

The God Who Must Be Feared, #2

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Bible Text: Proverbs 1:7

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Proverbs 1:7 as we saw last time says,

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

And we said last time that there are really 2 senses in which we need to understand the fear of the Lord. It depends on whether you're talking about how an unbeliever should fear God or how a believer should fear God and last time as we looked at the reality of the fear of God for an unbeliever we said that the fear of God describes the terror that arises when sinners understand that he is a threat to their well-being. It is the greatest of delusions for sinners to treat God lightly, to think as though he were some kind of cosmic grandfather who will benignly forgive all of their sins regardless of their response to Christ or any sense of conviction from the law. That's not true. The Bible says in unambiguous language that it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God and it's not a terrifying thing for us as believers who have been reconciled to him through Christ so that could only mean that sinners are going to be terrified when they stand before a holy God and give an account for their sins and their rebellion and their indifference to him. So there is terror that arises from the holiness of God that should cause sinners to withdraw from him in fear and the Scripture describes that. They fear because God has the prerogative to punish them in hell and so we said that God is a God who must be feared. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Now, what does that mean for us? If it's a terrifying thing and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and all of these things are true, then let's all just...if that's all we knew we would say, "Well, let's run and hide. Let's find a place to get away," if that was all that there was to the fear of God and understanding this theme from Scripture. But look at Psalm 112:1. It is very, very important to consider the fullness of Scripture's teaching on the fear of God if you are going to have a proper understanding of the whole. If we only spoke about the fear of the Lord in terms of the terror that arises in sinners in his holy presence, we would not be able to make sense at all of a verse like Psalm 112:1 which says this, "Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments." Well, wait a minute, we've been talking about abject terror and here Scripture speaks of delight and blessing and praise. This does not

seem to fit at all with what we were just saying and so Scripture describes the man as blessed who fears the Lord.

Well, it gets even more confusing at a superficial level when you go into the New Testament. Look at 1 John 4, if you would. 1 John 4. I'm just trying to give you a sense of the tension that Scripture creates when we read certain passages and try to synthesize them into a harmonious whole. In 1 John 4:16, a passage I briefly alluded to on Sunday, the Bible says, "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." Well, you see the tension in these different passages? On the one hand, it's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God; on the second hand, it says that the man who fears the Lord is blessed; and then on your third hand, it says there is no reason for fear at all. Christians have no fear because fear involves punishment. What are we to make of this? Is the Bible hopelessly confusing on a central issue that it says is the beginning of wisdom? How are we to put all of this together? Maybe we go back and forth kind of like a yo-yo and one minute you're terrorized at the presence of the Lord and yet you trust him the next and the fear goes away. Or maybe it depends upon your performance. You know how it goes: you have your quiet time and there is no fear because you have done your part but if you miss your quiet time or, heaven forbid, that you would have a struggle with sin, then boom! and the terror is back. Does that sound like anything remotely related to Scripture? And yet what do all these things mean?

Well, let me say this, beloved: untangling this knot of biblical interpretation will unfold vistas of spiritual understanding and establish a framework for your entire Christian life. I've said this in other contexts and completely unrelated themes and passages that when you come to something that seems particularly important and yet particularly difficult in Scripture, the call of God at that point, what we need to do when we encounter these kinds of conundrums is that we need to stop and be patient and simply go through things step-by-step until we are able to see the completed whole and not turn away in frustration and not get impatient with the fact that Scripture requires some effort to study. You know, the Apostle Peter said that there were some things, and this is the Apostle Peter writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit saying that there are some things in the writings of Paul that are difficult to understand. Proverbs 2 talks about that if you want wisdom, you have to mine for it like gold; you have to dig deep. So if we come expecting a lot of blessing with minimal effort, God's word isn't going to be open for us because God doesn't lightly dispense the treasures of the riches of his knowledge. He calls upon us to study them, to reflect and meditate upon them and when we embrace that challenge and we work through things, we find on the other end, just as those who have tunneled through mountains in Pennsylvania or Colorado, it seems like you've got a big obstacle in front of you but when you work through it, there are a lot of beautiful things on the other side and there is a way through these things that we are going to find and I trust and indeed I know, that this will be and an encouragement to you all and so I am very excited to share these things with you.

