

The Fear of God: Definition, Part 2; Ingredients, Part 1

by Albert N. Martin

Edited transcript of [message](#) preached June 21, 1970

[More Transcripts](#)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). That which is the chief part of knowledge, then, must be the concern of everyone who has any interest in true knowledge. So for the past few Lord's Day mornings, we've been considering that great and dominant theme of Holy Scripture, the fear of the Lord or the fear of God. The word "fear" has two distinct connotations in everyday parlance. There is the fear of terror and dread. Then the second kind of fear is the fear of awe and reverence and veneration. Both of these concepts are caught up in the Biblical teaching on the fear of God. Now, without any negating or diluting the first aspect of the fear of God which we studied last week, I wish to make it clear that this is not the predominant thought of Scripture in the many passages which command, commend, or illustrate the fear of God. Rather, it's this second aspect of fear, the fear of reverential awe and veneration which is the dominant theme of Holy Scripture. When Scripture says the fear of the Lord is the chief part of knowledge, it is not so much the fear of terror and dread which is in view but the fear of veneration, awe, and reverence. It is this fear God says He will put into the hearts of men in the blessings of the new covenant, which will cause them to adhere to His ways and to keep His statutes. So to think through this second aspect of the fear of God, I wish first of all to give some Biblical examples of this fear of reverential awe. Last week we looked at the examples of the fear of dread and terror. We saw it in Adam. We saw it in other places in Scripture. Now this morning we want the concept to come alive in flesh and blood of Biblical examples. And then having looked at some of these Biblical examples of the fear of reverential awe, we shall begin to consider the third main area of our study: what are the indispensable ingredients of the fear of God? Having seen the dominant theme in Scripture; having, I trust, come to some basic understanding of what it is, then we want to move on to consider what must there be in a man if he is to have this fear of God: both the fear of dread and terror but primarily the fear of awe and reverence.

The Biblical examples of the fear of reverence and awe. Genesis 28:12-22:

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into

this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

I've quoted the entire passage because it's pivotal in understanding in a very practical way what this fear of reverential awe truly is. Jacob has a dream. In his dream, he sees a ladder; angels ascending and descending upon the ladder. And in the midst of that dream and this very strange vision, he hears the voice of Jehovah God, the voice of the God of the covenant who comes to renew that covenant to Jacob. And when he awakes from his dream and he begins to reflect upon it, now in the conscious actings of his mind, he comes to certain conclusions. Conclusion number one--and we find it very clearly in verse 16: "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not." He said, "I came out and camped under the open skies, and I had no thought of the immediate presence of God, but I was mistaken." He says, "The Lord is in this place, and I was unaware of it." Then when his consciousness reflects upon the fact that the Lord Jehovah, the great God of creation, the great God of covenant making, covenant keeping promise has been there, and he has actually been in His presence, the reflex action of his whole being is this:

"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! [If God is here, and He is the God He has declared Himself to be in my vision, the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God of creation, the great God of my fathers, and if I am what I know myself to be, Jacob, a fallen son of Adam, a weak creature of the dust; that I should be in the presence of this great God--how dreadful is this place. This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.]"

Now, is that dread, that fear, a fear of terror and of anguish that makes him want to run from God? No, for the subsequent paragraph indicates that it was a fear that was coupled with the most tender characteristics of trust in the faithfulness of God, of confidence in the love and the mercy of God. It's a fear that is perfectly consistent with trust and love. For he then raises a pillar and says, "This will be a monument of the faithfulness of this same God whose presence is dreadful but who will nonetheless carefully fulfill His promise to bring me again to this place. And out of gratitude to Him, I will give Him the tenth of all that I possess." So I suggest that this is a beautiful and clear and accurate example of this second aspect of the fear of God. Though it says he was afraid, and though Jacob uses the term "dreadful," it was not that dread and terror that makes a man want to run from the object like the little boy runs from the bully. But it's a dread and a fear that is perfectly consistent with wanting to be in the presence of that object and wanting to render to it honor and worship, love, and obedience.

