

The Fear of God: Relationship to Conduct, Part 1

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In our previous studies, we have considered the predominance of the fear of God in Biblical thought, underscoring the fact that from Genesis to Revelation, literally and many verses in each book between Genesis and Revelation, the subject of the fear of God comes before us explicitly, that is, distinct, specific references using those very words "the fear of God," and then many other times implicitly where, though the words are not used, the thought of the fear of God is very evident in the portions of Scripture thus considered. And having looked at the predominance of the fear of God, we spent some weeks trying to grasp something of the meaning of the fear of God. What does Scripture mean when it says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"? When Peter says, "Fear God, honor the king," what are we to understand by those words? We have seen that Scripture teaches that one aspect, though a very small aspect of the fear of God, is the fear of dread or terror, which God's enemies ought to have when they think of His righteous judgment funneled upon them and directed toward them. But that fear of God which is most commanded and commended in Scripture is the fear of veneration, reverence and awe. It is to live under the constraint of God's holiness, His majesty, and His goodness; to regard God in such a light that His smile is life's greatest blessing and His frown life's greatest curse. Then having considered the predominance of the fear of God and something of its meaning, we spent a couple of weeks seeking to lay hold of the essential ingredients of the fear of God. Wherever the fear of God is present in a man or woman, fellow or girl, there are certain ingredients which will always comprise the fear of God. And there are basically three: right views of the character of God, a pervasive sense of the presence of God, and a constraining awareness of our obligation to God. Then last week we came to the fourth area of study, namely the origin or source of the fear of God. Whenever those ingredients are present in a man or woman, where do they come from? Is that fruit found upon nature's tree? Does it grow upon Adamic stock? Or is it the fruit of God's work in grace? We saw in our study of Jeremiah 32 that the fear of God is a distinct blessing of the new covenant of that which God is committed to do by virtue of the death of His own dear Son. Therefore, whenever the fear of God is present, it's because God has applied with power the blessings of the new covenant purchased by the blood of Christ. And so the fear of God being a blessing of the new covenant is a blessing that is inseparably joined with the joy and the realization of the forgiveness of sin. As one author has so beautifully said, "The heart is shy of a condemning God but closeth with and adhereth to a pardoning God." That's simply stating in beautiful poetic language what David said in Psalm 130:4: "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared," indicating that until a man knows the forgiveness of God based upon the blood of the everlasting covenant, he will never rightly fear God. He may have a terror of God; he may have a dread of God, but that terror and dread will drive him

from God. But the fear of God couched in the consciousness of forgiveness is a fear which causes us to draw nigh to God and to cling to Him and His ways.

It will be my purpose this morning and next Sunday morning, God willing, to deal with what I'm going to call the relationship between the fear of God and conduct. Having given this broad overview of the fear of God, I have at distinct points sought to bring in some application simply because I feel it's never right to teach objective doctrinal truth without application. But I've not been able to digress too long from the main structure. We've looked at the predominance of the fear of God, the meaning of the fear of God, the ingredients of the fear of God, the source of the fear of God. Now, after all this teaching, you sit there and say, "So what?" Well, I want to answer that question. What then is the relationship of all that Scripture teaches on the fear of God to this whole matter of conduct? And I will lay two propositions before you, one this morning and another, God willing, next week. The first: the fear of God is the holy soil which produces a Godly life. And the second: the absence of the fear of God is the unholy soil which produces an ungodly life. There will be some overlapping, but I trust to stick rather closely to this two-fold outline.

First of all, the fear of God is the holy soil which produces a Godly life. What is the practical outworking of this fear of God, this fear of God which is an essential element of true religion, which is a distinct and indispensable blessing of the new covenant? What is the practical effect of the fear of God? Well, I want you to look with me at seven or eight texts of Scripture. Qualitative selectivity has governed these texts, for we see different men and women in Scripture under a great variety of circumstances. And yet in each case where there is true Godliness, it will be attributed to this soil of the fear of God.

