

The Fear of God: Source

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This morning we continue our series of studies on one of the most vital themes of Scripture, that theme being, of course, the fear of God. One imminent commentator has said, "It is well known [what a blessing to live in a day when one could say this] that the fear of God is used to signify, not only the whole of his worship but all Godly affections whatsoever and consequently the whole of true religion." This commentator could say it's commonly understood by anyone who knows his Bible that the fear of God can be used as a synonym for the whole of true religion. I believe a study of Scripture leads to that conclusion. And there is this terrible negative implication: if the fear of God is synonymous with the whole of true religion, then the absence of the fear of God is indicative of the absence of true religion. And so, because of the great issues involved in this theme of Scripture, we have been seeking to come to grips with some of the broad outlines of Biblical thought as touching the fear of God. Since the references and illustrations of this are so numerous, it's been impossible to start in Genesis and trace it through to Revelation. We'd be here for years doing that, seeking to exegete and expound every passage. But rather, we've sought to collate some of the main threads of Biblical thought and set them before you in somewhat of an orderly fabric, that you might at least have a basic understanding of what the fear of God is so that when you come across these many references in your own devotional reading, you'll be able to attach to those references the meaning which Scripture warrants us in attaching to them.

Thus far we have considered the predominance of the fear of God in Biblical thought. Secondly, the meaning of the fear of God with its one aspect of dread but its predominant aspect being a fear of awe, reverence, and veneration. As one author has said, "That controlling sense of the majesty and holiness of God and the profound reverence which this concept brings constitutes the essence of the fear of God." And the practical outworking of that fear is that the person who understands God to be such a great being counts His smile as life's greatest blessing and His frown as life's greatest curse. So then, to walk in the fear of God is to so live that one's life reflects that perspective. God's smile is all that matters. Let the world frown; let it curse, but if God smiles, all is well. But if the world smiles and God frowns, nothing is well. So the fear of God, then, has practical and ethical implications. Hence, the people of God are exhorted to carry out progressive holiness in the fear of God, to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, to pass the time of their sojourning in fear. All of these admonitions which I've just quoted from the New Testament indicate that one saved by grace is one saved unto a life lived in the fear of God. Having spent some time on the definition of the fear of God, we tried to come to grips with the essential ingredients of the fear of God. And I suggested that they are three: 1) right views of the character of God, 2) a pervasive sense of the presence of God, and 3) a constraining awareness of my obligation to God: to love Him supremely, to obey Him implicitly, and to trust Him completely. Wherever the fear of God is present, those ingredients will be there.

Now, our goal this morning is to try to discover from Scripture the origin or the source of the fear of God. Now, to show the relationship of this morning's study to what's preceded, let me use a very homey illustration, one I trust will not cause you to begin to salivate in all of your juices down here so work that you'll be distracted from the rest of the sermon because of what I use for an illustration. But suppose someone has never seen a nice cake, and so you bake a cake and set it before the person. The first question they ask is: "What is it?" And you say, "That is a cake. It is something to eat." Then they ask you, "What's it made of?" So you give them the ingredients. You say, "It's made of flour, certain forms of shortening, baking powder, and certain forms of spices." And so now you've told them, not only what it is but what makes it what it is. Then when you're done with that, they say, "Where did the ingredients come from?" You say, "The flour came from grain, which is grown out in the fields somewhere. And the shortening came from either grain or a certain animal which fed upon the field." And so you tell them the origin of those ingredients. Now, what we've done in our study thus far is tell you what the cake is, what is the fear of God. It is that regard of God which, considering Him in the majesty and glory of His person, produces in us the sense that His smile is the greatest of life's blessings and His frown the greatest of life's curses. Now we say, "What is that made of?" And we've said three ingredients. It's made up of right views of who God is, a pervasive sense of His presence, and a constraining awareness of our obligation to Him.

