

The Fear That Loves

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When we gathered last Sunday, we started a study, a brief study on the fear of the Lord from Proverbs 1:7 and we're going to continue that study here this morning. Let me just remind you of what that verse says, Proverbs 1:7 says,

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

Back in 1994, John MacArthur said this, "We don't hear much about fearing God these days, even many Christians seem to feel the language of fear is too harsh or too negative. How much easier it is to speak of God's love and infinite mercy, but longsuffering, kindness and such attributes aren't the truths that are missing from most people's concept of God, the problem is that most people don't think of God as someone to be feared. They don't realize that God hates the proud and punishes evildoers. They presume on His grace. They fear what people think more than they care what God thinks. They seek their own pleasure unmindful of God's displeasure. Their conscience is defiled and in danger of vanishing. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Beloved, I think I can say without fear of contradiction that in the world and in the church as well, the situation has gotten much worse in the intervening 30 years since John wrote those words in his book "The Vanishing Conscience." In Revelation 14:7 the angel calls on mankind with a loud voice and says this, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." Later we read in Revelation 15, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed."

When you consider the topic of the fear of God and you see what Scripture has to say about it, you are in a unique way ushered into the very presence of God and you stand alone before him, and you are left to consider whether your soul fears this thrice holy God or not, whether you stand in awe of him, whether you respect him, whether you revere him or not, whether the fear of God is that which influences and motivates your entire philosophy of life or not. You cannot consider this biblical topic without it having a

searching effect on the nature of your entire soul, and for those of you that are not believing in Christ and those of you that are not saved and you know that you're cold and hard and indifferent to the things of God, you have no interest in the things of Scripture, you're here only because of human influence that makes you want to be here, I guess, understand that this God of whom we speak, there's a unique sense in which you really need to fear him.

As we said last time, for the unbeliever, the fear of God describes the terror that should arise in their souls when sinners understand that he is a threat to their well-being. Jesus said that you are to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. Jesus said you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus warned of eternal judgment in hell for those that refuse the call of the gospel and that die in their sins, the awfulness of the contemplation of eternal judgment should cause anyone not in Christ to tremble at what is their immediate future should they die in that condition. It's a terrifying thing, Scripture says, to fall into the hands of the living God, and it's the responsibility of the true church, it's the responsibility of elders to warn people about that and teach them the fear of God and not give them false comfort and false peace when there is no peace. Jeremiah, I believe it was Jeremiah that spoke against the false prophets who said, "Peace, Peace," when there is no peace. And the more the church caters to the desires of carnal men, the more the theme of the fear of God is going to be silenced because this is not what carnal man wants to hear. Carnal man wants God to help him. Carnal man wants God to be a friend to him. Carnal man wants nothing to do with a God who is authoritative and asserts his prerogative of holiness over their souls. Well, we've got to come to grips with what Scripture really says and the fact that people want God to be a particular way doesn't make God that way, it's simply an idol in their own mind. So for people like that, the fear of God describes the terror that arises when sinners understand that he is a threat to their well-being, and so the holiness of God should cause sinners, in one sense, to withdraw from him out of fear and concern about what he will do when he has their souls in his hands because it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

So let me put it this way: that gives us one segment of the proper understanding of the fear of God. He is a God to be feared. He is a God to be afraid of if you are not in Christ. There is no escaping that fact. But you keep reading in Scripture and you could say if that's all that you knew about what Scripture says about the fear of God, and by the way, just seeing some of your faces just reminds me this motivates us to evangelism, to warn people about this. I'm no model of evangelism, I'm very sad to say, but you know, as we study and understand the fear of God and we realize the danger that sinners are in, it should motivate us to evangelize them, to warn them about their condition and to call them to Christ lest they actually fall into the hands of God in that terrifying sense, unforgiven, with no eternal hope but nothing but eternal destruction ahead in their lives. You know, beloved, honestly, how can we withhold the gospel of Jesus Christ from people when they are in that condition and they're facing that threat? I mean, our view of evangelism should be motivated as well by a sense of the fear of God, if not for our souls for the sake of those that we speak to. How can we withhold this and not warn them of the danger that lies just ahead? The fear of God properly understood would motivate us to

share Christ more freely and more boldly looking past the momentary earthly rejection of people to whom we speak for the broader sake of honoring God and for the good of their eternal souls. The fear of God should motivate us in evangelism as well.

