

The Fear of God: Definition, Part 1

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"The fear of God is the soul of Godliness." And yet, as we commented last Lord's Day morning, it is obvious to any observing person that this pervasive and dominant theme of holy Scripture has well nigh been lost to our own generation. Now, this morning we begin to come to the second area of our study, namely the meaning of the fear of God as defined by Scripture. It is one thing to capture and feel and sense something of the predominance of this concept of the fear of God in Biblical thinking. It is another thing to know that we attach to that concept the meaning which Scripture demands that we attach to it. And at this point, as with all learning, we have a problem. For some of us have erroneous concepts of the fear of God, concepts which we have rejected. Others perhaps have concepts erroneous, nonetheless, but because they are compatible with our own natural inclinations, perhaps we embrace them and cherish them. And so it's necessary as we come to this subject that we, who are the people of God, inwardly cry to the Lord that He would make our minds virgin minds, unspoiled, unprostituted minds, minds that can receive what He Himself would say to us through His own holy Word. Now, how shall we attempt to arrive at the meaning of the fear of God in the light of holy Scripture? Since the Holy Spirit saw fit to use the two most common Hebrew words and the most common Greek word for fear when describing the fear of God, what we're going to do in attempting to arrive at the meaning of the fear of God is, first of all, attempt to find how the word "fear" is used in its general usage. And having established how it is used in its general usage in Scripture, then we'll see how these two facets of its general usage have been attached to its usage in reference to the fear of God.

How then are the words for fear (which the Holy Spirit took to use in describing and defining the fear of God) used in everyday common language in Scripture? Well, first of all, there is the fear which can be described as being afraid: having terror or dread. It's the kind of fear a little nine year-old fellow feels when he's walking home from school and he turns the corner to go the last block between where he is and his house and he sees there standing in the middle of the sidewalk the neighborhood bully. Here's a fourteen year-old kid; he's 5 foot 10, 170 pounds and he loves to beat up little nine year-olds. And so when this little nine year-old turns the corner and he sees the neighborhood bully standing there--and he looks like a giant to this nine year-old kid as he stretches up his 5 foot 10, 170 pound frame--and all of a sudden this child is gripped with terror and with dread. That terror and dread is based on the recognition of the potential harm that the object of that dread can do to the individual. Now, the word "fear" in everyday Biblical usage sometimes is used to describe this kind of fear. Notice the reference to this in Deuteronomy 2:24:

"Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it,

and contend with him in battle. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee."

God says, "I will so attend your efforts to subdue these Canaanites that when word begins to spread around of how mighty you are in battle because of My presence and power upon you and in your midst, people hearing of you shall be filled with dread. They shall be filled with terror. They shall be filled with anguish. And the word used here in verse 25 is the same word used when the fear of God is dealt with: "I will put My fear of you upon this people." You have a similar reference in Psalm 105. Speaking of the deliverance by which God brought His people out of Egypt, verses 36-38 say, "He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them." That is, they had begun to dread the presence of the Israelites because of the terrible judgments of the God of that people which were exercised upon them and directed toward them. So this is the fear, again, of terror and of dread. You have an example of this in the New Testament in that familiar Christmas passage. For we read in Luke 2:9, that when the angels suddenly appeared to the shepherds, they were terrified. They were filled with fear, and it was the fear of dread of these angels in this unusual manifestation. One other reference is Acts 5:11 when the news went out of how God struck Ananias and Sapphira because of their attempt to lie to the Holy Spirit. The Scripture tells us that fear came upon all men who heard these things. The exact wording: "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." So you have, then, both in the Old and New Testament, this common word "fear" used to describe this emotion of being afraid, of being gripped with terror and with dread.

