

The Fear Of God And Humility

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and the fear of the Lord in living a godly life, drawing parallels between the Old Testament teachings in Proverbs and the New Covenant principles. It highlights the need for Christians to develop a deep reverence for God and humility, as seen in the lives of the early apostles who first learned the fear of God before understanding the grace of God. The sermon also stresses the significance of pursuing holiness, overcoming sin through God's grace, and maintaining a heart of repentance and forgiveness.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:4, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 4:26, Malachi 1:6, 1 Peter 5:5, Luke 15:4

Topics: "Humility", "Fear of the Lord"

Description

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Transcript

There's a verse on my heart today from Proverbs in chapter 22. By the way, the book of Proverbs is the closest to the New Covenant teaching that we find in the Old Testament. All the Old Testament books are really referring to Old Covenant teaching, except if you exclude the words of God Himself.

The rest of it, all the men of God there are really living an Old Covenant life. But Proverbs has got so many things which are so close to the New Covenant. For example, that God gives His grace to the humble is originally found in Proverbs in slightly different words, Proverbs 3:34. But Proverbs 22:4 is what I'm thinking of now.

There are two characteristics mentioned here, which are very, very important, which we have often stressed in the church, which are important for all of us if we are to live a godly life. And all failure to live as God wants us to live is because we don't pursue these two qualities, humility and the fear of the Lord. Now, in the Old Testament, when it speaks about riches, it's all earthly riches and honor in life.

But he applied spiritually. The way to spiritual wealth and for God to honor you and for spiritual life are humility and the fear of the Lord. One difference between the first apostles of Jesus and other Christians is, and including us, is that they spent about 30 years knowing nothing about the grace of God.

You know, Peter, James, John, and all those people. I believe they were from God-fearing homes and their parents taught them only the fear of God. Fear God, fear God, fear God.

And after 30 years of hearing nothing about the grace of God, but the fear of God, then they hear Jesus in the New Testament speaking about the grace of God. And that is why they could come to a godly life. The problem with us is that from the beginning, we hear about the grace of God.

From the very first time we hear, go to church even before we are converted. How God forgives and is gracious. And because of that, most Christians never develop the fear of the Lord.

And that is the main reason why they can sin and not be convicted about it. They can hurt somebody and not apologize. Why is that? It's because they never learned the fear of the Lord.

And these two are coupled together in the humility and the fear of the Lord. They go together, I believe. A man who is truly humble before God will fear him.

A man who fears God will be truly humble. They go together. I believe they are like twins.

Now, in the New Testament, let me show you how that phrase, the fear of God, comes in 2 Corinthians 7. He's talking about these tremendous promises. First of all, chapter 6. These are amazing promises. 2 Corinthians 6, the last part of verse 16.

I will dwell in you and walk among you. Imagine if God were to say that to you in your home or in your church. I will be with you and I'll walk with you.

And you come out from the others and be separate. And I will welcome you. And here's the tremendous promise.

I will be a father to you, verse 18, and you will be my own sons and daughters. We take that lightly. But in the world, if a person is the son or a daughter of a king, particularly in lands in the olden days, kings were the most important people in the world, in the country.

And the son and the daughter of a king was a very privileged position. They had anything they wanted. They could solve any problem in the country, etc.

And if we understand what it means to be a son or a daughter of Almighty God, it becomes so cheap for us to think, yeah, I'm a child of God. But if you really think of what it means to be a son and daughter of Almighty God, it solves all your problems. But it's not automatic.

It says, therefore, next verse, chapter 7, verse 1, since we have such tremendous promises, what is that? That I, verse 16, chapter 6, I will dwell in them, walk with them, and you will be my son and my daughter. What should you do? Cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh. That means the smallest little pinprick of conscience, smallest little thing that you shouldn't have spoken like that, or you shouldn't have done that, or that financial thing, there's a little bit of unrighteousness there.

Smallest little thing. Cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness. Is that possible? Yes.

The Old Testament never speaks about perfecting holiness. I'll tell you what perfect holiness is. According to the light that we have, if you think of our spirit, in our spirit when Christ comes in, in the midst of our black flesh, right in the middle, a little white circle comes.

To use an illustration, Christ has come in, but it's a very small circle because we have very little understanding of what is sin. But what we know to be sin we turn from, and so that little circle is white in the midst of this huge black circle called the flesh. Now God's aim is that little white circle, as we walk with God, becomes bigger and bigger and bigger, slowly wiping out this black circle.

