

The Joy of Fearing God

by Hans Peter Royer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fearing God as a vital aspect of a loving relationship with Him, which is often neglected in contemporary Christian teaching.

Duration: 37:21

Scripture: Exodus 20:4

Topics: "Fear Of God", "Reverent Worship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of the fear of God in today's world. He references 2 Samuel 23:3, which states that when one rules in the fear of God, they are like the light of morning at sunrise. The speaker also shares a personal experience of witnessing a chain of lights that left people in awe, leading to a moral change in their behavior. He emphasizes that the fear of God is not about being terrified or running away from God, but rather about standing in awe and reverence. The speaker acknowledges that some people may struggle with this concept due to negative experiences with God being portrayed as harsh and punishing, but he encourages them to understand that perfect love drives out fear.

Transcript

This morning, I want to talk about a topic that is not very widely taught. There's a simple reason for that. But there is one aspect in a love relationship which we claim to have with the Lord Jesus.

There is one aspect in the love relationship which is widely neglected today, and that is the fear of God. It is quite interesting because the fear of God is expounded in Scripture very largely. But it's neglected.

And I believe the reason for that is we don't know quite what to do with that. Because it doesn't fit our theology. Certainly not our Western one.

It really doesn't have a place in our theology. And we struggle with the fear of God because we don't know how to understand where to put it. Now, me personally, I heard about the fear of God.

Certainly it was mentioned in some sermons. It was mentioned in some books, on some tapes that I listened. But it was always just mentioned.

But it was never explained. And so I, just a few months ago really, I started, I want to find out what does the Bible say about the fear of God? How can I experience and live in the fear of God? Does any one of

you, have any one of you seen the movie? I don't know exactly the English title. A Soldier, James Ryan.

Or what's the English? Alright, so you know, maybe some of you have seen that. If you haven't, I don't think you have missed much. But I, sometimes I go with my wife.

A few times a year we go to Salzburg. This is our closest big city that we have. We drive about 45 minutes.

It's quite a nice city, you know, Sound of Music city. And I sometimes go there. I take my wife out for the evening.

And sometimes we go to see a movie. And so it happened, we went to see a movie. And we didn't know which one we go.

So we just pick this one. We thought it's probably a good one. A friend told us, you know, they've seen it and so on.

But it wasn't a very long movie for us at least. Because my wife just couldn't stand it. The first 5 minutes or 10 minutes of this movie, that is so brutal, so incredible scenes.

When they approach the coastline of France. And they basically run into the fierce weapons that totally destroyed them. And it always, it gives you a fear, you know.

So the way it's made, of course, it's fantastic. It's so vivid, so real. And my wife just said, we were out for a romantic evening.

I don't think that's very helpful. So we left the movie. So I've never really seen it.

Just seen a couple of shots of it. And sometimes in a preview. Now, it creates a fear when you see something like this.

Now, when we talk about the fear of God. We certainly talk about a different kind of fear. But no less a fear.

When we come to God, we don't be afraid of something awful. But it's the fear of someone called wonderful. Now, for everything that we say about the Lord, about God.

Our basis is scripture. Now, the Bible teaches us from beginning to the end to fear God. I've always seen that.

But I never knew what to do with it. Do you want to be wise? Do you want wisdom? Well, fear God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

It says in Psalm, in Proverbs, The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. It's the fear of God which is the beginning of those things. Do you want to have a long life? Well, fear God.

It's what the Bible teaches. Do you want the protection, the blessing of God? Fear Him. It's what the Bible says.

Do you want to experience God's love? Fear Him. There are lots of passages. I don't give you all the quotes because it's long.

You just get your concordance. You will find not only dozens but probably hundreds of references about the fear of God. Do you want to please Him? How can you please God? Fear Him.

Do you want to be free from the fear of man? There's one way to do that. Fear God. It says in Proverbs 28, The fear of man is a snare.

Do you want that it goes well with your children? You know what the Bible says? Fear God. Now, who says so? Is it the psalmist? Is it some disciple? Actually, in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 13, we have a beautiful summary. It says, To fear God is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 12, 13. To fear God is the whole duty of man. It's quite interesting.

