

(The Foundation and the Building) a Reverential Fear of God

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reverent fear of God and becoming more like Jesus Christ as the mark of God's blessing in the New Covenant.

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Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:17

Topics: "Fear Of God", "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the influence of popular culture, such as books like Harry Potter, on people's acceptance of witchcraft. He emphasizes the importance of understanding God's unconditional love and acceptance, and the concept of justification, which means being free from sin. The preacher also highlights the need for Christians to show gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice by offering acceptable service to God with reverence and awe. He warns against the deception of thinking that freedom in Christ means abandoning holiness and living without fear and trembling before God. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the importance of entering into a life of victory and not falling short of God's rest.

Transcript

I want to read a verse, first of all, in 1 Peter chapter 1. 1 Peter 1, it says here what we should not be like and what we should be like. 1 Peter 1, 14, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance. That teaches us that when a man lives according to his lusts, it is because he is ignorant of God.

Remember this, my dear brothers and sisters, the proof that you are ignorant of God, you don't know God at all, is that you live according to your lusts. Any man in the world, whether Christian, believer, non-Christian, who lives according to his lusts is in ignorance, he doesn't know God. So when a lot of Christians say that they know God and yield to their lusts, they're telling lies.

They don't really know the God of the Bible, they know some other God who is a figment of their own imagination. But the true Christian, this is how he does, he is not conformed to his former lusts, because now he's not ignorant, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior, because it is written, you shall be holy because I'm holy. That's the main reason why we should be holy,

because He's our Father.

And listen to this, verse 17, and if you address as Father, that means we call God Father, the one who impartially judges according to each man's work. Conduct yourself in fear during the time of your stay upon earth, our entire lifetime. It says we must live in reverent fear.

The Living Bible says, act in reverent fear of Him from now on until you get to heaven. There is a fear we're not supposed to have, and there is a fear we're supposed to have. And we need to distinguish between the two.

We are all familiar with that verse in 2 Timothy 1.7, which says God has not given us a spirit of fear. But at the same time, it's like judging, you know, Jesus said, do not judge, but judge. I don't know whether you know that.

In John 7.24, He said, don't judge according to the appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. So He didn't tell us never to judge. He said, don't judge according to the appearance, but you must judge, righteous judgment.

And so if you don't judge, you're disobeying God. Some people know only one part of that verse, don't judge. In the same way, Jesus also said, do not fear, but fear.

That's in Matthew 10. And all failure in the Christian life comes because of an imbalanced understanding of the truth. It says in Matthew 10.28, do not fear those who kill the body.

It means don't fear man, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body. So just like Jesus said, don't judge, but judge in John 7.24. He says here in Matthew 10.28, don't fear, but fear. And a lot of Christians are taken up with the first part, don't fear.

God has not given us the spirit of fear. There are many verses like that. You know, Zachariah prophesied at the birth of John that we should serve God without fear.

And that's how it should be. And we know that other verse in Romans in chapter eight, which says, you have not received a spirit of slavery, Romans 8.15, to fear again, but a spirit of adoption by which we cry above father. So there are a number of verses that teach us we're not to be afraid.

We're not to be afraid of God. Jesus often said, fear not, fear not, fear not, don't be afraid. He came to deliver us, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter two and verse 14 and 15, from the fear of death by defeating the one who had the power of death and taking away that power from him so that he might deliver us who through fear of death were subject to slavery.

See, in Romans 8.15 also it says about fear and slavery. Fear always brings us slavery. When you're afraid of man, you're a slave of man.

Every man you're afraid of, you're his slave, whether you know it or not. Anyone you want to try to please, any man you want to try and please, you're his slave, whether you know it or not. That's why the Bible says we should not seek to please men.

We should not be afraid of men. When we are afraid of death, we're in slavery. Any type of fear brings slavery.

That type of fear we've got to be released from completely, totally, 100%. But there's another type of fear, a reverent fear of God which brings freedom. And it's because many Christians do not have that reverent fear of God that they don't come into freedom.

