

The Fear of God: Relationship to Conduct, Part 2

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The teaching of holy Scripture on the fear of God is so vital a thing that one author in writing on the subject was bold enough to say, "The fear of God is the soul of Godliness. The emphasis of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments require no less significant a proposition." And just as the body does not function without the soul, for Scripture says, "as the body without the spirit is dead," so there can be no true Godliness without this living soul of the fear of God. In order to acquaint ourselves at least in an introductory manner with this great theme of Scripture, we have spent the past two months each Lord's Day morning considering portions of Scripture which set before us this aspect of Biblical truth concerning God's fear. We've considered the predominance of this theme in both the Old and New Testaments. We've tried to grasp something of the meaning of the fear of God, the dominant thought, of course, not the fear of dread or terror but that fear of awe and reverence, that regard of God's character and the resulting attitude which causes a man or woman to count the smile of such a great being life's greatest favor and the frown of such a being life's greatest curse. And we looked at the ingredients of the fear of God. It involves at least some measure of right views of the character of God, some pervasive sense of His presence, and some constraining awareness of our obligation to Him. Then we looked at Scripture to see the origin of God's fear. And we saw that this fear is not an attitude that will ever grow upon unblessed Adamic stock. But it's a disposition implanted in the heart as a distinct blessing of the new covenant as we saw in Jeremiah 32:40.

Then last week we began to consider the relationship of the fear of God to our practical experience. What is the relationship of the fear of God to conduct? What are the practical effects of the fear of God? Having grasped, I trust, something of the Biblical teaching as to the fear of God in importance and its substance, then we asked the question, "So what?" What does the fear of God do in the life of an individual? And last week I gave a positive statement, namely that the fear of God is the holy soil out of which a Godly life grows. There can be no practical Godliness apart from the fear of God. And we looked at passages in both the Old and New Testaments where this teaching is so clearly set before us, that when people were walking in practical Godliness, it was because they feared the Lord. And perhaps the best way we can summarize all that we considered last week is to just look briefly at a passage in 1 Peter, one which we did not consider, but I think it will be the best summary and review of the main threads of thought that we tried to lay out last Lord's Day morning. In 1 Peter 1, we have the admonition beginning with verse 13 to gird up the loins of our mind and to be sober and set our hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words, we are to live in the constant awareness that the best is yet to come. And at the revelation of Christ, that is, at His second coming, measures of grace will be poured into us that

will climax and complete all that the present measure of grace has begun. And if we have our hope set perfectly on the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Christ, what will be its practical effect upon us? Verses 14-16: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: now as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." He says, "Don't be like you were. You are children of obedience. Don't fashion yourselves after the old pattern. But be holy after the very pattern of God Himself." And then he goes on to say in verses 17-19,

"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Negative exhortation: Don't be like you were. Positive exhortation: Be holy. And he says the climate in which that Godly life is to be developed and expressed is the climate of the fear of God. And then he says the basis of it all is God's free redemption in Jesus Christ. Is it impossible for a man to be Godly if he's not a redeemed man? The answer is obvious: "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." So without faith in and experimental acquaintance with the cleansing of the blood of Christ, there can be no Godliness. But just as there can be no Godliness without its ground in the saving merit of Christ, so there can be no Godliness without the atmosphere of the fear of God. These two things are tied together around this exhortation to a Godly life. And so it's accurate to say concerning this matter of the practical effects of the fear of God, that the fear of God is the holy soil out of which a Godly life grows. To change the figure, it's the holy atmosphere in which a Godly life breathes. And if you cut off the oxygen of the fear of God, then the man will no longer breathe. As one has so beautifully said, "The Christian is a light everywhere because God is a light everywhere. And he that fears God needs no other theatre than his own conscience and no other spectators than God and the holy angels." When I walk in the fear of God, I walk in that consciousness that I need no theatre but my conscience to which to appeal, and I need no witnesses to my thoughts or my actions but God and the holy angels.

Now I want to couch this statement in the negative form this morning. What is the relationship of the fear of God to conduct? Well, if the fear of God is the soil out of which a Godly life grows, then by the sheer pressure of logic--and logic has an amazing pressure--it would be right to say that the absence of the fear of God is the unholy soil out of which an ungodly life grows. But I would never think of building a message on logic. You know me too well for that. And so I want to demonstrate from Scripture that this negative statement is not just an inescapable statement of logic, but it is an accurate reflection of the teaching of Holy Scripture. The absence of the fear of God is the unholy soil which produces an ungodly life. Now, to demonstrate this proposition, I want to, first of all, consider with you a key text in some depth that will set the framework of our study, then secondly, look at several specific passages in a little less depth which support the conclusion of the main text, and then, as time permits, draw out some practical conclusions and observations.