But now someone says, "Yes, but where do those ingredients come from?" And so that's where we are this morning. Having looked at the cake, told what the ingredients are, we want to show what is the origin, what is the source of these things. And may I say at the outset, this is not an academic exercise. Some of you may sit here and say, "Ho-hum, why in the world doesn't the pastor tell us some nice sweet things. Here he's going to make us think again." Ah, my friend, one of the most crippling errors in all religious experience, even amongst Christians, is in this very area. It's not enough to know that a certain virtue is necessary, but you must know how to get that virtue. Remember what Paul said about his fellow Jews. They knew you had to have righteousness to be saved. They knew that a righteous God could not accept unrighteous people in a relationship of friendship. But Paul says in Romans 10, "And they being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about to establish their own righteousness, having not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." What was their problem? They knew they had to have righteousness, but they weren't concerned to find out what is the source or the origin of the righteousness which alone is acceptable to God. Now I hope if you've listened with even half of one ear, that you're convinced that if you don't have the fear of God, you're not a Christian. You know nothing of Biblical religion. I hope you're convinced of that. If you aren't--I say it lovingly--it will take hell to convince you. If all the testimonies we've brought forth from Scripture and laid them out--if these things have not convinced you that it's necessary that you possess the fear of God, I don't know what will. Ah, but great crippling harm can come if you don't see the right place to get the fear of God. It's not enough to know you must have it but where you get it. And so this is not an academic exercise. It's a matter of great spiritual concern. And it's only because of that that I've wrestled with trying to lay out in some simple clear way the Biblical material on the subject. Well, how will we answer the question, then, what is the origin or source of the fear of God? I want to do it, first of all, by showing that the fear of God implanted in the heart is a distinct blessing of the covenant of grace. And then secondly, I want to demonstrate from Scripture how the fear of God is planted in the heart by the work of God's grace.

First of all, then, let's establish from Scripture that the implanting of the fear of God in the heart of any fellow, girl, man, or woman is a distinct blessing of the covenant of grace. All of God's dealing with men are on the basis of His covenantal relationship to them. God pledges to do certain things upon certain conditions which He Himself determines. According to Scripture, the blessings of the saving grace of the triune God come to us in the terms of what Scripture calls the everlasting covenant, described sometimes under the terms of the new covenant when the blessings of that covenant are contrasted with the Mosaic economy. Now, Jesus said in the institution of the first occasion of the Lord's supper, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." In other words, all He's to do in the shedding of His blood has a distinct reference to the blessings to be secured within the framework of the new covenant. No man receives any blessing of the covenant apart from the blood which Jesus shed. But all who receive any benefits from that blood receive them in terms of the distinct blessings of the new covenant. So then, everyone who has any interest in the blood of Christ should be vitally concerned about the new covenant. Now, what blessings were promised in that covenant? And if you want a good exercise for your studies this afternoon to sanctify the Lord's Day, then study in detail the section in Ezekiel 36, Jeremiah 31 and 32 where you have the clearest statements in the Old Testament concerning the peculiar blessings God will bring under the new covenant. And we know these passages apply because the Holy Spirit quotes them in the New Testament, particularly in Hebrews 8 and 10. But the passage I have particularly concern that we look at this morning is Jeremiah 32, for of the passages dealing with the new covenant, it alone speaks directly to the matter of the fear of God and its place in the new covenant. Now remember what we're trying to do, so you don't get lost in the woods and can't see the woods for the trees. We're establishing the fact that the origin of the fear of God is the blessing promised in the new covenant. All these blessings of the new covenant are couched in the language that is suffused with references to Israel and Judah, for God was giving His prophecies through that people. But we know they have reference to all the people of God, as they are thus used in Hebrews 8 and 10. Jeremiah 32:38-41:

"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. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul."