The first text is the first passage in which the fear of God is distinctly mentioned in Scripture. Genesis 20. Now let me give you just a brief digest of verses 1-10. Abraham has been called out by the word of God. And as he's sojourning with his wife Sarah, he comes into the area which we would call the Philistines area. And he knows that in that area there's a heathen king. And he knows something of the practice of heathen kings when they see pretty women. And he knows enough of his wife to know she still qualifies as a pretty woman. So he reasons, "If I come into that area and that king sees my wife, and she's a good-looker, he's going to set his desire upon her. And I'll stand in the way; therefore, he'll dispose of me to get my woman." So he says, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll sort of tell a half-truth. I'll say she's my sister." Well, there's some relationship there, but that's not all she was. The impression was, "We're just a brother and sister taking a little summer vacation." So the king, Abimelech, takes Sarah into his house, but God wonderfully restrains him for cohabiting with her. He doesn't live with her as a husband. There is no sexual relationship. And God reveals Himself to this heathen king and says, "You go ahead and do this, and you're a dead man." And so Abimelech comes to Abraham and says, "Why did you do this to me?" Now we pick up the narrative in verse 8:

"Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? [In other words, Abraham, what did you see when you came into our kingdom that would make you lie

to me and therefore encourage me to take your wife to be my wife and almost plunge myself and my whole country under the judgment of God for this terrible sin? What did you see that made you so act with reference to me?] And Abraham said, Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife."

Do you see what he says? He says,

"Abimelech, you asked me for a reason as to why I was fearful that you would think nothing of killing me and taking my wife. It's because I reasoned this way: This is a heathen land; you are a heathen king. Since there is no true knowledge of the true God who has revealed Himself to me; therefore, there is no fear of God. For where there are no right views of God, there cannot be any fear of God. And if there is no fear of God, there will be no ethical sensitivity. Where the fear of God is absent, your conduct will be a reflection of the absence of His fear; therefore, I did what I did."

Now, Abraham was wrong in assuming that he had all the facts. He did not know that just like God revealed Himself to him, He could have revealed to Abimelech that this was a special servant of God, and he was not to touch his wife nor touch him. But Abraham staggered here in his faith, though he was the friend of God and great in faith in other places. And though Abraham was wrong in assuming there was no knowledge of God, Abraham was exactly right in assuming that if there was proper knowledge of God, it would reflect itself in the brutality of conduct in this practical way. Now, you see the relationship? Abraham assumed that the only soil out of which Godliness could grow was the fear of God. And if that soil was not present, neither would the produce of the fear of God be present. And so Abraham shows early in the revelation of God here in Scripture that there is this inseparable relationship between the fear of God and practical Godliness.

Now turn to Genesis 42, and we'll give another instance. Now, just stick with us as we go through these seven or eight passages. And I think it will be worth your trouble, for when we come to the matter of distinct and specific application, I hope it will open up many areas that perhaps have been clouded up until now. We're in the section dealing with the life of Joseph. And you'll remember the story of how Joseph's brothers come down to Egypt to get grain. And Joseph sits there on the throne second only to Pharaoh himself. And we read in this particular section of Scripture that Joseph is laying out certain propositions. He's telling his brothers, "Now, if you do this and this, I will do this." Now, to convince them that's he's a trustworthy man; to convince them that's he's an honest man; to convince them that's his demands are just, notice what he says in verses 18 and 19: "And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: if ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses." Joseph says, "Do you want some assurance that my demands are just and my word is true? I could give you lots of reasons, but this is the most pivotal: I fear God." He said, "I need give no other reason as a basis for my Godly, honest dealings with you than that I am a man in whose heart is the soil of the fear of God. And out of that soil will grow practical Godliness." So Joseph showed that he understood this principle, that the fear of God is that holy soil which produces a Godly life.

Now turn to Leviticus 19. And this is an unusual passage. And I'm even going to bring a little application here, because it's so pivotal I can't pass it and wait till the end. And

I see a few of you young people--you aren't with me this morning as though this was something over your head. Now, this is a lot more important than what you'll get in school. If you pay attention there to get some good grades, you pay attention this morning. Especially notice this verse. Here are these various and sundry regulations God is giving through Moses to His people. And He says in verse 14, "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD." Now let me ask you kids something. If a man's deaf, can he hear you if you cuss at him? No. Well, if he can't hear you, can he get mad at you for what you say? No. If he can't hear you, can he be hurt by what you say? No. And yet God says, "Don't curse the deaf man." Even though he can't hear you; even though you won't jeopardize your own reputation; even though you may not jeopardize your own well being by cursing, don't curse him. The second thing God says is: "Don't put a stumbling block before the blind." Suppose you stick your foot out to trip a blind man, does he know who did it? No. He can't think less of you. He can't retaliate. Well, why shouldn't you curse the deaf man if he can't hear you and trip up the blind man if he can't see you? He can't turn you into the cops. He can't see you. Here's the reason given: "Thou shalt fear thy God." What's He saying? What's the relationship between these two things? Here's what God is saying:

"Your conduct with reference to men must not be governed by their ability to retaliate your wrongdoing. It must not be governed by your reputation before them. One principle is to govern all your conduct with all men in all circumstances, namely, My eye is upon you, and I see; My ear is open, and I hear. My smile is there to be gained; My frown to be incurred."

Never let your conduct with any man be governed by any lower principle than this: How will God view that conduct? So what if the blind man can't see if you trip him up. Does God see? So what if the deaf man can't hear if you curse him. Does God hear? So then, what is the soul out of which Godliness was to grow, even the practical Godliness that makes a man as careful with his words in the presence of a deaf man as in the presence of a man with acute hearing; as careful as in the presence of a blind man as in the presence of people with 20/20 vision? Here's the principle that makes him as careful: he walks in the fear of God. Listen to me, young people, that's why you don't cheat at school. If you're walking in the fear of God, your teacher could go on a three-hour vacation when you take your final exams. It won't make a bit of difference as to your honesty in only putting down on that paper what you have learned and never once sneaking a look to the other desks, never once pulling out a crib sheet. And I say to every one of you kids in school who is a confirmed cheater, that's all the proof I would need and all God would need to condemn you at the day of judgment unless you repent that you know nothing of the fear of God. So what if the teacher can't see? Does God see? Some of you kids have two vocabularies: one you can use around the home and the preacher and one you can use out on the ball field with your buddies. And you can say your hells and damns as good as any one of them. But you never let Mom hear one; you never let Dad hear one. They might wash your might out. What is Mom and Dad? Does God hear? He's recorded all those hells and damns and Jesus Christs. If you're content that Mom and Dad don't hear and know, and the preacher doesn't hear and know, then it's an indication you're not walking in the fear of God. That's why when you adults fill out that form every April that Uncle Sam sends, you're just as careful to cut no corners as though every single tax agent from Maine to California was breathing over your shoulder. Why? Because you fill out that income tax form in the fear of God. And you want what you put there to pass the test of the eye of omniscience, not just the eye of the Internal Revenue

man in Newark or Trenton. If you can cheat on your income tax statement and claim more deductions for the church or charity than you actually gave, and this is the pattern of your life, my friend, you know nothing of the fear of God, absolutely nothing. And God will bring it up as a witness in the day of judgment unless you repent. This is what makes the man in the office or the shop just as careful about flirtatious glances as though his wife were standing at both sides of him, and she was a jealous witch. Ever see a guy who's got a jealous wife? When she's with him, he's just like a horse with blinders. My friend, if you walk in the fear of God, you're a man with blinders. And there's a check upon your tongue and your eyes. Why? Because you know it's not ultimately what your wife sees and knows. It's what He sees and knows. And you're seeking to keep a heart that is pure before His eye. And I say to any of you men who can be flirtatious with your looks and your words, and this is the pattern of your life, you know nothing of the fear of God. That's why when you're out on that highway, and there isn't a car to be seen in the rear view mirror and none through the front windshield, you have conscience about the speed laws. And if you only have conscience about the speed laws when you see a car in the rear view mirror that's got a rotating light or a box up ahead that looks like a radar box, my friend, you know nothing of the fear of God if this is the pattern of your life. Now you see how practical this is. "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but [all of your conduct must be governed, not with reference to what man sees and how man may react, favorably or unfavorably, but with what God sees and with what God knows and how He reacts]."