Then there is another kind of fear, the same word used but obviously a different meaning. And it's the fear of veneration and of honor, the fear of respect. Let's take that same nine year old boy--and he's no longer turning the corner on his way home and confronting the neighborhood bully, but he's with his school. And he's taking a class trip, and they've gone to Washington. And as they're going through various parts of the White House where they go on guided tours, suddenly an official brakes the ranks and says (calling this boy by name), the president of the United States wishes to talk to you. Suddenly the little boy's eyes get wide, and his breath begins to become hard. And he says, "He wants to talk to me?" "Yes, to you. Your name is such and such, isn't it?" And the boy is filled with fear. But it's not the fear of dread. He's not afraid that going to see the president, he's going to suddenly give the orders that will bring soldiers out and put rifles to his breast. No, it's the fear that comes when an individual stands in the presence of an object that is superior in worth and in dignity. It's the fear of veneration, of honor, and of awe. Now notice this aspect of the word "fear" in texts like Leviticus 19:3: "You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God." Now, does God command you children every time you look at Mom and Dad to have the same feeling you have when you meet the neighborhood bully? Does He want you every time you see Mom and Dad to tremble in your boots. No, but He says you shall fear them. The same word is used. But it's obvious it has an entirely different meaning. God is saying to all children, "You are to recognize in your father and mother, not just someone who is taller than you are, someone who is bigger, someone wiser and a little bit more experienced, but they are My representatives to administer My rule and My will to you." Therefore, because of the dignity of their position, you are to regard them with

reverence, honor, and awe. This is not the fear of dread but the fear of reverence and honor. You find a similar reference in Joshua 4. And I think this will suffice to underscore what is very obvious, I'm sure, to all of us, but what I wish to see specifically rooted in texts of Scripture. Verse 14: "On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life." And again, it is obvious that this is not the fear of dread or of terror but the fear of reverence, of honor, and of awe. As the fear of terror is based upon a recognition of the harm that the object of fear can bring to me, so the fear of reverence is based upon the recognition of the intrinsic dignity and worth and exalted position of the object of that fear. Now, these two common usages of the word "fear" that were found in the vocabulary of the people of Biblical times; that are found in some measure in our vocabulary are the two concepts that come together in the Biblical thought of the fear of God. The fear of God involves both of these concepts. There is a legitimate sense in which the fear of God involves being afraid of God, being gripped with terror and with dread. Though this is not the dominant thought of Scripture, it is there nonetheless, and I want to demonstrate it this morning. And then the second aspect of fear which is peculiar to the people of God is the fear of God in terms of that reverence and honor and awe with which we regard our God which leads us not to run from Him but to gladly submit to Him.

So then, let us move to first consider the first aspect of the meaning of the fear of God as found in Scripture: the fear of dread, of terror, and a fear that leads to anguish. The first instance of this fear is Genesis 3:10. The first recorded instance of any fear of God is in this passage. And this is the first aspect of that fear, dread, or terror. You remember the setting. God has placed Adam in a perfect environment surrounded with everything that his holy nature could desire. And then God has issued the threat: if you eat of that one tree that is forbidden, in the day that you eat of it you shall die. When the Lord comes and calls upon Adam, he responds by saying, "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." God had threatened Adam with death if he disobeyed. Adam has sinned, and now upon hearing the voice of God, he says, "I was gripped with a terror and a dread which led to aversion. I was afraid; I hid." Now the question is: is it right for a person to have this kind of dread with reference to God? Is this kind of fear any part of the fear of God which is commanded and commended in holy Scripture? Is the sense of dread and terror any part of that virtue which is such a dominant theme in holy Scripture? Professor Murray has so beautifully and accurately stated, and I quote: "The only proper answer is that it is the essence of impiety not to be afraid of God when there is reason to be afraid of God." Once Adam had sinned, suppose he had simply tripped up to God when He called and said, "O, how are you God? Nice to see you again." That would have been the essence of impiety and hardness of heart and searing of the conscience. For if Adam had any remaining sense of who God was, of the terribleness of sinning against Him, of the certainty of the fulfillment of the threat, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," anything less than this fear of dread and of anguish would have been the grossest form of impiety and brazen religious and moral folly. This kind of fear is right and proper in every situation where our condition makes us exposed to the righteous judgment of God. Is it right to be afraid of God? Yes, if you have Scriptural grounds to be afraid of Him. Was it right for Adam to be afraid? Of course it was. He had sinned against God. He had flown into the face of the explicit command of God, "Thou shalt not eat of it." And now, as God draws near to him, he's gripped with this dread which leads to a running from

God. And I say that Scripture warrants this dread of God whenever the cause of that dread is present.