Now, in the climate of promising good to His people, God says He will put His fear into their hearts (v. 40) thus securing their perseverance in His way. Notice the relationship: "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from Me." In the old economy, though God set His law before them; though they had such displays of His majesty and His power that they trembled and dared not touch the mount, they went a whoring from Him time after time until God had to send a whole nation into captivity because of their spiritual whoredom. Now He says,

"In the administration of this new covenant, of the blessings of the everlasting covenant, all the people who come under the blessings of this covenant will not go a whoring from Me. They will not depart from Me. And the reason they will not is this: I will put My fear into their hearts. I will so establish them in My fear from the heart (the seat of their beings) that they will cling to Me, cling to My ways, and will not depart from Me."

So then, what do we learn from this statement in the prophecy of Jeremiah? We learn first of all that the fear of God is a distinctive blessing of the everlasting covenant. No man fears God unless he has the fear of God within the framework of the covenant of grace. Secondly, it is a distinctly sovereign work of God: "I will put My fear in their hearts." How can God state it more clearly that He's going to do this? He will do it within the framework of the everlasting covenant. And He says, "I will put it into the heart." The realm in which He establishes His fear is the seat of a man's being, and what a man is in his heart, he is. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." God says, then, what He does will not be a surface thing that will merely affect Him in time as the administration of the Mosaic economy when they trembled for a time, and when under the prophet Elijah, there is this demonstration of power and the nation falls for a time upon its face saying, "The Lord He is God." The pattern of the nation as a nation was spiritual whoredom and turning from God continually. But He says, "Not so, all who come under the blessings of this covenant will have my fear implanted in the heart; it will secure their cleaving unto Me." And the fifth thing this passage tells us is that it will be done in a context of gracious blessing. Verse 41: "I will rejoice over them to do them good." So this implanting of His fear is in the context of the blessings of grace. Now, what can we conclude from this prophecy of Jeremiah? Two things. First, there is no way to be a partaker of the fear of God but to have it put into our hearts as a distinct blessing of the new covenant. No such fear is ever found growing in purely Adamic soil. There's only one attitude to God you can grow in your heart by nature. Romans 3:18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now by nature, if your conscience becomes awakened, you may dread God with a dread that wishes God were not, as Adam did. He was afraid when he heard the voice of God. He wished that somehow God would go into a state of nonexistence. But you won't fear God with this fear of awe and veneration that binds you to Him in a relationship of love and obedience. Only those who come under the blessings of the new covenant--there's no way to be a partaker of this sphere but in the way of the new covenant. It doesn't come by education. It doesn't come by spiritual osmoses. It comes only as you enter the blessings of the new covenant. But the second conclusion we draw from this passage is that all who are partakers of the blessings of the new covenant will evidence that the fear of God has been planted in their hearts. There's no such thing as a sinner forgiven by the blood of the covenant who doesn't fear God. There's no such thing as one who comes to Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant and is pardoned but who then goes out to walk indifferent to God's fear. No, no, there's no way to know the fear of God but by coming under the blessings of the new covenant. All who are under any of His blessings are under this blessing of His fear.

Having established the first principle that the origin of the fear of God is that it is a distinct blessing of the new covenant, consider now with me the manner in which the fear of God is imparted to the human heart in the new covenant. I don't mean to be irreverent when I ask this question: does God, as it were, form a disposition called the fear of God and then, like you put money into a safe, just plunk it down in the heart of a sinner? Now, I don't limit Him--He could do that. If He could put into the minds of heathen kings like Cyrus to be kindly disposed to His people in order to fulfill His words of prophecy, I have no question that God can do anything He wants along those lines. The Scripture says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." So the question is not what God can do, but has Scripture revealed how He puts the fear of God into our hearts?