Well, I'll resist the temptation to work that out in more detail. I think I've established the principle and illustrated it enough. Turn to Proverbs 8. Remember what we're doing. We're trying to show that the fear of God is the soil out of which practical Godliness grows. So identified is this matter of Godliness and the fear of God, that in these texts in Proverbs, they're actually equated. Verse 13: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." You see how the thought drifts? It says the fear of the Lord is to hate certain things. And it ends up as though God were speaking in the first person and saying, "These are the things I hate." So what is the fear of God then? What is it to walk in His fear? It's to walk in such a way that I share God's attitude to evil. Notice, not just evil that men can see, but pride--that's an evil only God can see and you can know. And the man who walks in the fear of God is then governed in the attitudes and dispositions of his heart and mind as well as the conduct of his life. "...arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." A parallel passage in Proverbs 16:6 actually states that the fear of the Lord is to depart from evil. "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil." So we see, then, that the soil out of which Godliness grows in its negative form is departing from evil, or in its positive form is performing what is good. Here it is. The fear of God is that soil.

Now turn to the Nehemiah 5 where we have another real life illustration of how the fear of God operates in a very practical level. In verse 14, Nehemiah says,

"Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. [In other words, he says, 'For 12 years, we have not used our official position as a means of personal gain.'] Verse 15: "But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and

wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God." He says, "I didn't do what they did. They used their position as a stepping stone to personal advantage. But I refused to do so." And what was his reason? Was it that he thought, "This will give me a better reputation before the people?" No, no. Here's his reason: because of the fear of God. He said, "That which was the basis of my conduct was that the eye of God was upon me, and the recognition that in so doing I would forgo His smile. That was more constraint than was necessary to cause me to walk in a path in which I refused to take advantage of others for the sake of personal gain." Now, isn't this one of the biggest problems in human relationships: people taking advantage of others for personal gain, insensitive to others' needs in the pursuit of fulfilling my own needs, selfishness in seeking to live to my own satisfaction while I trample over, as it were, the sensitive needs of others, tightfisted in business dealings, unreasonable in expectations as a parent? What's the great cure for all of this? To be able to say with Nehemiah, "Because of the fear of God." And so in the most practical area, again, we see the tremendous place that this principle holds in the life of God's people. 28:07

Now turn to two New Testament texts. These, of course, have all been Old Testament ones. Now very quickly, 2 Corinthians 7. The end of the 6th is concerned with laying out some very wonderful promises of God to those of His people who separate themselves from evil. And chapter 7 begins, "Having therefore these promises [of grace that God will identify Himself with His people], dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Now notice the connection you'll see between last week's message and this morning. He said, "That climate out of which our desire to be holy grows is a climate of grace." Having these great promises of the new covenant ("I will dwell in them, and I shall be their God and they shall be my people"), conscious of God's grace and His mercy, there is this desire to perfect holiness. And the atmosphere in which that holiness is perfected is one of the fear of God. Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves in the climate of the fear of God. In other words, the process of sanctification will go on with no greater degree of intensity and earnestness than the measure in which the fear of God is maintained in the heart of the child of God. The moment you in your Christian life cease to be governed in every relationship by the thought of your relationship to God's person in Christ, the sense of His presence, the reality of His smile, the terror of His frown--the moment those things begin to be distant and wane, the very nerve of pressing on to holiness is severed. Haven't you found it so? What can motivate you when the thought of your relationship to God ceases to hold you? What frown can turn you from evil when once the thought of God's frown has not turned you from evil? What smile can induce you to the path of right when God's smile can't induce you? Nothing. When you've gotten beyond the holding influence of the fear of God, you've gotten beyond the sphere in which holiness can be perfected. And so we see, then, the only soil out of which Godliness grows is the fear of God.

And then this last text in the New Testament: Colossians 3. Paul has been giving directions for a number of different segments for the church in Colosse. He's been talking to the church at large, and then he talks to wives in verse 18, husbands in verse 19, children in verse 20, and then in verse 21, he talks specifically to fathers. And now in verse 22, he talks to servants, not servants in the sense of people that are hired and have a contract--they are slaves, people whose job is chosen by another. And he says, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God."

