

The Fear of God: Predominance in Biblical Thought

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For a rather lengthy period of time, I have been toying with the thought of bringing some messages on one of the great and dominant themes of Holy Scripture, one concerning which there is almost total silence in our day, a theme which was a great theme of our forefathers in their thinking and in their preaching. And it's interesting, when one would describe one of our forefathers who was marked by unusual Godliness, they would use even this particular term to describe him. He would be described as a God-fearing man. And it's that theme of the fear of God that I wish to set before you in Scripture in these next few Lord's Day mornings. One mature and very Scripturally astute man of God has said that the fear of God is the very soul of Godliness. The emphasis in both the Old and New Testaments requires no less significant a proposition. Take away the soul from the body and all you have left is in a few days is a stinking carcass. Take away the fear of God from any expression of Godliness and all you have left is the stinking carcass of Phariseeism and barren religiosity. And so in order to think our way through, at least in an introductory way to this theme, we shall this morning seek to grasp something of the predominance of this concept of the fear of God in Biblical thought. Then we shall move on next Lord's Day morning to consider the meaning of the fear of God, the essential elements of the fear of God, and then last of all, some of the practical effects of the fear of God.

This morning then, the focus of our study will be on the predominance of the fear of God in Biblical thought. Now, one does not need a great measure of learning to be able to do what I'm going to do this morning. In fact, armed with a relatively good concordance and about an hour's time, you could pretty well lay out the study that I'm going to lay out before you. Or if you took your concordance and looked up the word "fear," you would notice that no fewer than 150 to 175 times there are distinct, explicit references to the fear of God. If you add to these explicit references to the fear of God all the instances in Scripture where you have the fear of God illustrated, though not explicitly stated, it is accurate to say that the references to the fear of God, both in explicit statements of the fear of God and of clear examples of the fear of God, number into the hundreds. Now, isn't it amazing that a theme so dominant in the Old and the New Testament, a theme which comes before us dozens and dozens of times, can be either on the one hand become so completely overlooked, or on the other hand so shallowly and so carelessly handled so that the average Christian, when you asked him what is the fear of God, he throws back at you a little cliché that he heard in Sunday school years ago: the fear of God is reverential awe. And he says, "Now let's get on with a more important theme." Well, I trust that after this morning, as we seek to grasp something of the predominance of this theme, that

none of you will be content with a mere cursory knowledge or acquaintance of this theme, the fear of God. I hope you will not be content to just parrot a little phrase "reverential awe" and think that's the sum and substance of the teaching of Scripture on this theme. Now, with such a large number of references, I can only hope this morning to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. And so I've tried to be qualitatively selective in pulling out of the Old Testament thirteen references and out of the New Testament ten references to the fear of God. I say I have sought to be qualitatively selective. That is, rather than just select passages at random, I have tried to select those which would contribute some of the most pivotal aspects of the Biblical thought concerning the fear of God. So then, fasten your seatbelt if you will, because we're going to move this morning literally from Genesis to Revelation, though we're not going to stop in every book along the way.

Genesis 31 is perhaps one of the most significant passages in all of Scripture concerning this matter of the predominance of the fear of God in Biblical thought. In verse 42, we read: "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." Notice a similar reference in verse 53 of the same chapter: "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac." God's name is a revelation of His character. God gave an increasing understanding of who He was by the accumulation of the names by which He identified Himself and through which He revealed Himself to His people. And here one of the names attached to God as a revelation of His character is the fear of Isaac. In other words, when God is rightly apprehended, having true Biblical fear of Him is so much a part of a right response to the revelation of His character that He calls Himself the fear of Isaac. Therefore, if my apprehension of God and my comprehension of God does not lead me to fear Him as Isaac did, I have not rightly understood who God is. He identifies Himself as the fear of Isaac.

Then turn over to the book of Exodus where we have the record of Moses' problem in seeking to administer single handedly the entire nation of Israel in terms of the many needs that would come up that needed some judgment of a mature mind. And you remember the suggestion made by Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, that he share this oversight; that he was not up to it doing it by himself. And so they're going to select men that will be used as Moses' representatives to help make judgments with regards to the specific problems that would arise in the life of the nation of Israel. When the requirements are given for those who will fill this role as judges in Israel, Exodus 18:21 says, "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." Of all the requirements that could be thought of for men to administer justice in so mighty a nation as this nation had now become, set at the very pinnacle place of importance is that they must be men who fear God. Whatever other qualities they have or may not have, if they are not men whose primary characteristic is the fear of God, they are not qualified for this significant role of the administration of justice and the solving of problems within the nation of Israel.