A key text to demonstrate this proposition that the absence of the fear of God is the unholy soil that produces an ungodly life. Turn to Romans 3. The text, of course, is verse 18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now, what is the context of this

statement? Any of you who are familiar with the larger context of the argument of Romans, Paul's concern to set out in systematic form the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation (verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1). He, first of all, displays the universal need of the Gospel, beginning with verse 18 of the first chapter, coming all the way through to verse 20 of chapter 3. Now, what he has been doing in great detail is rounding up one segment of humanity after another. He takes a certain group in chapter 1, and he corals them and holds over them the sentence of judgment and death. Then he corals another group in the early part of chapter 2, and another group in the latter part of chapter 2 and on into chapter 3. And then he comes to this summary statement of what he has been doing throughout that entire epistle in verse 9 of chapter 3: "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." Now, Paul says, "I've told you I've already proved that Jews and Gentiles are all under sin." Now, someone comes along and says, "But Paul, is this some crazy idea you concocted?" He says, "No, everything I say is consistent with the law of Moses and the prophets." Therefore, he's going to buttress the whole argument of chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 8 with a number of quotations from the Psalms and the Prophets. Verse 10. Now notice what he does. Follow his argument. And remember he's writing to peasants and slaves not scholars, not the PhDs, not the college graduates. He expects us to follow his train of thought and his argument. So recapitulating now, buttressing his whole argument with Scripture, he says in summary, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." There's the canopy of Scripture that hangs over all humanity. Not a one of them is righteous. The charge of unrighteousness is laid against them all. Now, someone says, "Well, Paul, isn't this matter of unrighteousness sort of just a philosophical concept?" He says, "No, sin is not a philosophical concept. Sin is not just a dirty religious word. Sin is a very practical reality, and I'm going to prove it to you from the Psalms and the Prophets." So he starts, then, in verse 11 with what we might call the effects of sin in the mind and in the heart: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Then he goes on to enlarge in verses 13 and 14 of the sins of the mouth and the speech apparatus:

"Their throat is an open sepulchre [when you open up a sepulchre; take away the stone, all the rottenness within belches forth: the stench of rotten flesh and the rest. He says when men open up their mouths, it's like rolling away a stone of a sepulchre. And when you hear their foul oaths, and when you hear belching forth the putrid lies and uncleanness, it's just what's within coming out]; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood [murder]: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known."

He shows what we might call the sins of their general character and their general living. And then he takes us in verse 18 to that which is the cause of this whole life pattern of ungodliness, and he says this is the reason for it all: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." As he contemplates the state he has described in verses 10-17 and he wants to find one phrase which is the cause of such a disordered ungodly life, he says it's this noxious plant in the heart of man: no fear of God before their eyes. That is, as they view life, as they live life, as they carry out their desires and ambitions, they do so void of the fear of God. How many of you have ever had spots before your eyes? Maybe you got knocked in the head, or you bent over too long. What happens when you have spots before your eyes? Well, everything that you see

has superimposed upon it those little spots. When you've got spots before your eyes, what's happened is there's been some disorder that's causing the eye to pick up and register some of the components of the blood and other things passing over. I don't know all the technical angles of it, but there aren't actually spots out there. But what happens is, you look at the curtains, and there are spots. Maybe you've had pictures taken at a wedding, and all the flashbulbs go off, and the next person you look at has a spot on the end of his nose. Then you looked out at the trees, and there was a spot on the end of a leaf. Or if you've gotten conked on the head, and you begin to see stars, everything you look at is superimposed with stars upon it. You can't look at your hand; you can't look at a tree; you can't look at the drape; you can't look at the preacher--everything you look at when you have spots before your eyes, those spots are superimposed upon the image. You cannot divorce the image from the spots. Now, Paul says of the wicked, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." That is, when they get up in the morning, they say, "What shall I do today?" They are able to look out upon life without superimposing upon it the being of God, the claims of God, the character of God, the salvation of God, the law of God, the judgment of God. And so they go out into that day with no fear of God superimposed upon life. That's the accusation. So Paul says, "When you see the life they live, this is the reason: no fear of God before their eyes." You see, the Godly man is the man who has in everything those spots before his eyes. He can't think of the day before him without reflexively thinking this is the day the Lord has made. He says, "I am His servant; He is my God. So as I go out into this day into the car, into the shop, into the school, into the place of business, into conversation; as I'm exposed to objects of sight and sense, everything must have stamped upon it the reality of God's being, the reality of my relationship to Him, His claims upon me, His provisions for me." The fear of God is before his eyes and is that which covers every facet of his life pattern.