He says, "Granted, you have another master if you are believing slaves. You have a Master according to the spirit; that is, Christ. But your relationship to Christ as your Master in the spirit does not negate the reality of your relationship to masters in the flesh." And it's so essential that new believers learn that. Any new relationship into which you come by virtue of faith in Christ does not cancel out the legitimate relationship of earthly existence, and suddenly you're exempt from speed laws and from obedience to kings. No, no, Paul never taught this whatsoever. So he says to these servants, "Though you've got a gracious Master in heaven, you still have earthly masters on earth. And you are to obey them in all things." You don't make your obedience just coextensive with your evaluation of whether or not what they've required is right or just. No, no, he says to obey them in all things, the only exception being if they command you to do something contrary to the law of God. Now, he gives two different ways that they might obey. Negative: "not with eyeservice, as men pleasers." And it's interesting this word "eye service." It's made up of the two Greek words "eye" and "service." There's no other way you can translate it. And it literally means, "Don't do your work serving with reference to your master's eye." You hear his footsteps coming, and he turns the corner, and all of a sudden you really work up a sweat and polish those boots and scrub that floor. And you look over and see the master's eye, and he's got a nice look on his face. And he says, "Boy, you're really put out." Paul says, "Don't do your work with reference to the master's eye, because in three minutes time the master's going to be gone off on his business in town. His eye won't be there. Now what's going to motivate you? What's going to make you produce? What's going to make you work up a lather doing that very mundance task? You've lost all your motivation." Contrary to that, this should be the climate in which you do your work: "in singleness of heart, fearing God." In other words, you're to have a heart that's not divided between a man-pleaser and a God-pleaser but that's single in walking and working in the fear of God. "You mean to tell me the only way a common house slave can do his work acceptably to God is to do it in the climate of the fear of God?" Absolutely! And so you have the tremendous spectrum all the way from a king reigning in righteousness because he reigns in the fear of God (2 Samuel 3:3) to a common house slave scrubbing dirt out of a hovel somewhere. And the only way the king and servant can do their duties acceptable unto God is to perform them in the climate of the fear of God so that the eye of a master is not the focus of concern, but the eye of the Master is the focus of concern. Now you see, then, why I dared to state at the outset that Scripture teaches that the only soil out of which a Godly life can grow is that soil of the fear of God.

Now, very briefly let me draw out some of the most important implications of this teaching. First of all, consider the folly of seeking to solve the problems of human conduct without considering the necessity of the fear of God. God has rooted ethics (human conduct) in religion (man's relationship to God). Now follow closely. When you slay true religion, it's only a matter of time before any kind of semblance of ethical integrity will die. Now, what happened three or four generations ago in our national life was that God was thrown out in terms of true religion. In its place was humanism (Man is God) and liberalism with a God made in the image of man. But we still had some of the carryover of the ethics of true religion. And what's happened in the past 20 years? This has died. And so now, people who have no thought of God are concerned about the drug problem. I looked through the TV guide this past week, and it seemed like every other program that's a drama program was something dealing with the drug problem. Everybody's concerned about the drug problem. One who attends here said that in their own school, they have ex-addicts in to talk to the

high school students. Then they have the cops come in to try to scare them. And the kids have turned them all off and said, "We don't want to hear them anymore." Why? Because they're attacking an ethical problem without facing this principle that the fear of God is the only soil out of which Godly living and some kind of semblance of stable ethics can grow. People are concerned about the problem of drugs, the problem of pornography, the problem of the lawlessness in labor (the labor-management mess), individual and corporate problems. But the underlying agreement is that God has nothing to do with all of this, "and let's make sure He doesn't." Do you know what God is saying? "Alright, stew in your own mess. You'll be smart enough to have ethics without religion and right conduct without the fear of God. See if you can do it." And man reels and staggers and stumbles and wallows in his own moral vomit. That's the simple but basic and Biblical explanation of why our greatest sociologists and educators and all the rest are doing absolutely nothing to stem the tide of moral looseness. And they will not be able to do anything, because what God has joined together man cannot sever without bearing the consequences. If you don't believe that, just read Romans 1:18 to the end of the chapter. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." And you see what follows. You say, "We don't want moral debauchery. We want a nice, good decent life, but without God." And God says, "Alright, you rule Me out and see how nice and decent your life will be." You read Romans 1, and it says men become like animals. And you see it happening before our very eyes. And that's the first implication of the teaching I've tried to lay out before you this morning: the absolute folly of seeking to solve human conduct without considering the necessity of the fear of God.

