

The Soul of Godliness

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Proverbs 1:7
Preached on: Sunday, May 15, 2022

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, let me encourage you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs this morning as we come to our final message on a very key scriptural biblical theme that we've been studying the past two weeks called "The Fear of God." We read this in Proverbs 1:7 where it says,

7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Then in Proverbs 9:10 it says,

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

And what we've said in this brief series is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning in the sense that it is the foundation, it is what everything else is built on so that a recognition of the existence of God, something of his divine nature and attributes as they are revealed in creation around us, something of the authority and majesty of the word of God, these are the things that feed and inform the fear of God from which an entire life view is formed. If you do not fear God, your entire worldview is mistaken, it is wrong, it is fundamentally flawed in a way that certain collapse is going to come.

Look at Matthew 7 with me as we just contemplate the sense of the foundation. Matthew 7. And the reason that we emphasize this foundational knowledge of it, this foundational aspect of the fear of God is this, it is one thing to understand that it is the foundation upon which everything else is built, that is the sense in which Scripture means it's the beginning of knowledge, however if you think that it's simply the beginning like it's grade 1 and then you move on to more important things afterwards, you can kind of leave that behind, that's a desperately wrong view of it. As we've seen over the past two weeks, the fear of God informs everything for unbeliever and believer alike and what happens, what happens if someone rejects the fear of the Lord? For those of you that are in here that are not Christians and have rejected the gospel and your heart has become increasingly hard to it, what lies ahead for you? Well, Jesus said what it would be in Matthew 7:24. He said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods

came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock." And so you see this foundational aspect of the teaching of Christ which leads us to the fear of God. This is what everything else is built on.

You know, in the old days they used to ask whether someone was a God-fearing man because if a man was God-fearing there were certain things that you could assume about his character going forward. We've so lost the fear of God that we don't even know to think in those categories but the fact that we don't think in these categories is not a reflection that their importance has been diminished over time, it's simply an indication of how far the church of Jesus Christ has strayed from a most fundamental aspect of biblical reality. And so the one whose foundation is built on the words of Christ, built on the fear of the Lord, Jesus said when the storms come, when the storm of judgment comes, they'll stand, they'll be safe, they will survive the judgment.

But he gives the contrast in verse 26 of Matthew 7 when he says, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell and its fall was great." It was great and that closing word "great" in the original just gives the sense of an echo that goes on. It was great, great, great, great.

So great was the fall that comes to those that reject the words of Christ and reject the fear of the Lord and Jesus says it's a foolish man. That's the same language that we find there in Proverbs 1:7 where it says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." So what we want to do today, having seen something of the fear of God in the past two messages, I want to just take a quick review of what we said in the prior two messages and then lead you on into how it is that you develop and cultivate a true fear of God, and that's what we want to accomplish here with our time here this morning.

By way of review, we said that there are two senses in which the fear of God should be understood depending upon whether someone is a Christian or not, whether someone is an unbeliever or a believer. That has two distinct applications for the fear of God. And we started with the unbeliever, the person who has rejected Christ or does not know Christ at all, has not heard the gospel. What does the fear of God, the fear of the true, living, biblical God, what does it have to do with them and we said this: the fear of God describes the terror that arises when sinners understand that he is a threat to their well-being. God is holy. God does not accept sinners in his presence and all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and in that understanding and when we understand these things, we come to realize that a sinner who faces death outside of Christ is a sinner who is going to be condemned to hell forever. There is no excusing sin. There will be no exceptions. God is a threat to bring eternal judgment on the heads of those who do not believe in Christ. Those who reject the gospel will be on the receiving end of the most severe of judgment.

So for my unbelieving friend that may be listening here today, you need to understand this, that when you die you are not going to a better place, you're not going to someplace green and comfortable, and you're certainly not going to go someplace where you can party with your friends. The Bible says that there is a terrifying expectation of judgment for those who die without Christ, and so this is of utmost eternal consequence. We are standing, as it were, we are teetering on the brink between earth and eternity, between heaven and hell as we talk about these things, and an unbeliever should understand that God, the holy God, is a threat to their sinful being. We have to start there and a recognition that we have broken the law of God, that we are convicted by the law of guilt, should bring us to a point of utterly being undone in the sense that we are in grave danger. Someone who fears God in that sense is motivated to look for relief, is motivated to look to Christ for salvation, is motivated, "Where can I find forgiveness? Where can I find something to deliver me from this terror and this threat that is hanging over my soul?" And you see, for the unbeliever that for the first time becomes the beginning of wisdom for them, to forsake their self-righteousness, to forsake their own spiritual resources and look for relief from the judgment that is certain to come. Someone who has not done that has not practiced the first principle of wisdom.