So, just a recap on hand number 1: terror. On hand number 2: the fear of the Lord brings blessing and delight. Then on the third hand: there is perfect love that casts out fear and fear involves punishment and all of that. How are we to bring these things together? Well, mark this one simple point: salvation, being reconciled to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, when a person is redeemed, when he is born again, salvation changes the way in which God is to be feared and I will spend the rest of the evening unpacking what I mean by that. As Christians, we do not fear eternal punishment like sinners should if they knew the truth. We don't fear eternal punishment because the Lord Jesus Christ stood in our place at the cross, bore the weight and the guilt of our sin in his body and endured and satisfied the stroke of God's justice upon him at the cross as our representative, as our substitute in our place and so the judgment of God upon our sin has been dispensed on someone outside of us and when you received the Lord Jesus Christ, his righteousness was credited to your account, your sin was judged, as it were, on the cross and there was a great exchange that took place. He became sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him and therefore there is no fear of eternal punishment for a true Christian. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

So we have to divide the word of God correctly. When it speaks of the fear of God involving terror and judgment, we realize that it is not speaking to those who have been reconciled to God and born into his family. He does not pour his wrath out upon his own children and we have become his children through faith in Christ. So we have been delivered from that terrifying judgment and the accompanying terrifying fear that that judgment provokes because Christ has received the judgment on our behalf and has shared the gift of salvation with us therefore we are secure and we are unafraid when things like hell and judgment and wrath are discussed. We realize that that has been settled on our behalf by a substitute, by a Lamb slain for sinners who believe in him.

So we don't fear God in that way and yet, as we saw on Sunday, the Bible does call us to fear the Lord. How do we reconcile this? What does that mean then if the worst of fear is not there? And you know, some false religions that go very broadly and loosely under the name of Christianity like to still hold the threat and the sword of eternal judgment over people that they would recognize as Christians as a means to whip them into earthly obedience. That's wrong. That's not right. You don't manipulate people and you don't motivate people with falsehoods and it's a falsehood to think and suggest that a true Christian could still somehow lose his salvation which Christ paid for at the cross and still end up in the eternal flames of hell. That is a lie. That is wrong. That is a serious mistake. So when we talk about fearing the Lord, we are not trying to hold the guillotine of eternal judgment over the neck of a Christian, rather we want to understand what Scripture means by that so that we could respond in an appropriate way.

So we come to this conclusion that I'm going to support with 3 main points here this evening: the people of God, true Christians, fear God differently than sinners do. For you as a believer in Christ here this evening, here's what the fear of God means, here's what it means for me, for every true Christian: for us, and I'm going to give you a definition if

you want to limber up your writing hand, for us, the fear of God means this, it is the wholehearted life of humble worship you render in response to his saving mercy to you. I'll say that again: for the believer, the fear of God is the wholehearted life of humble worship you render to him in response to his saving mercy to you. Now, someone might be tempted to say, "Wouldn't it just be a lot easier to just call this reverential awe and be over with the thing?" Well, no, actually it wouldn't be because reverential awe is not nearly as helpful as what the full teaching of Scripture is. And here's the thing, beloved, and here's what I really...I'm going on a tangent here. We have to study Scripture for ourselves. We have to be Bereans. We have to go beyond merely repeating what we have heard other people say. Even if many people have said it, if it's not helpful, we need to examine the Scriptures more closely and come to that which is helpful. As I said on Sunday, most of us have heard multiple teachers call the fear of God something like reverential awe but I'm sure that if you and I, if you and I had a private conversation and talked about that for more than 60 seconds and asked each other some probing questions, we'd say, "Well, I don't know what that means then." Well, if it's not useful then let's not use that as our term just because a lot of other people do and let's get down to something that's actually helpful that you can build your life around. We don't want to just simply walk in the footsteps that others that have tracked in the snow if they're walking into broken ice where they have fallen in. We want to follow in the footsteps of where the word of God leads us and that's what we're going to do here this evening.