Then turning over to Exodus 20, we have another very pivotal reference. For in this chapter God, is stating the whole end for which He is giving this unusual revelation of His mind and will in the Ten Commandments and doing it in the manner in which He did. You remember, there was thunder and lightening on top of the mount, and God Himself drew near that mountain in the giving of this revelation. And here in verse 20,

we have a statement as to why God is so revealing Himself to His people: "And Moses said unto the people, Fear not [that is, don't be afraid with that carnal dread and fear]: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." If you were to stand off at a distance and see the lightening flashing off the top of Mount Sinai; you were to see the decent of the cloud and hear the rumbling of the thunder and stand there full of natural dread; if you were to turn to someone and say, "What is all this? Why is God bringing about all this phenomena in the physical realm?" The answer would be: He's doing this to rid you of carnal fear and to teach you holy fear. The whole end of His drawing near in this way is that His fear may be before you. We see then the great significance of this concept when in this verse the fear of God is set before us as the primary reason for this unusual manifestation of the presence of God upon Mount Sinai. And the parallel passage to this is found in Deuteronomy 4:9-10:

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children."

"The whole end," God says, "for which I drew near to you and gave this revelation is that you might learn My fear." Therefore, to be exposed to this revelation of God for this unfolding of His mind and not to learn His fear is to miss the whole purpose for which all of this was given. It's a pretty central issue then, isn't it? So much of the whole Old Testament revelation clusters around the given of the law. And the whole purpose of the giving of the law was to teach His fear. To miss, then, what the fear of God is is to be utterly blinded to much of what God is saying in this great section of His holy Word.

Now then, we turn to the book of Job. We turn here from God's dealing with a nation to teach them His fear to a description of an Old Testament saint, one of whom God speaks, not like the Pharisee who boasts of his own attainments in supposed grace, but one of whom God speaks and boasts of the attainments in grace. And how does God describe the piety of this man Job? Chapter 1, verse 1: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright [there was the outward expression of his life. What was the inward soul of that life?], and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." The first few words are a description of his outward bearing. This is, as it were, the body of a Godly man. And then He tells us that the soul of that Godliness was that He feared God. This thought is underscored again in verse 8: "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" The soul of his external piety was this inwardness of the fear of His God. Verse 9: "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?" He says, "Ah, yes, you say that the fear of Your name is the soul of his Godliness, but he has some other motive other than Your glory." Then the whole story unfolds as God is going to vindicate His claims on behalf of His servant Job. So we see, then, that the essence of Job's piety and God's estimation of all true piety is that it is suffused with this fear of God.

Now turn to over the Psalms. Remember, all we're trying to do is, by a qualitative selectivity, show in the Old Testament the centrality of the fear of God. Now, in the Psalms, there are dozens of references to the fear of God, and again, we select only several. In the second Psalm, we have the command issued in verse 11. In the light of God's exaltation of His Son, God says (backing up to verse 10): "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings [I have made One My appointed King. Therefore, in the light of that, be wise]: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." He says, "In the light of what I've done with reference to My Son and the pivotal place to which I've assigned Him, the only right response is service that is carried out in the context of Godly fear. "Serve the Lord with fear." We're warranted, then, in saying that if our view of Christ and His exaltation by the decree of the Father is not such as to bring us to a place of service in the climate of Godly fear, we have not rightly understood nor responded to the exaltation of the Son by the decree of the Father.

Then in Psalm 5:7: "But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy: and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple." Not only is all acceptable service carried out in the climate of Godly fear, but even as we approach God in the fullest consciousness of His mercy and His love, it is never a consciousness of mercy and love divorced from the climate of Godly fear. Notice how David ties these two together: "But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy...." He says, "I will come fully conscious that God's love is like the ocean." A few weeks ago, we stood beside the Cardiganshire Bay in Aberystwyth, Wales, and we thought of that illustration that was conveyed to us by a missionary who, when having talked with one of the natives that had gone to the coast of Africa for the first time and seen the great cities and all the rest, was asked upon his return, "What impressed you most?" Instead of talking about buildings and automobiles and locomotives, he said, "The sea." Why the sea? He said, "Because it's like the mighty love of God: ever stretching out before me but ever coming towards me." That's something of what David said. Seeing the love and mercy of God like a sea stretching out before him as far as the eye could see, yet ever breaking toward him as the waves break upon the shore. He says, "But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy: and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple." Therefore, no worship, no matter how deep may be the consciousness of divine love, is acceptable unless it is worship in the climate of Godly fear.