Conversely, the ungodly man is the man who does not have this fear of God before his eyes: no regard to God's authority, no consideration of God's law, no concern about His smile, no dread of His frown. He may be a nice guy or not too nice. He may be moral or immoral. He may be religious or irreligious. But this he has in common with every other unregenerate sinful son of Adam: there is no fear of God before his eyes. As one has accurately said, "Since the eyes do not see Him, their feet and hands and mouth act as though God were not." For as you read this list in Romans 3, when a man curses, what does he say? "There's no God to tell my tongue what to do. Whatever my spirit and my nature and my mind want to do by way of the tongue, my tongue will do. Who's God to control this member that sits there between my cheeks?" So their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. And when they see someone who is in the way of their ambition, someone who opposes their carnal desires, Paul says, "Their feet are swift to shed blood." Why? Because there's no God as far as they're concerned who says, "Thou shalt do no murder." "Who is God to tell me not to take out vengeance on the object of my hatred." There's no fear of God before their eyes. You go through that entire description of chapter 3, and as we'll see when we turn to the passage from which it was taken, I've not read that in. That's precisely the way the Holy Spirit has given it to us and the way the Apostle understood it. So we learn at the very outset--and even the youngest child here, I trust, will grasp it--that moral and ethical problems, that is, problems of life and conduct are rooted in religious principles. And you cannot separate ethics, morality, and conduct from true Biblical religion. You cannot do it, for God has joined them. And what God has joined together, man puts asunder only to his own peril. So it's

clear, then, from this text in Romans 3 that the absence of the fear of God is that unholy soil out of which the ungodly life grows.

Now, having looked at the key text as a sphere of reference, look with me at three other supporting and explanatory texts in the Old Testament. First of all, Psalm 10. Now, the context of this Psalm is set out very clearly in verse 1 and the first phrase of verse 2: "Why standest Thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble? The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor." Here are the righteous being oppressed and pursued by the wicked, and it seems like God doesn't give a hoot. He says, "God, why do You stand far off? Can't you see? These are Your people that are being afflicted. These are Your people that are being trodden down by the wicked. Why do you stand far off?" This is a great problem; it comes up again and again in the Psalms. If you never have that problem as a Christian, you're simply not living with your eyes open. There are times you say, "God, this doesn't seem right." Psalm 73 is another one. So the context, then, is the active work of the wicked in oppressing the righteous and God's apparent silence and indifference to the whole thing. What would you think of me as a father if I could look out the picture window there at 25 Meadowbrook Lane and see the neighborhood bully beating up my son, and I don't run out of the house and say, "You get your hands off him, fellow, or you'll have my hands on you." What would you think of me as a father if I could see my son kicked around and abused by a bully, and I had the power to do something and didn't? Would you have some questions about the depth of my love to my children? Sure you would. And God's people have this problem. Maybe you're not honest enough to admit it, but you have it. Why? Now, in that context, what the Psalmist does is, he gives us the psychology of what happens in the mind of the wicked when he observes this. He picks on the righteous, and no thunderbolts break out of heaven; no lightning strikes him; no divine visitations, and he has made bold to go on in his wickedness. And the Psalmist explains how the ungodly man thinks as he carries out his ungodly living. Notice very carefully now, in verses 5-10, he tells us what the wicked does:

"His ways are always grievous; Thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones."