If it's the whole duty of man, why do we never hear anything about it? When you read the characters of the Bible, Old and New Testament, you find they have all been afraid of God. When you look at Moses, when he stood in front of the burning bush, he was afraid. You look at Isaiah in the temple, when he saw God, he was terrified, he was trembling.

When you look at Pharaoh, he was trembling when he saw God at work. You look at the disciples that Jesus had, they were afraid when Jesus walked on the water, when Jesus told them to catch the fish, when he rose the dead, when he drove out demons. They were afraid, it says.

They were terrified. It says in Matthew chapter 17, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples were terrified when they heard the voice of God. This is a message we rarely hear today.

Today's emphasis is on the love of God, and rightly so. Nothing wrong about that. We need to speak about the love of God.

But I am afraid, just as we will never understand the grace of God without the law of God, we will never enter the fullness of the love of God without the fear of God. It's the paradoxes which bring forth truth. One of my favorite songs, and I love to sing it, maybe we can sing it today, that would be great, is Amazing Grace.

And one line in Amazing Grace goes, it was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears released. If you know grace, you will fear God. Grace teaches us both to fear God and to embrace God.

Both is there. Now why shall we preach about the fear of God? You see, I do it sometimes, and I don't end up very popular usually. But that's okay.

But why shall we do it then? Isn't it enough to speak about the love of God? Why speak about the fear of God? Now let me give you one very simple reason why I do that. When I look around the world today, when I look at my own country, when I look at the leading politicians, when I look at the deterioration of values, the change in culture, you know what I notice? There is no fear of God. It says in 2 Samuel chapter 23 and verse 3. 2 Samuel chapter 23 and verse 3. It says, The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me, When one rules over man in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.

Why are politicians corrupt today? Because there is no fear of God. We need to hear that message. We today, we have tamed, we have domesticated God.

And fear of God today among evangelical Christians is explained with awe, or with reverence, or with worship. But if fear is awe, why doesn't the Bible use the word awe? The Bible does use the word awe. But it also uses the word fear.

The Bible does use the word reference. But it also uses the word fear. If it's one and the same, there is no reason to use two words.

These are all things that are involved in the fear of God, yes, but it's not the fear of God. I'm afraid that the fear of God actually means to fear God. It says in Psalm chapter 34, Psalm 34, it says in verse 7, Psalm 34 verse 7, The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the Lord, you his saints.

For those who fear him, they lack nothing. Verse 11, Come, my children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is something that we can learn, and it's something that we must teach. It says in 2 Chronicles chapter 26, it says, He instructed him in the fear of God. We need to instruct people and ourselves in the fear of God.

Now, what exactly is the fear of God? What is it? My wife, she loves to read the Narnia stories. I don't know if you know, C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and all this, she loves to read it. I don't read that stuff, but she loves it.

I gave her the books that I don't, that I want to take time to read and I tell her to give me the summary. It's great to have a wife. But there's one book among this series, it's called The Silver Chair.

And it's a story of Jill, the little girl, who just saw how Eustachius, the little boy, fell off the cliffs. And as she sat there crying, Aslan, that's the king, that's the lion, you know Aslan, he's the lion? He sits there at the creek. By the way, you know, I kind of, I love these stories.

As I said, I haven't written a whole book yet, but as she tells me, I read portions of it and it's great. It's great pictures. I'm going to read them to my children now.

You know what's interesting? Whenever Aslan is around, things are right. I love it. Whenever he's around, things are just right.

And of course, in this story, Aslan is always a picture for the Lord Jesus. But I just want to read you this portion about Jill. Jill was exhausted and terribly thirsty.

The lion invited the girl, when you're thirsty, come here and drink. Jill was terrified by his appearance and didn't say a word. The lion asked again, aren't you thirsty? Jill said, I die of thirst.

Then drink, said the lion. May I? Can I? Would you mind to move a little bit away from the Greek? The lion's answer was only a look and a deep growl. When Jill looked at his motionless body, she knew that she could have just as well asked the whole mountain to move aside for her own comfort.

The delightful splashing of the Greek almost drove her insane. Do you promise me not to harm me? She asked. I don't promise anything, replied the lion.

By now, Jill was so thirsty that unconsciously, she made a step towards the water and the lion. Do you eat little girls? She asked. I have devoured girls and boys, men and women, nobles and kings, cities and countries, replied the lion.