So the black part gets less and less and less and less, and the white circle is occupying this black circle. It's just exactly like the children of Israel occupied the land of Canaan, driving out the giants. The picture is the same.

The flesh is overcome. Flesh means all the potential for sin that there is within us, which tempts us. Many of us think of the devil as our enemy.

Well, I want to tell you something. The devil was defeated 2,000 years ago, and if you walk in the light, the devil cannot touch you. He cannot touch you.

He cannot touch your children. I believed that for many years, ever since I discovered that the devil was defeated on the cross. I'm not scared of the devil.

He can't touch me. Not at all. I can tell him to go, and the Bible says he will not walk away.

He'll flee. James chapter 4, verse 6 to 8. Resist the devil. He'll flee from you, but you know what my enemy is? It dwells right inside me, the flesh.

Your enemy is not the devil. He was defeated. It's the flesh.

You think it's out there. It's not out there. It's not the devil out there who's your enemy.

It's the flesh. It's not the devil who's tempting you to be angry. It's your rotten old flesh that makes you angry.

It's your rotten old flesh that tells you not to apologize when you do get angry. It's the flesh. It's not the devil.

Yeah, the devil does tempt us in the ways from outside, but he can't come inside us. No. Christ lives inside me.

The devil's got no place inside me, but the flesh is inside me, and that's that big black circle, and Christ comes in in order to completely overcome this flesh, and that is the reason why he's given us the Holy Spirit, and it says here we can perfect holiness only in the fear of God in this verse, and if your holiness is not getting more and more perfect, by that what I mean is the white circle is occupying more and more of your flesh. In other words, you're becoming more and more Christ-like, and as we saw in Proverbs 22, fear of the Lord and humility are twins. They go together.

You can know how much humility you have by knowing how much fear of God you have, and you can know how much fear of God you have by seeing how much humility you have. The fear of God will make you very sensitive to sin. See, when people get married, one of the greetings I give to them, almost all of them nowadays, is our advice.

Be quick to ask forgiveness and be quick to forgive. That's all. Two sentences.

I say it'll take you through your married life in happiness. I say that at weddings. Be quick to ask forgiveness and be quick to forgive.

When you have hurt the other partner, be quick to ask forgiveness. Don't wait immediately as soon as your conscience pricks you, and if your conscience has not pricked you when you have spoken rudely to your partner or in anger, then you're in a pretty bad shape. Like a doctor says, the prognosis is bad.

That's what the doctor says when there's not much hope of recovery for a sick person. The prognosis is bad. That means there's not much hope, but with the Lord, there is hope.

So I say, if you can do something wrong, hurt somebody, it could be somebody in your office or at home, and you don't feel immediately convicted about it, the prognosis is bad. But there's hope. Ask God to give you the fear of God and a humility to acknowledge that you were wrong.

That was my mistake. Please forgive me. I'm sorry for hurting you and lost control of myself.

Return with me to Ephesians in chapter 4. Perfect holiness in the fear of God. That's what we read. If you really believe in these tremendous promises God has given you, let's perfect holiness in the fear of God.

In Ephesians 4, it gives us a time limit for our anger. Verse 26, be angry, but don't sin. That means the only anger that's permitted is that which is without sin.

For example, when Jesus was angry in the temple at people making money in the name of religion, it was righteous to be angry. But when they slapped him or cursed him and spat on his face, he didn't get angry. When they called him the prince of devils, he didn't get angry.

So what I've learned from that is Jesus is my dictionary. I define anger by looking at the dictionary, which is Jesus Christ. And I discover in that dictionary that he never got angry when people said anything about him or did anything to him or hurt him or whatever they did.

But when it concerned the glory of God, he was angry. When he saw people making money in the name of religion, when he saw people not willing to have a poor man healed because it was a Sabbath day, their legalism made him angry. So that's my example.

How shall I follow Jesus? When should I have anger and not have anger? It says here, be angry, but don't let there be any sin in your anger. So that means when somebody hurts me or speaks evil about me or to me, if I get angry, that's a sin. It is a sin.

Maybe somebody in your office hurt you or some relative of yours said something about you or your husband or wife said something to you. If you get angry, you are sinning. But at the same time, you see a television program where a preacher is making money in the name of religion and telling people to give money, and you don't get angry, again, you're sinning.