Notice the references to this aspect of fear commanded and commended in holy Scripture. Deuteronomy 17:13. The context is, if a man disregards the directives of the appointed judges in Israel, he is to be put to death. And one of the reasons for this, God clearly states in verse 13: "And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously." Here they go out one day for their neighborhood Powwow, and they find that one of their friends is missing. And they say, "Hey, where's so and so?" "Didn't you hear? He flaunted the laws of God. He was indifferent to the enforcement of those laws by the judges. He was taken out and stoned yesterday." "Stoned? For doing what?" And they mentioned something which perhaps seemed very insignificant in itself. It was not the issue so much as his disregard to the institution of the law and the administration of that law by God's directive. What happened? His friends are filled with fear. There is a dread: "We dare not do as he did lest we get what he got." And God says the very purpose for which He gave this directive was that His people might be possessed of the fear of God which has dread and horror in it. This is commended. It's the very end for which this was instituted. In Deuteronomy 21, directives are given for dealing with a stubborn rebellious son, who in spite of the faithful discipline of his parents, refuses to walk in the ways they have directed for him. Verses 19- 21:

"Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say into the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

Some young fellow is tempted, and he begins to be a smart aleck with regards to his parents. It's the in-thing in his particular neighborhood in that group of tents out there in the wilderness to start mouthing off about your mom and dad. And you begin to show your maturity of how smart aleckly you can be. So one day the group gets together to have their clandestine session of bragging before one another of how they've been able to get away with things at home. And one of their cohorts doesn't show up. And they say, "Hey, where's Johnny?" "Didn't you hear what happened to Johnny?" "No, what happened?" "His mom and dad took him to the elders of Israel, and he's dead under a pile of stones." Suddenly a lot of the gaiety leaves the little group. They're not so apt to be bragging now. The group just gradually dissipates, and they go to their homes gripped with the dread of fear, lest by coming into the same sphere of guilt, the same condemnation come upon them. God says, "I'm giving this mandate, not only to put away evil so that it will not be infectious but to put fear into the hearts of the people." This is the fear of dread, the fear of terror.

Ah, but someone says, "That's in the shadowy, hard-angled, iron-like climate of the Old Testament. The New Testament is a new climate." Is it? Listen to the words of our Lord Jesus: "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." What is that fear? That's not the fear of veneration and awe. That's the fear of dread and of horror. Jesus said if you come into that sphere of conduct which warrants the damnation of God, you should be gripped with terrible dread. That

God can cast into hell. Our Lord not only commends this fear, He commands it. Then we find in the writer to the Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 1--exhorting these people to press on into the full knowledge of Christ and into an unswerving commitment to the Christian faith as they begin to waver. Some of them who've been enlightened and tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come are tempted to go back to the old shadowy forms of the past. He says in his exhortation, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." What fear is that? He said, "Let us be filled with horror and dread at the thought that we might fail to enter into full Gospel rest, and failing to enter in, finding ourselves under the condemnation of God." Turn over to chapter 10 where the same thought is enlarged more fully. I'm not expounding what verse 26 means. I'm simply trying to extract from the passage the concept that this aspect of fear is commended and commanded in the Word of God.

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

See what the writer is saying? He's saying if a man places himself in that relationship to God where judgment is inevitable, then he should be filled with a fearful looking for that judgment, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And for a man to judge himself as being a candidate to fall into God's hands in judgment and not to fear is to show a total insensitivity to all that Scripture reveals about the character of God and the terror of His judgment. So in answer to the question, is it right to have this aspect of the fear of God, this dread or terror of the Lord?, the answer of Scripture is clear--yes.