That's the issue. And it's a beautiful thing when we discover that with so much of God's working in grace, it does not bypass the natural structure of how man is made, the operations of his mind and his affections. But it works behind and underneath and in and through them so that many times it's difficult to discern our working from His working. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Does this mean He bypasses your wishing, desiring, choosing, willing, and doing; that we're just sort of little puppets at the end of the strings of God working, waiting for impulses to move us to pray, to move us to witness, to move us holy deeds? No, no, God works in you to will. He works beneath my consciousness. All I'm conscious of is that I chose to come to church; that I chose, when Mr. Bishoff was praying, to give myself with him as he prayed, as he worshipped. I chose to have my heart go out with him. God was working in me to will and to do of His good pleasure. So then, He doesn't work in us bypassing what we are as human beings but laying hold of all that we are, working beneath and above and outside and through and in. And this is the beauty of the working of His grace. And so turning to Jeremiah 31, we can see how He plants this fear in our hearts as we parallel this passage dealing with the blessings of the new covenant with what we've already read in Jeremiah 32. Verses 31-33:

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people."

What's the first distinct blessing, then, of the new covenant? And this is the passage quoted almost word for word in Hebrews 8. God says,

"This is the first thing I will do: I will powerfully and inwardly incline them to a life of obedience. What I require of them will not only be external to them. They had that in the Mosaic economy. They know what I required of them. I wrote it with My own finger upon tablets of stone. But with a few exceptions of those true Israelites within Israel, very few of them could say with David, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God. Yea, Thy law is within my heart.' But in the new covenant, everyone who comes under its blessings will not only have the external standard of My law to tell them what to do, but I will write My law upon the heart. There will be an inward affinity to that law so that there will be an inclination to keep and to obey that holy law. I will not only set My requirements before them, but I will inwardly incline them to a life of obedience."

Now, what is that but the third ingredient of the fear of God. I've called it a constraining awareness of my obligation to God. God says, "I will put that in you. I will write my law upon the heart so there will be a constraining awareness of your obligation to Me and a delight to perform your obligation." "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." Why? "Thy law is within my heart [external, telling me what to do, yes, but internal within me, inclining me to a life of obedience]."

What's the second thing God says He will do? Notice the latter part of verse 33: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people. [They will not only own Me as I revealed Myself in the new covenant, which takes in the whole revelation made in the Person

and work of His dear Son, but I will own them.] Now, what is this but God bringing Himself into an intimate covenant relationship to His people, filling them with this pervasive sense of His presence and their relationship to Him and His to them. And isn't that the second ingredient of the fear of God, when I recognize this great, mighty, transcendent, holy, powerful God is not a God out there somewhere, but He's my God, and I am His child. I belong to Him, and He belongs to me in this covenantal relationship. God says, "This is what I will do." He'll commit Himself to an intimate relationship with His people, which is one of the pivotal issues of all God's covenant relationships. You see it come to its fullest expression in Revelation 21 where the new heaven and new earth are described, and John says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." That's what heaven's all about. And God says, "This is what I've pledged in the new covenant."

And what's the third thing He promises here? Verse 34: "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD." God says in the new covenant He will impart a true and inward knowledge of Himself to His people. Under the old economy, there were some that truly knew God, but the great masses of them didn't know Him. They saw such mighty demonstrations of His power, but they were utterly ignorant of His heart. God tells them, "I hear your groaning down here in Egypt. I'm moved with pity and compassion. I send Moses down to be a deliverer; to bring you out in My pity and compassion." And they're no sooner out of Egypt down by the Red Sea, and what do they do? They come to Moses and say, "God brought us out to kill us." They didn't know Jehovah. They had no knowledge of His heart. To think that of God, the God who said, "I've heard your cry. I've heard your pleas. They've come up into My presence. In love and pity, I will redeem you." They turn around and say, "He brought us out to kill us." How would you feel as a father if you told your son, "Look, I've planned a wonderful day for you. We're going to do thus and thus." And you no sooner get into the car, and he says, "Daddy, are you going to take this car and run it off a cliff and kill me?" He'd say, "Son, you don't know me." They didn't know Him. O, a few did, but most didn't. They didn't know His power. They'd seen those miracles and the plagues upon Egypt, and yet here's a little sea, and they say, "That sea's bigger than our God. We've had it." They didn't know Him. But He says in the new covenant, they'll not need to be tutoring one another saying, "Know the Lord," for one of the blessings of the new covenant will be the impartation of a true and inward experimental knowledge of God. And what is that but what I called earlier, right views of the character of God inwardly and spiritually perceived.