Having said that, as we contemplate that you could come to this conclusion. You talk about the fear of God and you emphasize those things and you could say, "Well, maybe we should all just run and hide, then. If God is like that and the fear is like that, then why do we gather together with any sense of hope?" And yet as you continue to read and study in Scripture, you find another dimension of the fear of God being put forth before us. For example in Psalm 112:1 you read this where it says, "Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed." Now that's different. You know, we talk about the fear of God being one who is entitled to a terrifying fear and yet here is Scripture using the same word for fear and saying a man who fears God is blessed and that there is blessing upon him. On the one hand Scripture describes the terror of judgment, and then on the other hand the Bible says the fear of the Lord produces delight and blessing. This is something of an enigma.

Then as you continue to read in Scripture, you find something else that Scripture says about it. Turn to the book of 1 John 4 in your New Testament. 1 John 4 as we try to see the fullness of what Scripture says on this magnificent theme. 1 John 4, beginning in verse 15 as it speaks to Christians. Scripture says this, 1 John 4:15, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

So we have this broad teaching of Scripture that says on the one hand, God is a God to be feared with a sense of terror, there is another sense in which Scripture describes the fear of God producing delight and blessing, and then there's this other perspective that says for Christians there's no cause for fear at all. Now you know, when you first look at this on the surface, and I remember when I was first studying this theme many years ago, you could almost come to the conclusion or ask the question at least, is the Bible hopelessly confusing on this point? Why the mixed signals? Are we terrorized one moment and then we trust him the next? Maybe it depends upon your performance and the way you're living life; you have your quiet time in the morning, one morning, there's no fear but if you miss your quiet time then there's cause for terror. Is it like that? Are we in and out of a frightful fear of God and then sometimes we feel confidence? How are we to understand this?

Well, let me tell you this, beloved, that untangling this apparent knot, k-n-o-t, untangling this knot actually establishes the framework for all of Christian life and all of the way that we respond to God at all. Understand this, and as we looked at that passage in 1 John I highlighted the fact that John was speaking to Christians at that particular point when he

wrote, understand this, that salvation, true biblical salvation, God in Christ having delivered you from sin and judgment and adopted you into his family through repentance and faith in Christ alone, true salvation, true salvation based not on your works but on faith in Christ, true salvation like that, it changes the way in which God is to be feared. There is still a proper realm for fear but it's a different kind of fear than what we talked about last week, and when we understand the work of Christ and what he's accomplished on our behalf, we can understand that plainly. When we speak about the fear of God for unbelievers, we speak about it in terms of the terror that they should have that they are under the wrath of God temporally, and that they face the eternal wrath of God if they die in their unrepentant state. They will be judged and they will be punished eternally and if you are not in Christ, that is what is just ahead of you, an eternal, painful, real, everlasting judgment at the hands of God for your sins and rebellion and deadness toward him.

But beloved, the very nature of Christianity tells us that Christ came and stood in our place in order to deliver his people from that very judgment; that all of that awful judgment fell on the Savior as our substitute when he died for us at the cross; that Christ absorbed the wrath of God, that he drank the cup in full down to the very last drop; that he bore every stripe that should have fallen on our backs; that he bore the searing pain of judgment that should have been ours; that Christ suffered for us, that Christ bore our sins in his body on the cross and that he absorbed that judgment because he loved us, because he cared for us, that he came in order to save us from that punishment that we deserve, so much so that the book of Romans 8:1 can say this, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." So that when we think about the judgment that produces fear in the hearts of the unbelievers, we take a deep breath like you do when you just miss a really horrible car accident, "Ah! Oh, I'm safe." You stare into the fires of hell as a Christian and you go, "Ah! That should've been me. Ah, but in Christ, phew, I'm safe." So that you are delivered from that cringing fear of terror and yet we find that Scripture calls Christians to fear God in some manner. 1 Peter 2:17 says, "Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." Fear God, 1 Peter 2:17 says, the same message that we have seen from Proverbs 1:7.