I feel as I've observed our own church here through, as I look back over the past say 10 years, when we began to break free from the clutches of legalism and law that governed a lot of our preaching in previous years, and we never want to go back to that, I have observed something which is very sad. In the last 10 years, folks in our church here have indulged in more secret sin than in the previous 15 years when we were under law. Not everybody.

Number. You don't know. I happen to know a number.

And I ask myself, why is that? And I also know that some others have come into a far more glorious freedom and a holiness that they've never experienced in previous years. And I'll tell you why. The reason is, and it may apply to a number of you here, because you know the sins you've lived in, in secret, that nobody in this church knows about.

Perhaps only God, but maybe some of you are living in sin. I don't even know about myself. It doesn't matter.

It's because in breaking free from the old covenant, we have not entered the new covenant, but no covenant. See, there are three possibilities. Old covenant, no covenant, new covenant.

And many people here in CFC have said, we're finished with legalism, we're finished with the old covenant, and entered into an area which I would call no covenant. They break free from the fear of man and the fear of the elder brothers and come into a place where they don't even fear God. It's very sad.

People feared Moses and lived holier lives than a lot of Christians today. And that is why I've always said, if you come to this church, if you don't fear God, at least fear the elders. That's second best, because that's old covenant.

They feared Moses and obeyed him. It wasn't the best. It was a fear of God.

But examine your life and see whether your holiness has exceeded the holiness of people under the old covenant. If not, I want to say to you, you're living in a delusion. Have you broken free? It's because we don't have that.

You know, we've heard a lot about the love of God. But many people think of God as a grandfather. You know, the love of a grandfather is different from the love of a father.

I want to tell you, God is no grandfather. He's not one who just ignores anything you do, like grandfathers do. What did we read in 1 Peter 1? Spend your entire life on earth.

This is not Old Testament. This is New Testament. It's the apostle Peter writing 30 years after the day of Pentecost.

Spend your entire life on earth in fear. The same word. I'm supposed to live my entire life on earth, 1 Peter 1, 17, in fear.

In fear of what? Fear of God. Let me show you some other verses. Hebrews chapter.

I'm not going to go to the Old Testament. I'm going to be in the new covenant, in the New Testament, Hebrews chapter 12. In Hebrews chapter 12, it says, Hebrews 12, verse 25, after speaking about coming to Jesus, verse 24, the mediator of a new covenant.

He says, then if that is the case, you've come to Jesus, the blood of Jesus that cleanses you from all sin. Then see to it that you don't refuse him who is speaking. And listen to this.

This is a warning to new covenant people. For if those did not escape, that is, those under the old covenant did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from him who warns from heaven. And his voice shook the earth then, but now he has promised not only earth, but he's also going to shake heaven.

And this expression yet once more denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken as of created things in order that things which cannot be shaken may remain. Every created thing is going to be shaken. Those of you who depend on created things, I want to say you're on a shaky foundation.

If you are glorying in anything created, you're on a shaky foundation. If your foundation is money, property, a good job, a secure job, and 101 earthly things like that, you are going to be shaken without a doubt. There'll be nothing left underneath you.

The only things that will remain are the things which are not created. And therefore, since this is going to happen, what shall we do? Since we are going to receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken, what should we do? Let us show gratitude. How do you show gratitude for Jesus dying for you? There is only one way to show gratitude to Jesus for dying for you, and that is by offering to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.

How many of you brothers and sisters have a reverence and awe for God 24 hours a day that makes you afraid to say certain things, that makes you afraid to do certain things? I fear it has disappeared because you have moved from old covenant to no covenant. And the devil has deceived you to think that this is the freedom there is in Christ. Freedom has become an opportunity for the flesh.

Like I said, the student who cheats in the examination and passes and then asks the Lord to forgive him and cleanse him in his blood, he thinks he's got the best of both worlds. He passed in his exam. At the same time, he confessed his sin and Jesus forgave his sin, and he also believes in justification, which means just as if I had never sinned.

That means, praise the Lord, it's just as if I never cheated in the exam. Isn't that wonderful gospel that I can pass in the exam with cheating, confess my sin, and be just as if I had never cheated? It's not just as if you had never cheated. Every sin we commit, God may forgive it, but it causes a scar which will never be removed.

