

The Fear of the Lord

by K.P. Yohannan

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the foundation of our Christian life, and it involves having a deep reverence for God and recognizing His power and authority.

Scripture: Genesis 22:12, Psalm 111:10, Matthew 7:21, Matthew 7:24, Luke 6:46

Topics: "Fear Of The Lord", "Obedience"

Description

K.P. Yohannan emphasizes the significance of the 'fear of the Lord' as the foundation of wisdom and a true relationship with God. He explains that fearing God is not about being afraid, but about having a deep reverence for His greatness and authority, which leads to obedience and a closer walk with Him. Yohannan contrasts the themes of the Old and New Testaments, asserting that true grace is built upon an understanding of the fear of God, and warns against a superficial faith that neglects obedience. He encourages believers to embrace the hard teachings of God, just as Abraham did, and to recognize that true friendship with God requires sacrificial obedience. Ultimately, the fear of the Lord is presented as essential for spiritual growth and wisdom.

Transcript

Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." More often than not, the "fear of the Lord" is just a vague spiritual term. But the way to become a friend of God and to have our lives built on the correct foundation is to understand what it means to walk in the fear of the Lord. In Genesis 22:12, God says to Abraham, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

" This passage is the first time in the Bible that the fear of God is mentioned. For most people, when we hear the word "fear" it brings a negative connotation. But to fear the Lord is not to be afraid of Him. Rather, it is to have a deep reverence for Him, to realize that He is God--all-knowing, all-powerful, all-encompassing. A.W. Tozer said, "If there is one terrible disease in the Church of Christ, it is that we do not see God as great as He is. We're too familiar with God."

I think we ought to remember who He is. 'He is thy Lord; and worship thou him.' And though he comes down to the lowest point of our need and makes Himself accessible to us as tenderly as a mother to her child, still don't forget that when John saw Him--that John who had lain on His bosom--he fell at His feet as dead."¹ The fear of the Lord is not a happily received message in today's Christianity. We like to hear about the joy of the Lord, His blessings and grace and how much He loves us.

And although all these things are true, the blessings of God come through the fear of Him. Did you know that three-fourths of the Bible is Old Testament and only one-fourth is New Testament? The principal theme of the Old Testament is the fear of God, while the principal theme of the New Testament is the grace of God. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not against the grace of God. But in today's Church we hear so much of the grace of God and so little of what it is to fear the Lord.

The way to distinguish between false grace and true grace is by finding out whether the grace being taught has incorporated into it a fear of God. If the grace of God preached does not include the fear of God, it is false grace. For how can we really understand grace unless we know what grace has done for us? The grace of God is preached in the New Testament to a people who knew the fear of God--the Jewish people. The Jewish people were established in Old Testament teaching; they knew the fear of God.

Then came the revelation of grace in the New Testament. Grace was not given as a replacement for the fear of God. The revelation of grace was meant to build upon the Old Testament understanding of the fear of God. Grace is a completion, a culmination, of the Old Testament teaching of the fear of God. You can't know grace without also knowing something of the fear of God. But today, we preach the grace of God to a group of people who don't understand about the fear of God.² That is so sad because we cannot walk with God as Abraham walked--in sacrificial obedience and as a friend of God--without the fear of the Lord.

Many of today's Christians desire all the blessings but don't want to pay the price. We want to be God's friend and we want to serve Him, but we also want to skip over the surrender and obedience parts because they are hard. Rather, we like to say, "If you feel like it, do it." I'm sure Abraham did not feel like sacrificing his son. But he was prepared to do anything, motivated by love and holy fear. God tells us that this holy fear of Him is the beginning of all wisdom in our lives (see Psalm 111:10).

"Nowhere in the Bible does it say that 'the grace of God is the beginning of wisdom.'"³ Wisdom is practical knowledge of the Word lived out in obedience. To have wisdom is to understand. Our word "understand" comes from a root word meaning "to align oneself with or stand under." To understand, a person must "stand under" in obedience to God and His Word. The fear of the Lord helps bring this obedience. So often we misunderstand obedience and call it legalism. We resist doing anything that we do not want to do and quickly cast off the guilt that comes from not obeying.

Because of this, we miss the whole reason that God calls us to obedience--that we might know Him, be blessed by Him and be a friend of God. He is God and He is to be feared and obeyed, known and loved. In Matthew 7:24, Jesus said, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock." The wise man heard God and then obeyed. This must be the progression in our lives--acting on the things that we hear. This is how the fear of the Lord is the beginning--the foundation-- of our whole Christian life.

The fear of the Lord is like the ABCs; it is impossible to walk intimately with the Lord Jesus without it. This is why we cannot downplay obedience and consider it something optional. So often we make the mistake of treating God as if He were a nice little buddy we carry in our pockets, taking Him out when we need something and praying, "Do this for me, Jesus." Then we put Him away and merrily go on with our lifestyle. We treat Him more like an equal, someone we consult for an opinion when we cannot figure out what to do on our own.

And we only take His advice if it seems good and is not too difficult. There is no cross. There is no pain. There is no sacrifice. There is no true obedience. We are those who call Him, "Lord, Lord!" but do not do what He says (see Luke 6:46). Brothers and sisters, please be aware of the horrible consequences of this type of lip service. Jesus Himself warns us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21, NIV).

It is only as we fear Him, obey Him and trust Him that He will continue to lead us deeper into Himself. Have you ever heard God calling you to hard and difficult tasks like He called Abraham? Moses, David, Esther, Paul and so many others heard God calling them to hard things. Or do you only hear God comforting you with promises all the time? Oswald Chambers asked, "Have you ever heard the Master say a hard word? If you have not, I question whether you have heard Him say anything."⁴ Abraham had ears to hear hard words.

He had a heart that was willing to obey difficult requests. I pray that the Lord would give each of us ears to hear and hearts to obey difficult requests. Notes: 1 A.W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1996). 2 Taken from a message shared by Zac Poonen at the Gospel for Asia Biblical Seminary in India. 3 *Ibid.* 4 Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Ohio: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1994).

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