So I want to give you 3 aspects of the fear of God that marks the life of a believer. This is the way that you and I should fear God and you are going to find that this is greatly clarifying, I trust, as we just look at a number of scriptural passages. When you start to dig into it, it just starts to unfold before you like a beautiful spring meadow lined with all kinds of beautiful fragrant wildflowers. You say, "Wow, this is beautiful. I want to walk down this path." Well, that's what the study of the fear of God does for you. It makes you appreciate him and it gives you something that you can build your life on rather than just a cliché.

Well, let's get to it then, shall we? The first point, what does this fear of God look like? First of all, it is the fear that loves. It is the fear that loves. As we're going to see, when the Scriptures talk about the fear of God for his people, it virtually equates it with loving God and we're going to see that and you can start turning your way back to the book of Deuteronomy, the 5th book of the Bible, which of course, we looked at briefly a few months ago here on Tuesday evenings. You will recall that the first 5 books of the Bible are the book of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. And what we said when we studied the book of Moses was that those first 5 books of the Bible were the foundation of Scripture. Everything else in the Bible is built on those first 5 books of the Bible and that's a very important principle to understand. Narrowing it down to our context for this evening, watch this: what God said to his people through Moses sets the context for how we are to understand the fear of the Lord. It lays the foundation for this entire scriptural theme and when you read things later in Proverbs and Psalms and Ecclesiastes, those later writers are assuming and building upon the theme of the fear of God that was laid out in great detail in the book of Moses. And in Moses, in his book,

fearing God is used interchangeably with loving God and I'm going to show you several passages so you can see this for yourself.

Look at Deuteronomy 5 now and we'll look at verse 28 as kind of the starting point. Deuteronomy 5:28. Moses in Deuteronomy is preaching his final sermon, as it were, to the people of Israel before he would depart and Joshua would lead them into the Promised Land and in Deuteronomy 5:28, he says to the people, "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.'" Then he says in verse 29, "'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!'" Notice that he speaks of the fear of God, equates it with obedience and makes it a heart matter for the people. That's very important for you to see: to fear God is expressed in obedience to his commandments.

Well, as you go on in Deuteronomy, there is something that is very interesting that starts to take place in the verbs that Moses uses. Look at Deuteronomy 6:1, he says, "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 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." Now, look down in verse 4, he says, "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." So as he continues to speak about obedience to the commands of God, he moves from the idea of fear over to the concept of love and starts to use them interchangeably throughout the ensuing chapters of the book of Deuteronomy so that they become virtually inseparable.

Look over at Deuteronomy 10. They are used side-by-side. Deuteronomy 10:12 says, "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 fear God. You love him. You serve him in obedience and these things become wound together like strands of DNA wrapped around one another to express the character and destiny of the one who believes. Just as physical DNA defines the body, so fear and love are defining the spiritual life of the people of God. Look at verse 20 of Deuteronomy 10. It says, "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name." Then in chapter 11 as he looks in the mirror, what this description of fear comes back and reflects back in love, chapter 11, verse 1, he says, "You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments."

So we see that the fear of God is inseparable from loving and obeying God and, beloved, you must grasp that in order to avoid confusion on your fear of God and what it means

for a believer. It is describing an affectionate submission to God that issues in obedience in your life. That's what it means to fear God. It's a fear that loves and it loves enough to obey. You remember that Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," right? He said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?" So fear is expressed in this affectionate submission to the God of the Bible and that is the sense of fear that we are called to, a fear that loves and loves enough to obey.

