

Fear God

by Eli Brayley

The fear of God is the foundation of Christianity and is essential for salvation, worship, and sanctification.

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Scripture: Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10, Ecclesiastes 12:13, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 12:28-29, 1 Peter 2:17, Revelation 14:6

Topics: "Fearing God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of fearing God. He emphasizes that the lack of fear of God is the fundamental problem with mankind. The preacher highlights that salvation depends on the fear of God and that God's mercy is upon those who fear Him. He also mentions the positive feedback loop that occurs when awe and fear of God increase, leading to a greater understanding of His greatness and a deeper reverence for Him.

Transcript

Let's turn together in the Bible to the book of 1st Peter, chapter 2. 1st Peter, chapter 2. 1st Peter, chapter 2, we're going to read just one verse, verse 17. Verse 17. Verse 17.

Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the King. Let's pray. Father, we give you praise and thanksgiving for this time together that we get to share.

Lord, I pray that every week you would impress us with what a wonderful and awesome thing it is to gather with the saints in assembly and to praise your name together and to lay our requests and praises before you and then to hear from the scriptures together. Lord, we pray that in everything we do that you would be honored and glorified and all of this would turn, Lord, out for your glory and that each one of us would come to fear you and love you in a greater way. Thank you for this special time now, Lord, to look at the scriptures, to look at this verse.

And I pray that you would teach us and instruct us and challenge us and shake us and change us, Lord, where we need to be changed. And please speak to every heart this morning. Help us to listen with expectation that you do speak through the preaching of your word.

This isn't merely men talking to men, but this is truly an opportunity for us to hear from you, the living God. And I pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The title of my message this morning is Fear God. Fear God. And based on the title, you can probably tell that I'm not preaching on the various other short and pithy injunctions that the Apostle gives in verse 17, all of which are important and all of which need to be heard.

But this morning, I'm going to be focusing on the most important of these injunctions in verse 17, the one upon which the others depend. The one upon which the others depend. Consider verse 17, if we took out honor the king, we could still hold up honor all people and love the brotherhood and fear God.

You know, if you took out one of those four, honor the king, the other three would still stand. But if you took out fear God, I submit to you that not only would the other three injunctions in verse 17 fall apart, but the entire book of 1 Peter would collapse. In fact, the entire Bible would collapse if we took out the injunction to fear God.

All throughout the Bible, the fear of God is shown to be absolutely foundational. Wisdom, knowledge, ethics, life, prosperity and salvation, all are said in the Bible to depend upon the fear of God. Remember that? Does that ring a bell at all for you Bible readers? It's one thing to believe that God exists and it's another thing to contemplate the implications of God's existence and to take the existence of God seriously.

I often think of a common cartoon device when I hear atheists talk about ethics. And atheists talk about ethics all the time. You remember in the cartoons when, say, a coyote runs off of a cliff? And what happens when he runs off of the cliff? Does he fall immediately? No, he continues running just as he was in mid-air until he looks down and realizes he's not standing on anything and then he falls, right? And that's the image that comes to my mind often when I hear atheists talk about ethics.

Because the coyote continues to run even though there's nothing under him because, according to the cartoon, he continues running off of ignorance and momentum, basically. And so it is with atheists. Without God, there is no ethics.

And yet atheists continue to run in ignorance and using the momentum that has been built up by belief in God. But there's no substance to what they say, and eventually they will plummet like the coyote. And I don't think this is only true for atheists, but it's also true of those who maybe believe in God but don't actually take God seriously.

They also want to say much about ethics and say much about how people should live. But really, if there's no fear of God, then they also have no substance to what they're saying either. This morning, as we contemplate the fear of God and what this commandment is in 1 Peter, I'd like to talk about three things.

First of all, the enduring importance of fearing God. The enduring importance of fearing God. Secondly, what fearing God means and how you know if you fear God.

How you know if you fear God. And thirdly, I'd like to just briefly talk about ways to cultivate the fear of God in your life. So, first of all, the enduring importance of fearing God.

Now, I say the enduring importance of fearing God, because while many people think you shouldn't fear God at all... Have you ever met somebody like that who says that we shouldn't fear God? Many other people, we shouldn't say and think that we shouldn't fear God anymore. That is, if it ever was good to fear God, it was in the past. It was in times of ignorance.

It was in the old covenant times. That's when we were supposed to fear God. But now that Jesus Christ has come and he's shown us who God really is, now that we really know who God is and our ignorance of God is removed, there is no more need to fear God.

So some people think you shouldn't ever fear God and some people think you don't need to fear him anymore. Now, there's no question that the subject of the fear of God covers the Old Testament like moss covers a rock in the wetlands. The fear of God shows up everywhere in the Old Testament and especially in the critical places.