Notice now, here is a description of what the wicked man does. But that section of the Psalm is bounded by verses 4 and 11. Both of which tell us why he does what he does. Verses 5-10 tell us what the wicked does. He carries out all his schemes against the righteous, against the poor, against the helpless. Some of these phrases are quoted in Romans 3, but notice carefully the reason for all of this. Verse 4: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts." Verse 11: "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: He hideth His face; He will never see it." In verse 4, you see the wicked man voids his mind of conscious thoughts of God. That doesn't mean he is an outspoken atheist. But in the thoughts that govern his life, God does not enter. All his thoughts are, "There is no God. I make my plans; I carry out my ambitions, but I don't do so with reference to God." Verse 11 shows the same wicked man seeking to rid himself of any

constraining awareness of the character of God. Notice, he said in his heart, "God has forgotten." He tries to make God a little short on memory. "He hideth His face; He will never see it." He tries to limit God's omniscience. Do you see what he is doing? In verse 4, he simply tries to put God out of his mind. But he can't totally do that, and because there are some remaining thoughts of God in his mind, he says, "But God is not the God I know Him to be. He's short on memory, and He's a little bit nearsighted." Now, why does the wicked man need to push God out of his thoughts, and when he can't fully succeed in that, twists the God who remains in his thoughts? Because he cannot live an ungodly life unless he can take himself out of the orbit of the fear of God. So, if he's to grow his plants of ungodly living, he must condition the soil to be soil over which there is written, "No fear of God." So it's not just the force of logic that leads me to make the proposition that the absence of the fear of God is the unholy soil out of which an ungodly life grows. It is precisely the analysis the Psalmist made when in this troubled state of mind, he analyzes the psychology of the wicked man. And he says this is how he thinks: "I'll push God out of my thoughts so I can sin with abandonment. And when my conscience begins to disturb me, I'll twist God into a shape and an image that will make me feel a little more comfortable with Him in my sin."

Psalm 36 is another illustration of this same basic principle. In this particular Psalm, the larger context of the thought pattern is the Psalmist is contemplating and contrasting the wickedness of men and the character of God, particularly His mercy. So you have a contrast. The mercy of God beginning in verse 5: "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." Verse 7: "How excellent is Thy loving kindness...." Verse 10: "O continue Thy loving kindness...." So the theme of the latter part of the Psalm from verse 5, with but one or two exceptions, is a celebration of the character of God as a God of mercy. But the first four verses are a contemplation of the man of wickedness. He describes what the wicked man does in verses 2-4:

"For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good. He deviseth mischief upon his bed [as he's going off to sleep at night, he's not meditating on the law of God. He's conceiving new ways that he can carry out his sinful designs the next day]; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil."

Now, as he looks at such a man, indifferent to God's law, constantly conceiving and giving birth to his wicked designs, verse 1 tells us what his conclusion was: "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart [as I observe the wicked man and how he lives, there is within my heart this conviction], that there is no fear of God before his eyes." As he sees a man live in the way described particularly in verses 3 and 4, he says there is but one explanation of that life pattern: "There is no fear of God before his eyes." And so we have essentially what we found in Psalm 10, that this is the explanation for the conduct of the wicked man: full of self-flattery, a mouth full of evil, abandoning all true wisdom, abandoning all true righteousness, conceiving iniquity in his spare time.

Then one other passage in the Old Testament: Malachi 3. The chapter begins with the announcement of this one called the Messenger of the covenant, a reference, of course, to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And when He comes, the prophet says He will have a two-fold ministry. There will be ministry of purification. Verse 2: "But who

may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi...." This Messenger of the covenant will come and His first ministry will be one of purification. But then His second ministry is to be one of judgment. Verse 5:

"And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers [those who dabble in the occult/spiritism], and against the adulterers [those who give themselves to the violation of the 7th commandment in thought or in deed], and against false swearers [those who assert truth and even bring in the name of God, but do so dishonestly], and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages [those who take advantage of their position as employers and do not give just due to the employee], the widow, and the fatherless [those who oppress the helpless and those who cannot be defended by a father], and that turn aside the stranger from his right [in other words, He says, 'My judgment will come against all those in the whole spectrum of the life of evil: from those who are guilty of open, gross immorality to those who are indifferent to the needs of the sojourner.' And He says they have one thing in common], and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts."

What does the adulterer have in common with the person who is indifferent to a legitimate need which he sees and does not respond to it when he can? They have this in common: they do not walk in the fear of God. And so the prophet Malachi tells us that God's judgment will come forth with fury and vengeance upon all such.