Secondly, consider, then, in the light of this the relationship between true revival and ethical and social changes, which always follow. What is a revival but an extensive and powerful movement of the Spirit of God setting up true religion, the fear of God, in the hearts of many people in a given geographical area. And what happens? In a community of ten thousand people, if all of a sudden a thousand of those people begin to walk in the fear of God so much so that their conduct is not governed by the eye of policemen but by the eye of God; the students who go to school conduct themselves not with reference to the principle's eye or the teacher's eye but to the eye of God. What happens to that community? It becomes a little Eden. Why? Because the fear of God implanted in the hearts of a number of people begins to be the soil out of which grows ethical uprightness, and people begin to be kind to one another and thoughtful of one another. Every revival in history has always been the womb out of which great social change has come. But now in our day, you see, the radicals come along and say, "We want social change but no God." Every effort at social change that ruled out God has been the worst form of tyranny. And we see it in our own day. From the wickedness of a substandard position and evaluation of our black population, we've moved to a black militancy that is as cruel as any white racism that's ever been known. The white racism was sin and stood under the curse of God. The black racism is sin and stands under the curse of God. All man can do is run from one extreme to another. The tyranny of men who rule without the fear of God is a terrible thing. Senators and others in the so-called establishment who take their responsibility with no reference to the fear of God is a terrible thing. And so in reaction, you've got people saying, "Let's cut down the establishment and break the system if we can't work it." And so you have this tyranny of the New Left, which is just as great as the tyranny of the establishment. What is it telling us? It's telling us there's no answer but a mighty and powerful and extensive movement of the Spirit of

God that will establish God's fear in enough hearts, in enough areas, and in enough places that out of that soil of the fear of God true Godliness will begin to grow.

Then the third thing I want to say by way of application--and I trust you parents will listen to me carefully--in the light of this principle, consider the basis upon which you and I should evaluate our influence with our children. There are three great strands of influence upon our children: the first and essential one is the home, the second is the school, and the third is the church. You say, "Didn't you get the order mixed up?" No, because you've got them for the most hours and have the most powerful influence. The school has them next, and the church has them the least.

Now, do you want to evaluate whether your influence as a parent is an influence owned of God and being an instrument in the hands of God? Here's how you evaluate it. To what extent are my children learning the fear of God by my example and by my precepts? Psalm 34:11: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD." Granted, only the Holy Spirit can plant the fear of God in the heart of the child. But it's our responsibility to surround him with a climate in which he knows what it is and what it will do. And that's done first of all by example. Do your children see that in all of your conduct, in all of your living, that which is the most forceful and powerful influence is the eye of God? Or do they see you living two or three different kinds of lives, one in church, one with a certain class of friends, one with another circle of friends? By your example and by your precepts, are you teaching your children the fear of God? If not, my friend, don't you be surprised if they miss it morally and ethically. Don't come to the pastor and the elders someday surprised that you girl's run off and got herself pregnant, or your boy's got himself hooked on dope. Don't be surprised, dear one, if you have not provided a home in which the fear of God is taught. That alone will keep them. You say, "You mean kids in our church?" Yeah, it will come. I hold my breath--I hate the first day. But I'm sure one of these days I'll get a call from a parent saying, "The local police station just told us my child is on drugs." Do you think the devil is going to somehow exempt us from these pressures and your kids from these pressures? No, not at all. What reason can you give us? This is what the high school teacher was telling me. The kids say, "Look, you've given me no reason not to take dope. You tell me not to ruin my body. Why can't I ruin it? If I want to ruin my body and put it in the grave at age 30, why not?" And if you can't give as a reason: because Almighty God made that body and Almighty God has a right to be glorified in that body and Almighty God demands that you regard that body as His temple, there is no reason not to destroy the body at age 30. They see their parents nursing their body along between coffee and cigarettes and pills to do what? To retire at age 65 and go down and bake it in the sun in Florida for the next ten years and then stick it in the ground. And the kids say, "What's the use? Why not ruin it when I'm 30 and put it in the ground?" Isn't this their thinking? I'd like some of you high school students to stand and tell me. Am I thinking right? "Why should we? You tell us not to have premarital sex. Why shouldn't we? You tell us we might get it in trouble. So what if we do. Who says you've got to get married to have babies?" What reason can you give them? Unless you can say and have taught that child to think instinctively that all of your conduct with reference to your body, its use, its appetites, its capacities must be referenced to the eye of God who gave it. Unless the child, as it were, is taught reflexively to think that way, you have robbed him of life's greatest blessing in seeking to face and evaluate the whole matter of ethics and conduct. So evaluate the influence of your home along this line.