So how are we to reconcile this? Let me just state it plainly here. God's people, true Christians in other words, fear God in a different way. In keeping with 1 John 4, we do not fear the punishment of God for our sins because we understand that Christ intervened and took that punishment for us. He delivered us from that punishment so that we do not live in fear of what will happen to us when we die. We are confident. We are at peace. We are at rest. Not for anything in ourselves but because we trust Christ eternally. We trust our brother in heaven to take us to our Father. We trust our brother in heaven to care for everything that pertains to our estate. We trust Christ. We trust that his perfect life and his death and his resurrection on our behalf satisfies everything that God requires at our hands and from our soul, and so that in Christ we are safe, we are secure, everything has been accomplished for us.

So we don't fear judgment from God and we don't fear him on account of judgment being that which is in our future but we fear him in a different way, and let me just summarize this and then we'll find these things in Scripture. Beloved, if you are a Christian, you

should and you must fear God in this way, you should still reverence and respect him in this way. For the believer in Christ, giving you the definition now if you're taking notes, for the believer in Christ the fear of God is the wholehearted life of humble worship you give to him in response to his saving mercy to you. Let me say this again, I ought to repeat it a half dozen times to do whatever is possible to get it into your souls, into your minds in a way that you respond to it as the Holy Spirit helps you. For the believer the fear of God is the wholehearted life of humble worship you give to him in response to his saving mercy to you.

Listen, beloved, if you are in Christ, there is a life-changing reality that ought to affect all of your priorities and all of your life affections, and having entered into this realm of thought through the prism of the fear of God that unbelievers have, realizing that you were delivered from the judgment that provokes that fear in the unsaved, and you realize that God has been merciful to you, God has been kind to you, God has been patient to you, God has loved you, God has been merciful to you, God has not imposed upon you the judgment you deserved, in other words, that should have a revolutionary impact on your soul. That should cause you to look at God with such gratitude, with such thankfulness, with such profound reverence that God in Christ saved you from what you deserved that you say, "I owe my whole life to Him. Love so amazing demands my life and my all." There's no other response. If you don't somehow see that principle, if you don't somehow have that in your heart as a professing Christian, you should examine yourself to see if you're a Christian at all because one who understands the danger from which Christ delivered him can do nothing but respond in a way that says, "Jesus, You have my all. I love You. You saved my soul. My whole eternity is different as a result of Your kindness to me." You say with the Apostle Paul, "O Lord, what would You have me to do?"

So the fear of God provokes in the believer a wholehearted life response of humble worship. We're going to see this in three particular ways to define this fear. What we're going to see as we go through Scripture this morning is that the believer's fear of God, it has three dimensions to it. First of all, and I'm just going to summarize this overview fashion and then we'll look at it one by one. First of all, the believer's fear of God is a fear that loves God. It's a fear that loves God. Secondly, we're going to see that the believer's fear of God is a fear that obeys God. That obeys God and that takes it out of the realm of mere sentiment and addresses the volition, addresses the will, "I fear God enough," the Christian says, "I fear Him enough to obey Him, to obey His Scripture, to submit to His word, to submit to the authorities that He's put over me because that's part of what God instructs me to do." It's a fear that loves, it's a fear that obeys, and you could say, thirdly, as we'll see it's a fear that lives. It's a fear that lives. All of life is defined in response to this fear of God and so it influences us in every direction.