But now there's another class that we've omitted this morning. These three passages deal primarily with those who are openly irreligious in their wickedness. But there is a second great class of persons who is very religious but is guilty of religious hypocrisy, who maintains the outward profession of true religion, many of the activities of true religion, but who is devoid of the power of true religion. And of course, the classic example of such a class of people was the Scribes and the Pharisees. Remember what our Lord said in Matthew 6 about the Scribes and the Pharisees. He said don't be like them, for when they pray, they pray to be seen of men; when they give, they give to be seen of men; when they fast, they fast to be seen of men. What is he saying? He says in all the maintenance of the form of orthodox religion and activities of religious practice, they're devoid of the fear of God. For what's the essence of the fear of God? That regard of His person which makes His smile my greatest delight and His frown my greatest dread. And having my own conscience for a theatre and God and the holy angels for witnesses, I need no other. And so our Lord describes their religious experience in great detail in Matthew 23. And in particular, in verses 25-28, He uses the picture of dirty dishes on the inside that are clean on the outside, and sepulchers that are bright and shiny on the outside but full of uncleanness within. And He says that's what this always produces when you have adherence to revealed religion in the head and adherence to the practices of revealed religion in the life but where a person is devoid of the power of revealed religion in the heart. And why do they live that way? Jesus said because they don't know the fear of God. What they do, they do to be accepted and seen of men. But what God sees never enters their hearts. One of the things I asked again and again from this pulpit is, where is your heart? I can see your body here, and I can see your eyeballs on me. But what does God see? Does He see that your presence here this morning is an expression of the fear of God in the heart; that you're here because your God has commanded you to forsake not the assembling of yourselves together; that you're here out of love to Him and desire to please Him, constrained by the awareness of your obligation to Him?

Or is it simply a part of your life pattern? "Well, if I don't come once in a while, you and the other elders will be down my neck, so to keep you off it, I'll come." Why are you here? I can answer for only one person. Am I here simply because I get a check from this church, and it's part of my duty, and coming every Sunday morning is punching my clock? Or am I here because God's put His fear in my heart. Even if God were to rip my tongue out, I'd be here to worship Him, to gather with His people, to confess my sins with them, to rejoice with them. Why are you here this morning? Why do you do what you do? Why don't you do some of the things other people do? Is it simply to keep up the form and semblance of true religion before the eyes of men? Jesus said, "You Pharisees appear beautiful unto men, but within...." You see, the person who maintains orthodox religion in the head and the form of it in the life but is a stranger to the fear of God in the heart knows nothing of the inwardness of true Biblical Christianity. Poverty of spirit, he knows nothing. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness, he knows nothing. Mourning over his sins in secret, he knows nothing. The sum and substance of his whole religious experience is what's packed into his head and what's done externally in life. And of the going's forth of a heart after God, he knows precious little. Whereas our Lord says, by contrast, when you pray, give alms, and fast, there should be one concern: your Father who sees in secret. Is that your concern that brought you here today? "My Father sees me." What does He see? He sees a cold heart if I brought it unto Him that He might warm it by His grace by giving to me a fresh sight of His Son. Does He see a heart that is running off in a thousand directions? If so, then He's found me praying, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Has the Father's eye been your primary concern this morning as you sat here? If not, then somehow the fear of God is absent from your whole experience of worship. So then, the soil out of which overt wickedness grows or the subtle wickedness of religious hypocrisy is that soil of the absence of the fear of God.

Now, very quickly--and I can only give you the headings--I want to make a general concluding application. There are two main ways to destroy a house. If I saw a structure I wanted to get rid of, I can arm myself with a pinch bar and a good claw hammer. And I could climb up on top of that thing, and in an hour's time, you would pretty well know what I was out to do. I could rip off a lot of shingles in an hour's time. And if I had a 16 pound sledge, I could knock down some bricks from the chimney, so anybody going by would say that fellow's out to destroy that house. But there's another way I could do it. I could take my sledge and start working on the foundation. After an hour's time, you might not be able to see what I was out to do. You might walk by, and the house looks very intact--I might be working in the back. And all I've been able to do in an hour's time is displace a few concrete blocks or put a hole in the foundation. And at the end of the day, the house might still stand intact if I'm taking the second approach to destroy it. Whereas, if I took the first approach, there could be a pretty big mess at the end of the day. I could probably have some of the sheathing torn off and some of the windows knocked out. But if I stuck with the second approach, at the end of a day or two, I'd do a lot better job. Because if I could at strategic points of stress where the foundation bore the weight of that whole structure undercut that foundation, I could bring the whole thing down upon itself. Whereas at the end of a couple of days just working piece by piece, there still might be 80 percent of the structure of the whole left. Now, you see, the devil hates the structure of Biblical ethics and morality wherever he sees that structure raised. And there's two ways he can go about to destroy it. He can come by attacking every shingle of a Christian virtue and say, "There's no such thing as purity or honesty, and