Evaluate the influence of the school. If God says the fear of God is the chief part of knowledge, then I think it's right to say the absence of the fear of God is the chief part of folly. And if that's true, most of your children are under calculated folly day in and day out in the public school system, because they are taught that life can be lived without reference to the fear of God. You say, "There's no teacher that ever says that." By the very absence of trying to teach any standard of ethics and morality without the fear of God, they're saying the fear of God is not needed. And the kids are seeing through it. And that's why they're saying, "Don't send us any more ex-addicts. Don't send us any more police. Don't send us any more doctors. Your reasons are full of holes. They don't hold water."

And this is how you evaluate the influence of a church: not how busy does it keep my kids, but does it teach them the fear of God? That's how you evaluate the work of a church. There are churches all over this county that keep their teenagers busy, busy, busy. And when they get together for a little hymn singing, and they start to sing their little ditties about God, you know they don't have a clue about who the God of the Bible is. Is it no wonder that when they go out on their dates Saturday night, they do the same things the kids do who go from the drive-in movie theater to go home? And they go from the youth meeting to go home, and you'd never know the difference in what they do from 11:00 to 1:00 in the morning. Why? There's no fear of God planted in their hearts. That's how you evaluate the influence of a church. Does it implant the fear of God? Does it set forth right concepts of the character of God? Does it seek, by the grace of God, to implant in young people, not only right views of God's character but the sense of His presence and the requirements of His holy Law and the wonders of His grace? That's the measure, the standard by which to evaluate, not only when influencing young people but ourselves, the hymns sung, the climate of worship created. One of our own members told me he was in a church recently, and when the man (a fundamental, Bible-believing evangelical) stood up to lead the meeting, he said, "Now I want all of you to lean over and say to the person next to you, 'I think you're sweet.'" And so for the next minute and a half or two minutes everybody leaned over giggling, laughing, and saying, "I think you're sweet," a church that was packed out on a Sunday night. And that's looked upon as a status symbol of success. "Ah, a full church on Sunday night." Yes, in the house of God--"I think you're sweet." This particular member had the grace to lean to the person next to him and say, "I think this is an abomination in the house of God." And what was the difference? I'll tell you what the difference was. Different views of God. Now, that's a gross example, I know. But it simply brings into focus the principle I'm seeking to enunciate.

And so I leave you where I began this morning with this practical outworking of this teaching on the fear of God, namely that the fear of God is the soil out of which a Godly life grows. And it's only in that soil that true Godliness will ever be found. And so if you're here this morning, and you say, "I wouldn't have done what Nehemiah did. If I could have been where he was and had the opportunity to live off the wine and the money of the people, I would have done it." Or if you see yourself with that servant saying, "If the master wasn't around, I wouldn't put out any more than I have to. I wouldn't live that way." My friend, if you wouldn't live that way, it's because there's no fear of God in your heart. And if there's no fear of God in your heart, it's because you're a stranger to the blessings of the new covenant. And there's only one thing for you to do; that's to go to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant and ask Him to grant to you the blessings of that covenant that He purchased with His own blood. For as Bunyan so beautifully describes in relating the conversion of Faithful, he was admonished to go to a throne. And he would find there seated upon that

throne one who lived to show mercy to all sinners who came unto God by Him. And that would be my exhortation to you this morning. I say to you dear young people, you children, why do you cheat at school? Why can you lie as long as you're sure Mom and Dad won't find out? Why can you cuss when you're playing with those fellows when you wouldn't dare do it around Mom and Dad? It's because the fear of God is not in your hearts. And that's your need, that God would put His fear on your hearts.

And you who are God's people, why is it that we cut corners at times? Isn't it because we've moved out of the realm of the fear of God? That's why God says to be in His fear all the day long. It's unthinkable, isn't it, that you would cut corners on your income tax if you were living in the consciousness of the fear of God. As I fill out this form, the eye of God is upon me. Will He smile when I'm done? You see, when it becomes that real, and I'm driving down that highway, and there's no cars behind or in front of me--my God is here. You see it's so practical. And the closing message is going to be on the practical steps to cultivate the fear of God. Let me urge you this morning to at least cry to God that He would increase His fear in your heart. For only to the extent that His fear is increased will the Godliness and the practical holiness be worked out in fuller measures than hither to we have known. So may the Lord help us to walk in His fear.

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