So we start there realizing that the fear of God for the unbeliever is the terror that arises when sinners understand he is a threat to their well-being. As we've said many times in the past, hell is real, hell is painful, and hell is eternal. That comes straight from the teaching of Jesus Christ himself who warned us to fear not those who can destroy the body but to fear God who is able to destroy body and soul in hell. And so the false sense of comfort that is created by weak, insipid preaching is not a help to the state of mankind. It is not a help to your soul to seek out teachers who simply tell you what you want to hear. You need to hear the truth. You need to hear from God's word on these themes because this alone will awaken the sinner to the danger that he is in so that he can be delivered from it.

Now having said that and that was the message from two weeks ago, you can find it online, last week we said that there's a different aspect in which we understand the fear of God as believers, and as a believer salvation in Christ, Jesus Christ our hope, our rock and our Redeemer, he delivers you from judgment because he took your judgment on himself when he died and sacrificed himself to God on the cross. He stood in your place on the cross. He absorbed the punishment of God, the wrath of God against you on the cross and when you believed in Christ, when the Spirit of God led you to Christ to receive him into your life, God accepts the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf so that your sin is paid for in full and now you are free from the terror of eternal judgment. But as we saw, that does not eliminate every sense of the fear of God. We're not to simply view God as our chum and as somebody that does not need to be taken seriously now that eternal judgment has been taken away. No, no, no, no, no. Once a person comes to Christ there is a complete revolution of what takes place in his mind and in his heart. God takes away the old prior, cold, stone dead, sinful heart and puts into the person a heart, what the Bible calls a heart of flesh, a heart that is warm and responsive and beating in response to the work of God and to the word of God. It's a heart that is grateful to God for having delivered them from so great a peril as death and hell. It's a heart that responds to Christ

with a sense of gratitude, a sense that gladly says, "I give my life and my all to You in light of what You've done for me to save me. All I can rightly do is submit to You as Lord, give all of my life in obedience to You, and live my life exclusively to Your glory as You give me strength."

So the fear of God that Scripture describes for the believer is this, for the believer and I'm just repeating definitions that I gave over the past two weeks now, for the believer the fear of God is the wholehearted life of loving humble worship that you render to him in response to his saving mercy in your life. You fear God with love. You fear God with obedience and you fear God with faith, with trust, with confidence in him. And so the fear of God is a multifaceted reality in the life of the believer that is wholehearted in which the entire man is engaged, the whole inner man is engaged in responding to God in that way. One writer, the great systematic theologian from past days at Westminster Seminary, John Murray, said this in his book "Principles of Conduct," he said this and I quote. Listen carefully, "The fear of God is the soul of godliness. The fear of God is the soul of godliness." No one is godly who does not fear God. That is just the way that it is. How could you be godly if you do not fear the one who is your Creator, Redeemer and King, the one before whom you will stand and give judgment? It shows a complete lack, someone who does not deeply fear God shows a complete lack of understanding of the most elemental aspects of biblical truth, the most elemental aspects of true Christianity. And we emphasize that it is the soul of godliness. This is about the inner man. This is about who you really are inside, who you are in your thoughts and in your mind and in your heart, and in the way that you think. It vibrates and it pulsates in the inner man and shapes and influences everything from which flow the issues of life. It's wholehearted. It's the whole man and it could be no other way.