I'm out to destroy these concepts." But the devil is smarter than that. He says, "Keep your shingles for a while. I'm going to go around back where you can't see me, and I'm going to start dislodging foundation stones." So what's happened in our own Western culture? What's happened in our own America? For several generations, the devil was behind the back working at the foundation. O yes, the concept of general honesty rooted in the very Biblical concepts upon which our nation was founded, our whole system of jurisprudence, our whole concept of a shared responsibility between the three branches of government--all of that is rooted in the Puritan concept of the depravity of man and the fact that powers are not safe in the hands of any one depraved sinful authority. All of that has its roots in Biblical thinking. So the devil was working away at the foundation stones. And one of his greatest hammer blows was that of religious liberalism, which distorted the God of the Bible and turned Him from the glorious, fearful God of Israel into this formless mass of unprincipled sentiment. So everybody thinks God's just some formless mass of unprincipled sentiment called love. His holiness, His justice, His righteous anger are concepts that are gone. Then there was the humanism that came through in our American educational system: man's not a creature depraved and bad. The influence of evolutionary thought: He's not obligated to God. He never came from God in the first place. So what has happened? It seems almost overnight a house that looked beautiful is the next day a shambles. We see the problem now. Everybody says, "Look, the house is coming upon us. Why?" Because the fear of God has well nigh vanished from the very fabric of our national life and experience. And the only way there's going to be any return in any widespread measure to any kind of true ethics and morality is to start from the beginning by implanting the fear of God in the hearts of men. That means we've got to go back to telling men who God is. And then when they begin to see who He is, they'll begin to see their obligation to Him, the terribleness of sinning and offending such a holy God until they're driven to despair. And then when they're told this God, transcendent, holy, majestic, and powerful, so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, they will see forgiveness in the perspective of Psalm 130:4: "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." And instead of the Gospel being some cheap panacea which seals them in their conduct reflecting no fear of God, it will be the instrument by which through the blessings of the new covenant applied with power to the heart, they will be brought to fear and reverence this God and walk strictly in His precepts and commandments.

The second brief application is to you who are strangers to the grace of God. Do you want an explanation of why you live the way you live? Here it is. Some of you young people and children, you know why you live the way you do? You get up in the morning, eat, go off to school, lie a little bit, cheat a little bit, fight with brother and sister, are a little dishonest to Mom and Dad. You say, "I'm just like the rest of the kids. I'm not real bad." Do you know what explains your life? There's no fear of God before your eyes. That's the explanation of your life. And that's the explanation of the lives of some of you adults. That's why you can live the way you do. That's why you can go home today, click on your TV this afternoon with no thought that this is God's day with any particular requirements. It won't enter your mind at all. You think that how you spend the day is your business, not God's. Why? There's no fear of God before your eyes. When you get that pay check, you don't say, "Now, Lord, what is your rightful due?" You think you can do what you want with it since you earned it. Why? There's no fear of God before your eyes. And I plead with you to recognize that until you come to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and have Him implant this fear with your heart, this will be your life's pattern.

And my last word is to you who are the people of God. If this principle is true, that the only soil out of which ungodliness can grow is that of the absence of the fear of God, may God help you and I to resist with holy violence anything that would lessen the fear of God in our hearts, for we can only move into the realm of sin deliberately when we have moved out of the realm of the fear of God. And the first step to moving us into the realm of sin is to get us moved out of the atmosphere of the fear of God, either by putting God out of our thoughts or fashioning a God with whom we can be more comfortable in our sin. That's why God, when He accused David through Nathan, said, "Thou hast despised Me in that thou hast taken Bathseba." He said, "David, you could never take her in violation of My law till you pushed Me out of your mind." O, dear child of God, beware of any influence, no matter how innocent it may appear, if it lessens your regard to God's smile and your dread of His frown. May God help us to be in His fear all the day long.

God willing, next week I want to consider with you that text in Proverbs: "Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." And I want to speak very practically, giving five or six principles from Scripture as to how we may seek to keep ourselves in the fear of God all the day long. "But," you say, "I thought God put this in our hearts." Yes, the fruit of the Spirit is love, isn't it? Yet God says, "I beseech you as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on the bowels of mercy." God does it; we must put it on. That's His whole pattern of grace. And though God puts His fear in our hearts, He commands us to be in His fear all the day long. May the Lord be pleased to help us heed the word of exhortation and to dread this unholy soil of the absence of the fear of God which produces and ungodly life.

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