Now, watch this, we're going to go into the New Testament here in just a moment but at this point let me repeat my definition for you so that it stays front and center of our brain lobes here this evening: for the believer, the fear of God is the wholehearted life of loving humble worship you render to him in response to his saving mercy in your life. Now think about it, think about where we were at Sunday and where we have come so far here tonight. We talked about the terror of eternal judgment that all of us felt to one degree or another or we never would have come to Christ at all. You come to Christ to be delivered from sin and when you feel your sin and you feel the threat of God's judgment on your sin, you gladly run to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why the Gospel is good news. There is a means to be delivered from the wrath of God. Now, beloved, listen, listen and pay heed and take heed: if you realize that you have been delivered from such a great threat as that by the precious shed blood of Christ, then all you can do is respond in humble gratitude and say, "Of course I will live my life as a thankful response to what Christ did for me to deliver me from that great threat." It's natural. It's the only way that it could be in a genuine conversion. Scripture knows nothing of someone who is saved and then does not live gratefully to Christ in response and being a true Christian at the same time. You are overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and affection and love and a willingness to obey in response to this one who delivered you from so great a peril as death and hell. It could be no other way. There is no way you could understand those things and not respond like that if you have a new heart given to you by the Holy Spirit.

Now, with that said, turn over to Matthew 10. We're still under this first point, this first heading that says that the fear of God for a believer is a fear that loves. It is a fear that loves and in Matthew 10:37, you see the way that Christ defines the priority of our affections and what he demands from those who would follow him and receive him for eternal life. He makes no bones about it. There is no room for confusion on this issue. Jesus says, "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. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." What Jesus is saying there is that his true disciple will love Christ as the preeminent affection of his heart and no earthly relationship will compete for that primary affection. Christ is in first place in the heart of a true believer and nothing is in places 2 through 10. So unique is our affection for him, so much do we love him for redeeming our souls and we realize the closest and most cherished spouse, the most beloved child of our physical body, no one, no thing, no relationship compares or competes with the love and affection that we have for Christ because he alone is the one who saved our soul.

Nothing else competes with him and if you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ supremely like that, you have every reason to doubt the reality of your salvation because if you understood what Christ has done and you have really understood your guilt before God and that his blood washes it away, what flows from an understanding of that is the preeminent affection of your heart permanently and forever belonging to him. That doesn't diminish your love for other earthly relationships, in fact, it informs and enriches them but when it comes down to what you love the most, the answer should be clear in your mind, "I love Christ more than anything." That's what Christ says and we can't love father or mother or spouse or child or anything earthly more than him. He says, "If you don't take your cross and follow after me, you are not worthy of me." The cross was the instrument of death in the first century and so he is saying, "You must lay your life down before my regal Lordship. I will gladly save you but I won't take you if you are clinging to things that are more important to you than me."

So the fear of God is a fear that loves more than your earthly relationships, more than your own self and so we see from Scripture that the biblical fear of God for his people, it's a fear that loves God. It loves God preeminently. It loves God submissively. It loves God obediently. A heart that is oriented toward submission to him. That's the fear of God as Scripture defines it and that's not a terror. That's not an irksome yoke upon our neck. We realize that we're not talking about a perfection in our character that somehow earns his favor. We know that it's not any of that. It's not an irksome thing to love and follow the one who laid his life down for your soul, is it? You don't resent following the one who first laid himself down for you, do you? Why would you? Why would we resent his authority? No, we respond to his authority and respect it and love it and kiss his scepter in a loving expression of affection and submission and loyalty and so the fear of God is a fear that loves.