Just to give you a few examples, you remember when Abraham sacrifices his son Isaac in obedience to the command of God. When the angel of God stops Abraham, he says, Now I know, Abraham, that you fear God. I'm just giving you an example how the fear of God appears in critical places.

Or when King David, the greatest king in Israel, is on his deathbed, his last words were about the fear of God. And he says, I know that whoever is to rule over men needs to fear God. The writer of Ecclesiastes, the wisest man in the world, says that in conclusion to the whole matter, this is what it's all about, my friends.

It's all about fearing God and keeping his commandments. There are literally hundreds of verses in the Old Testament that speak of the fear of God, the significance of the fear of God in the Old Testament cannot be overstated. The scriptures tell us that the fear of God is more precious than all riches.

If you're going to search for anything in this world, it should be for the fear of God. It's better to have the fear of God and have little substance and material than to have lots of things and no fear of God, the Bible tells us. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him.

And God will reveal to those who fear him his covenant and his salvation. When we see the significance of the fear of God in the Old Testament, it immediately becomes suspect that it would be repudiated with the coming of the Messiah. When you see the significance of it in the Old Testament.

In fact, this opinion that the fear of God is repudiated with the coming of the Messiah is a foolish opinion when you consider Old Testament prophecy that speak of the Messiah, who, by the way, according to Isaiah chapter 11, himself is filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord and who delights in the fear of God. That's Jesus, by the way. So Jesus Christ delights in the fear of God.

And the Old Testament prophesies that the Messiah will bring to the earth the fear of God and in the messianic age men will fear God. So with the coming of Jesus, the fear of God will be established, says the Old Testament prophecy. And so this opinion is a foolish one that it would be repudiated with Christ.

Both the importance of and the enduring nature of the fear of God is demonstrated by the apostle here in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 17, when he tells Christians to fear God. Now this isn't the only place in the New Testament where we read of the fear of God. Turn with me to Luke chapter 12.

Luke chapter 12 verse 4 and 5. Jesus himself speaks of the fear of God in Matthew 10, 28 and here in Luke 12, 4 and 5. Here's what Jesus says about the fear of God. Luke 12 verse 4. I say to you, my friends... Now he's not telling this because he's mean. He's telling this because he's our friend.

And he says, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. I will tell you and warn you whom to fear. Fear the one who after he has killed... Notice, after he has killed.

Not after men have killed you. But after God has killed you, he has the power or the authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, be afraid of him.

Basically Jesus is saying, stop worrying yourself with lesser fears. Let me tell you the thing that you really should fear. You really should fear God.

And why should we fear God? Because he can kill you and throw you into hell. That's why you should fear God. And that's not to be interpreted away in some spiritual sense.

That's just how it is. You should fear him for that. That's plain.

I once was on campus talking with some students with a particular friend of mine actually. And he believed that we should not fear God. We should never fear God for any reason.

And I took him to this passage here. And I said, would you read it? And he began to read it. And the moment he saw what it was saying, he closed it and said, I'm not reading that.

No. And I said, it says to fear God. And he just didn't want to look.

He didn't want to consider. He didn't want to talk. He just had made up his mind, no, not to fear God for any reason.

The book of Romans in chapter 3, verse 18. In Romans 3.18, the Apostle Paul summarizes what he's been saying up to that point and tells us that the fundamental problem with mankind is that there's no fear of God before their eyes. Romans 3.18. He summarizes everything he's been saying.

The fundamental problem with mankind is they don't fear God. Luke chapter 1, verse 50. Mary, in her song, says that God's mercy is on those who fear him.

God's mercy is on those who fear him. That is, salvation depends, we're seeing here, upon the fear of God. Salvation depends upon the fear of God.

Luke 23, verse 40. The thief on the cross rebukes the other thief on the cross for not fearing God. Because the other thief on the cross is mocking Jesus.

He says, do you not have any fear of God? Meaning, aren't you afraid of God? Don't you respect God enough to not mock this holy man? You criminal. Like, I'm a criminal too. But, what's the matter with you, crazy man? And guess what? That man was saved.

That man was saved. In Revelation 19, verse 5, the Bible describes believers as those who fear God. Believers are those who fear God.

And in Revelation 14, verse 6-7, we see an angel come out of heaven to preach the everlasting gospel to all nations. And you know what that gospel is in Revelation 14? Revelation 14, verse 6-7. Fear God.

That's interesting, isn't it? An angel comes out of heaven to preach the eternal gospel to all nations. And the first thing he says is, Fear God. Hebrews chapter 12.