But a second question, I trust, arises in your mind, and it is this: what lies at the basis of this dread and fear? Let me state it negatively. It is not a work of God's grace. This fear is known by unconverted people. This fear and dread is rooted in things that do not necessarily have a relationship to the operations of grace within the heart. But positively, that which lies at the basis of this fear is some comprehension of the character of God as holy. And because He is holy, He is infinitely opposed to all sin. It's the recognition of who God is as a holy God. And because He is holy, how He feels with regard to sin--it is this that lies at the basis of this fear of dread and of terror. It is what Adam knew of the holy character of God, a holiness that had been stamped upon his own inner being but now marred by his sin. It's what he knew of the character of God as holy that caused him to run when he heard God's voice calling him, because there was dread and terror as a result. So when we read through the Scriptures, we find such phrases as "the fierceness of God's anger" (Isaiah 42:25). We read in the prophets: "the fury of His wrath." We read in Romans 2:9 such terms as "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His

power." What's involved in all of these terms? It's the Biblical concept that when omnipotence is wielding the sword of vengeance; when the infinite God takes the finite creature into His hands for judgment, that creature ought to tremble with horror and with dread. For it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And it's only ignorance of the character of God or spiritual insanity that will deliver a man from this aspect of the fear of God if he's in the way of the judgment of God. Let me illustrate. What would you think if you walked down Bloomfield Avenue today (the main street running through our town) and running parallel to it are some railroad tracks on which a train used to go or still occasionally goes--what would you think if on that track you saw a train bearing down at 50mph about 100 yards away from a man who's walking right down the center of that track in the direction in which the train is coming and he's whistling "Yankee Doodle"? You'd say one or two things is wrong with that man: either he's blind and deaf, utterly ignorant of what's about to overtake him and utterly destroy him, or if he has eyes and ears and all his senses, he's insane. He can't relate the coming of those tons of steel at that speed to what it will do to his body; what it will do to his life. He's an insane man who has failed to relate facts that are obvious to everyone else. And so people stand back horrified, helpless to do anything. People who have their sanity are able to make a relationship between the onrushing train and this poor man. He can't. He's out of touch with reality, so he has no fear. Or it may be that the man is blind and deaf and therefore utterly ignorant of the danger that is coming. That's the only way a man can be walking down the track whistling full of apparent joy and peace, not someone who's deliberately out to kill himself or take his life because of discouragement. But here's a man perfectly happy; whistling "Yankee Doodle" going down the track. And my friend, the only reason any fallen son of Adam who is not savingly joined to Jesus Christ does not find himself gripped with a constant terror and dread of God is because he's either blind to the character of the God of the Bible, or having been acquainted with that character, he is so filled with spiritual insanity that he can make no relationship between the fury of God's wrath and his own reception of that wrath in judgment. I would speak to you young people here this morning. You adults who may be strangers to a saving union with Jesus Christ, it's difficult to shut out of your minds this aspect of the dread and terror of God, isn't it? No man likes to live with dread and terror. So what every son of Adam will do prior to a work of God's grace is try to rid himself of that terror. So what does he do? He tries to say the locomotive is only a papier mache plaything. And he'll tamper with the character of God. "God loves His creatures too much to destroy them." I read some sermons the other day preached by a Presbyterian minister in a liberal church not too far from here (not in this town) on the subject of the future life. And in one of the paragraphs he said, "Now one thing I am absolutely sure of, God would never send one of His creatures to hell. That I know." Of course he had lots of Scripture to prove it--not a one. What was he doing? He was a man standing on the track; who sees the train coming, and he knows he's to be destroyed. And he's trying to kid himself that it's not a train made of steel--and tons of it--that will crush him but a papier mache mirage. That's what lies behind all the attempts to change the character of God, because men don't like to live with terror and with dread. And even the heathen men who've never seen a Bible have something of this terror and dread. You read about it in Romans 1: "Who knowing the judgment of God...." Romans 2: "Their conscience also bearing witness [saying the train of judgment is coming]." "No, No, it's just a mirage." That's what men will do. They'll seek to change the character of God. Or they'll seek to find some way to utterly submerge their senses in sensual delights that they can push these thoughts utterly from their minds. What makes incessant television such a national pastime in