Because that's where Jesus did get angry. But what I see among a lot of Christians today is they can read about all these preachers who make money and they don't get angry. But somebody does something to them in the office or at home and they get angry.

It's the exact opposite of Christ. And there's a word for the opposite of Christ, it's called the Antichrist. That's the spirit of the Antichrist.

That means I see people making money in the name of religion and I don't get angry. But somebody hurts me and I get angry. That is the spirit of the Antichrist, the opposite of Christ.

Now, you may not like what I'm saying, but it is the truth. And because I have taken sin seriously, I seek to follow it. And you heard me expose all these preachers who make money in the name of religion.

Go to the internet and go to YouTube and see how many people speak against it. The fear of God is absolutely absent in Christendom. And one proof of it is they don't expose these money-loving preachers like Jesus did.

And secondly, they get angry when somebody says something against them. They get hurt. Husbands and wives get upset with each other.

That is the spirit of the Antichrist. Be angry, but don't sin. Look at the dictionary, Jesus Christ, and see where he got angry, where he didn't.

We must get angry when we see people not having compassion on some person who's sick and not allowing him to be healed because of some religious ritual saying there's a Sabbath. Jesus was angry, but he was never angry at any time. He forgave people as soon as they called him the Prince of Devils, and he never retaliated when they spat on him in the judgment hall.

He didn't say, wait till I come back in the day of judgment and teach you a lesson. He never said that. No, he just ignored it.

You know what he said? Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. You think a man doesn't know what he's doing when he's spitting on a person? You think a man doesn't know what he's doing when he's crucifying a person? Of course they know.

But what he meant was they don't know that they are spitting in the face of Almighty God. They don't know whose face they are spitting on. Forgive them, Father.

They don't know who I am. They don't know I'm the Son of God, so forgive them. That should be our attitude to others too.

I am a Son of God. I don't hesitate saying that. Not the Son of God like Jesus was, but a Son of God.

The Bible gives me the authority to say that in John chapter 1 verse 12. I believe on God's Word. And when people do something against me, I have to say the same thing.

Father, forgive them. They don't know who they are hurting. They don't know what they're doing.

If you're husband and wife, you're born again, and you hurt each other. You don't know who you're hurting. You're hurting a child of God.

There's a saying in English, familiarity breeds contempt. Now to explain that, it means that you become very...you get to know a person very well. It could be husband and wife.

It could be some very close friend of yours. Gradually, we are not so careful in speaking to such people as we are with a stranger. You know, a stranger comes to your door.

You'd never think of being rude to that person. No. You speak very graciously.

You ask yourself the last time you met some total stranger at your door, came to your house, or somewhere else, anywhere, would you be rude to that person? Never. I don't think any of you would be. We are rude to people we know so well, usually the ones at home.

Without even thought, we speak. That's the meaning of familiarity. Familiarity means we have become so familiar with each other.

Breeds contempt. Breeds means it's producing. Contempt.

Contempt means, ah, who's this person? I don't know how to speak to him so kindly or so graciously. It's my wife. Why should I bother? Or it's my husband.

Familiarity breeds contempt. The fear of God will eliminate it when I recognize the presence of God there. There's an old booklet called The Practice of the Presence of God.

Now, I don't think we can practice it, but if you really seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, I believe this is one of the main reasons why we must seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day. Ephesians 5:18 says, be being filled with the Spirit all the time. And I'll tell you honestly before God, I seek to be filled with the Spirit every single day of my life.

Even though God did fill me in a very evident way many years ago, since then I've prayed that God would fill me with the Holy Spirit. In fact, every day that's the most important prayer I pray. Like I heard of a very godly man in the 19th century.

Somebody asked him, what is the most important lesson you have learned in the Christian life? And he said, the most important lesson I've learned in the Christian life is that I cannot live the Christian life. Have you learned it? I cannot live the Christian life. If you think you can, your standard of Christianity must be some school where 10% is pass marks.

I say, I passed. That's your standard? Okay. That's not God's standard.

God's standard is not even 90%. It's 100%. And when you recognize that, you recognize I cannot live the Christian life.

And there's a really godly brother who said it. And it's when you recognize that, that you will cry out to God and say, Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit, because I cannot live this life. The whole purpose of the Old Testament law.