Second point here this evening which we won't spend probably near as much time on but the fear of God for us as believers is a fear that is humble. A fear that is humble. Some people don't like to pronounce the "h" and say it's a fear that is umble but we don't talk that way around here, do we? It's a fear that is humble. The fear of God and these things kind of overlap, but the fear of God for us as believers is a fear that humbly embraces the responsibility to obey him. The fear of God humbly embraces the responsibility to obey him. Should we say it embraces the privilege of obeying him. The opportunity to obey him because we view it as a privilege and an opportunity, not something that cuts against the grain of our heart. This is in perfect compliance with the affections and the direction of a redeemed heart. The prophet said that God would take out our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh that was tender to his commandments. The mark of the new nature, the mark of a new heart is one that is humble enough to obey God as he has made himself known in his word.

You don't need to turn here but you can jot down a couple of references to support this. In Isaiah 66:2, God says, "To this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Philippians 2:12 says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Beloved, I can't help but just make this point one more time. I make it so many times, I know, but I invite you as you are listening, maybe as you attend

other churches, as you listen to teachers on the radio, it's not that hard to see whether they tremble at the word of God or not. If the words of Scripture are central to their word and they are serious and earnest in their presentation of God's word, you are listening to a man who fears the Lord. If it's a man who likes to joke and talk about himself and ingratiate himself to the audience as if he were suddenly their best friend and all of that, he may be smooth but he does not fear God. And don't let the smoothness of the potion when it's on the taste of your tongue deceive you because that becomes very bitter when it goes inside because men like that condition people to treat God's word lightly, treat it without authority, to look to themselves rather than to the words of Scripture. That is the total antithesis, isn't it, of what Isaiah describes when he says, God says, "I will look to this man who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at my word."

Now, why fear and trembling in the words of Philippians? Why fear and trembling? Why work it out with fear and trembling? You say, "Aren't we reconciled to God? Why would we tremble then in his presence?" Well, let's think through this for a moment. Yes, we have been reconciled to God and we are gloriously grateful for that and our Lord Jesus said he was happy to call us friends and to call us his brethren but that doesn't reverse the order of creation. It doesn't reverse the order of the universe and somehow elevate us to his level as if we were equal with our Creator, we were equal with the one who was pre-eternal. No, even though he has brought us into this reconciled relationship where we are fully forgiven and fully welcomed with bold and confident access into the presence of God, beloved, we still revere his majesty. We don't forget that he is still the Lord over all. In other words, we take salvation earnestly. We take it seriously. We don't trifle with it. We don't trifle with these eternal revealed matters that have secured the redemption of our eternal soul. We don't squander the earnestness of our hearts with trifles and with humor and thinking that these things really aren't so important after all because we've been delivered from sin. No, no, we treasure it so much that we revere the one who has delivered it to us through self-sacrifice and love and obedience to his Father.

Furthermore, we humbly fear because we understand that God will discipline us for our sin. Not cast us away eternally but we will feel providential spankings in our life if our lives are not conformed to his word. Look over at the book of Hebrews 12, if you would. We humbly fear because we don't want to feel the discipline of our heavenly Father. Hebrews 12:9, actually verse 7. Go to verse 7, he says, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Verse 9, "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?" If you knew something about what it was like to grow up under a father who had authority and perhaps also had a belt, you realize that there was a respect that you accorded to him in his office as your father. Verse 10, "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them." We realize that the father has the prerogative of discipline but he goes on and says, "but God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." Verse 11, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

So we recognize as the children of God that we have a heavenly Father and after the pattern of our earthly father, our heavenly Father still has the prerogative and the need sometimes to discipline us when we stray. We realize that he does that out of love. He does it for our good but you come to a point in your Christian life where you say, "Sin is not worth it to me any longer. I fear God enough that I don't want to feel his disciplining hand by continuing in this spirit of rebellion any longer." So it's a fear that is humble rather than being defiant or self assertive in the presence of God. We fear, taking it from a positive perspective, I'm saying the same thing in multiple ways here in this point.