I don't know whether you know that. We have to reap what we sow. Do you think a man can live 50 years in sin, and another man lives 50 years in faithfulness, and at the end of those 50 years, the fellow says, I'm justified by the blood of Christ, just as if I'd never sinned, and God says, yeah, you're all going to get the same reward in heaven.

God would be the most unrighteous person in the universe if he ever did that. How could God do that? Treat a man who's lived in sin for 50 years and claims to be a believer in the same way as another man who's been absolutely faithful for 50 years. So don't misunderstand justification.

Justification gives us a standing before God. I don't have to be condemned. I don't have to be discouraged.

That's true. But it does not make me equal to another man who's been faithful for 20 years. You've got to be crazy to think like that.

Because Jesus said, my reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be. Believe me, my dear brothers and sisters, a lot of believers are going to have tremendous regret in heaven because they moved out from the old covenant to no covenant. And Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and David, and a lot of those old covenant people will be way miles ahead of a lot of new covenant Christians.

Because those fellows lived under the old covenant, and these so-called Christians lived under no covenant. They tried to get rid of the fear, all fear, and they got rid of the fear of God as well. And their attitude to sin became so light-hearted.

They tried to offer to God a service without any reverence, without any awe. They ignored these passages of the New Testament. And they got a one-sided Christianity, which always spoke about, always be sure you're accepted before God.

God loves you, brother. Don't, don't be. Remember, God loves you just as you are.

His love is unconditioned. It's all true. But if you only look at that, you've got one side of God, and you've got a one-sided God, and you'll see the end result of that in the way you live.

And I believe that's the reason. It's one of the great schemes of the devil. The devil's got many schemes.

He releases games like Dungeons and Dragons to get people to get used to witchcraft. He releases books like Harry Potter, etc., to get people used to witchcraft. And he also urges Christians to think about God's love, and how good he is, and how unconditional his love is.

And we never must be afraid, and we must always know that God has accepted us, and how justification means, just as if I've never sinned in my life, and how wonderful this gospel is, and we spend our time praising, worshiping, praising, worshiping. Now, I'll tell you something. In the last ten years, our singing has improved tremendously.

But I wonder whether our holiness has improved just as much. And I'll tell you something. The only worship that is acceptable to God is the worship that is offered in what the Bible calls the beauty of holiness.

Now, let me show you that verse, because that principle remains true in Psalm 96 and verse 9. It says here in Psalm 96 and verse 9, Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, or as the NASB says, in holy dress. Worship the Lord in holy dress. Now, that means that if you're not coming in holy dress to worship God, you're coming naked.

Think of yourself coming here without a stitch of clothing on you. However loudly and wonderfully you may sing and praise God. People say, what's wrong with this fellow? The fellow's not wearing any clothes.

You'd be ashamed to come here without any clothes. You would be ashamed to come here in an underwear. The Bible says that's how it is when you come to worship God and there's not holiness in your life.

And I don't mean this type of holiness where you keep on living in sin right up to this morning and then say, oh Lord, cleanse me. I'm justified now. It's just as if I've never sinned the whole week.

Don't fool yourself with these psychological tricks. God is not fooled. The devil's not fooled.

Godly men are not fooled. Only you're fooled. I have preached and have believed in justification by the blood of Christ more than anybody else, perhaps.

But I fear God. I know who God is, and anyone who lives close enough to God will reverence Him more than anybody else. We live in a day when people are trying to be chummy with God, slap Him on the back, and that type of thing.

These are people who don't have any understanding of the true God. I believe that many Christians are worshiping a false God, God of their imagination, who's a grandfather, who just allows them to do what they like. There's no sense of responsibility and no sense of reverence, and I'm convinced that many are living under no covenant.

The Bible says the law was our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, Galatians 3. Not to lead us nowhere, but that's where a lot of people have been led, to a false Christ who allows us to live as we like. The word reverence has gone. We're worshiping the Lord, and we think that the thing that really impresses God is if all the drums and the music are all going wonderfully, and our singing is so beautiful, and the parts go so well, but what about the holiness? That's the one thing God is looking for.