Would you turn there with me? Hebrews chapter 12. We see that the fear of God is not only foundational and essential for salvation, but it's also essential for worship. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 28 and 29.

The fear of God is essential for worship. Hebrews 12, 28 and 29. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, some Bibles will say grace, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service or worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

In the light of the fact that God is a consuming fire, which is a statement of His wrath and His judgment. Let us be thankful for Jesus and worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. John Bunyan comments that the fear of God is the salt that seasons every duty.

It is foundational for our service to God. Far from removing the fear of God, the New Testament states that it is essential to worship. It is also a motive for evangelism.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 11. 2 Corinthians 5, 11. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, the old King James says the terror of the Lord, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.

Why are we doing what we're doing? Because we know the fear of the Lord. Now, this is spoken of by Paul. Paul was the greatest missionary probably of the Christian church of all time.

You want to know one of the reasons why he went and told people about the gospel? You want to be stirred up to evangelize more? Here's one thing you should consider. The terror of the Lord. It's a motive for evangelism.

Turn two chapters over to 2 Corinthians 7, verse 1. We see that the fear of God is not only essential for evangelism, it's also indispensable to sanctification. Indispensable to sanctification. And look at verse 1 of chapter 7. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

So here we see that not only is the fear of God indispensable for holiness or sanctification, but for the perfection of holiness. Isn't that something? Let us perfect holiness in the fear of God. And many passages in the Bible show us that fearing God is the foundation and the basis for both the everyday things that we're called to do, the everyday good deeds, more mundane good deeds that we're called to do, and even the heroic things that we're called to do as well.

From the everyday things to the rare and heroic things, the fear of God is shown to be indispensable. For example, if you look in the book of Leviticus, honoring the aged depends upon the fear of God. Honoring the aged depends upon the fear of God.

Not mocking the handicapped depends upon the fear of God. As well as perfecting holiness depends upon the fear of God. One of the main reasons why you and I sin is because we're not fearing God.

Are you seeing a pattern here? That the fear of God is foundational. Are you seeing a pattern here? Brothers and sisters, I do not hesitate to say for a moment that the fear of God is the foundation of Christianity. The fear of God is the foundation of Christianity, not the love of God.

The fear of God, not the love of God, is the foundation of Christianity. Our knowledge of the love of God depends upon our fearing of God. Love is the apex of Christianity.

Love is the great defining characteristic of Christianity, but it is not the foundation. If we lose the fear of God, then we lose everything else. This is why it's so serious that our culture has basically rejected the

idea of the fear of God.

There was a time when people were called God-fearing people. This is a God-fearing woman. This is a God-fearing man.

We probably, especially us young people, have probably never heard someone be called that way. And the fact that we don't hear of people being God-fearing or the fact that our culture has basically rejected the idea of the fear of God shows how far away from the Bible our culture has become. In Genesis chapter 31, Jacob calls God by this name, the fear of Isaac, my father.

Jacob calls God the fear of Isaac, my father. Remember that? That is, Jacob, in his experience with his dad, saw his dad fearing God. He knew his dad feared God.

And so much so that after his dad died, Jacob was willing to call God the fear of my father. Mom and dad, do you want your kids to think of God as the fear of their mom and dad? Do you want them to say, One of the things I know about God is my parents feared Him. I know that for our child, our child also does, the fear of Eli.

This is so important to see that the Bible says much and makes much of this essential foundation, the fear of God, and that our society doesn't. It's important to see these two things. It's crucial to notice things, my friends.

And to notice that the Bible talks a lot about the fear of God and shows its importance, its enduring importance, where our society does not. And therefore, we must not, and I urge you not to, just go along with our culture and just kind of float along with the thinking of the day and age. Do you ever do that? I do it sometimes.

Do you ever just kind of float along with the thinking of our day and age? You just do it and think it because everybody does it and everybody thinks it. That is not what we're supposed to do. Even if everybody else thinks we're not to fear God, we find that in the Bible we are to fear God.

Being a Christian and being a believer in the Bible has always been counter-cultural. Peter tells us to fear God. And so we need to see its enduring importance.

And I pray that as we leave this sermon this morning, that we would never again wonder if we should fear God. That's my prayer for each of us. As you leave this sermon, you would never again wonder if you should fear God, but that you will leave here and say with the psalmist, in Psalm 19 verse 9, the fear of the Lord is clean and pure, enduring forever.

Now we've looked at the enduring importance of fearing God. Now let's talk about the second thing. What fearing God means and how you know if you fear God.