The second illustration is in Exodus 3. Now remember, all we're trying to do is look as some Biblical examples of the fear of reverential awe as opposed to the fear of dread and terror. Verses 1-9:

"Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them."

And he goes on to say, "I will deliver My people." And Moses enters into conversation with God beginning with verse 13. Now get the picture, here Moses is out tending sheep--try to relive the situation--and all of the sudden as perhaps he's just looking over his flock to make sure they're all gathered together; that they're no stragglers wandering off to become prey to wild predators, he notices a bush that burst into flames. What would you do in a case like that? Well, all of us have this natural inquisitiveness. And it says the first thing he wanted to do is turn aside and figure out why in the world is that bush not consumed. It's burning, but it's not consumed. So he's going to make a little scientific investigation. He's going to subject that bush to a little scientific analysis, for the Scripture says he's going to turn aside to see why the bush is not burnt. That's the only reason he's going to turn aside. This was some kind of a natural phenomena which caught his eye, and he's inquisitive. He wants to know why things are operating this way. But when God gets his attention through this strange burning of the bush, then He says, "Moses, you don't come near to do a little scientific investigation. I, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have a word to say to you." And when Moses recognized that God was there, the same God whom Jacob recognized as recorded in Genesis 28, it is recorded in this passage that, instead of going over and subjecting that bush to some kind of scientific analysis, Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. Here is a clear statement that Moses was filled with a fear and a dread of God. But was it a fear that made him want to run from that God? No, for that same God then reveals His compassion for His people, His purposes to deliver His people. And rather than run from Him as Adam did when he heard the voice of God and was afraid, Moses draws near with true reverence to commune with this God and talks with Him face to face. So then, this dread that causes the man Moses to hide his face is not the least bit inconsistent with the most intimate dealings with that same God. Moses hides his face, yet he talks with this God. It's the fear of reverential awe, veneration, and honor.

Then over to Isaiah 6. This will be the last example in the Old Testament. Are you beginning to feel something? This is why I'm asking you to turn to all these passages; not for filler. I know I'm only going to get through about one third of what I had hoped

to this morning. But this concept of the fear of God is so pivotal in Scripture that we must spare no pains to gain an accurate understanding of what it is. Isaiah 6:1-5:

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Now, there's two people here or one group and an individual; both looking upon the same object. Now, what is the reaction of these celestial hosts as they look upon this sight of God. They are filled with a holy restlessness. They cannot, as it were, pause and fix their position before the throne. But it says they fly about that throne. With two of their wings they cover their feet, and with two they cover their faces. These creatures called here the seraphim, some form of angelic manifestation who've never known sin; who've never once known the sting of conscience for doing wrong; who've never known what it is to be ashamed in the presence of God because of moral guilt, and yet in the presence of that great God, they veiled their faces. As Moses hid his face and said, "I'm afraid to look upon God," so they hide face, cover feet, and fly about that throne overcome; filled with awe at the holiness, the immensity, the omniscience of God. And they cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." But notice, there is no indication of any sense of grief or self-effacing shame because of sin. But it's not so when the prophet looks upon this same God. For seeing the same object the seraphim saw, there is not only the reaction of being overcome by the immensity and the transcendent majesty of God and His holiness, but there is an added dimension. There is this reflex action of grief, self-effacing shame, conviction, and contrition, because this is not just a creature as the seraphim are, looking upon the exalted creator; this is a sinful creature looking upon the holy God. And therefore, the only fitting reaction is a fear of reverential awe, which is mingled with a sense of uncleanness, which in turn produces conviction and contrition, the only disposition fitting for a sinful creature who gazes upon a holy God. As one has said, "We have the awe and adoration the majesty of God must illicit from all rational creatures." And we have that complexion which the fact of our sinfulness must impart to that reverence and adoration. Seraphim may veil face and cry, "Holy, holy, holy" with no shame of sin, but you and I can't. And if it's incongruous; if it's out of place for sinless beings like seraphim to be in the presence of God without this reverential awe, how much more is it out of place for sinful men and women laden with iniquity like you and like me to draw nigh to His presence without that reverence and Godly fear coupled with a deep sense of self-effacing shame because of our sin.