We need to understand what is the mark of God's blessing in the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant it is very clear. If you read Deuteronomy 28, the first 13 verses, you know what is the mark of God's blessing in the Old Covenant.

If God was blessing you in Israel, the proof of it would be, you'd have a lot of money, you'd have a lot of children, your cattle would multiply abundantly, your barns will overflow with your crops, your enemies will cringe before you in fear, you will never be in debt, you'll borrow from nobody, you'll be a person whom human beings respect, because God's blessing you. Now the sad thing is that a lot of Christians today think that that's the mark of God's blessing in the New Covenant too, except for the children part. They don't want that many children, but all the other things.

They say that's the mark of God's blessing. It's not. There's only one mark of God's blessing in the New Covenant, and that's we become like Jesus Christ.

Never forget that. How do I know whether God's blessed me in the year 2003? I've become a little more Christ-like, a little more gracious, a little more gentle, a little more humble, and above all, a little more pure than I ever was in my whole life. God's blessed me then.

A little more free from the love of money than I was in the last year and the previous year, and God's blessed me. See, in the Old Testament, you could fear God and love money and have a lot of money also, but Jesus said you can't love God and love money at the same time. They're two opposites.

The closer you come to God, the further away you come from money. The closer you come to money, whether you know it or not, the further away you're going from God. It's like two opposite walls.

You can't go to the North Pole and the South Pole at the same time. The further you go away from the North Pole, the closer you come to the South Pole. The further you go away from the South Pole, the closer you come to the North Pole.

God and money are like that. The closer you come to money, believe it or not, the further away you're going from God. That is New Covenant.

How many people understand that? The devil has deceived people in this area. No man, I don't believe any man, can be close to God and be close to money at the same time. It's impossible.

Jesus, you read Luke 16.13. These are marks of New Covenant blessing and one of the earthly proofs of it. I can imagine I'm becoming like Jesus. But one of the tests of our relationship with Jesus Christ, like John says, if you say you love God and you don't love your brother, you're a liar.

You're not a believer. You're just fooling yourself. It's very easy for somebody to think, I love God, but I can't love that person.

Well, something's wrong with you. You don't love God at all. If there's a brother or sister whom you can't love, I don't care what you may say.

I mean, you may not agree with that person. That's another thing. You may not be able to work together.

I can't work together. I can't work together with a lot of believers because they compromise in so many things. But I don't hate them.

I love them. I love a lot of people and that's why I don't work with them. I love them too much to encourage their compromise.

But if I don't love them, I don't love God. If I love God, I have to love every single brother. I've got to love every one of God's children.

Otherwise, I don't love God. I'm just fooling myself. And if I'm becoming more and more like Christ in the vertical direction, one proof of it will be that I'll be having more and more fellowship with godly people.

If you're getting more and more fellowship with worldly people, you're going in the wrong direction. Just like Jesus spoke about God and money, 1 John chapter 2 verse 16, 17 says, If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. If you love the world, the love of the Father cannot be there.

So, the more worldly my friends are, the more I'm away from God. Actually, I don't love God at all. The more I love God, the more my fellowship with godly people will increase.

And if you're really become more like Christ in the year 2003, your fellowship with godly people should have increased in this year. And if your fellowship with godly people has become less, you're fooling yourself that the blessing of God is upon your life. And I don't mean fellowship with a whole lot of carnal worldly type of Christians.

I mean, they're also there. But, it's fellowship with the godly. Jesus was very selective about whom he spent most of his time with.

He preached to the multitudes. He selected 70 from the multitudes whom he sent out two by two. I mean, Jesus, come on.

Jesus sending out people two by two. And those 70 people cast out demons. They got so excited when they came back and said, Lord, the demons are subject to us.

Then he said, that's fine, all you fellows. Demons are cast out and you're serving me. But from you, I don't think 58 of you are wholehearted enough.

I've got to select 12 out of you. Can you imagine how the other 58 felt? Hey, we're also serving God. We're casting out demons.