And so the three ingredients of the fear of God are all here. God says, "I will put these things into their hearts," and by putting the ingredients there, you get the cake. When you put the flower, the shortening, the leavening, and everything in the right proportions, you come up with a cake. Where the ingredients are put together, you get the end product. God says, "I will put My fear into their hearts." How will He do it? By inwardly disposing them to a life of obedience, making them aware of their obligations to Him and then delight in the discharge of that obligation. "I will," He says, "commit Myself to an intimate relationship to them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." And He says, "I will bring them to an experimental knowledge of who I am." But now notice carefully, I left out one phrase at the end. And this is, as it were, the pivot upon which everything else stands and rests: "For I will do all of this in the light of and with reference to and because of this great blessing: I will forgive their

iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more." In other words, the base upon which all these other blessings rest, and that by which the others are supported is the blessing of full and final forgiveness of sin. "All these things I said I would do: inclining you to do My will, giving you an experimental knowledge of Myself, owning you as My people so that you own Me as your God." All of this is inseparably joined to the forgiveness of sins. And only he who receives that forgiveness will know the other blessings of the new covenant implanted in his heart. And so you see there is in the development in the thought of the prophet--and again I remind you it's quoted in Hebrews 8 to show this is what Christ came to effect--there is this inseparable relationship between having the ingredients of the fear of God and therefore having the fear of God and being in a state of conscious forgiveness through the blood of the covenant.

Now, there's one text of Scripture that ties those two thoughts together beautifully. And let me exhort you to gird up the loins of your mind and pray that the Spirit of God will make this truth increasingly real or perhaps real for the first time. Here in Psalm 130, the context is a state of dejection by the people of God. They are in what the Psalmist describes as "the depths." Verse 1: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD." When you're in the depths, you may not be able to shout, but you can cry. And that's what he does. "Lord, hear my voice: let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." Now we get a little hint as to what his depths are. "If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" As he contemplates who God is (holy, lofty, spotless light, purity, inflexible justice), he says,

"Lord, if a God like You should mark iniquities; that is, if You should take account of every sin I've committed, every deflection from Your holy law in thought and word and deed, if you should mark all that I've done that is contrary to Your law, if You should hold me to account for all that I failed to do that is required by Your law, who, Lord, could stand, that is, who could abide in Your presence?"

As Psalm 1:5 says, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." They shall be overcome. They shall shrivel before the sight of God's burning holiness and their own guilt and sin. And so the Psalmist asked the question, "If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" And if we can't stand before God with delight, we can't walk in His fear. How can you walk in delightful communion with a God with whom you sense nothing but dread and terror? "Who could stand before you, God?" There's the question, but then verse 4 brings out the affirmation, "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." He says,

"Lord, no one could stand before You if You mark iniquity; if You're to punish iniquity; if You're to give me what I deserve. And if I cannot stand before You, I will know nothing of a heart inclined to do Your will; I will know nothing of being able to own You as my God and have You own me as Your child; I will know nothing of this inward experimental acquaintance with You that makes You delight in me and me in You. Hence, Lord, I will know nothing of true fear. I can know dread. I can know the terror of a Felix who trembles, but Lord, I cannot stand."

But he says, "The answer to this dilemma is, a way of forgiveness has been discovered in God. And the result of discovering forgiveness in God is that it brings the discoverer into the fear of God." So what does this text tell us? It sets before us in a beautiful synthesis what I've been trying say: that the end of this disclosure of His way of forgiveness on the part of God is to have a people who truly fear Him. And a

discovery of God's way of forgiveness will always secure the fear of God in the heart of the one who discovers it.