Then turn over to Psalm 67, one of those Gospel Psalms which has as its vision the proclamation of the message of saving mercy to the ends of the earth; the Psalmist pleading that God's mercy will be to him and to God's covenant people to the end (v. 2) "that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations." And what will be the result of God's saving message going out to the nations? Verse 7: "God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him." In other words, the whole end for which the Gospel goes out through God's covenant people is to teach the nations the fear of God. That's a pretty central issue, isn't it? If God's blessing upon His people that they in turn may bring blessing to others is expressed in terms of purpose in these very words, "God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him," then this is no peripheral issue when it stands so central in the thinking of the Psalmist. You have a parallel passage in Psalm 72 where this same extension of the Gospel is seen under the figure of the reign of the righteous King. And, of course, that righteous King is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. The type of that reign in righteousness, of course, was Solomon; the fulfillment in our Lord

Jesus Christ. And what will be the result of the Lord Jesus administering that kingship in power by virtue of His exaltation to the right hand of the Father? Verse 5: "They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations." The result of Christ's kingship exercised over the hearts of men is to bring men into the fear of God.

Now turn over to Psalm 103. And here in this Psalm, there are several references to the fear of God. And basically what they have in common is this: they teach us that an indispensable characteristic of the people of God is that they fear Him so much so that when you wanted to describe the people of God, you could do so by using as a synonym "those who fear God." Notice how the Psalmist does it in verse 11, 13, and 17. Verse 11: "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him." This idea that God's redemptive love is just some kind of a general gushy benevolence that is focused upon all men is not the teaching of holy Scripture. Here the Psalmist says that His mercy is upon them that fear Him. His peculiar love is upon His people. And who are His people? Those who fear Him. No fear of Him, no mercy. Down again in verse 13: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him." He uses as a synonym for "His children" "them that fear Him." No fear of Him, no right to claim that I'm under the canopy of redemptive love (v. 11); no right to claim that I'm one of His children (v. 13). In the whole thinking of Hebrew parallelism, you have this often in the Psalms and in other poetic writings. This is used interchangeably with the concept of child. "The LORD pitieth them that fear Him." Verse 17: "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him...." So then the Psalmist conceives of the people of God as those who are in every instance marked by this characteristic of the fear of God. And then Proverbs 1:7. As this book of Proverbs is going to come to us giving wise counsel with a manifold purpose (you read about it in verses 2-6), Solomon then says at the very beginning of his discourse, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning [chief part] of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Learning, then, the fear of God is not only the ABC from which we move on to DEFGHIJKLMN--from little words to big words as you kids will do once you learn the alphabet. And you would say, "learning my ABCs was the beginning of learning how to spell." But it is the chief part, just as the use of the alphabet is something that is not left but becomes the chief part of all your learning so that when a man is studying the most complicated book on far out physics, he's dealing with the same numbers he learned in kindergarten and first grade and with the same letters he learned. Now, there could be arrangements of them that we look and scratch our heads and say it looks like a cat ran through there with ink on its paws (all the equations and the rest). But he's working with the same numbers 1-10 and letters A-Z. So then, the fear of the Lord is the chief part of knowledge. Not only the beginning, but that which permeates all accumulation of heavenly knowledge is the fear of God. Lose that, and God says you're not learning true wisdom. So it's a pretty important thing, isn't it?

Then we turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. And we listen to this man who surveyed all the possible avenues down which a man may go to find the meaning of life; to find satisfaction in life, some of those paths that some of you are contemplating. And right now they seem pretty sweet paths as they did in the beginning to this man until he went down to the end of every one of those paths and saw that it was nothing but vanity and vexation. Then he comes to this conclusion in chapter 12 and verse 13: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter [here's the true meaning of life]: fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or

whether it be evil." What is the summary of the totality of man's duty? How is the true meaning of life to be found? Fear God and keep His commandments.