Well, that leads to a final question that we want to ask and answer here today. If the fear of God is the soul of godliness, then how do we develop that healthy fear of God? How do we develop that healthy fear of God, that thing that is inside, that thing that shapes who you are, that informs the way that your heart responds to every aspect of life? How do we develop that? Well, praise God it's not complicated, it's not a complex matter, and we're going to start here with, first of all, the one who fears God, the man who fears God is a man who pursues Scripture, is a man who pursues Scripture. There is no fear of God apart from the word of God. Understand the Spirit of God inspired the word of God, the 66 books of the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the third member of the blessed Triune God and as a result of that, the Spirit who is of the very essence of God, who inspired the word of God does this, he puts into the hearts of the people of God a desire, a respect and a fear of the word of God. These things go together. The Spirit acts in perfect consistency with his prior work. The Spirit inspired the word, he brings someone to fear the word and to respect it and to love it. The Spirit gives testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who fears God will love Christ and respect him and obey him because this is all flowing from the self-same Spirit.

Now with those things in mind, go back to the book of Deuteronomy 4. We're going to bounce around to a few different texts to just develop the theme today and trust that God will knit it all together in our hearts as we consider these things over time. As you're

turning to Deuteronomy 4, let me just make a simple plea especially to those of you that are members of Truth Community Church. I know we have visitors and we're so glad to have visitors here on this special week in the life of our church, this is a tangent but it's an important one. There is a lot to be said for listening to the sermons that you hear on Sunday, to listen to them repeatedly over time, to let them come in deep into your heart. If you just listen to a sermon one time, we all know what the reality of that is, the reality of it is that you forget it by next week. Maybe a little tiny nugget, a little tiny piece of gold dust attaches to your soul but it doesn't go deep, it doesn't take root, and so I just encourage you to take the opportunity to listen to sermons repeatedly, especially on these kinds of fundamental themes so that they would go deeply in your heart especially on the fear of God. We think we fear God when we really don't. You can see it in the way that people respond to correction, you can see it in the way that people respond to accountability whether they fear God or not, you can see it in the way, so many ways of life manifestation that it comes out, and I'm not preaching on the fear of God just because this happens to be a favorite theme of mine. It is but that's not why I'm preaching it. I preach on the fear of God because I have a fear of my own that it's not deeply rooted in the hearts of many at Truth Community Church. I say that not to rebuke you but to caution you and out of love to encourage you to seek these things out and to dwell on them and to meditate on them because the fear of God is something that revolutionizes life and it changes the way that you relate to people, it changes the way that you relate to spiritual authority even. It changes the way that you relate to others in your household and these things are just so vital. This is the root from which everything else about a godly life flows and those who dismiss the fear of God, those who arrogantly are confident in their own judgment, Scripture says it's a fool who trusts in his own heart.

So we need to abandon our confidence and love of self and come to this fear of God and one of the ways that this is found is by coming to these things repeatedly over time and letting the word of God sink deeply into your heart because it just doesn't happen on, you know, just on a one-time basis. We need to meditate, we need to come to these things again and again. And you can see this reflected in the Scripture in Deuteronomy 4 as Moses was speaking to the people of Israel and giving them instruction on fearing God, in Deuteronomy 4:9 he says this, "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently." You see, you're paying attention, you're keeping your soul diligently. This is something that you watch over, "so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." Keep these things diligently, Scripture says. Don't forget them. And in verse 10 he goes on to say, "Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'" God shows that hearing his word and hearing it diligently is what produces the fear of him over time in your life. It's you fear him all the days you hear the words as you are giving heed to yourself and keeping your soul diligently. You know, I'm just so afraid that there's just so much self-confidence in the Christian world today, people who are glad to tell other people what they should do with their lives having no grounding in the word of God themselves, and

things like that. That happens because people do not fear God. I can't say it any clearer than that. You develop a godly fear by meditating on Scripture for yourself.

You can keep your finger in Deuteronomy 4 but in Psalm 119, that great long text that is centered on the word of God, in Psalm 119:36 you read this where he says, "Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to dishonest gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, And revive me in Your ways." Then he says this in verse 38, "Establish Your word to Your servant, As that which produces reverence for You." Today in New Testament terms we could say it like this, "God, I am asking the Holy Spirit to work in my heart to illuminate my mind, to give me understanding of Your word and appreciation for its authority and its power and its role in my life. Help me to understand that and to understand that this word from You, these 66 books of the English Bible, this is what brings me to fear You." As you read the word of God, as you hear it taught, as you respond to it, that is what develops the fear of God in you.