Let's look, first of all, at this concept that this is a fear that loves. It is a fear that loves and there's a little principle of biblical revelation that is really helpful to understand here at this point. Proverbs 1 was written by Solomon some time, you know, 900-1000 BC, some time in that century of time, without getting too precise about it. Understand that when Solomon wrote the Proverbs and when he wrote Proverbs 1:7 in particular, that there had

been centuries of prior revelation from God that he was building on. It's the idea of progressive revelation. God did not give us all of the Bible all at once, at one point in time all 66 books of the English Bible came down from heaven. It wasn't like that. God spoke to Moses some 1,400 years before the coming of Christ and then through other prophets and through David and Solomon and latter prophets up to the time of Christ, and then Christ came, you know, after 1,500 years of revelation going on, written revelation, and then the apostles wrote for another century. Over the course of 1,600 years, God's word is coming over the course of time and what you must understand at this point is that the revelation that came later by the later writers of Scripture, was building on and was perfectly consistent with the revelation that had come earlier. We know that to be true because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All Scripture comes from God and so while it came through some 40 different men over the course of 1,500 years, the same Holy Spirit was directing and guiding it so that what they wrote was the very word of God. The Spirit worked through their human personalities, their life providential experiences, God shaped them so that as the Spirit moved on them he worked through their personality to produce the word of God. Very important to understand that. Well, with Solomon and the Proverbs, when Solomon was writing the Proverbs he had the whole corpus of the Mosaic law to draw upon. Solomon was building on what Moses had written. He wasn't writing in opposition to it. He wasn't changing it. He was taking it further, developing it, working it out even further, and that's so important as we consider the fear of God.

Turn to the book of Deuteronomy now. You see, we can't just look at Proverbs 1:7 and kind of interpret it in isolation and decide what we think, what our opinion is of what the fear of God involves. We can't do that. We have to understand it in the broader context of the revelation that God has given, and in Deuteronomy we find that as God's people were about to enter into the Promised Land, the 40 years of wilderness wandering were basically over, Moses is preaching this sermon in Deuteronomy preparing them to enter into the land, he would not go with them, they would go in under the leadership of Caleb and Joshua, and Moses in his parting word, "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord for his word." Moses in his parting word to the people of Israel tells them and prepares them spiritually for their life in the Promised Land and that's what's going on in Deuteronomy. And what we find is that Moses calls the people repeatedly to fear God, and the words that he gives and how he communicates to them gives us great biblical divinely-inspired commentary on what it means to fear God so that in Deuteronomy 5, you can turn there, we're going to look at a number of different passages now.

We'll be at Deuteronomy 5:28 where we read this. Moses is speaking to the people. He's reminding them of what happened earlier in the national history and he said, "The LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!'" God says, "Oh that the people of Israel would fear Me," and parallel to that, "that they would keep all My commandments always." You see that the fear of God as God explains it through Moses, the fear of God is linked to

obedience to his commandments. The commandments, the commandments which we just finished studying over the past year, as God revealed his moral law in a unique way in Exodus 20 and the accompanying legislation that surrounded that, that's what God is referring to. "Oh that people would fear Me enough to embrace My moral law and live it out and obey it, and not give Me mere lip service but actually live in response to My word." That's the fear of God.

Look over at chapter 6, the first two verses. We'll make a couple of passes through Deuteronomy 6 here. Deuteronomy 6, "'Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that," here's the purpose of all of it, "so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged." Look down at verse 5, in that context, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Beloved, as we see God, and there's a lot more to go here, as we see God explaining the fear of God, you see it expressed, you see it kind of furthered in the concepts of obedience to his word and you see it in a response of love and affection that is given to him that is wholehearted.

Verse 5, look at it again with me, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jesus would later draw upon this in the gospels and say, "This is the sum of all the commandments. This is the first and great commandment of them all, that you would love the LORD your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind." Well, to fear God for his people is to obey him and to love him, and to love him in a way that is wholehearted. You see, Scripture from the very beginning, Scripture would have nothing of what passes for modern Christianity today where people simply make their devotion to God limited to a Sunday service, to Christmas and Easter, and then live however they want to all of the rest of the week and all of the rest of the year. Scripture knows nothing of that. Scripture knows nothing of the people of God living in a way that is totally disregarding to him except occasional nods to corporate worship. Fearing God is a matter of your whole life, your whole heart, your whole soul, all of your might, it says, and we have to emphasize that because this is what God emphasizes.