When we read through the Bible asking the question, what is the fear of the Lord? We discover soon enough that the meaning of the fear of God is not simple, but it's complex. And there are various shades of meaning. Most scholars are in agreement, and I agree, that these various shades of meaning come down to two.

There are two shades of meaning to the fear of God. First of all, the fear of God means to dread and to be frightened by God. We speak of fear in the sense of dread and fright.

According to the dictionary, fear in this sense is an unpleasant emotion. You all should be familiar with this emotion. An unpleasant emotion caused by perceived danger.

Have you ever felt that before? Have you ever felt like you're in danger and you got this unpleasant emotion? That's fright. That's fear. For example, fear of heights.

Let's climb up there. You may not even have climbed up there, but you think, no, not me. And you get this shiver up your spine.

I don't want to go up there. No, I'm afraid to go up there, because I'm afraid of heights. And if for whatever reason you cave in and climb up there, there's a possibility you'll be paralyzed up there and just cling to something and don't want to look down and you just can't hardly think, because you're so afraid.

When the Bible talks about the fear of God, it talks about the fear of God in that sense. That is one of the shades of meaning. That is, when people encounter God, and we see it in the Bible, I think, for example, at Mount Sinai, when God appears to Israel at Mount Sinai, it is described in terrifying terms and the people are terrified.

Moses even, his knees knock. He's afraid. This is literal fear, dread, fright, just like being scared of heights, but worse.

Because there's a sense that God is dangerous. God is dangerous. And this is the sense in which Jesus, as we read, told us to fear.

Don't be afraid of those guys who can hurt your body. Be afraid of God who can throw you into hell. He's really dangerous.

And you can't be hurt by anyone more than you can be hurt by God. This kind of fear as fright is actually a good thing. Do you guys believe that and understand that? Fright is a good thing.

Fright is so good. Parents, you're probably really glad your children have this fear. Contrary to many people who say you shouldn't be afraid of anything, fright is a good thing because fright actually comes from love.

Love of what? Love of self. If you love yourself and you're in danger, you're afraid because you want to be safe, right? And so fright is a good thing. If you love others, you'll be afraid for them.

You want to get them out of danger as well. Fright is a blessing from God, just like pain is. It's there to protect us.

Of course, fright is a bad thing when it is irrational. That is when you're afraid of something when you shouldn't be or when it's misguided. That is when you're rightly afraid of something but you should be afraid of something more.

For example, a man is afraid to go to battle but he should be afraid of what will happen if he doesn't go to battle more. And this is the sense in which Jesus talks about the fear of God. It's a misguided fear if you're only afraid of men and what they can do to you.

Yeah, there's a healthy fear of what men can do to you. Jesus isn't saying don't be afraid of man at all. You just walk down those shady places, you know? You're going to be fine.

He's just saying don't have a misguided fear. When push comes to shove, you're afraid of God. You need to realize He is to be your dread and your fear.

Many religious people believe in God simply only because it helps them cope with the scary universe. That is, we're afraid of the universe and we're afraid of life and we're afraid of the world and so therefore we believe in God and it gives us some comfort and it kind of offsets the fear of this world. Now, brothers and sisters, the real reason why people believe in God is because there's actually very good reasons to believe in God.

It has nothing to do with fear at all. But there is some truth to the fact that God does give us comfort from the scary universe because the universe is a scary place. I will agree with that.

And certainly, I know in my own life, believing in God does give me comfort, does give me peace in the midst of the scary world. But I'd like to quote one theologian, William D. Eisenhower. He comments on this idea.

Unfortunately, many of us presume that the world is the ultimate threat and that God's function is to offset it. How different this is from the biblical position that God is far scarier than the world. When we assume that the world is the ultimate threat, we give it unwarranted power for in truth the world's threats are temporary.

We believe in God because there are very good reasons to believe in God. And God does give us some comfort from the fears of the universe. But God is far scarier than the universe.

If I wanted lesser fear, I would not believe in God. Or at least, I would not believe in the God of the Bible. Do I fear God in the sense of fright and over danger? Yes, I do.

The second shade of meaning in the Bible when it talks about the fear of God is in the sense of awe and reverence and extreme respect. So when the Bible talks about the fear of God, as we look at the use of it in the Bible, it speaks of the fear of God in the sense of awe, in the sense of reverence and extreme respect. That is not just a sense of danger.

When you encounter God or when you think about God, the fear of the Lord doesn't just mean a sense of danger. Whenever you think about God, I hope you don't only think about danger and get that unpleasant emotion, but also you get a sense of wonder. You feel to bow down before Him.