I don't have the courage to come, said Jill. Then you will die of thirst, replied the lion. Oh no.

Jill made another step towards the water. Then I will have to start walking to find another creek. There is no other creek, said the lion.

I like this story. As you read on the story, she then did come closer, she did drink, and then she was standing between the two paws of the lion and a very tender love relationship developed out of that. It's a beautiful story how fear is a part of a love relationship.

You see, my kids, they love me. I know that. And they do.

But they also fear me. It's not only respect. It's a fear.

Now, what is involved in fear? What is involved in fearing God? I'm saying it's involved. It's not fear, but it's involved. One point is, something that's involved in fear is to stand in awe of God.

This has to do with being overwhelmed. Those who've been here over the weekend, I spoke about worship. To be overwhelmed about the greatness of God with our mind, with our emotions, even with our body.

And to be overwhelmed with His holiness, His might, His purity, His justice, His greatness, His glory. I have a question. Have you ever trembled in the presence of God? It's interesting.

We tremble as we see certain things, especially when we are in them. For example, we may be terrified when we see an avalanche coming down the Alps and destroying a village or a group of people. I have seen it.

It's terrifying. We may be terrified when we see an earthquake like in India recently that destroys ten thousands of people and villages. We are terrified when we see a flood that covers whole islands.

It's terrifying, especially when you're in it. I have been in three avalanches myself. I survived them, but whenever I got out of it, my whole body was shaking.

I was afraid. You see, it's interesting. We are afraid and we are terrified about those powers, but compared to the mighty God, this is nothing.

The One who calls the universe into existence, have we ever been terrified in His presence? It says in Exodus chapter 33 verse 20, No one may see me and live. I'm a holy God. And it says in Hebrews, in the New Testament, Hebrews 10 verse 31, in case you think that's only the Old Covenant, Hebrews 10 it says, It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Last year, we did something in our mountains. We have the Dachstein range. It's the highest mountain in our area.

It's a very famous mountain. For rock climbers, for insiders, it would be one of the famous areas to go to in the world, like Yosemite is in the States or whatever. And what we did, we had a hundred year celebration

of this mountain being climbed the first time.

And what we did, we were 200 mountain guides and mountain rescue men and we made a chain of lights through the 1,000 meter high vertical wall. There are two famous routes that are leading up and 200 mountain guides, we climbed up with special safety and so on. I myself was in it as well.

It was just last year. And we had 200 torches, a chain of light, which showed these two famous tours. And of course, I was in it, so I wasn't aware of it, but my wife, she was down.

There were about 2,000 spectators up on the Alps. There are only three houses there, but they all came up to see that. And my wife just told me it was very interesting when we all had torches, magnesium torches.

They're very light. And they were lit at the same second. We got a sign and we lit them at the same second.

As those chain of lights became visible, there was kind of, all you heard from those 2,000 people was, Ah! And there was a silence for about two minutes. Nobody said a word. You know what's interesting about that? When people stand in awe, they behave different.

When people stand in awe, there seems to be a moral change going on. As we stand in awe of God, He does something to us. That's involved in the fear of God.

Another thing that's involved in the fear of God is to show reverence to God. The people of Israel, they had such a high reverence before the Holy God that whenever they read the Tanakh, the Old Testament, and the Torah, of course, the Law, whenever the name Yahweh, J-H-W-H, whenever it appeared, that's the name of God, so to speak. We don't know how to pronounce it.

It has various reasons. One reason is, they never spoke it out. They always substituted the word Jehovah or Yahweh, as we glibly call it.

They always substituted with the word Adonai, because this name was too holy to even take into your mouth. That's one reason why we don't know how to pronounce it anymore. It's interesting.

As I watch my own life growing with the Lord, I have a very hard time to call the Lord Jesus, Jesus. I just noticed it. You know why I noticed it? When I type out my sermons and my teaching, I don't write Jesus.

I always write L-J, Lord Jesus. Something has changed over the years. As I prepared it, I became aware of that.

I didn't in the process. It's also interesting to note that nowhere in the Bible, not even once, does anybody call God or Jesus, the Lord, his friend. Never.

The Lord Jesus says, You are my friends when you do what I command. But nobody ever dared to call Jesus his friend. It's interesting.

It says in John 13, 13, You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, because this is who I am. I'm not the body from upstairs. I'm not just your friend.