Let's step back for just a moment. Step back for just a moment. We'll take a little breather. We remember, don't we, as if we were at a communion table, we remember with reverence the body and the blood of Christ and we're grateful in that moment of communion as we remember and hold physical symbols of the spiritual reality that that blood was shed so that our sins could be forgiven; that the chastisement for our sins fell on someone else rather than upon us. And we treasure Christ and we love him for that and we respect and bow before the majesty of Christ and the reality of salvation. Well beloved, speaking to you as true Christians, when we are thinking rightly, that's how we think about Christ and how we think about our salvation and we realize how precious it is. Well, in those moments where it's clearly precious to us, the fear of God teaches us that we fear lest we would inject defiance and rebellion into that precious relationship. Christ will never cast us away but even on a temporary basis, on a temporal basis, we are unwilling and we learn in the fear of God that we don't want to inject defiance that would sully and dirty the purity of what Christ has done for us and so we fear with a humility that says, "This is so precious. I just want my life to be conformed to it more and more."

So we fear God, in one respect, like an earthly child fears his loving father. We are secure in the love of Christ. We are secure in the eternal plan of God that has redeemed us and brought us into his family. We trust in his goodness just like a young child implicitly trusts his father that has his arm around him in the worship center tonight and the child just implicitly knows that it's all well here. Yet at the same time, there is this simultaneous affection that says, "We want to honor that relationship. We don't want to dishonor our father. We don't want to provoke him to exercise his authority to correct us, we want to live in the light of his authority that protects us but we fear him and both ways. We fear and love and submit to him because he is our father and cares for us and protects us and we want to honor that. At the same time, we realize that God is not one to be trifled. He is not one to be mocked and therefore we are unwilling to tolerate ongoing sin in our lives because we fear him too much and we don't want to feel the stroke of chastisement any more than a 3-year-old boy wants to feel the stroke of chastisement from his father's belt." And looking, whenever I'm pointing that way, I'm not pointing to the nursery, I'm usually symbolically pointing to heaven and toward our eternal destiny at the judgment seat of Christ.

So with that in mind, we realize and we remember that we are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We're going to give an account and that will be a greatly sober moment. We'll give an account and he will dispense our eternal reward in accordance with our faithfulness to him in this life. Well, when you realize the majesty and the

momentousness of that moment, you'd better believe we work out our salvation with fear and trembling because don't you want that moment to go well for you? Don't you want Christ to see you and when your moment comes to appear before his judgment seat whatever that's like, to know that you will be there and that he will reward you for faithfulness rather than giving you a skimpier reward because you were indifferent throughout your life? So knowing these things, we live in a humble fear of God, gladly without any sense of resentment. Just as a child conforms himself to the pattern of his parents' authority, so we gladly conform ourselves to the pattern of being one in the family of God. It's a fear that loves. It's a fear that is humble before God. A heart broken. Submissive. Compliant to God's word.

Now, third and final point here this evening. We said that the fear of God for us as his people, it's a fear that loves, it's a fear that is humble, thirdly, let's put it this way: it's a fear that lives. It's a fear that lives and here's what we mean by that: the fear of God is not a passing emotion. It's not a subjective height of emotional ecstasy under the influence of darkened lights and heightened music. It's not a permanent ongoing sense of conscious emotional passion that never wavers. You know that real life isn't like that. Your day to day hasn't been like that in an unbroken sense. I know that, you know that. So it must be something more than that and this point is why I'm not comfortable with just sticking with and limiting ourselves to the definition of reverential awe. The fear of God that is described, you're not always conscious of that reverence and always conscious of being in awe of God when you're swinging a hammer or doing your daily work. It's not like that. The fear of God is something much, much more than that. No, the fear of God rather than thinking about it as an emotion, I want you to think about it like this: the fear of God is the fundamental disposition through which you order your life. It's the fundamental organizing principle of your entire worldview. It is the reason that you exist. It animates kind of in a background operating influence, it animates everything that you do. There is a consciousness, there is a set of priorities that are established in your heart by which you live each moment of life.