You have a sense of humility before God. Do you ever get that sense when you think about God? And you see that in the Bible when people come into contact with God. Not only are they frightened, but they also are humbled and they want to bow down before God.

Turn to Psalm 33. And this is the sense spoken of here. Psalm 33, verse 6 to 9. Psalm 33, verse 6. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Wow. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap. He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

Do you ever have a junk drawer in your house? Or you just store stuff? Or is your garage a storage shed or something? Yeah, the oceans are that for God. Look at verse 8. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. And I could quote many more verses in the Bible like this one that speak of the fear of God in the sense of awe.

Wow. Consider for a moment, my friends, that the universe was created by the word of God. And stand in awe and bow down and be humbled before Him.

As we reflect upon the nature of God, the wonderful works of God, the majesty of God, the might of God, the holiness of God, the attributes and His perfections of God, we are stunned not just with fear of danger, but with wonder at who God is. Let all the earth stand amazed at God. A.W. Tozer comments, In olden days men of faith were said to walk in the fear of God and to serve the Lord with fear.

However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of their religious life was the conception of God as awesome. This idea of God transcendent runs through the whole Bible and gives color and tone to the character of the saints. However bold they were in prayer, underneath the life of the men in the Bible who feared God was the sense of God's awesomeness.

It is this kind of fear that I believe is the fear that is the beginning of wisdom. When the Bible talks about the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, I believe it's talking about the awe of the Lord. The awe, the reverence, and the deep respect of God.

The theologian J.I. Packer comments, Not till we have become humbled and teachable. Let me repeat that. This is really important.

I can't stress how important this is. Not till we have become humble and teachable. How many of you struggle with that one sometimes? Standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty, His supreme rule, acknowledging our littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom be ours? True.

What if you're not humble? What if you're not teachable? What if you don't stand in awe of God? What if you think you're not little? What if you think you're big? What if you think your mind doesn't need to be turned upside down? Can you receive wisdom from God? Knowledge from God? No. It's this kind of wisdom, this awe of God, considering who He is and who you are, comparing both of you and realizing you're nothing, you're little, you're, compared to Him, dust. It's this kind of fear that leads to us listening to God and shutting our mouths.

A very important theme in the Bible, by the way, is shutting your mouth. It's this kind of fear that the end of the book of Job is all about. Hey, Job.

Who are you? Who are you? Who's this babbler talking about me? Who do you think you are, Job? Where were you when I created this world? Where were you when I spoke all the stars into existence? Ask yourself. Put your name in the blank, not Job's. And are you going to be the expert on God? Are you going to be the one to tell God what He should and shouldn't do? Are you going to be His counselor? Are you going to hear God's word and reject it and to say that you know better than Him? So it's this kind of fear that's the beginning of wisdom because it gives you humility and makes you teachable to receive wisdom from God and to shut your mouth and realize your place as God's creature.

These two shades of meaning, dread and fright, and awe and reverence, is what it means in the Bible to fear God. And there's actually a relationship between the two. Which one do you think comes first? You should probably know by now.

Dread and fright of God or awe and reverence of God. Which one comes first? Fright and dread, I've heard. Actually, I'm going to challenge that.

I believe what comes first is the awe and the reverence of God, which leads to dread. Because you have to recognize who God is and respect that in order to be afraid of Him. You realize, wow, that's God? He created the world out of nothing? He's got infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite righteousness, infinite holiness, infinite justice.

And when you realize who He is and you respect that and you fear that in the sense of awe, then it leads to dread. Because you're recognizing who God is. We realize that this God that we have to deal with is so awesome that the sin against Him brings about the condemnation and the worthiness of death.

And that He is able to do it. That not only do we deserve damnation, God is able to give us that. But there's more to this relationship, and it's very interesting.

I said earlier that I fear God in the sense of dread and fright. As a Christian, I do. However, the Bible also tells us that God, through Jesus Christ, through His salvation, delivers us from this dread.

So you don't read the Bible and you don't get the impression that Christians are enslaved to the fear of punishment. Christians are actually set free from the fear of punishment. We've talked about that in the book of Galatians.

So how does this work? I said that I was afraid of God in the sense of fright, and yet now I'm acknowledging that the Bible says that Christians and those who believe in Jesus are set free from this fright. Are we to fear God? Are we to be frightened of Him? Are we to dread Him or not? And the answer is yes. I've given this example many times.

I'm going to give it again. Suppose there was a big, nasty, deadly, poisonous snake in that room over there. Instead of Zach being in that room, there's that poisonous snake.

They're different, all right? And, you know, who wants to go in there? Nobody. We're all afraid to go in there. Why are we afraid to go in there? I don't want to go in there.

