

Fear not to fear the Lord

Opening: Ps 112:1-9

We live in crazy times. So often the news is overwhelming in the sense of the awful things that happen. What people do to one another, how hopeless so many have become. In addition, over the years I have seen multiple people go off the deep end, choosing to reject the way of life to choose sin and lay ruin to themselves and bring heartache to those around them.

To address this I could have picked a topic which touches on the hope we have in Christ, or the love God has for all. But I have felt compelled to talk this morning about a topic that doesn't get much play in American Christianity at this time. The title of my message is "Fear not to fear the Lord". The text of my sermon is:

Prov 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"

We know that the joy of the Lord is our strength. The kindness of the Lord leads to repentance. The love of God compels us. The patience of God preserves us. But it is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord gives us balance and perspective. It sets our hearts right to know the God who sees all and hears all and records all will judge the earth in righteousness. And all will have to stand and face that judgment. It helps us to give proper weight to the *commands* of God over the *demands* of people. It causes us to consider what pleases God more than what pleases ourselves. It also is a guardrail for our own hearts when we are tempted to go astray. To know that God is not mocked, we will reap what we sow.

So what is the fear of the Lord?

I want to hit a few scriptures quickly to start off, setting the biblical tone for what it means to fear the Lord.

Ps 19:9 The fear of¹ the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

Prov 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Prov 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

Prov 15:33 The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

¹ OT:3374 yir'ah -- fear, terror, fearing

a) fear, terror; b) awesome or terrifying thing (an object causing fear); c) fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety; d) revered; (from The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon)

Prov 22:4 Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.

So we see that the fear of the Lord is: pure, enduring, the beginning of wisdom, a fountain of life, and when combined with humility it brings wealth and honor and life.

Now we often are quick when we talk of the fear of the Lord to say it means reverence. And that is true. But there is also an element here of just plain old fear. Like the kind of fear that freaks you out a bit. For example, consider the story of Ananias and Sapphira. If you are unfamiliar with the story you can read it in Acts 5, but basically there was a time in the early days of the church that people were selling stuff to give to the apostles so they could distribute it as needed. (Note that voluntary and not government forced wealth redistribution is the model.) Perhaps giving in to peer pressure this couple wants to look good in front of everyone so they also sell a piece of property. But they either couldn't afford to or didn't want to give up all of the proceeds, which was perfectly within their rights. They could have kept it all, kept part of it, gave it all, it was entirely their choice. Peter even says the money was at his disposal. But to try to look good before people, and keep some of it back they conspired to lie about it. When they pull this off the Holy Spirit strikes both of them down dead before the apostles.

So imagine someone asks you what happened at the church meeting that day and you say two people were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit. The reaction would be to be freaked out right? Now listen to these verses at the end of the story:

Acts 5:11-15

11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

12 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

So, there was a sense of fear that God was for real, and not to be trifled with. And I love how verses 13 and 14 read. No one else dared join them, but more and more believed and were added to their number. So how are they added if they were afraid to join? I think the key is that any who thought to join for wrong motives – because they wanted the benefits or because it was the cool thing to do at that moment, said “I don't think I want to mess around here”. But because the Spirit of God was doing stuff, and even though some of it was frightening, people were becoming believers! They were convinced of the reality of the kingdom, convicted of their sins and converted. This is reiterated in

Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Fear of the Lord goes along with growth. So maybe all of the churches who are trying to attract people by making God less scary and less holy and less concerned about truth are going

about it all wrong. **This is born out in the way those compromising denominations keep shrinking.**

What Does Fear of the Lord Look Like?

Prov 8:13a To fear the LORD is to hate evil

That's pretty clear isn't it. If we fear the Lord, we can't be dabbling with evil. It will repulse us. We can't play loose and easy on the fringes and get our toes up close to the line, because we hate evil and want nothing to do with it.

Ps 33:8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. 9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

So here is that idea of fear being reverence. This is the awe and wonder of looking at God as the creator and recognizing none of this happened by chance or by my doing, but rather it was the work of a magnificent and awesome creator.

Don't take the wonder of creation for granted. When you see beautiful flowers or trees or birds – give praise to God! When you see shows on TV of the amazing creatures on the earth, don't talk about "mother nature" – give praise to God! Our creator is truly awesome.

So the fear of the Lord is about reverence, it is about hating evil, it has an element of being a little freaked out at times. But it is a holy and good fear. In essence, to fear the Lord is to desire to please him above all else.

Even Jesus was prophesied to walk in the fear of the Lord

Isa 11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- 3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

Jesus walked in the *delight* of the fear of the Lord.

In John 8:28 Jesus says "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

So Jesus, even though he himself is fully God, when he took on human nature and walked the earth, he didn't speak on his own accord he didn't do on his own will. He said and did what his Father instructed and did what pleased his Father. This was pleasing to the Lord. And as a result, Jesus experienced the pleasure and delight of walking in the fear of the Lord.

So we can all agree that the fear of the Lord is a good thing!

...Fear of the Lord is the beginning...

Why is the fear of the Lord the beginning?

A proper *fear of the Lord* is apparently foundational to our life in God. So much so that it even operated in Jesus life. Another prophetic scripture links the fear of the Lord to our salvation.

Fear of the Lord is the key to our Salvation

Isa 33:6 He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.