So that's why we say the one who fears God is the one who pursues Scripture, and for all of the warning that I've given let me also say on the other side that as pastor of Truth Community Church, that I'm so thankful for so many of you who manifest this kind of fear of God. You love the word of God, you want to be here when it's taught, you're eager to interact about it afterwards, and so there's just a broad cross spectrum here, a broad cross section of people here as I warn those that I worry about, I also give thanks to those who have manifested the fear of God in their lives, that have shown obedience, that have suffered even to the point of losing relationships out of a desire to obey and be faithful to the word of God. But this is the core, this is the center of it all is how does one respond to the word of God, the Scripture, the 66 books of the Bible? Do you read it? Do you go to the word of God on your own during the week because it matters enough to you to spend time with it? Or is the word of God just part of the Sunday routine for you?

Now let me say this just about ministry in general and giving a sense of a principle for discernment. The emphasis that a church gives to the Bible will tell you whether that church fears God or not. A church that's big on lighthearted entertainment, a church where people can comfortably come in Sunday after Sunday without even carrying a Bible into the service, that's a very bad sign because the church that fears God and the people in that church who fear God are going to be pursuing Scripture. There's just no avoiding this. This is the reality and the fact that it might make many churches uncomfortable to hear this said does not diminish the truth of it. There's just a time where things need to be said regardless of whether it makes people feel good or not. Isn't it time once in a while, isn't it time in this point in the life of our country and the life of the church of Jesus Christ to say things regardless about how people feel about it as long as the truth is spoken? Are we in danger of not caring enough about the way people feel and are we too concerned about what God's truth is? That's not the reality of the society that we live in at all. So you can tell whether a church fears God by the emphasis that it gives to Scripture and I'm thankful for many churches across the land pastored by men that I know and love who manifest this reality but, beloved, understand also that what's true of churches is true of individuals as well. I say this in love, I say this to help you, I'm on your side even as I speak directly and even confrontationally. I'm on your side. The

emphasis that you give to the Bible in your life gives you a measure of whether you fear God or not. So we leave it there.

There's another way to develop the fear of God, there's another measure by which we can understand this. We've said the God-fearer pursues Scripture, secondly, the God-fearer is one who pursues sanctification, who pursues sanctification, who pursues spiritual growth, who pursues becoming more like Christ in his character. And that kind of practical godliness, those attitudes and actions of a godly man, a godly woman, practical godliness, my friends, stems from, it springs from a heart that fears God. It doesn't occur in any other kind of heart but one that fears God.

Look at the book of Job just before the book of Psalms in Job 1. Job was probably the first book of the Bible chronologically that was written and in this God-inspired piece of Scripture we get direct quotations from God himself in his interpretation and God's view of what the fear of God means. It's remarkable. In Job 1:1 we read that, "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." He feared God and as a result of that, wrapped inextricably around that fear of God was the fact that he turned away from evil. You read it again in verse 8, I'm assuming your familiarity with the basic narrative so I'm just hitting highlights here. Satan came, wanted to tempt Job and discredit him and discredit God by discrediting Job, verse 8, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.'" And in chapter 2, verse 3, the Lord said to Satan again, chapter 2, verse 3, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.'" Beloved, there's the starting point. This gets very very practical, doesn't it? The fear of God is shown in your willingness and eagerness to turn away from sin and to walk in a path of righteousness. Those who tolerate ongoing sin in their lives are showing that they do not fear God. They're showing that they love their sin. They're showing a lot of bad things but they are showing an absence of the fear of God in their lives because they are not turning away from evil.

So again we're met with very practical questions. Is there a sense in your life where you are conscious of the fact that you are repenting from sin on an ongoing basis? When sin comes up, you grieve over it, you fall into temptation, you hate what you've done and you go to God and you confess it and you repent of it, that sense of turning away from evil, that turning away from sin, or is it just something that you accept and tolerate? Maybe the sins of your mind and the imaginations that you just accept and go about and you revel in them and you roll them around in your mind because you think no one knows, do you hate sin enough to turn away even from the sins of your mind?

