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are blameless towards Him' (2 Chronicles 16:9). The 'eyes' of the Lord is the Holy Spirit, and He is looking for a certain type of person anywhere on the earth, because God wants to show Himself strong through that person; the person whose heart is perfect towards Him or fully committed to Him. That means there is no area of the heart that is turned away from the Lord. The entire heart and attitude of that committed person is wholly focussed on the Lord. This person wonders only how he can please the Lord. What does the Lord require of me? How does the Lord view this situation? How does the Lord view this choice I have made? There is nothing in the committed person that seeks to hide anything from the Lord, or seeks to turn away from the Lord, or do something that He may not approve of, or something that offends Him, or something that is selfish, or not to do His will. That is full commitment and it is essential for the true fear of the Lord. We have to make a commitment that is irrevocable as did the Bible characters. God expects commitment before He will show us His will. A person who is fully committed always tries to see things through God's eyes. He will not have the attitude, "How will this affect me?" But, "What can I do for God in this situation?" The fear of the Lord overrides every other motive in the committed believers life.

Sometimes God asks us to do things that are very much out of the ordinary, so we cannot be afraid of man (public opinion); we cannot seek wealth; we cannot depend, rely on or lean on another person; we cannot seek to serve ourselves; we cannot do His will in our own strength and knowledge. To be a dependable disciple, we must put 'self' aside and obey God no matter what the cost and no matter what people say. When we fear the Lord, we will not fear when heat (trouble) comes; our leaves (righteousness) are always green; we never wither (burn out); we have no worries in a year of drought (more trouble); we never fail to produce fruit (the result of spiritual service) (Jeremiah 17:7 & 8).

So how can we cultivate the fear of the Lord in our own lives? By choosing to listen to God and by accepting His counsel. It is impossible to teach someone who refuses to listen. If we choose to seek the fear of the Lord, then we have to humble ourselves and turn ourselves over to God and listen and obey. God has many ways in which he teaches people; through the pastor; through an evangelist; through a radio program; through Christian television, through the internet; through a wise elderly Christian; through the Bible; through a word of knowledge; through a prophecy; through a dream; through a vision; through an angel; through a born-again friend; through parents; or by speaking straight into our own hearts. To hear the Lord we need to incline our ear, open our heart, be teachable, listening carefully to what God is saying, and receive His Word. We need to lift up our voice in prayer, seek and search as though for hidden treasure. Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44). The treasure mentioned in this verse is the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 33:6). We have to walk God's way to find it. Christians have the blessed hope of spending eternity with the Lord, and that is the ultimate benefit of fearing the Lord.

Amen and God bless you.

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