You see this as you continue to read on in Deuteronomy remembering that Solomon was building on this as he spoke in Proverbs 1. Look at Deuteronomy 10:12 and 13, "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?" You see, beloved, you fear God. Fear is expressed in terms of obedience to his word, loving him and loving him with all of your heart, soul, strength of mind, and you can even extend it out even further with that final clause there, loving him and fearing him in faith. Verse 13, "commanding you today for your good," you know, and as a believer embraces the fear of God, he embraces this duty of reverence and respect to him which is manifested in a life of obedience to his

word, in a life that loves the person of God, loves as we see it in the fullness of subsequent revelation, loves the Triune God Father, Son and Holy Spirit who alone is holy, holy, holy, and loves him in a way of faith that is confident that the God who saved us has our good in mind; that as I respond to God in this godly fear, he will bless, guard, keep and protect me so that it is certain that he'll do good for me in the end. All of those elements are involved in a true fear of God. You revere him. You obey him. You love him. And you do so with a confidence that he has your good in mind come what may. It's a fear that loves God like that.

So beloved, what you see is this, is that what we saw last week, God speaking to the way that sinners should fear him, is distinct from what he says to his people about fearing him, and that distinction must be kept very much in mind. The fear that sinners have is an isolating fear, "I'm alone and I'm in danger." The fear of a believer says, "I'm not alone. I'm not afraid of final judgment but this God who saved me and delivered me from that, oh, He's awesome, He's majestic. I submit to Him. This God who saved me in Christ, He's a merciful and loving God and all of my heart belongs to Him. I fear Him like that. I respect Him." And this fear speaks further and says, you know, if Christ loved me and gave himself up for me, I start to understand in a Romans 8 kind of way, if he gave himself for me, if he gave his life to save my soul, he's going to give me everything else that is necessary for my good so that nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So there is obedience, there is love, and there is confidence in this fear of God. Our fear of God is inseparable from love, obedience and faith. That's really important to understand, and what you start to see is that what Scripture says about the fear of God for a believer makes a comprehensive claim on all of your life, external and internal, that there is nothing in life that is not influenced by this response of fearing God. So I ask you, beloved, just as a point of introspection and application, do you know anything, do you know something about this in your life? Do you see some of those impulses in your heart even if they are imperfect and not fully developed yet? Do you see something like that? Are you afraid of sinning because you don't want to offend this God who's been so good to you, and you realize that sin is a violation of fear, love and confidence? Do you fear God enough that when you do sin, and there is no man Scripture says in all the earth that does not sin, do you fear him enough that when you do sin you go to him with a repentant broken heart and say, "God, I've sinned against You again. God, I ask for Your mercy again. God, I ask You to be gracious to me again because this sin while it clings to me and it grieves me to the point of tears, O God, it grieves me so much in my heart that I can't be free from this, that I still am entrapped in this besetting sin of mine, God, it's not what I want. I reject it. I hate it. Be merciful to me and help me again. Forgive me again." Is there something in your heart that responds to the sin in your life like that, with abhorrence rather than with love and embracing it? Because this is what the Spirit of God produces in all those that he truly saves. There's something of this that is placed in your heart in a seed form at the moment of your conversion and it grows forth from there.

And I can't tell you whether you truly love and fear God like this or not. I can only raise the standard before you and call upon you to examine your heart. If you see affections

like that in your heart, it is a sure sign that God has truly saved you, that you are truly safe and secure in Christ because those heart desires, those enduring heart desires are not natural. They don't come from Satan. They don't come from the world. They don't come from the boastful pride of life. These heart desires come from above and it's part of the gift that God gives from above when he causes you to be born again. You see, and this is totally different from saying, "Well, I need to try harder." This is totally different from living a life of church established regulations and rules. It's about a wholehearted life of loving humble worship.