I am your Lord. I'm the Lord Jesus. It's interesting, always in the New Testament, nobody calls the Lord Jesus, Jesus.

They always call him Rabbi or Lord. Only three times people call him Jesus. It's unbelievers, but it's interesting.

So it's to show reverence to God is part of fearing God. The next point I want to make, the fear of God also creates in us a desire to please God. When we fear God, we want to please God.

There is a right fear of God. There is also a wrong fear of God. We come to that later.

It creates a respect. You see, there are some people in our life that we respect incredibly, more than just respect. One in my life would be, for example, Major Thomas.

I really respect him. It's almost more than respect. I would never call him by his first name, even if he would offer it.

I wouldn't feel comfortable doing that. When he calls me, I almost end up in my office, although it's just a telephone. He was always friendly to me, never threatening, always encouraging.

But there is more than respect. But it's interesting, fear also has a romantic side. I read an article the other day of a pastor who married a lovely couple.

And he just wrote down this. I just read it to you. He says, Years ago, I married a lovely young couple.

They were so much in love with each other and still are today. They got to know each other when they were 13 and 14 years of age. They never looked at someone else and they never wanted to do that.

After their honeymoon, they returned home again a few weeks later. I saw them in church the following Sunday and greeted them with a little joke, asking the young man if she had burned the first meal as she was cooking for him. Both laughed, and the woman said, Oh, I was so afraid that something terrible would happen.

I often read that young women cannot cook, and so I was determined to cook the best meal for my husband that I can possibly do. So I began to prepare the evening meal at three o'clock in the afternoon. I made everything ready and began to cook.

When I finally put all my pans on the stove, I was so afraid that it wouldn't taste well. Then Charles came home a little bit later than expected from work. I was so afraid that because the meal was too long on the stove, it may have lost its taste.

I interrupted her and said, Three times you now mentioned that you were afraid, that you had fear. Do you believe John would have beaten you had it not tasted well? With a funny look on her face, she shook her head and said, Of course not. And as she was looking over to her husband standing next to her, you could tell how much she loved him.

But I didn't give in so quickly and asked again, You said that you were afraid. She answered, You know what I mean. Of course I knew what she meant.

Her fear was not something horrifying or awful. Her fear was the great desire to please the person she loves more than anyone else. And in this case, her fear was the beginning of a delicious evening meal for and with her husband.

You see, fear has a romantic side. But to have fear of God, to be terrified of God, is something that I find in the Bible. Remember when Peter, when the Lord Jesus met Peter the first time, what did Peter say? Go away from me, I'm a sinful man.

He was afraid. And we must rediscover again that God is angry at sin. He hates sin.

And he pours out his wrath on sinful man and a sinful world. It says in Psalm 8, God is angry every day. And hell is simply the final expression of God's wrath, the anger of God.

Now, as we stand in the fear of God, we have two choices. Adam was afraid of God after he fell into sin. What did Adam do? He ran away from God and was hiding from God in his fear.

Peter was also afraid of the Lord Jesus. What did he do? He ran to Jesus and asked for forgiveness. This undeserved love that we receive in the Lord Jesus will produce in us, I call it a wonderful fear, as we stand in the presence of the one who is called wonderful.

It says in Ephesians 6, in verse 5, Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. It says in Romans 8, 15, it says, We are no longer slaves to fear. There's a big difference.

We are not slaves to fear anymore. We don't have to be terrified, in a sense, of running away from God, hiding behind a tree from God. No.

It says in 1 John 4, 18, Perfect love drives out fear, but it drives out the fear that drives us away from God. And I understand that some people have a hard time with that message, especially those who grew up in a church where God was always proclaimed as somebody who will slap you, who will beat you, who will knock you into shape. When they come to know the Lord, they never want to hear about that again.

But we need to learn. It's just like, you see, our past always, to some extent, determines our theology. We can never escape that.

It was funny, I stayed together with Charles now for a few days. In the evening we sometimes talked about things. He has a very different background than I have.

We have the same Lord. We have basically the same message, but we come from different angles because we have very different experiences. But what we must learn as we mature in Christ is not to throw out the baby with the bathwater, but to learn a balance.

And there is a good place for fear as well as for love. It belongs to the complete picture of God. Now, I'm closing with how can we learn to fear God? In a right, in a healthy, in a biblical way.