Because that snake, we recognize its nature and we dread it. It gives us fear. No one wants to go in there.

It's scary. But suppose I have a suit that you can put on, and that suit makes you completely invincible and it protects you from the snake completely. Once you put on the suit, that snake cannot hurt you anymore.

And now you can go in there and do your studies on it. You know, you're a scientist, let's say. Now, you put the suit on and you go in and you do your studies.

Now, I'm going to ask the question. The person in the room with the suit, doing the studies on the snake, does that person fear the snake? Is that person afraid and does he dread and does he have fright of the snake? The answer is yes, right? That's why he's wearing the suit. He's wearing the suit because he's afraid of the snake.

But because he's wearing the suit, he's not afraid of the snake. Because he's wearing the suit, he doesn't have to fear going in the room anymore. And he can go in and be at peace and do what he has to do.

And that is exactly the same thing when it comes to us as Christians fearing God. Now, we as Christians are delivered from the fear of punishment through Jesus Christ. We're delivered from the fear of punishment through Jesus Christ.

All of us are sinners by our behavior and we deserve damnation. We take that very seriously. Therefore, we put all of our hope and our trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins.

And according to the Bible, everyone who believes in Christ is forgiven of their sins and is counted as righteous and blameless before God. We have nothing more to fear in the sense of dread. If you're a Christian, do not be afraid of punishment anymore.

Do not be afraid of the justice of God coming and getting you anymore. You can live in peace, you can live in safety now that you are clothed in Jesus Christ. However, we are clothed in Jesus Christ and we are trusting in Him because we're afraid of God and we're afraid of His judgment.

So I can answer the question with yes and no. Eli, are you afraid and frightened of God? No, I'm not. I'm safe and I am safe in Christ.

On the other hand, I am afraid of God. That is why I put my faith in Christ. J. Gresham Machen says, Even the Christian must fear God.

But it is another kind of fear. It is a fear rather of what might have been than of what is. It is a fear of what would come were we not in Christ.

Without such fear, there can be no true love for the love of the Savior is proportioned to one's horror of that from which man has been saved. And how strong are the lives that are suffused with such love! They are lives brave, not because the realities of life have been ignored, but because they have been faced. See, Christians are brave.

Christians have boldness to come before God. Christians have peace and Christians have joy. And it is all the more amazing because we do fear God.

Imagine if you didn't have the fright and the dread of God. Imagine how unamazing our peace would really be. Now, an interesting thing happens in the relationship between awe and fear.

I said that it begins first with awe and then it moves to fear. But then the gospel of Jesus Christ takes away our dread and removes our fear of being punished. It would all end, brothers and sisters, with dread if the gospel didn't come with good news.

But the wonderful thing about the gospel is it brings us a new discovery of God's nature and therefore new awe of God. So I am in awe of God as the Creator and as the Just One and as the Powerful One and therefore I am afraid of Him. And then Jesus comes and delivers me from damnation and from dread and all of a sudden I have a new awe of God.

Wow, God is even more amazing than I thought He was. So it moves from awe to fear to salvation to more awe. And as your awe goes up, guess what else goes up? Your dread.

Wow, to sin against this God because He is even more amazing than I thought is really bad. And then your dread goes up. And then your awe goes up.

And then your dread goes up. And what we have here is a positive feedback loop. Do you know what that means? It means that there is an initial change that takes place or there is something that happens and the response to that thing actually increases what happened.

So we move from awe to fear to awe to fear and it increases and it will increase for all eternity, brothers and sisters. It will increase forever. The Puritan Stephen Charnock says this, and he says it rightly, the gospel affords us greater discoveries of God's nature and therefore enhances our reverence of Him.

The more spiritual and evangelical, therefore, any service is, the more humble it is. Wow. The more evangelical our worship is, the more humble it will be.

Awe of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because the awe of the Lord brings dread and the dread of the Lord brings us to Christ. Now, how do you know if you fear God? I'd like to give three signs that you fear God and these are for self-evaluation. Three signs that you fear God.

First, you have an inward attitude of reverence towards God. Secondly, you don't oppose but humbly receive whatever God says. And thirdly, you are more afraid of God than of anything else.

Now, the converse is also true. You know that you don't fear God if you don't have an inward attitude of reverence towards God. You know that you don't fear God if you oppose what God says and do not humbly receive it.

Whatever He says. And three, if you are afraid of other things more than you are afraid of God. I'll just break that down briefly.