You say, "How is that? If the text had read, 'There is justice with God that He may be feared,' I could understand that. But how does the forgiveness of God discovered secure the fear of God?" May I suggest two ways. Number one: Because in that which was wrought to work out forgiveness, there has been the fullest, most intense, and glorious display of all the attributes of God. If the fear of God begins with right views of God's character (seeing His majesty and His glory), then I say that discovering God's way of forgiveness is to discover the brightest display of all His glorious attributes. Therefore, because there is forgiveness with God, He is feared. How did that forgiveness come? Are you staggered at the wisdom that framed worlds, that formed the intricacies of a little cell as well as the expanses of the galaxies. That's all like kindergarten knowledge when you stand baffled before the wisdom of a virgin's womb, of an incarnate God, the wisdom that could conceive of a way forgiving sinful men by God Himself actually becoming a man; the offended God taking the offense upon Himself and so discharging that offence that He can be just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus. No wonder Christ is called the wisdom of God. What a display of wisdom. Ah, but what about His holiness? Do you see His holiness when you look out with those escaping ones from Sodom and Gomorrah and see the plains going up in fire and brimstone, and you say, "Who's doing this?" God is. You say, "O, what a holy God He must be, hating the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain so much that He makes, as it were, heaven to be a belching oven to pour out fire and brimstone." My friend, that's no display of God's holiness in comparison with Calvary. But when you look to the cross and see the shrouded heaven covered in blackness; look upon the heaving bosom of the Son of God, then you hear that cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?", the only answer is, God is so holy that when His own beloved Son, the one of whom He spoke from heaven on several occasions and said, "This is the one in whom I'm well pleased"--when the sins of men are being imputed to Him, the Father must bring down the stroke of His wrath upon His own beloved Son until He cries out with a cry that eternity will not be able to fathom, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

"There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." You see, to discover the way of forgiveness wrought out in the incarnation of Christ, in the terrible agonies of Christ, is to see a display of wisdom far beyond any other display God has made. It is to see a display of holiness far beyond any other display God has made. It is to see a display of power far beyond any other display God has made, even the power that raised His Son from the dead. For we read in Colossian 2 that Christ made an open show of the powers of darkness when He triumphed over them in His death and in His glorious resurrection. Think of all of the powers of hell that would have sought to keep Him in a state of death. And when Paul would try to somehow gather some analogies or illustrations of the power of God operative of believers in Ephesians 1, what does he reach for? He speaks of the power of God's might, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. There's the display of God's mighty power. The display of His love, who can speak of it? "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The display of what I know no other way to describe than majestic condescension. Philippians 2:6-7: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 2: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Now, do you see why the way of forgiveness discovered produces

the fear of God? How can you discover those things without standing amazed before such a God. Can you? Impossible! Then the second reason why forgiveness and fear are joined together is that a believing reception of that forgiveness which God offers through His Son brings peace and rest from the fear of dread and terror and binds the heart to God in grateful love and glad submission, even the submission of an adopted son. Who can discover that kind of forgiveness in God without saying, "Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee. 'Tis all that I can do." So God, by showing mercy upon the undeserving and displaying forgiveness, brings His people into this fear. So we see, then, that the fear of God is secured on the basis of mercy and grace in a way that all the terrors of the law could never approach. It considers God's mercies and benefits given more than His judgments promised. The fear of dread thinks of judgment and trembles. The fear of God thinks of mercies given and worships. It regards more the open hand of God's blessing than the closed fist of His judgment.