Do you see that, beloved? That's the understanding that we're after. That's the standard that we are applying toward. It's the motions of your heart and the way that you respond to him, you know, and I understand there's all kinds of legalistic materials that are out there to try to tell families how to live their lives and they'll regulate when you feed your kids and what kind of discipline you do, and how you teach them to use their silverware and all of that stuff. That has nothing to do with the fear of God, beloved. That is not what we're talking about at all. You can regulate your children and try to get them to conform to respectable manner of external conduct but that is not the same thing as teaching them to fear God, to fear God with love, obedience and trust. It's not the same thing and the fact that parents might be able to condition their children to a particular kind of outward deportment is not necessarily an indication that those children are being taught to fear God in the way that Scripture decides. We can't simply treat this as an external matter.

You fear God by setting your highest affections on him and we've looked at his passage often but I want you to turn again to Matthew 10 with me. Matthew 10. On this Mother's Day, fathers, mothers, it's fitting for me to say this by way of encouragement to you as you cultivate the heart of your child, to cultivate and impart to them this fear of God, understand that that is far more than external conduct that you impart to them, that to regulate the outer man without speaking to their heart about loving, fearing and obeying Christ is to miss the whole point of raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We must understand this particularly as our society tears at families, tears at children, whistles for them to come over to all kinds of deviant lifestyles. There's a limit to how much you can protect them from that. Sooner or later they're going to grow up, sooner or later they're going to be exposed to it. Isolating them only protects them for so long. The surest protection is to do what you can and to pray for them that God would impart this kind of fear to their hearts because the fear of God is what turns people away from evil. And you know, as much as we love our children at the church and having them in the worship center, beloved, and I love the fact and I congratulate sincerely the parents that are so faithful to bring their children like they do, but understand that you must be teaching them day by day consistently throughout the week and months and years of their lives what happens on Sunday and Tuesday is only equipping you for the real work of imparting these things to your children. It is not the responsibility of the church to train your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is yours if you're the parent. Churches get blamed for a lot of wayward stuff that is not their fault, not that there's any accusations like that at Truth, I'm just speaking more generally.

Anyway, with that family dynamic in mind, Matthew 10:37. You fear God by setting your highest affections on him. Matthew 10:37. How do we fear God? We love him supremely, we love him above every other earthly affection. That's the fear of God. That's the real thing. That's the fear that lets people come and go. Verse 37, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Oh, the pain of reading that. Do you see how many times he says it, "not worthy of Me, not worthy of Me, not worthy of Me." You know, a truly regenerate heart, one who truly belongs to Christ, that's the most grievous thing that could be said about a believing heart. To the believer for Christ to say, "not worthy of Me," crushing to think that the Lord would have that assessment. And so we want to fear him, we want to love him, we want to trust him, we want to obey him, and part of the way that we do that is that we establish in our hearts that there is no human life that is more precious to us than the Lord Jesus Christ, "And if I have to follow Christ alone and leave my family behind," the believer says, "I will. If my father calls me to abandon Christ, I say, 'Dear father, with all love and respect, no, I cannot do that.'" If a child goes wayward, the parent says, "That grieves me but I'm going to love Christ and continue walking with Christ no matter what." In other words, the fear of God is a fear that loves him and you love him over all earthly relationships and even over your own self. Christ says, "Take up your cross and follow Me." The cross was an instrument of death when he said that. It was an instrument of execution. He bids a man come to himself and die. "All of my ambition, Lord, dies at the foot of the cross. I now belong to You. Take me, shape me, use me however You wish." There's an exchange, "My life for Yours."