Ah, but someone says, "That's the climate of the Old Testament. In the Lord Jesus, there has come an overshadowing revelation of the softer lines of God's character." Is that true? Well, turn to one of the accounts in the Gospels, which will forever abolish such a thought. In the Gospel according to Luke, we have an incident in the life of our Lord Jesus, who came for the express purpose of revealing the Father. ("He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." "No man has seen God. The only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.") In Luke 5, Peter and his friends had been fishing all night; they caught nothing. Verses 5-11:

"And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him."

Now, can you bring these two strands of thought together? "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.... And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him." What had happened to Peter? Peter got the message of this act of our Lord. Peter saw behind the fact that the net was put down, and a great multitude of fish was enclosed. He saw that the one who did this is none other than the Son of God, Messiah. And the recognition that dawned upon him--to what degree we do not know, but to some degree that this is God incarnate; this is none other than the Son of God. When that recognition dawned upon him--"I'm in the presence of deity"--what was his reaction? To fall at His feet overcome with a sense of reverential awe and dread that made him blurt out, "Depart from me, Lord. It's not fit that You and I should be in such close proximity." And yet that very reaction was coupled with the most intense longing to be with Him; to be with Him so much that he leaves his business, his home, his friends and follows Him. And there's no jangling of these concepts. Without those two concepts being present in the heart of a man, it's doubtful there's any true attachment to the Christ of Scripture. The idea that we can just snuggle up to Jesus and feel so much at home with Him without this sense of our sinfulness; making us want to cry out, "Depart from me, Lord. It's not fit that You and I should enter into intimate relationship." And yet, wonder of wonders, He's so revealed to us the heart of God and its love and in its way of forgiveness, that we cling to Him. And like these disciples, by His grace, are willing to forsake all to follow Him. Here you have Isaiah 6 repeated. Here is not only a creature in the presence of deity but a sinful creature who senses something's wrong that they are so close: "Depart from me, Lord." And yet at the same time when the commission comes, there is the glad response even as there was with Isaiah. You see, unlike that fear of dread and terror that makes a person want to run from its object, this dread, this fear, this awe, this reverential veneration is perfectly consistent with attachment and with love.

One other example from the New Testament: Revelation 1. John is in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and he receives this vision of the glorified Christ as He now is amidst the candlesticks, that is, in the midst of His church. And as John has this, what is called an apocalyptic vision, there is this unique symbolism. He sees this personage with a sword proceeding from His mouth; His head and His hair white like wool, as white as snow; His voice when it speaks sounds like the dashing of seas upon the shore. What is John's reaction to this vision? Verse 17: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." He said, "My life was overcome. This sight of the transcendent glory and majesty of the Son of man in His position of exalted glory overcame me. I felt as though life had gone out from me." And yet this same one lays His right hand upon John and says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore," and then enters into the most intimate dealings with John. So here you have again an example of this fear and reverential

awe that overcomes a man, and yet at the same time captures a man and brings him into intimate relationship with his object.