Well then, we move on into the Prophets. And it was difficult to be selective here. And I thought perhaps one of the best things to do would be to take the prophecy in the book of Isaiah, chapter 11. Here we have a beautiful prophecy of Messiah who should come out of the stock of Jesse. Verses 1-3a:

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make Him of quick understanding [His delight shall be] in the fear of the LORD."

Here is an explicit statement that when the Spirit would come upon Messiah as He came upon in the waters of Jordan, He would come upon Him not only as the Spirit of might and power by which He raised the dead, unstopped the deafened ears, and loosened the dumb tongue, but that Spirit should be upon Him as the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. And the one aspect of that Spirit's ministry which is enlarged upon in verse 3 is that very concept, "His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord." So then, the dominant aspect of Messiah's own character is that He should walk and live and move and delight in the fear of the Lord.

Then in Jeremiah 32, as Jeremiah speaks of that new covenant which Messiah should bring to pass by His own suffering and death, that covenant sealed and ratified by the blood of Christ and expounded in Hebrews 8 and 10 in which passages there is a quotation from Jeremiah 31 and 32 and also from Ezekiel 36. Look at what God says to the prophet concerning what will happen by virtue of the blessings of the new covenant being brought to men. Verses 38-40:

"And they shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me."

God says, "The whole end for which I will work in such power in this new covenant is to so put My fear within the hearts of My people that they will not turn away from Me." Do you claim to be one who sits here this morning a benefactor of the blessings of the new covenant? Do you frequent the Lord's table where you take the outward symbols of the blood of that covenant? God says if you have inwardly partaken of the benefits of that covenant, one of the dominant characteristics of your life will be that you are held by the fear of God. And if you're a stranger to that fear, my friend, you're a stranger to the blessings of the new covenant; you're yet in your sins; you're under the wrath of Almighty God. For every time the benefits of the new covenant are applied with power by the Spirit, it is in such a way that God says, "I'll put My fear in their hearts." So this is a central theme, then, of the great theme of the new covenant.

And then the last Old Testament reference: Malachi 4:2. Here we have the picture of that coming day when Messiah shall come forth in judgment on all His enemies to

consume them. And that same day that brings the consuming of the wicked will bring the full and final glorification of the people of God. So we read in verses 1-2:

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. [But this will not be the case with all men. In that day when He will come as a refiner's fire; in that day when He shall come to consume His enemies, there will not only be enemies to consume, but there will be another class of people.] But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings...."

The only people who will escape the fiery wrath of Christ at His second coming are those who fear Jehovah's name. That's a pretty central issue, isn't it? You say, "Who will escape His wrath in that day? All who have made decisions?" No. "All who have made professions?" No. "All who fear His name?" Yes, and only they. So we see, then, in the light of these thirteen references taken from the dozens and dozens of the Old Testament that the fear of God, whatever it is--and we've not tried to describe it this morning--is a predominant theme in the Old Testament. It is a virtue that is not peripheral but absolutely essential in the saving work of God. Now someone says,

"Ah yes, but that is part of the dark and shadowy religion of the Old Testament. Now, with the full revelation of God's love and mercy in Jesus Christ, just as the types and shadows of the blood of bulls and goats and heifers have been swallowed up in Christ, so that dark, foreboding concept of the fear of God being a dominant characteristic of worship has given way to the bright and flitty quality of the joy of the Lord."

Is that true? Will the New Testament support such thinking? Well, I trust as we look at ten references in the New Testament, we will see such thinking absolutely flagged and laid dead. And may God grant that the carcass shall not be revived in the mind of any one of His people.

Alright, turn to the New Testament, and what do we find? Well, at the very conception of our Lord or shortly thereafter, you'll remember that Mary goes to pay a visit to Elizabeth. And as she does, she is filled with the Spirit, and she breaks forth in what has commonly been called the Magnificat. And in this hymn of praise, Mary sees illustrated in God's dealings with her a principle or principles which have been characteristic of God's dealings with His people throughout the centuries and characteristic of His dealings with His people through the very one she now carries in her womb. When you read the Magnificat in that light, it becomes a wonderful hymn of praise. Mary sees that what God is doing to her is simply illustrative of what He has always done with His people and what He will continue to do through the coming of the Son of God whom she now carries in her womb. And in this great hymn of praise, she says among other things, "For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:49-50). She sees what God is doing to her as an illustration of this principle, a principle that will continue to be operative as Messiah comes and carries out His mission.