Not as slaves, not destructive. Well, the first thing is the fear of God comes from God, not from man. That's very interesting.

No man has to beat you into fearing God. The fear of God comes from God. The natural man does not fear God.

Fear is not something that is already present in the cradle. Heathens have no fear of God. It says in Romans chapter 3, 18, there is no fear of God in their eyes.

Therefore, we must ask God that he may give us this reverent, this constructive fear of God. It says in Jeremiah 23, verse 39, It's something that we get from God, not from man. But we must teach, we must instruct, gentle the scriptures.

You see, we are always tempted to selectively leave out those passages that don't make sense to us or those we don't like. And always come back to those chapters that we like. But friends, we don't have the freedom to do that.

This is why, secondly, contemplate over the character of God. I encourage you in your Bible reading, don't pick out those chapters you like. Read every chapter.

Read also those passages that make you feel uncomfortable when God is destroying nations in the Old Testament and so on, because only then you get the full, the real picture of God, not the one that you create in your own mind. What is the first command? Do not... What is it? Do not make any image of God. Now, we think of image immediately of something we create.

No, you can make your image of God in your mind. It's first command. We must get to know this God who revealed Himself in and through scripture.

One other point that helps me to fear God is to look at God's creation with open eyes. And even though we live a fallen world, there is enough evidence that makes me astonished and fear God because of His greatness. I read an interesting article as well about the Dome of Cologne in Germany.

It's a fantastic building. But in the Second World War it was almost destroyed. Bombs have hit the building, walls collapsed, but the structure remained.

And I've seen pictures of that dome and even though it was half destroyed, it was dirty, the bombs have hit it, you could still see. You know what? There must be a very wise man who constructed this dome. It still spoke of the one who created it.

You see, even though we live in a sinful world, there is plenty of evidence that there is a mighty, a very wise God behind all this. As I said before, the greatness of God that makes us fear God we see in the galaxies. The wisdom of God we see in our DNA, in the atoms.

And the mercy of God, look at the cross. And one other thing that helps me to fear God is to worship God in His creation. There is an order, a Catholic order called the Jesuits.

And those monks who live in a monastery, they have a very good tradition. They still do that. They get up at five o'clock every morning.

The first thing they do is they read the last five psalms. Forty-five to fifty. It's actually six they read.

The Hallelujah Psalms. Every morning. You know what? I do it, not all the time, but every now and then I do that.

You know what it does to me? Before I go into the day, I get a right perspective with whom I am living today. Who is the God who indwells me and in whom I am sheltered? This is the one I'm living with. It puts

all other things in the right perspective.

It's good to remind ourselves with the psalms what kind of God we are dealing with. And one last point and then we close. How can we learn to fear God? We learn to fear God the best in our homes.

Teach your children to fear God. When you read the Bible with your children, read every chapter. Don't leave out the nasty ones.

If you do that, your children will grow up with a false understanding of God. The Holy Spirit can use it as we faithfully show our children the whole counsel of God. As I prepared this, I was driving someone, Lucas was with me, my ten-year-old son.

Just a couple of months ago, I asked him, Lucas, do you love me? He said, of course I do. What a question. And I said, do you also fear me? Then he was thinking about it and he said, yes, I do.

And he said, how come? When is it so? He said, when I do something I know I'm not supposed to do and you come around the corner. I have fear of you. It's not respect.

It's more than respect because there are consequences. And in a tender love relationship, fear is always involved. And so I want to teach my children the fear of God.

Of course the love of God. But give them the whole picture of the one who is our Lord, the Lord Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your Scriptures that you have given us in order that we can understand you. That we can learn to think the way you think. That we can learn to see you who you really are.

And Lord, I ask for forgiveness when we try to shape Scripture according to our mind. And I pray that we allow you to shape our mind by your word. That we don't change your image into ours, but that our image is changed into yours.

Father, we have twisted so many things around. And very often we have not even been aware of it. Thank you that you are a forgiving God.

Thank you that you do not hold it against us. But Father, you are so pleased when we learn to understand you, to obey you as our God and Father, the Eternal God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. And thank you that we may know you as our life.

So good to know. Thank you for this morning, for your word, for your presence. And in your own name I pray.

Amen.

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