So in summarizing, I believe it is accurate to say that that fear of God, which is the soul of Godliness, is a fear which consists of awe, reverence, honor, and worship, and all of these things in the highest level of their exercise. And I just quoted that sentence. It is the reaction of our minds and spirits to a sight of God in His majesty and His holiness. As Professor Murray has so accurately said in seeking to define the fear of God, "The controlling sense of the majesty and holiness of God and the profound reverence which this apprehension draws forth constitute the essence of the fear of God." Or to use the definition given by John Brown in his exposition of 2 Peter where he deals with a little phrase "fear God," he says this: "The fear of God consists in cherishing an awesome sense of the infinite grandeur and excellence corresponding to the revelation God has made of these things in His Word and in His works, inducing in us a conviction that the favor of that God is the greatest of all blessings and His disfavor is the greatest of all evils." The practical effect of all of this is so clearly seen when the Apostle Paul, in describing the state of all men by nature, brings as a pivotal and capstone description of the state of unconverted men in Romans 3:18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." You know why some of you live the way you do--indifferent to the claims of God's holy Law; indifferent to the overtures of the Gosel of His dear Son? It's because you do not live life with the fear of God before your eyes. You do not have a sight and sense of His infinite glory and majesty eliciting, drawing from your heart that longing to walk so as to please Him and never to walk in a way that would displease Him. That's why you live the way you do. There is no fear of God before your eyes. You look out at life and what you want, and you set yourself in a way to obtain it. What your lusts dictate, you do. What your desires and appetites crave, you pursue. And the fear of God, that is, that controlling sense of His majesty and holiness and the profound reverence which that draws forth--that is nothing to you; no part of it is in you. So I trust, as we've looked at these examples and sought to share these formal definitions, that you have somewhat of an understanding of what the fear of God is, particularly this second aspect, the fear of reverential awe.

Now that being so, I trust our minds are already anticipating our next area of consideration: what are the essential ingredients of the fear of God? I think they will be obvious to all of us. Let me give you the heads, and we'll see how far we get this morning. First of all, there must be correct concepts of the character of God. Secondly, there must be a pervasive sense of the presence of God. And thirdly, there must be a constant awareness of our obligations to God.

First of all, then, there must be correct concepts of the character of God, particularly His majesty, His immensity, and His holiness. Revelation 15:3-4 ask a question:

"[Here are the victorious amongst the redeemed, or the redeemed who are victorious. And they are in the presence 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. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest."

As they behold their God, they ask a question: "Seeing You as You are and therefore, having right views of your character and your ways and your judgments,

who shall not fear Thee?" They ask this rhetorical question saying in essence, "Anyone who sees You as we see You must fear You." In other words, this is the acknowledgement that correct concepts of the character of God are an indispensable element, an indispensable ingredient in producing the fear of God. One of the great problems in our day is that we have lost sight of those aspects of the character of God, which are calculated to produce His fear, namely His majesty, His immensity, His holiness. It's as though we're looking at a landscape, and in the foreground of that picture there are little rabbits jumping through the field chasing one another. There's a soft flowing brook winding its way through the foreground. There are other creatures of the fields nested: birds that find themselves on the edge of the twigs of the trees. It's the perfect picture of tranquility and peacefulness. But the backdrop of that landscape is made up of mountains: rugged hunks of stone that up past the timberline shoot to up to 20,000 feet; snowcapped all the year long. And off the sides and behind and above those mountains is a great thunderhead cloud and lightning flashing and playing off the edges. Now, if a man looks at such a picture and only focuses his attention upon the foreground with the rabbits, the brooks, and the birds, he may have a very accurate view of one part of the picture, but his response is inadequate to the totality of that picture. And if he can look at that and feel nothing but tranquility and ease and have no sense of awe and breathless wonder, it's because he's only looking at the foreground and not looking at the background. If any of you have ever had the occasion to be in the midst of the Rocky Mountains, you'll know what I mean. There's that sense of being overpowered by the might and grandeur and sheer massiveness of those mountains. And so it is with the character of God. The Scriptures set before us the softer lines of God's mercy and His compassion and fatherly tenderness. But never do the Scriptures set those attributes before us in isolation from the more awesome and breathtaking characteristics of His holiness, His wrath, His immensity, His eternity, His omniscience, His omnipotence. And in our day, we have lost this aspect of the character of God, and therefore, we have greatly lost the fear of God. The framers of the shorter catechism caught this concept, for in answer to the question "What is God?", they framed the answer in this way: "God is a Spirit." That's His essence. Therefore, He's boundless. He cannot be contained. Then they used three adjectives: infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. And He's those three things in all of these others in His being: wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. What they're saying is: as you look at His goodness, remember, it's the goodness of infinity--infinite and eternal and unchangeable in His goodness, in His mercy, in His truth. They're saying don't look at the birds and the brook and the rabbits without looking at the mountains and the lightning playing off the edges of the cloud. That's what they're saying. And that's what Scripture says to us. So that to contemplate God's love is to contemplate holy love, infinite love, immense love, transcendent love. My own heart was so blessed in the reading of John Brown's thoughts along this line that I felt I could do nothing better than to read a couple of pages to you in which he says,