That's fearing God and so you see that this fear of God, this love of which we speak could never make someone casual or careless in the presence of God. Understanding the grace of God does not make one flippant in his approach to life. As we prayed earlier, this does not cause us to presume on grace, it makes us all the more eager and desiring of obeying and being conformed to his image because we fear him because we love him. We want to be like him rather than persevering and continuing in sin. That's what we want. That's what fear does. So this is a fear that does not presume on grace, it's a fear that seeks to develop that grace that has been given to us in our personal sanctification.

So it's high, it's lofty, it's challenging, but at the core the true believer says, "Yes! That is exactly what I want! Oh that I only lived that way more!" Because it's a fear that loves. Secondly, it's a fear that obeys. It's a fear that obeys. I'm glad we have one more message on this for next Sunday because I can't exhaust it all here today. But secondly, it's a fear that obeys and kind of, you know, where there's overlap in what we're saying here today as I go back and forth between my points in different Scripture texts, but the fear of God for the believer is a fear that – watch this – it humbly embraces the responsibility to obey him. It's a fear that humbly embraces the responsibility to obey him. Notice that I did not say it's a fear that does, in fact, perfectly obey because there is, you know, we're all in the process here, we're all growing in Christ-likeness, those of us that are in Christ, but we haven't attained perfection yet; that's what Paul said in Philippians 3, "Not that I've obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on. I embrace the responsibility of growing in Christ. That's what I want."

So it's a fear that obeys from the heart even if that obedience is imperfect. God expressed it this way in Isaiah 66:2, "to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Humble. Contrite. Broken over sin, in other words. Who trembles at my word. Who embraces the majesty and authority of the word of God as that which is to be obeyed even if my personal inclinations or my prior understandings were contrary to it. If there's a conflict between the way I think and what the word of God says, the way I think has to change. That's the heart of a true believer.

Paul said it this way in Philippians 2, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Now that you're saved, work out the implications of that with a sense of fear and trembling before God because, you know, even though we're not as Christians we're not going to face the Great White Throne Judgment and be cast into hell with Satan and all of the fallen angels, we still are going to stand before him and give an account of our lives. For those of us that stumble and fall, which is all of us, we tremble at that. And someone might say, "Well, why fear and trembling, preacher? You've just spoken with your limited eloquence, you have spoken about how we've been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, all of our sins are forgiven, God accepts us as righteous for the sake of His Son," that's justification in a nutshell. "God accepts us as righteous for the sake of His Son received by faith alone. He pardons all of our iniquity, casts them into the depths of the sea, they are as far from us as the east is from the west, then why fear and trembling, preacher? Are we not reconciled to God?" Well, fear and trembling in this sense, my friends, we fear and tremble because we revere the majesty of God. We take his salvation seriously. We see something of the glory of Christ, two natures in one person, fully God, fully man in the one person of Jesus Christ. We marvel at the wonder of that. We marvel at the death, burial, resurrection, ascension and soon return of Jesus Christ. We realize that these things are glorious majestic realities far beyond human comprehension, far beyond human existence, and we respect that and we revere him, and we take these things seriously. We're not interested in an approach to spiritual life that just puts on a veneer of righteousness as a performance before men. These things matter to us. These things are why we live. Christ is the one for whom we give our existence, our loyalties, our love. With that kind of fear and trembling we fear him so much so that we say, "Though none go with me, I still will follow. Though none go with me, I still will follow. Though none go with me, I still will follow. No turning back. No turning back."

It's that kind of fear and in an earthly temporal sense, we fear because we understand that God will discipline us for prolonged unrepentant sin in our lives. Let me just read Hebrews 12:9 and 10 to you, "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but [God] disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." Look, you know, people can mock Christians, "Oh, so you're afraid of God?" Do you know what? I am. I fear sinning and having my sin exposed. I fear the consequences that would come. Even as a redeemed Christian if I, you know, if I pursued a course of sin at this point in my life, I'm afraid of what God would do to me and I'm not ashamed to tell you that. What I'd be ashamed of is being afraid of you enough to say, "No, I'm not really afraid," so that you'll think, you