For the biblical scholars out there I must admit that only the NIV uses this phrasing about the key to this treasure. But it certainly fits the pattern of some of the verses I read earlier that show how the fear of the Lord can put us in the right place so that we don't miss out on the good that God wants to do in our lives.

Prov 14:27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snare of death.

There are many snares in life which can lead us away from the fountain of life. The **desire to get rich** is a snare that is mentioned that can lead to heartache and pain. **Relationships** can be a snare. **Pride** is a snare. A **mouth that boasts** foolishness can be a snare. If we live with a fear of the Lord we can avoid these snares and enjoy the fountain of life.

Prov 15:33 The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

Prov 22:4 Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.

Note how **humility** is tied in here. Again if we are putting God in the proper place and having a proper fearful perspective, we will learn wisdom. And as King Solomon learned, when you live a life of wisdom, wealth and honor and life often are the end result.

...the beginning of wisdom.

Finally, the verse says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of *wisdom*. Wisdom is more than just knowledge. It is taking the knowledge of what is right and applying it to our lives so that we live out this knowledge in real life.

Fear of the Lord teaches us reaping and sowing

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

This principle has a positive and a negative side. I mentioned at the beginning how I've seen far too many people chose to go down a road of self destructive and sinful choices, often feeling like they are justified or that they deserve to indulge in their freedom. They sin lustfully and with gusto. Yet they do not find what they are looking for. Sure, it's fun for a season. But then it turns bad. Ugly. Painful. Young people – listen to me. God cannot be mocked. If you live to please yourself, you will reap destruction.

On the other side if we sow to please the Spirit – so we are living in the fear of the Lord desiring to please God – we will reap life! The warning for us all is to not give up doing good. Yes, we grow weary, we get discouraged when we don't see the results that we wish. Yet we must keep at it until we cross the finish line! I'm not as young as I used to be, as evidenced by the gray beard I'm sporting, but I want to keep pushing forward and pressing in until that day I see Jesus face to face. Yes, that will look different for different people and different in each season of your life. But if the heart is there to please the Lord, God will lead you in his ways.

Fear of the Lord motivates our evangelism

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

We need to allow the **weightiness of God's coming judgment** to be a reality in our lives. Now I know it is only the blood of Jesus that permits us to stand before the judgment seat and be accepted by God. Can you imagine how awful it will be for those who have to stand on their own works before a holy God as they come to the terrible realization that they have no hope to stand? This is a fearful thing that motivated Paul to try and persuade men. Note that – persuade. It isn't just dispensing the gospel, it is reasoning, discussing, praying for and pleading with people to repent so they can escape the coming wrath of God upon the earth.

Fear of the Lord gives us perspective

1 Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

Again, we know we will have our works judged, even though we are in Christ. Will our works stand up or will they be worthless? This perspective should help us consider if what we are doing will matter in eternity. Is our focus on the things of the earth, where we will only be a short while? Or is it on the eternal?

Fear of the Lord trumps fear of man

There are places in the world where this very day Christ followers may stand before ISIS or some other radical and be called upon to renounce their faith in Christ. This *really* happens in 2017! In that place we must think of what Jesus spoke:

Luke 12:4-7

4 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 Are not five

sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Notice the balance of fear and love there.

Now if you hear about someone, confronted in that situation with the choice of death or renounce Jesus, what would you think if they renounced Christ on the outside, but in their hearts are saying "God you know I don't mean this". Then later they ask God to forgive them for not being strong enough. Seems kind of wrong. But yet we ourselves often melt in the face of far smaller and weaker challenges to our faith and give in without a fight too.

Why? Because we don't understand what it means to fear the Lord.

Fear of men, or fear of what others think is such a dangerous force in our lives. Honestly many of the mistakes I've made in life were because I was worried about what others thought more than what God thought. Or because I had a short-term perspective rather than a long-term one. I think my biggest faults in parenting were because I wanted to make sure my family reputation was in tact. Being an elder in the church meant my children couldn't be wild and disobedient. So when they made mistakes, it makes me look bad. At times I worried too much about how they looked on the outside rather than parenting to reach their hearts and minds with the love of Christ. I wanted them to do right, but sometimes I didn't do enough to just connect and build the relationship with them. I eventually did learn this lesson but how I wish I could go back and start over knowing then what I know now. Not all the way back – I hated high school. Maybe start over around 18?

When we fear the Lord, everything takes on a long-term perspective. **We begin to see our lives being played out before the throne of God.** We see our children as adults, living out their lives before God. Will they live according to the fear of the Lord? We think about how God loves us and works with us and is patient with us to teach us. When we think long-term we don't worry about the times our kids make us look bad in the eyes of those whose opinions aren't going to factor into God's opinion. The Lord isn't going to be asking your friends how to carry out judgment upon your life. He already knows the truth.

Summary

Fear of the Lord includes:

- Reverence for God because He is creator
- Being in awe of his greatness
- Being a little freaked out because he might surprise us, he is God

We fear God because:

- We will reap what we sow
- He is able to do his will
- He will judge our actions and only what pleases him will last into eternity
- He will judge the world and everyone in it.

Living in the Fear of the Lord is good because:

- It helps us keep an eternal perspective
- It makes us humble and allows us to gain wisdom
- It keeps us from fearing men