"Everything about God is fitted to fill the mind with awe. And it would seem as if nothing short of insanity could prevent any being possessed with reason and affection from habitually feeling the sentiment of supreme veneration for God. [You see what he's saying? He says only insanity could prevent any being who has reason and affection, who has a head and a heart or a part of his head and a part of his heart--nothing but insanity could keep such a being from constantly experiencing supreme veneration for God.] He is the unexhausted inexhaustible fountain of all the being, all the life, all the intelligence, all the power, all the activity, all the excellence,

all the happiness in the universe. He is the first and the last and the living one--from everlasting to everlasting, immense--filling heaven and earth with His presence, infinite in power having called into existence myriads of worlds; capable of calling into existence myriads more, upholding all these worlds; Himself upheld by none, controlling all things; Himself uncontrolled, doing according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, infinite in knowledge--every creature manifest in His sight, all things naked and open to His eyes, Hell itself naked before Him and destruction having no covering, infinite in wisdom, wonderful in counsel as well as excellent in working, wise in heart as well as mighty in strength, the holy, holy, holy one, infinite in righteousness. He is the Rock whose work is perfect, and all His ways are justice; a God of truth without iniquity. Just and right is He. The blessedness of the divine being may seem a quality fitted to excite love rather than fear, yet are there two qualities of it: its immeasurable extent and its immaculately holy character, which are well fitted to deepen the impression of awe produced by His eternal, infinite, immutable power, wisdom, and holiness."

Then he goes on to elaborate, quoting passage after passage and concludes by saying,

"Surely a being such as this is worthy to be feared. Surely He is the meet object of the supreme esteem and reverence and love of all intelligent beings. Surely to be the objects of His approval and love and care is the highest honor and happiness of such creatures. To be the objects of His disfavor is to the deepest disgrace and misery that can come to any one of those creatures. And of course, to seek His favor in conformity of mind and will to Him is their highest wisdom and duty. Such are the convictions and feelings of unfallen and restored angelic and human inhabitants of the celestial world. Their unceasing hymn is: 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty. Great and marvelous are Thy works. True and just are Thy ways. Who shall not fear Thee and glorify Thy name?' And this enlightened affectionate sense of the infinite grandeur and excellence of God is in their minds a principle of supreme allegiance to His holy government, rendering it morally impossible that they should disregard His authority or seek their happiness in anything but in union of mind and will and enjoyment with God."

What's the essential ingredient of the fear of God? It must begin with correct concepts of the character of God, particularly His immensity, His majesty, and His holiness. It should be obvious to us, then, as we draw our study to a close this morning, that when the true knowledge of God is forsaken, there can be no valid fear of God. Proverbs 9:10 ties these two things together: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And what is the fear of the Lord? The knowledge of the holy one. That is understanding. So where there is no concept of God to illicit this reverential awe, to produce this sanctified dread, then there can be no true fear of God, and hence, no true understanding. So the decline of the fear of God is rooted in the fact that we've lost the God of the Bible, particularly the God of majesty and His holiness. When divine love is couched in any other context than that of the omnipotence, immensity, holiness, and sovereignty of God, it becomes cheap sentiment which illicit no true fear of God.