our own country and other places where people have a plethora of televisions? May I suggest that this is the main reason behind it: Men don't want to leave themselves alone five minutes with their thoughts, because unless the conscience has been totally seared, they hear the rumbling of the wheels of a God coming in judgment. And they see themselves upon the track, and they say, "If only I can so fill my mind with other things between now and then, I won't have any agony until it overtakes me." So they are obsessed with activity. What will drive Americans this Labor Day weekend to cover 10 billion passenger miles? For some it's an opportunity to visit relatives. Yeah, granted. Alright, let's say we knock off half on that basis. What is it that drives others to go from crowded cities to crowded highways to crowded beaches? "I've got to keep busy lest I hear the rumbling of the wheels." What lies at the basis of this dread and fear? Some apprehension, some comprehension of the character of God as holy and of the sinner's being in the way of judgment.

A third question that perhaps has come to the minds of some. If not, it will come sooner or later. What about the child of God who knows he's accepted in the beloved one--I say it reverently--who knows that train of judgment has crushed His Lord and will never crush him? Should a Christian, one who knows there is no condemnation for him in Christ Jesus--should a child of God have any of this aspect of the fear and dread of God? May I answer emphatically and then demonstrate from Scripture, yes. Think with me, even before Adam sinned, this aspect of the fear of God was to have been part of his deterrent function, for God gave the command and couched it in the form of a threat, didn't He? He said,

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it [and He could have stopped there, but to enforce the command and give added motivation to obedience, He stated it in a negative form in terms of a threat]: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. [Adam, if you have any dread of Me as a God of judgment, don't eat, or you're going to put yourself in the track.]"

Now, if this was a legitimate motive for a man in an unfallen state, how much more for us who are in a redeemed state but not yet perfected? The sin that is still within us and about us can have terrible effects upon us, can bring great reproach to the name of our God, and cause us to be wounded and pierced through in many ways with God's chastening hand. So it's not surprising, then, to find such confessions as these coming in the Old and the New Testament from the saints of God: Psalm 119:120: "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; and I am afraid of Thy judgments." This is the nine year-old bully on-the-street-corner trembling. This is not the trembling of awe. David mentions that in other places. But here, as he's contemplating the judgments of God and what it would be to have this God whom he knows by divine revelation, this God whom he has come to see and love in all the magnitude and glory of His holiness and omnipotence--and he thinks, "What will it be when that great God takes men in hand for judgment?" And just the contemplation of it, he says, "It causes me in my flesh to tremble." You see, the Christian has a greater and more accurate view of the character of God than the non-Christian. When he contemplates those darker sides of God's character as they relate to judgment, he cannot help but tremble because he knows God is true. That's the confession of Moses. Psalm 90:11: "Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath." He says, "O God, in the light of Your anger, there is a terror and a dread that is due unto Thee." And failing to render it, is failing to give God what is His due.

Ah but again, someone says, "That's the Old Testament. Does not the New present us with a different perspective?" No, the New Testament only enforces this perspective, for we read in 1 Peter 1:17: "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." Never get so irresponsibly happy and so flippantly cock sure of yourself that you forget you're dealing with a God who judges without respect of persons. Let there be something of holy dread about you throughout the entirety of your days. Paul underscores the same principle in Romans 11 where, having dealt with God's judgment upon Israel as a nation because of unbelief, he says in verses 20 and 22a: "Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." I believe it is clear from these passages (and others could be brought forward), the answer to the question, should the child of God have this aspect of fear? Yes, he should. It is not the dominant thought of the fear of God as we shall see in our study, God willing, next week, but it is nonetheless a vital part of what comprises the fear of the Lord which is the chief part of knowledge and of wisdom.