What did our Lord teach? Certainly, if His presence should cause men no longer to fear God but simply to have joy in Him and to love Him, we would expect our Lord to discourage anything like fear, especially anything that had the fear of dread in it. For

as we shall see in our definition, there are two basic aspects of the fear of God as in all human fear: a fear of dread and a fear of awe, one that drives us from the object of dread; one that draws us to the object of awe. But our Lord's teaching in a passage like Matthew 10 is very clear, even in underscoring this concept of fear that has an element of dread. Speaking to His disciples in the parallel passage in Luke 12, He says, "And I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him" (vv. 4-5). Rather than come with a mission that was to negate the fear, the fear that even has the aspect of the dread of what God can do if I fall into His hands with my sins laid to my charge, Jesus enforced it and said, "Don't be afraid of them who can kill the body, but fear that God who can cast you into hell." We shall see in our further studies, as there was ground in the shadowy revelation of God in the old covenant to fear Him, so the fuller revelation in the new covenant has only intensified the obligation of Godly fear.

Now we turn to the Epistles, 2 Corinthians 7. Is there remaining sin in the life of the believer to be dealt with? Is he negatively to seek to mortify the deeds of the flesh and positively to cultivate every grace that will bring him into closer conformity to Jesus Christ? And every intelligent Christian says, "Yes." How then is it to be done? Is he to be spurred on by the thought that "the more holy I am, the more gifts I'll get when I get before the Lord?" Is that to be the dominating thought? Is the dominating thought to be: "The more I am filled with the Spirit, the more joy and happiness and peace and vibrancy I'll have, and so I'll live life with a capital L. So I should carry out the pursuit of holiness in the climate of anticipating greater joy." Now, there's an element of truth in both those things, but I suggest that's not to be the dominant thought. Look at the words of the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 7:1: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." In other words, the highest reaches of attainment in practical holiness and Godliness are to be attained and sought after in the climate of the fear of God. In the outworking of practical Godliness, much has to do with our interpersonal relationships. The Godliness that leaves you ugly with your boss, churlish with your wife, nasty with your husband, snippy with your mom and dad is no Godliness at all. The Godliness and holiness of the New Testament and the Old as well are intensely practical things, things which show up most clearly in their presence or absence in the interpersonal relationships of your deepest human relationships (family, place of work, school, etc.). So our holiness, our going on in sanctification must be seen in those relationships. And as we go on in seeking greater degrees of holiness in those relationships, what's to do be the dominant characteristic? Well, look at Ephesians 5:21 and then Colossians 3:22. Ephesians 5:21 introduces the climate of the home: husband-wife relationship, parent-child relationship. And notice what the Apostle says in introducing that subject: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." All of these injunctions concerning the nitty gritty of practical Godliness in the interpersonal relationships of the home are couched in the framework of the fear of God. Therefore, any attempts to go on in holiness in these relationships that ignores this idea of the fear of God is something less than that which is set before us in the Word of God. In the parallel passage in Colossians 3, you have your interpersonal relationships found in your place of work: servants/masters, masters/servants. And in that context, the admonition is: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." In other

words, the fear of God is to be as present in that place of business as that lathe into which you put that piece of steel; as that foreman who passes by to check your work; as that person who stands next to you at the work bench; as that girl who sits next to you and bangs her typewriter and blows her smoke into your face; as near as her dirty smoke that you've got to absorb against your will should be the fear of God in that relationship. Now, that's a pretty central thing, is it not? And so, rather than finding a negation of this concept, we find it intensified; we find it enlarged; we find it set before us in even a wider scope.

Turn to Philippians 2. We could say as a summary of what we're admonished to do in 2 Corinthians 7: going on cleansing ourselves from defilement of the flesh and the spirit; going on in practical Godliness in the home and in the place of business--all of this comes under the general heading of working out in greater measure our salvation. And as the Apostle commands the believers at Philippi to work out their salvation, what's to be the context of that working out? Philippians 2:12: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Now I ask you, where in the world do we get this idea that the people who are most jumping about with jolly, jolly joy all the time, time, time are the most spiritual? "Fear and trembling"--and anyone who is working out his salvation in any other context is working it out in a context unauthorized by the Word of God.