This brings me to close the message this morning by drawing out several practical implications of this teaching. As to the source of the fear of God, one very basic doctrinal implication and then several practical. Behold the folly of all man-made religions, for they will either seek to produce the fear of God on another basis other than forgiveness, or they will promise forgiveness in a way which doesn't produce the fear of God. All deflections from Biblical religion will do one of two things: They'll say like the Romanists, "Why, you can't tell people they're completely accepted and forgiven, they'll go out and live like hell." That's the claim of Rome. "You don't dare do that. They'll go out and raise cane. You mean tell a man he's forgiven, accepted; heaven is just as certain now as though he were there. Why, he'll live like the devil." And so their way to produce the fear of God that produces obedience is to rub the conscience raw with terrors and insecurities and doubts about one's acceptance. Keep the conscience raw. Rub it with duties, rub it with terrors, rub it with judgment. Then people will tremblingly try to obey God, hoping they'll make it. That's not Biblical religion; that's heathenism. And this truth we've dealt with this morning exposes it for what it is. O no, God takes the raw conscience full of the terrors of the damned, and disclosing the way of forgiveness, binds that heart to Him in fear, true fear based upon love and trust. But then the second aspect of false religion is this--and this is what you find much in our day: They'll say, "O yes, through the blood of the cross--full and complete forgiveness." And they're people sitting here this morning who have no terrors. You don't tremble like some of my poor Roman Catholic friends do, hoping and wondering if you'll wake up in purgatory tomorrow. You're dead sure you're going to wake up in heaven because you're forgiven through the blood of the cross. But your forgiveness has come in a way that has left your heart utterly devoid of the fear of God. You don't know what it is to walk before Him with a careful conscience. You don't know what it is to be powerfully inclined to obedience to His holy law from the heart. You'll go out and desecrate this day. You've thrown your two hours before God this morning. You'll live the rest of the day as you please with no reference to His law. You order your home, the use of your TV, your time with no reference to His law, and yet you don't have any terrors of the damned. Why? Because, my friend, you've believed a lie, that you could have forgiveness in a way that leaves you a stranger to His fear. Both of those are errors that are damning to the core. You can't fear God until you come into the climate of full forgiveness. But if you come into the climate of full forgiveness, you must fear Him. And if you don't, you've never known His saving mercy.

Well, then, several practical words of direction in closing. There are some of you here this morning to whom I would give a word of direction. I'd call you awakened souls.

You've got a conscience that is rubbed raw. The terrors of the law and of God track you down, and you have a fear of dread. But you know nothing of that fear that is based upon forgiveness. You have the spirit of bondage. But you know nothing of the spirit of adoption which makes you cry, "Abba Father." I say to you, you'll find no rest and no true fear of God until you come as you are to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and see Him seated upon a mercy seat. There is a way of forgiveness that He may be feared. You'll not fear Him until you trust Him as your Savior. And I plead with you to cast yourself upon Him just as you are, for that's how He bids you come.

Then a word of consolation for some of you troubled souls, true children of God who feel yourselves so sinful. At times you wonder how it can be that God bears so long with the likes of you. Ah, my friend, don't listen to people who tell you, "Forget your sin; just rejoice in the Lord." No, don't forget your sin. You let the Holy Spirit show you all He wants to, realizing He's only shown you the one-thousandth part of it. But don't stop there, for when you've said verse 3, "God if You should mark iniquities, who could stand," the more you see of your sin, the more you'll be amazed at the display of all the magnitude of God's glory in providing forgiveness. And the more you see the magnitude of God's glory in providing forgiveness, the more you'll fear Him. "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." Jesus said, "To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much." So when God's showing you more of your sin, it's because He would draw you deeper into His love. Don't run away from that which would make you love Him more. The way to love Him more is not to think positive thoughts and say, "Well, if I'm accepted in Christ, I'm not going to think about my sin; I'm not going to think about my foul motives; I'm not going to think about the windings of my corrupt heart. I'm just going to be happy, happy, happy in Jesus all day long." Rubbish! The Holy Spirit never told anybody that. If we live in the Psalms, it will keep us from that. Let the sight of your sin bring you to tremble with David in verse 3: "Lord, if you should mark my iniquities...." That's a child of God talking. That's not somebody who hadn't been converted. He says, "Lord, if you should mark my iniquities, I who am your child, how could I stand? But with Thee there is forgiveness." Octavius Winslow, that great devotional writer who wrote the book *Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul*, said, "Soak the roots of thy profession daily in the blood of Christ. And as you soak them in the blood of Christ and come again and again to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, that's how the fear of God will be deepened."