know, so you'll think of me rightly in a carnal way, you say to your coworkers, your neighbors, your unbelieving family. "I fear God more than I fear you, that's for sure." And we fear out of love, out of respect, out of reverence for God, out of that kind of heart attitude, beloved. We fear lest we inject an element of defiance into our relationship with Christ. After he laid his life down for me, after he loved me and gave himself up for me, after he thought of me and my sin as he suffered on the cross for me, I am afraid, I am afraid of the wickedness that remains in my heart that I would give room for that to inject defiance and indifference to Christ. I'm afraid of that because I realize what a shame that would bring upon my own head that I would respond to my glorious Lord like that. I'm afraid of that.

So we fear God in this fear that obeys, we fear God like an earthly child fears his own father. I had a father with a belt. I don't know if any of you did but he had a belt. I was afraid of that. We fear God like an earthly child fears his father. My dear old dad, God rest his soul if only he could. We are secure in the love of God just as a healthy Christian child in a Christian family, I should say, is secure in the love of his father. We trust the goodness of our father and yet we fear in a sense that we want to honor that relationship. Look, you know, we all fall short of this but a true Christian wants to honor God, wants to honor Christ. Any other thought is abhorrent. It's impossible to contemplate not living a life that honors Christ if you're a true Christian. How could anyone think that way? How could anyone live that way, more importantly? He's worthy of our love. He's worthy of our respect. He's worthy of our obedience. We know something of our own heart that we're prone to wander. "Lord, I feel I'm prone to leave the God I love." So we fear him enough to have the spirit and the prayer in our heart, "Here's my heart. O take and seal it. Seal it for Your courts above." Because we want to honor that relationship.

So, yes, you'd better believe we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We see the majesties of Christ, we see the majesty of the gift of salvation, we see the majesty of one day giving an account for how we've lived in response to it and we fear enough to love, enough to obey, third point, we fear enough to live. Third point, the fear that lives. The fear that lives, point number 3. What we see in everything that we've said here, we're just kind of summarizing it up now, the fear of God is a fundamental disposition toward all of life. This is your worldview. This is the perspective that informs everything else about the way that you live, about every decision that you make, every career decision, every life-mate decision, everything that you make is informed by this fundamental perspective.

Look at Deuteronomy 6 remembering that we have one more week to go on this. Deuteronomy 6, beginning in verse 4, illustrating the point that the fear of God is a fundamental disposition toward all of life. Verse 4, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart," on your inner man, they shall inform your conscience; your conscience shall be guided by what God has said in his word and your standard and understanding of what is right and what is wrong informed by the constant meditation on the word of God. Verse 7, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of

them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." The word of God informing you from the moment you wake up in the morning until you lie down at night, informing, animating all of the conversations that you have throughout the day.

You see, beloved, you live in the fear of God as the ongoing worship of your life. A Christian, a true Christian understands that Christ saved him to set him apart for a consecrated life of love and obedience to him, and the things of this world grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Beloved, that biblical background tells us and informs the meaning of what Proverbs 1:7 says, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and so only one question matters at this point, only one question is at stake as we close here today: do you, do you, do you know this, this fear of the Lord? May Jesus Christ himself give you a deep repentance that leads to a profound fear of the Lord to the glory of God and for your eternal good.

Let's pray together. Beloved, Scripture says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon." I call you to turn to Christ, my friend, today. Today is the day of your salvation. It is time for you to forsake your way, to reject the world, and to come to Christ. Man and woman, boy and girl, I call you to Christ as we close.

Dear Father, may You show that compassion upon those whose hearts are inclined to turn to You. May You be gracious to the wandering Christian who has stumbled into sin. Father, may this concept, this biblical teaching on the fear of the Lord be that which motivates him to true repentance, and just as the father ran to the prodigal when he first saw him on the horizon returning from his time of sin, O God, may You run to the Christians who are turning in their hearts to You with repentance even now. Lead us and help us and keep us in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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