May I, in closing, bring a word of exhortation to you who are strangers to God's grace. Do I speak to some this morning, young and old, who are strangers to vital union with Christ, strangers to the regenerating work of the Spirit, who bear no positive marks of a saving union with Christ and of true discipleship? Have you no dread of God's awful judgment? Can you sit here this morning and say, "Yes, I believe God is the God as revealed in Scripture. And if He is that God, then like the train that is bearing down upon that man, His judgment bears down upon me." Can you say that without fear and trembling? Can you sit through another Lord's Day a stranger to grace and to the cleansing of the blood of Christ? If you came in this morning ignorant, don't leave ignorant. If you came in spiritually insane, will you leave the same way? Ah, but you say, "Are you trying to scare me into being a Christian?" Listen, suppose I yell out to the man on the track, "Sir, a train is coming! Flee the track!" Am I trying to scare him out of the way? You bet I am, but I'm not scaring him with any phantom scare. I'm scaring him with naked reality, the reality of hardened steel that will crush his throbbing flesh. When I cry out, "Flee the wrath to come! Repent! Give yourself no rest until you know you're joined to Christ!" You say, "Are you trying to scare me into being a Christian?" Yes, but I'm not scaring with phantoms but with awful realities. If the man walking down the track hears my voice and says, "Ah, that guy's just trying to get me off the tracks because he's a killjoy." Or "He's just trying to get me off the track because he wants to hit me for a few bucks." In a few seconds, he'll know I had no motive but his own good. My friend, it will be but a few short seconds as God reckons time. You go on in your impenitence, the very cry that's entered your ear this morning ("repent and flee to Christ") will come to you. May God grant that you will fear with a fear that will cause you to flee from your sin.

And I say to you and myself as the people of God, let us not be caught up in the idea that the essence of spirituality is the measure to which we can carelessly regard the judgment of Almighty God and the terror of the Lord. As one has said,

"Humility, contrition, lowliness of mind are the essence of Biblical godliness." And the dispositional complex which is characterized by these fruits of the Spirit is one that must embrace the fear and trembling which reflect our consciousness of sin and of frailty. The piety of the New Testament is totally alien to the presumption of the

person who is a stranger to the contrite heart. And it is alien to the person who never takes account of the holy and just judgment of God. No little part of our perseverance is that holy dread. When sin becomes so seductive and attractive in its overtures, and it seems as though the reality of a dying Savior and all the other motives of grace have suddenly been cut off in our minds and hearts, there is one motive that is often used of God: if I go down that path, God will have to damn me, for He says, 'The wages of sin is death.'

Then not only with reference to ourselves, Paul speaking in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." My friend, if you stand there seeing the train come to another man, you don't stand there and whistle and say, "Well, it's not going hit me." The thought of what the train will do to him will make you tremble. If you have any sense of ability to identify with a fellow human being, you could do nothing but grow white with horror as the train bore down upon him. So the child of God who's been rescued from the tracks and knows he's been delivered, as he beholds the train of God's fury and wrath bearing down upon others, he cannot help but tremble. And the terror of the Lord becomes part of the motivation to persuade men to flee the wrath to come. May God grant that this aspect of His fear will become an increasing part of our hearts, of our thinking, and may have its commensurate effect in our living. The presence of this fear is no evidence of grace. You may like Felix and tremble this morning and still be impenitent. This fear is no evidence of grace, but it's doubtful there's any grace where this fear is not present. For grace has introduced you to the knowledge of God, the God who is terrible in His judgments. The fear of the Lord is the chief part of wisdom.

God willing, next week, we shall consider that which is the far more dominant aspect: that fear, not of dread and of terror but of veneration and awe which draws us to our God and binds us to Him in a life of loving obedience. And that fear is the fear which is the fruit of the work of God's grace in the hearts of those who become partakers of the benefits of the new covenant.

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