Well, how do we develop that? How do we cultivate that? Well, first of all, here's a subpoint here as we're pursuing sanctification, there is this subpoint A here, there is an inward turning from sin. An inward turning from sin. You establish the fear of God in

your heart with decisive heart commitments. You make commitments in your heart about the way that you are going to approach life.

Look at chapter 8, verse 13 of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 8 in verse 13. Notice how this starts in the heart, that this starts with, as it were, decisive commitments in a particular life direction. Proverbs 8:13 says this, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate." You see the connection as God was describing Job, he said he fears God and he turns away from evil. You read further in the wisdom books of the Bible, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. And so the one who fears God has it settled in his mind that, "I am the sworn enemy of my indwelling sin. I do not tolerate sin even though sometimes it crops up in my life." Sometimes, you know, as the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7, "I do what I don't want to do." There is this reality in the heart that says, "When I sin it is contrary to who I really am and what I endorse and what I accept and what matters to me in life." Sin becomes the sworn enemy of the one who fears God. It could be no other way.

In Matthew 5, you don't need to turn there but in Matthew 5 it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." This is a mourning, a poverty of spirit that involves a recognition of spiritual bankruptcy apart from Christ. The one who belongs truly to the kingdom of heaven is the one who mourns when sin crops up in his life. It's not that we've reached a state of perfection. The idea of spiritual perfection in this life is unbiblical. It is wrong and it leads to hypocrisy. What Scripture says is that there is this decisive heart commitment in the one who fears God that hates evil and that mourns over it when it pops up in life. Beloved, all I can do is ask you: is that describing you or not? I can't answer the question for you. Is this talking about you or not? And by the grace of God may there be no one in this room that just hardens their heart against this and says, "You know, I'm okay," without searching and examining your heart about these things.

John Murray also said this and I quote. He said, "The Christian knows that sin is displeasing to God and he is keenly sensitive to the demands and judgments of His holiness. Humility, contrition, lowliness of mind are of the essence of godliness. We must embrace the fear and trembling which reflect our consciousness of sin and frailty."

Back in 1640, the Puritan Richard Sibbs said this, he says, "What is done for God must be done wholeheartedly and without reservation. If our hearts balk, we do not have a good conscience; partial obedience is no obedience at all. To single out easy things that do not oppose our lusts or threaten our pride is not the obedience God calls for. Our obedience must be universal to all His commands, therefore let us search ourselves and propound searching questions to ourselves whether we believe and obey or not and what our motives in doing so are." He goes on to say in that context, "If your profession of faith is meaningless now, it will be meaningless at the judgment." In other words, if what you believe your faith is doesn't lead you into an immediate fear of God and provoke in you a life-long approach of fearing God, then your faith isn't real no matter what you may say with your lips. Your life says the truth about it all, and those that make excuses for their sin, those that look for people who will simply affirm them rather than confront

them in their sin are not fearing God. There's just no avoiding this because the God-fearer turns away from evil, the God-fearer pursues sanctification and does so from the heart, does so in a way that says, "This is fundamental to my existence."

There's the inward turning, there's also, second subpoint here, there's also the external turning toward obedience. You turn away from sin and you turn toward obedience. Go back to the book of Proverbs again with me in Proverbs 16:6. Proverbs 16:6 we read this in the words of Solomon. Let's start in verse 5, "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD." God doesn't simply hate the sin, he hates the sinner who is unrepentant and hard in his presence. His anger is against them. "Assuredly, he will not be unpunished." Then you read this in verse 6, "By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil." It's by God's loyal love and truth as it is found in Jesus Christ that sin can be taken away, and it's by the fear of the Lord that one keeps away from evil.