Go back to Deuteronomy 6 and as you're turning there, Deuteronomy 6, many, many years ago, I had a friend who, one of those friends, he is now a pastor in New York and a cherished friend of mine but he was one of those friends who was happy to confront people with their assumptions and their presuppositions and all of that. We were talking along these themes one time and I was standing in front of him and I had just said with both of my hands in my pockets, that's relevant to what I'm saying, I had just said, "I think that we should always be able to give a scriptural reason for anything that we're doing at any particular point in time." I do think that that's true that we should be able to articulate something that is influencing us scripturally as we do that. And I was standing and he was sitting at his desk and I was kind of leaning against the wall like this and he said, "Okay, why do you have both of your hands in your pocket?" I said, "That's easy, I don't want my left hand to know what my right hand is doing." He gave me a point for that response. That's just a little aside to give us a breather.

It's a fear that lives. It's a fundamental disposition through which you order your life. Go back to Deuteronomy 6 where we were talking about the fear and the love of God and

notice what it says here. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." There is this defining disposition that says, "My consuming priorities and passions are wrapped up in the person of Yahweh." Verse 6, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." Verse 7 said, "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." It is so woven into your natural existence that it just oozes out of you and influences you and is affecting your mindset when you lay down, when you rise up, when you walk, when you sit down. It's a fundamental disposition and you see that being a true Christian could never be simply about showing up to church on Sunday and marking the attendance card and then going on and living life however you wanted to on Monday through Saturday never giving a thought to the true and living God or his word. It could never be that. That is not how Scripture defines and illustrates what it means to belong to the family of God. This takes over your life because you realize that God is over all and that he is over every moment of time and your life is a gift from him and you will be responsible to him and it just defines everything for you down to details of you're speaking of it when you sit and when you rise up.

Look over at Proverbs 23:17, not as familiar a verse as some of these others but Proverbs 23:17 says, "Do not let your heart envy sinners." Proverbs 23:17. I'll give you an extra moment to turn there, sure. "Do not let your heart envy sinners, But live in the fear of the LORD always." You live in the fear of God. Beloved, it is the ongoing worship of your life that we're talking about. That day by day and with each passing moment you are oriented toward, you are conscious of living in his presence, of wanting to please him, of being grateful to him, of respecting his authority, of anticipating your presence with him one day in eternity. So this shapes the way we think about everything. It shapes what you as young people pursue in life. It is the motivating factor that can wean people off of sin. It is that which gives us hope to persevere when the world seems to be drawing it's sword against us and sharpening and shining it for battle. We're undaunted by that, you understand that, don't you? We're totally undaunted because we are not driven by the fear of men. We are not living for this world. We're living in light of the fear of the Lord always. He is our preeminent affection. He is with us always, even to the end of the age. What have we to fear?

So we live in the fear of the Lord as the ongoing worship of our life. Not in terror of judgment. Our fear is a humble life of loving obedience, gratefully offered in response to a mercy that was first given to us at his initiative. That biblical background informs the meaning of the proverb that we have considered, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." Do you see it now? Do you see how orienting your life toward this loving obedience to God is the beginning of knowledge? Because only then are you beginning to live life according to the way that he has ordained for his people to live. Only then does your life even matter. Everything else will pass away but the one who fears the Lord will abide forever. Only one question matters: do you know that kind of fear of the Lord? Is this the animating principle of your own life?

Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we praise you and we honor you. We thank you, Father, that we have a particular privilege of living these things and studying these things after the cross; after the Lord Jesus laid his life down for us; after he gave himself up for us in obedience to you and to your plan. We see what humble response, humble obedience to you looks like because our Lord modeled it for us because the Lord fulfilled it perfectly on our behalf. Now Lord, we just ask for each one gathered here, for each one that will ever hear this message in the future in other forms of media, God, we pray that you would teach us and help us with this kind of fear that we might, Father, manifest the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of wisdom and look forward to that great day when we stand before Christ and we trust, hear him gratefully, praisingly say to us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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