Well then, you say, "Does this have to go on all the while we're here? Can't we come to the place where's there's no longer the constraint of the fear of God?" Well, let Peter answer that question in 1 Peter 1. We've looked at the words of our Lord; we've looked at the words of the Apostle Paul. Peter speaks the same word. And he speaks it in the most interesting context. Verse 17: "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Ah, but you say, "If you've got real assurance that you've been saved by the blood of Christ, doesn't that negate the fear of God?" No, for he says in the next two verses, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." He says the knowledge that you've been redeemed at such an awful price will intensify the reality of the fear of God, not negate it. He uses as the very argument to enforce the necessity of walking in Godly fear the fact that we know we've been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Now, don't you put a meaning on that that I haven't put yet. You're temptation's going to be to say, "The pastor said you've got to walk around cringing like someone before a bully." I didn't say that. I haven't defined what the fear is. I'm simply exegeting these passages in a very surface way which shows the centrality of this concept. And Peter says you're to pass the whole time of your sojourning in fear, so that at any point in my sojourn from the moment I breathe my first breath as a new creature in Christ to the moment when the Lord comes to take me at His glorious appearing, or I pass through the valley of the shadow of death and breathe my last, the fear of God should characterize the entirety of my sojourn. This is why Luke, in describing the maturity and the blessing of God upon the early church, sets forth the beautiful effusion of things that so often we would separate, but God brings together. Following the conversion of Saul who had been making havoc of the church, we read in Acts 9:31: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified [brought to fuller development in the fullness of Christ]; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Why you say, "If there's the comfort

of the Spirit, wouldn't that negate the fear of God, and wouldn't the fear of God negate the comfort?" No, for the Spirit who rests upon Messiah, and the Spirit He received in plentitude and now Himself pours upon His church is, according to Isaiah 11, the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. And just as the fear of the Lord characterized our Lord Himself, so now, as He who received the Spirit without measure has gone to the right hand of the Father and sheds forth the Spirit upon and into the church, the more that church is filled with the Spirit of Jesus, the more that church will reflect the fear of the Lord.

So indispensable an element is this, that on into eternity, even after the last remains of sins are purged from the believer, we'll still fear God. So our last two references are taken from Revelation 15. Here in symbolic language, we have set before us the redeemed of God. Verses 2-4a:

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. [What should be the response of the redeemed there in His presence?] Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?"

So then, the fear of God will mark the worship of the redeemed even in His presence. And in a similar hymn of praise recorded in chapter 19, verses 4 and 5 we read: "And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great." That's taken as the dominant characteristic of the service of God, even as they know the completion of God's redemptive purposes in them.

So then, what can we conclude in the light of these thirteen pivotal texts in the Old Testament and these ten texts in the New Testament? Let me draw three conclusions very briefly. Number one: I believe we are warranted to conclude that to be devoid of the fear of God is to be devoid of Biblical religion. No matter how much of the Bible we may know; no matter how many verses we may claim to be embracing; no matter how many promises we may claim to believe, in the light of these texts of Scripture, I believe the youngest child here would agree with me this morning--if you don't know what the fear of God is in your heart and life, you don't know the first thing about Biblical religion experimentally. Now, that's a pretty serious conclusion, but no less a conclusion can be drawn from the texts of these Scriptures. Since Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of Biblical religion, and since the Spirit given to Him and sent from Him is the Spirit of the fear of God, to be without the Spirit of God is to be without the Spirit of Christ, and to be without the Spirit of Christ is to be none of His (Romans 8:9). If you sit here this morning saying, "I don't know what in the world that preacher's talking about. I've never heard this before," you better do some serious reflection. You better do everything possible to make sure. You can be present for the further expositions; you can go home and get your Bible and start crying out to God saying, "God teach me what it is to fear you, for I see that if I'm devoid of Your fear, I have no true saving religion." The second conclusion we are warranted to make is this: the measure of growth in any individual and in any church is the measure to which that individual or church is increasing in the fear of God. It speaks of Nehemiah in chapter 7 and verse 2 as man who feared God above many.

And so his spiritual stature above many was in great measure due to the fact that he feared God above many. And then thirdly, to be ignorant of the meaning of the fear of God is to be ignorant of the basic and essential doctrine of revealed religion. And I believe there are many of you here who are not strangers to the fear of God in your experience, but you are very woolly about the fear of God in your understanding. And since growth in grace is always joined to growth in knowledge, I exhort you who have the fear of God in your hearts to give yourself to earnest prayer and study together with us that you might have a clearer understanding of the fear of God to the end that the understanding may lead to your growth and to your development.

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