You have an inward attitude of reverence towards God. Now, this appears, this is not something we can see into each other's hearts, but it does appear in things like not taking God's name in vain. If you had an inward attitude of reverence towards God, why would you take His name in vain and use it as a cuss word or not honor that word and hold it as something substantial? It will appear in how you speak about God in conversation, how you pray and how you worship, how you sing, how you serve.

And as I said, this isn't for others to judge and of course all of these things can be faked and you know yourself. That's one sign of the fear of God is that you have an inward attitude of reverence that will manifest in how you speak of God and pray and worship, etc. Secondly, you don't oppose but humbly receive whatever God says.

And I'd like to clarify this. We use our minds that God has given us and God has given us brilliant minds. We use our minds to the best of their ability in order to determine whether God has spoken and to determine what God has spoken.

We use our minds to determine whether God has spoken and what God has spoken. But when it has been determined that God has spoken and what He has said, then we are to believe and accept what He says. Even if we don't understand it.

And this is a hard thing for people because we're not humble before God and not teachable. I only will believe in things and accept things if they make sense to me. My friends, if it has been determined that God has spoken and what He has said has been determined, then we are to accept it because it is the Word of God.

Who are you to reply against God? Now, this doesn't mean that we don't seek to understand. This doesn't mean that there isn't an understanding that we can come to as to why God says things. But we accept it and then we seek to understand it.

If we don't, many times we do understand. So ask yourself, if you fear God, do you have this sign? Do you accept whatever it is that God says? Calvin says that whenever the Word of God is despised, all reverence for Him is gone. And we do not rightly fear God unless we hang upon His lips.

Augustine said, If you believe what you like in the Gospels and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself. John Stott says that we need to repent of our haughty way in which we sometimes stand in judgment upon Scripture and must learn to sit under its judgment instead. If we come to Scripture with our minds made up, expecting to hear from it only an echo of our own thoughts and never the thunderclap of God's, then indeed He will not speak to us and we shall only be confirmed in our own prejudices.

We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, and it will do that, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior. The point is, if you approach the Word of God already with your mind made up, then you're just going to hear yourself talk. And what a scary place that is to be.

And to fool yourself into thinking you're really hearing God's Word. And thirdly, which is self-explanatory, you're more afraid of God than of anything else. Just like Jesus said, don't fear other things, I'll tell you really the great dread, and that is God.

Some people refuse to listen to the Word of God and to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ because they're more afraid of their families than they are of God. Or they're more afraid of losing their reputation before others than they are of God. The fear of God means you will fear God more than anything else.

And if these three signs are in you, then it can be rightly said, you are a God-fearing person. I want to make a point that I think is one of the most important points of all, and I want to be very clear on this, that everyone who believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the fear of God. Every Christian has the fear of God, in a sense.

Every Christian has the fear of God, for you become a Christian because you've heard the Word and listened, you've feared the judgment of God, and you've come to Christ to be delivered from the judgment of God. And so there is a sense in which every Christian fears God. We have listened to His Word, we have listened to His Law, we have listened to His Gospel.

And there is a sense in which every non-Christian does not fear God. There is a sense. But yet in 1 Peter 2, verse 17, the Apostle shows us that there is still a need for Christians to be told to fear God.

So it's not enough just to acknowledge all Christians fear God, but we also need to be told to fear God. And the fear of God, here's the important point, the fear of God can grow. It is something that comes in degrees.

In Nehemiah 7, verse 2, there's a man who is said to fear God more than others. He fears God more than many others. And so I'd like you to remember that.

Every Christian fears God, but that doesn't mean you can't grow in the fear of God. And there is a sense in which some non-Christians fear God, but they ultimately don't if they're not believing in Christ. And we need to grow in the fear of God.

This explains, brothers and sisters, why we can fear God and be saved, and yet still struggle with the fear of God in our sanctification. And this brings me to our last point this morning, and I'll just be brief. Ways to cultivate the fear of God in your life.

And I'm just going to briefly share four ways you can cultivate the fear of God in your life. First, and perhaps the most important, learn to delight in the fear of God. Learn to delight in the fear of God.

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 1. Nehemiah is left of the Psalms. Go to the Psalms and turn left. And if you hit 2 Chronicles, you've gone too far left.

Nehemiah chapter 1, verse 11. Nehemiah 1, verse 11. This is in a prayer of Nehemiah's.

O Lord, I beseech you, may your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name. And so here, Nehemiah speaks of the servants who delight to fear the name of God. I'd like to quote John Bunyan.

John Bunyan says, and this is Old English, so please follow carefully. Quote, That point being, you're not going to grow in the fear of God if you don't think it's something you should grow in. If you don't delight in it, if you don't think it's a good thing.