So beloved, let's just be candid with one another here. The patterns of unaddressed sin in your life show a lack of the fear of God in your life. You can say, "I fear God," but an acceptance of any pocket of sin in your life contradicts what you're saying decisively. You can say it but it's not true if you tolerate sin in your life. I knew a Christian many years ago who was prominent in his local church and he was prominent for many many years, but eventually and quite sadly he was caught in adultery. He had been prominent but he had been living a double life. He was respected up to that point. But beloved, do you see that in just that little brief summary, do you see and understand that the measure of his spiritual life was never his service in the church. It wasn't the outward performance and the outward accolades and the outward positions that he held. The reality of his life was exposed in his pattern of adultery and, beloved, what I want you to understand is that you and I, men and women, boys and girls, this is the unvarnished truth of the word of God: men fall into sin when they do not fear God. You can only go into a pattern of sin like that and live a double life like that, you can only do that if you do not fear God. Something inside has not clicked for a man or a woman like that to think that they could profess Christ, live a double life of sin and get away with it. The fear of God is to turn away from evil and so the searching nature of this truth shows us the reality, shows us the reality of who we are. It's not who we are in front of each other, it's who we are in the presence of sin and temptation and whether we turn from that or not.

There's another aspect of the fear of God and this turning to obedience and the way that obedience plays itself out. The fear of God, the true fear of God produces obedience to God even when it seems to be against your self-interest. Let me say that again: the fear of God produces obedience even when it seems to be against your self-interest. For this I want to take you to a narrative portion of Scripture in Genesis 22, the story of Abraham and Isaac and God's call on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Genesis 22. This passage takes away all of our excuses for disobedience. Genesis 22, we'll look at the first three verses to start. "Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning and

saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him." Do you see that he is obeying even though the command seems so unusual, seems so inexplicable? Isaac was the one through whom the line was to be continued and yet he trusted not in his own heart and in his own understanding and judgment. He trusted in the word of God that came to him in that time, and he obeyed and pursued obedience even though the command was so unusual.

Look at verse 4, "On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.' Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together." Understandably, Isaac is getting questions in his mind. Verse 7, "Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'" There is no lamb here. What are we going to sacrifice with this wood and fire? "Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together."

Now the story reaches its climax in verse 9, "Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." You can see it in the text. His hand is upraised and the knife is about to plunge into the heart of his own son because that's what God had told him to do. His obedience was so implicit that he would do what God said even to that point of sacrificing his son Isaac. Verse 11, "But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" And here's the point for today in verse 12, the angel said to him, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." His willingness to even give up his son showed forth his fear of God.

God declared that the fear of God in Abraham's heart had now been fully manifested, he had passed the test, as it were, and we know what God did in the next verse, God provided the lamb. Verse 13, "Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son." Abraham's fear of God manifested by the fact that he was willing to let his nearest and best and closest go, he was willing to lose them for the sake of obedience to God, that's how far the fear of God goes and in the same way, beloved, your obedience or your sin show forth whether you fear God or not.

Let's take just a moment here to pause and contemplate Christ and the love of God the Father for sinners in light of this passage. You realize that when Christ was hanging on the cross, God the Father was looking on his Son and there was no one that called out to stop. No one stopped. God slew his own Son for the sake of the salvation of sinners. For

Abraham and Isaac, there was a voice to call out stop and to intercede and to intervene. When Christ was on the cross, there was no one to intervene. The dagger, as it were, the dagger of death, the dagger of the wrath of God came down on the Son of God himself and the Father didn't withhold even his Son for the sake of the salvation of sinners; the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, the fulfillment of our redemption when God withheld not even his Son from us for the sake of our redemption.

Beloved, those are great eternal realities. This is a revelation and a manifestation in Christ of the love of God, the wrath of God, and the magnificence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For those of us that God has saved and given new life to, this defines our existence. This is what we're all about. But don't you understand that when in light of those things there is no place anywhere in anyone's heart, let alone in a conceptual framework of what true Christianity is to do anything other than fear God who did that. God the Father letting his Son go because he loved the world and sent him to be the Savior of the world. God the Son enduring the punishment. God the Son willingly accepting his appointed place knowing that redemption of sinners cannot happen unless he drinks the cup and drinks it to the very last drop. These are things that throb with godly significance, that throb with that which would provoke fear, respect, awe, and reverence in response. There is no place, there is no room for a casual Christian who treats these things lightly and who lives any way they please in response to them. No room whatsoever. The power and the truth of these things transform the heart because the God-fearer pursues Scripture, pursues sanctification and settles heart commitments that, "Come what may the orientation of my life will be to obey and honor God even if it crushes me, even if He takes my dearest and best away from me, even if life does not turn out anyway like I had hoped. I'm still going to follow. I'm still going to follow Christ because what else could I do? Where else could I turn," in the words of John 6, "O Christ, where would I turn? You have words of eternal life."