Why would God give the law? Paul makes it very clear in Romans 7. The whole purpose of the law is to show you what a sinner you are, and to show you that you cannot come to God's standard. That's why for 1500 years, God gave the law to the Jews to teach them, you can never make it to my standard. And at the end of 1500 years in the book of Malachi, which is the last prophet, you see, God says, you guys are

hopeless.

And did they learn the lesson that they cannot come up to God's standard? No, they would still give some rotten old sheep as a sacrifice and all the worthless things. That's what God tells them. You people bring a lame sheep or a blind goat as a sacrifice, because it's pretty useless in your flock in any case, you get rid of it, because you have to make a sacrifice.

That's how a lot of people give time to God also. Yeah, we have to give some time to God. Let's, you know, in the Old Testament, the law was you must offer a sheep.

Okay, let's pick out from our sheep, the one which is a bit of a nuisance, it's blind and lame, let's get rid of that. In other words, I have an obligation to give a sacrifice, so let me take that which costs me nothing. And so, oh, I need to spend some time with God.

Okay, well, let me ease my conscience by opening my Bible and reading something, and okay, then go back, go off to work. I've done my part. That is the equivalent of offering a blind sheep or a lame goat to God.

And God said, what's the use of this? Are you trying to fool me? It's because of the lack of the fear of God. Fear means a lack of reverence for God. It's a lack of reverence for God.

And you know what the Lord says in Malachi? Let me show you that verse. Remember, this is at the end of more than a thousand years of hearing the law. He says to them, you are doing evil.

And they ask, what is the evil we are doing? Verse six, you present the blind for sacrifice. Isn't that evil? The land that should have been presented to God should have been a perfect land, but they'd offer a blind one, which is a bit of a nuisance to them in any case. And you offer the lame and the sick, that lame goat, which is a bit of a problem for them, or a bullock, which is lame.

They'd offer that. And then the Lord says, supposing your governor, verse eight, middle, came to your house for a meal, would you pick some rotten old food from last week or week before, which is rotting already, would you give that to your governor? If you invited the governor of the state to your house for a meal, what would you give him? And he says, I'm not pleased with you, verse 10. But the Lord says, something new is going to happen now.

Malachi was the last prophet, and the Lord was telling him, in a few years, a change is going to come. I'm going to be finished with you, Israel, as a nation. From the east, verse 11, to the west, my name will be great among all the nations, in the United States, in India, in Europe, everywhere, not just Israel.

And in every place, a pure offering will be given to me. My name will be great among all the nations. That's the period in which we are living.

When we started the first CFC church 47 years ago in Bangalore, that's the verse the Lord gave us, that I'm raising up a church to offer a pure offering, an offering that will cost us something, not something cheap, not something to ease my conscience. I read my Bible to ease my conscience. I say, don't read it at all.

Why do you read it to ease your conscience? It shows that there's a lack of reverence for God. This is the time in which we are living, and I believe God is raising up churches that will manifest that reverence for

God, pursue that reverence for God and humility. See, I believe this with all my heart, that it is impossible to overcome sin without God giving us His grace, which is His power.

You know, when Paul had a thorn in the flesh, the Lord said, my grace is sufficient for you. I want to show you two verses, 2 Corinthians 12. What is grace? Many people think it is the freedom with which God forgives us, but listen to God's own definition.

2 Corinthians 12 verse 9, my grace is sufficient for you because that is my power. Grace is God's power, which will strengthen you in your weakness. Let me read it like that.

My grace is sufficient for you because that is my power, which will strengthen you when you're weak. And do you know what our weakness is? Our weakness is not that we can't lift heavy weights. Our weakness is that we sin so easily.

That's our greatest weakness, that we tell lies so easily, that we get angry so easily, that men lust after women so easily. You look at a picture and lust comes immediately. It's so easy to fall.

Grace is the power that will help us to overcome that weakness. And that's why it says in Romans in chapter 6 and verse 14, that if you are under grace, no sin can overcome you. You will overcome anger 24 hours a day if you have grace.

Without it, impossible. You overcome all the lusting with your eyes 24 hours a day if you have grace. If you don't have grace, you won't get it.

So the important thing, question comes, where can I get grace? You remember the foolish virgins. The lamp was not burning. They had no power.

No oil means no power. So they were not ready for the Lord's coming. The wise virgins had their lamps burning.