And Bunyan's saying, bring it into your heart, love it, see it as a good thing, study it, study what it yields. We Christians, and I'm absolutely certain of this, need to return to a place of the fear of God because it's largely been lost. Even in the Christian church.

Yes, we all as Christians have some sense of the fear of God. But we need to get again a sense of the fear of God and delight in it and see its importance. I'm sure even, there's many people here that this sermon is refreshing and it's coming as a challenge because perhaps for many years you haven't even thought about fearing God.

Or you haven't seen it as a good thing or an important thing. Brothers and sisters, we are both to love and fear God. Amen.

And those things are in relationship to one another. So, learn to delight in it. Secondly, pray for it.

Psalms 86 verse 11. Psalms 86 verse 11. Pray for it.

Psalms 86 verse 11. David says here, Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name.

Here's a prayer. David is praying to God. God, unite my heart.

That is, let my heart have a focus here. Let it not be scattered all over the place. Unite my heart to fear your name.

This should be a prayer that is on the lips of all Christians. Because the fear of God ultimately does come from God and we must seek it from His hand in prayer. Thirdly, read the Old Testament.

Read the Old Testament. And I say this because the Old Testament is often neglected in the Christian Church even to the point of it being a joke. Do not restrict yourself to the New Testament alone.

Do not restrict yourself to the New Testament alone. But read the Old Testament and meditate upon what it says about God. Meditate on God's awesomeness, His wonders that are revealed there, His wrath, His grit.

And meditate upon the cross in the light of the Old Testament as the Apostles themselves did. When the Apostles meditated upon the cross, they meditated upon the cross in the light of the Old Testament and the God who is revealed there. That's how the Apostles thought about it.

And so we need to return again to the Old Testament, read the stories that are there and learn about the awesome God that is revealed there. And when we do, we'll be amazed at the cross. We'll be amazed at the New Testament.

We'll be amazed at the things that the New Testament tells us about His love and His grace and what He's done for us when we see it in the light of the mighty and majestic God that He is as He's revealed there in the Old Testament. So I challenge us all to read the Old Testament more than we probably do. And lastly, read books on the doctrine of God.

Read books that are about God. It's interesting to me how this one gets actually overlooked. Christians often read lots of books, but seldom do we read books that are just about God and His awesomeness.

Don't just read novels. Don't just read self-help books. Don't just read books that are only on God's love and only on God's grace.

And I'm saying don't only read those. We should be reading them. But read books that are on His awesomeness.

Read books that are on His attributes. Read books about His judgments. Read books like Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.

Read books like the Holocaust. Where Was God? That's a heavy one. Read books like the classic The Confessions of St. Augustine.

Read books that are on God's awesomeness also. Don't limit yourself to these, but read these because often we don't. And brothers and sisters, if you do, I guarantee it will challenge you.

It will shake you. And His love and His grace will become more amazing. If you'd like, we can give you suggestions of books.

But my prayer is that we would be a people who cultivate and grow in the fear of God. And this morning as we take the Lord's Supper, we are contemplating the death of Jesus Christ. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ in our place who took our sins so that we could be saved.

Let's remember what this means. We are celebrating our only hope. And why is this our only hope? Why is the death of Jesus Christ our only hope? Because God is to be feared.

God gave us this gift freely because of His love for us. And He gave us the gift of Christ out of necessity because of His great wrath. He could not ignore His own nature.

He is an awesome, transcendent, righteous, and wrathful God. And that is one of the reasons why Jesus came and died for us. The reason, really.

And in His love for us and not wanting us to perish under His wrath, He sent His Son to die for our sins. This is our hope. Let's contemplate these things as we take it.

Let us rejoice in the grace of God as we take the Lord's Supper with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire. Let's pray. Father, we can be so glib about things.

Lord, I pray for for us here as Christians who do fear You. Lord, often we fail to grow in our reverence for You. And I pray that You would give us afresh a sense of Your awesomeness that we would wonder and inwardly revere You.

That we would fear You so that Your love doesn't become unamazing. And Lord, that we would have a posture of humility before You and receive what You say. I pray, Lord, if there's anyone here who hasn't put their faith in Jesus Christ that this morning they would.

And that they would realize that You are a dangerous God and that really the only thing that separates them from Your wrath is a very short amount of time. And I pray, Lord, that they would flee to Christ and receive His salvation totally free, undeserved. We don't have to work for it.

Thank You that it is by grace we're saved. And Lord, we just pray that as we take the Lord's Supper we would truly have a sense of Your of the fear of You. And take it with thanksgiving, with boldness, with joy, with peace in the light of the fact that You have saved us at the cost of the blood of Your Son.

Thank You, Father. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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