Then I would close with what I trust will be a word of conviction to some of you who are deceived. There are many of you here this morning who feel yourselves to be forgiven--no dread, no fear of hell, because you feel all is well. You say, "I have the blessings of the new covenant." But my friend, where is this fear? He said if He's brought you into that covenant, He's put His fear within your heart. Do you display the constraining awareness of your obligation to Him? Do you display the pervasive sense of His presence? As one servant of God has said, "But if any who imagine themselves partakers of God's forgiveness who do not at the same time feel their hearts struck with a Godly fear of the divine majesty, let them know that all their joys are self-invented deceptions, since it is to this very end that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared." Has your understanding of forgiveness bound you to a life lived in the fear of God? Let me make it more personal. If I were to ask your children what's the one thing that characterized your Dad above everything else, would they say, "He fears God." In everything in the home, Daddy's first regard is, "What's God say? How do we keep the Lord's Day? What's God say? How will we plan our lives? What's God say? What will we do as a family? What's God say?"

Would your children say that's the dominant characteristic of you as a father? What about you as a mother? What do your children think most of when they think of Mom? Would they instinctively say, "I don't know how to describe it, but all I know is that in everything Mom does and says, it's what God says that matters most; it's knowing God, believing Him, trusting Him, loving Him. Is that what your kids would say of you? Or would they say, "That which characterizes Dad most is...." Now let your conscience go to work. What would they say? "That which characterizes Mom most is...." How I thank God that I can give that testimony to my parents. If anyone asks me, "What did your mom think most about?", I would have to say before I was converted, with clinched teeth, "Everything's God, God, God." Now I can say, "Thank God, everything was God, God: what did He say about rearing children, not what did psychology say; not what did society say about the home, but what did God say?" Are your kids going to make that testimony about you? My friend, you can't buy that. You can buy pretty clothes to keep up with fashions, but you can't buy that witness. You've got to earn it, and you earn it in a life lived in the fear of God. Thank God, I know there are some of you kids that would jump off of your bench this morning and say, "Pastor, that's my mom and dad." But there's some of you who wouldn't dare go home and ask your own kids if they could be ones that would jump off their bench this morning, because you know they couldn't if they were honest. Can I make it any plainer? Will you go out another Lord's Day with just a Christ of convenience, or will you say, "O God, by Your dear Son in the Spirit, give me such a sight of forgiving grace that I'll begin to truly fear You.

That's the origin of the fear of God, the climate of the gracious provision of the new covenant. Isn't it wonderful, child of God, to look back and say, "You mean God did all that to bring me to fear Him?" Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of time. But the Scripture says that the works of God are sought out of all those who have pleasure therein. Has it been a pleasure to trace out this morning how God put His fear into your heart? Doesn't it make you want to shout, "Halleluiah, what a Savior!" When God said, "I'm going to take that sinner; I'm going to bring him in tow, and I'm going to put My fear into his heart." Then He gave us such a saving sight of mercy that it broke us. We didn't know what happened. I look back now and say, "How stupid I was." But all I found was I couldn't keep away from this Book. I wanted to know what it said, and I wanted to obey it. And God wasn't just a word that Mom and Dad talked about. He was my God, and I knew Him, and I knew that He owned me. He did all of that for a little dirty-mouthed senior in high school in Stamford, Connecticut. O amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Ah, dear friend, if you can't be amazed in tracing out the work of God, may God grant that you'll cast yourself upon His dear Son, the mediator of the new covenant. This is what Jesus does. Flee to Him and ask Him to have mercy upon you.

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