The first and essential revelation made in the life and ministry of our Lord, according to John in 1 John, is not that God is love. John says, "The Word of life has been amongst us. We beheld Him. We touched Him. We handled Him. And now we're

going to share what we learned of Him." And he says in verse 5 of chapter 1, "This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." It's in that context and in that alone that we dare put the statement of 1 John 4 that God is love. It's the God of infinite pure light who is a God of love. Therefore, His love will come in a way consistent with and answerable to His burning holiness; never in a way that will cancel or negate the demands of His holiness. So then, if sinless creatures hide their faces in the presence of the God of burning holiness, who are we to think that a sight of the wounds and sacrifice of Christ will negate the necessity for us drawing near with veiled faces and with trembling hearts. It's accurate to say that perhaps nowhere in all of Scripture is this principle more clearly seen than in the cross itself. For what is the cross but God's clearest revelation of His inflexible justice. God had given many revelations of His justice, but when He's put to the test--I say it reverently--and His own beloved Son must be the object of His wrath; if divine justice is to be satisfied, and He spares not His Son but brings upon Him the full brunt His wrath against sin, what a display of inflexible justice; what a display of spotless holiness, so holy that He will turn His back upon His only begotten, the one of whom He said, "This is My Son, My beloved, in whom I am well pleased." Yet the cry comes forth from Golgotha, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me." And our Lord Himself knew the answer. As you read the 22nd Psalm, as He's complaining of His abandonment, in the midst of it, He says, "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." Where do we see infinite, incomprehensible wisdom more clearly than at the cross of Christ? Who would have ever conceived of a way in which the offended triune God punishes Himself to be true to Himself in order to let guilty rebels free. Infinite wisdom revealed in the cross--it's there that we see holy love revealed, love so deep as to press to death the Lord Jesus, love so holy that its channel must be cut through the heart of the Son of God, love so holy that it cannot find a channel for its expression any other way than through the heart of the Son of God, a broken heart. So an enlightened view of the cross of Christ, rather than canceling or negating or diluting anything of the whole drift of Scriptural teaching on the fear of God merely serves to heighten and to seal that concept, so that all our relationship to God through Christ is a relationship in the climate of the fear of God.

You who are here this morning strangers to grace, strangers to forgiveness, strangers to a new heart, could it be that the reason you feel so at ease is because you're doing what is spoken of in Psalm 50:21: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Have you been trying to make God in your own image so you can feel comfortable in your sin; comfortable in your state of impenitence? My friend, God has never been made in your image. He is still that holy one before whom seraphim and cherubim veil face and feet and cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy." There will not be any measure of the fear of God in your heart until you begin to take seriously the revelation He has made of His own character and begin to tremble before Him with the fear of dread and terror till you would fain cry for rocks and mountains to hide you from His face. Then, dear friend, the Gospel will become good news to you, that one was hidden from the face of the Father that you and I might be forgiven, even the Lord Jesus.

And I would say to you and myself as God's people, that we will not grow in the fear of God unless we grow in our awareness of and sensitivity to the Scriptural teaching of the immensity, the majesty, and the holiness of God. This is not something that is incorporated into the life once for all. I would be intensely practical and exhort you to spend much time meditating upon such passages as Isaiah 6 and 40 and Revelation

1 and 19 and some of these other passages which are particularly calculated to set forth God in His transcendent majesty and holiness and immensity until you begin to feel something of the climate of the Biblical patterns of thought and take your place before Him in true Godly fear. As we shall see in subsequent studies, it is this sense of His majesty and holiness, bringing that reflex reaction of true Godly fear that becomes one of the great motivations for a life of holiness and Godliness.

The first essential ingredient of the fear of God is a correct concept of His character. The Lord willing, in subsequent studies, we shall look at the other ingredients. Let me just exhort you, that if your thoughts of God have been such as to leave you devoid of His fear, there's something wrong with what you're thinking about God. And may God help you to begin to adjust your thinking to the statements of Holy Scripture that you might have that fear of the Lord, which is the chief part of knowledge.

www.eternallifeministries.org