Finally, you know, we've spoken about these things in strong terms today but there's a sweet closing aspect to it that I want to bring to your attention as we close here. Point 3 here this morning: the God-fearer trusts God. The God-fearer trusts God. Beloved, understand this Christian fear of God that I've been describing. We live this way in a spirit of trust, a spirit of gratitude, a spirit of thanksgiving, a spirit of optimism, that the God who offered up Christ for my salvation is surely going to give with Christ everything else that I need. If he did not withhold Christ, he won't withhold any good thing from me. And that means that God will be good to those who fear him.

Look at Proverbs 22 as we close with a series of passages in Proverbs here. Proverbs 22. This is no cold approach to life. This is no quivering in fear in a corner because of fear of the consequences. The fear of God produces confidence that he is going to bless me for responding to him, to Christ and to his word, and it trusts God for the reward so that in Proverbs 22:4 we read this, "The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life." God rewards those who fear him. God honors those who fear him. This is the most attractive life possible to live. This is what in part sustains you through difficult trials, unsolvable family conflict. This is what sustains you through a broken heart is that, "I know," as Job said, "I know my Redeemer lives. I know He's faithful. I

know that on the last day I will see Him face to face. He will not abandon me. He will bless me in the end because that's who God is and that's what He does with His people, He blesses them. And I fear Him enough to obey Him, and I fear Him enough and I know Him well enough to trust Him come what may."

This is ultimately a very positive, optimistic perspective on life. Look at chapter 14, Proverbs 14. I'm old enough now that I'm happy to be perfectly direct in my preaching. Better to offend man than to offend God. Proverbs 14:26, "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death." Do you see it? Strong confidence. This is what makes a man bold as a lion is the fear of the Lord. This is what makes a woman stand firm in Christ even when her husband despises her, rejects her, maybe walks out on her. This is what allows a woman to stand firm in the Lord is the fear of the Lord and a sense of confidence that he will be a refuge to his children. Proverbs 15:33, "The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility." One last one, Proverbs 19:23. This is ultimately what allows you to sleep at night, "The fear of the LORD leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."

Beloved, God rewards those who fear him. How does he do that? He gives us joy as we walk through life. How does he do that? Also he provides us with his providential favor. He orders life in a way that enables us to walk through with confidence, with joy, with satisfaction, with trust even when the way is hard. He orders our life in order to accomplish his will to his glory and for our good. He orders our lives so that we walk in the works that he appointed for us before the foundation of time. And he provides us with his blessing in this life, and then in the next life, at the moment of death we pass out of the presence of this sin-cursed world and enter into the presence of our blessed Lord Jesus. Better to be with Christ, better to depart and to be with Christ than to be here on earth. All of this and the storehouses of the mercies of God are infinite, the granaries are full of the way that God blesses those who fear him.

So beloved fellow Christian, God having saved you in Christ will guard you now and save you to the uttermost in the end so I call you to fear him with a humble confidence that he will reward you in the end.

Let's pray together. O my friend, only one question matters after what God's word has said to us here this morning: do you fear the Lord or not? Is your heart broken and contrite before the word of God? Do you mourn over sin and long for righteousness? Or do you walk through with an arrogant attitude just doing whatever you wish without regard to how it affects anyone else, without any regard to the vertical aspects of fearing the Lord? Each one of us needs to search our heart because God is a God who must be feared.

Dear Father, dear Son, dear Holy Spirit, we ask for nothing less than a powerful work of the Triune God in each heart to lead, to draw, to convict those that are not in Christ of their sinfulness, to lead them through the law to be, Father, that the law might be the

tutor that leads them to Christ. And Father, for those sweet, tenderhearted, sensitive Christians with a tender conscience, Father, may you strengthen them with the assurance of their salvation; may the Spirit give them just a warm confidence and bear witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, and as the children of God one day we will see Christ face to face and we will be made like Him because we will see Him as He is. Strengthen Your people, Father, and let no one walk out shaken in assurance that should not be shaken but, Father, shake to the core those who are rebels at heart and do not fear You. We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find more church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com teaching God's people God's word. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.