And when the Lord came, they came to the wise virgins and, give us some of your oil. Give us some of the power that you have. How can I give you the power God's given me? The wise virgins told the foolish ones, go to the place where you can get it.

And then they went. It was too late. That's not the time to go to seek to overcome sin after Christ has come back.

By the time they came back, the door was shut. Do you know the meaning of that story? Now is the time to go and get the oil, the power of the Holy Spirit. How to get it? How to get this grace? It's very simple.

1 Peter 5 and verse 5. The door is always open for anybody who wants to get grace. God gives his grace to the humble. God gives his grace to the humble.

So every time you get angry, every time you have told a lie, every time you do something evil, you have to say to yourself, I did not get grace. And however humble I may think I am, God doesn't think so. However humble I think I am, God does not think so.

He refused to give you grace. The door is shut. Pursue reverence for God and humility.

All spiritual riches and all spiritual life is from there. Recognize how much God has forgiven us and be grateful. All of us know that we all have had a past history of failure.

I know I have and you have. Don't forget that. Don't ever forget.

It's very easy to forget the life of sin that we lived once where we didn't care for God. I was recently looking at a song I used to sing in the old days called There Were Ninety and Nine, about the 99 sheep. There were 99 sheeps in the fold but one was lost.

And in that song it says there was one who was lost far away from the gates of gold. And the shepherd goes after it way in the desert. He saw that sheep sick and dying.

And when I hear that line of that song, I know that's me. I was sick and dying as a believer. Remember the sheep and goats.

The goats are the unbelievers. Matthew 25 speaks about Jesus separating the sheep and the goats. The goats are unbelievers.

Sheep are believers. So the lost sheep is not an unbeliever. No, it's not 99 sheep and one goat.

It's 99 sheep and another sheep. It's a backslidden believer, a careless believer who went off without the reverence for God and was lost. And the shepherd goes after that.

And in that song it says none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters that the shepherd had to go through and how dark was the night that the shepherd had to go through. And away in the darkness he heard the cry of this lost sheep sick and dying. And I say, Lord, that was me, one who had accepted Christ and then backslid.

Like all of us, if you sin every now and then, you're a backslider, whether you know it or not. Whatever you may call yourself, a CFC believer, but you're a backslider. And I remember because I know that for 16 years after I was born again, I never knew what it was to live an overcoming life.

I used to get angry. I used to get angry with my wife. I used to raise my voice.

I praise God it's gone from my life completely now. I've experienced grace and reverence for God. But I know I was in that lost condition and the shepherd came and found me and I allowed him to put me on his shoulder and bring me back into the fold.

And dear brothers and sisters, this church must be a fold like that. How shall we describe what this church should be? Let me turn to Luke's chapter 15. I'll conclude with this.

Luke 15.4. A man among you has a hundred sheep, a hundred believers, but one of those believers, let me paraphrase it and explain the meaning. One of those believers backslid, took sin lightly, lost the fear of God, and the shepherd leaves the 99 and goes after that one. I was listening to Santosh, my son, speaking at RLCF this morning online.

Listen to it if you get time. And I was impressed by what he said. You know, in that song it says, Lord, you've got 99 here.

Why do you want to go after that one? The Lord says, no, I've got to go after that one. And he said, the way he understood it was the angel saying, Lord, you've got Paul and Peter and so many other people here, David Wilkerson and Tozer and all these people are in here. But the Lord says, no, I have to get Santosh also.

He's also got to be here. Put your name there. He's got all the other saints in heaven, but put your name there.

He wants you that one that is missing. He leaves the 99 and goes after that one. And when he finds it, he comes home rejoicing.

And he brings him into this fold. And this is the way he describes a righteous fold. This is what CFC Church should be.

Listen to this. Last part of verse 7. 99 righteous people who need no repentance. I don't think we are.

Are we 99 here? Whatever it is, whatever number there are here. It should be every person here does not need repentance. Because you've already repented.

Because you're quick to repent. Because you're quick to ask forgiveness. You're quick to forgive.

And therefore, every day, you don't need to repentance. Because you're immediately, it's not that you don't sin. But when you sin, you immediately confess it and it's gone.

Cleansed. That is the description of a New Testament church. 99 people who don't need any repentance because they are quick to acknowledge their sin, get forgiveness, and humble themselves and live in reverence for God.

I pray this church will be like that. Amen.

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