That's fine, Jesus said, but there are 12 whom I select out of the 70. And if the other 58 get offended, they're welcome to get offended. They're welcome to go where they like.

But Jesus was very selective. He selected 12. And then he called these 12 and he said, well, I find that three of you are a little more sensitive to things of God than the others.

And he picked out Peter, James, and John. And he always took them with him wherever he went for special things, like praying for Jairus' daughter who was dead. Peter, James, and John come.

Praying alone gets so many. Peter, James, and John come. Going up to the Mount of Transfiguration.

Peter, James, and John come. It was not by rotation. Okay, now this is your turn.

Next shift. Next three. He didn't believe in all these earthly things.

He was closer to those who were more sensitive to the things of God. Not perfect people. You know Peter was not a perfect person.

But he was a sincere person. Thank God he was not a perfect person, otherwise we'd have no hope. But he was utterly sincere.

And Jesus selected. From the multitude he selected 70. From that he selected 12.

From that he selected three. And Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Don't think that he's as close to every believer as to the other.

He loves everybody. He blesses everybody. He's not just as close.

From the multitude, even today, he selects 70. He selects 12. He selects three.

If he doesn't do that, we'd have to say he has changed. I don't believe he has changed. I believe he's exactly the same today.

And that's why I want to say the Lord is not as close to every believer in CFC as to the other. It's not true. He wasn't there.

It wasn't like that in Palestine. It's not true today. It all depends on your reverent fear.

It does not depend on how well you can sing. It does not depend on how much money you put in the offering box. It depends on your reverent fear of him.

Those who are closest to him, fear him the most. They're not insecure. It's not the fear of torment.

No. They have understood God's perfect love. And like it says in 1 John chapter 4, the wrong type of fear has been cast out of their life.

You know, it says, there is no fear in love. 1 John 4.18. Because perfect love has cast out fear. And that type of fear, those people who are close to the Lord don't have.

You know, like someone has said, there are two types of fear of God. Listen carefully. One is the fear that God may hurt me.

The other is the fear that I may hurt God. That's the right type of fear. One is the fear God may hurt me.

We should never be afraid of that. God's not evil. God's a good man.

He's not a good person. He's not a hard taskmaster. He doesn't hurt people.

But the fear that I may hurt God by something I say, something I do, something hurt God by different things in my life. I want to encourage you in this year to develop that fear. To be totally free from the other fear that God may hurt you.

And as much as you are free from that, to develop in this fear throughout this year, that I may hurt God. I may hurt my loving Father by something I do, something I say. See, that's how love is.

See, the Bible says the relationship between Christ and us is like a husband and a wife. I mean, a wife who really loves her husband will respect him. She won't want to do anything that hurts him.

How can we say we love God, love the Lord, and do things that hurt him? Then you don't love at all. It's a deception. A wife who says, I love my husband tremendously and keeps on doing things that hurt him, she doesn't really love him at all.

I think one mark of love is that I don't want to hurt the person I love. Apply that to God. And now let's ask ourselves, are we fooling ourselves that we love God a lot when we're taking advantage of His grace day after day? For myself, one of the tests I ask, I apply to myself is, am I being defeated by the same sins that I have been defeated by year after year? If so, I'm taking advantage of God's grace.

Is there some progress there? Is there a progress towards perfection? Am I climbing to the peak of the mountain, or am I right down at the bottom still, rejoicing in justification? Have I moved out of the old covenant into no covenant? If so, I would recommend to you, all of you, get back into the old covenant. Get back into legalism, because in the days of legalism, you did not sin like this. That was better.

There are many people who are under the old covenant who are in heaven. Jesus said that. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, they're all in heaven.

But people who are under no covenant won't get there. God has provided something better than the old covenant, but the law was our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, not to lead us nowhere. And if you have not found this real Jesus, who's the mediator of this better covenant, then it's better to hang on to the schoolteacher, the law.

I believe with all my heart that for a number of people sitting here, the life of legalism is far better than the life you're living today. I'm sorry to say that. It's not the best, it's second best.

But second best is better than third or fourth or tenth best. So that's what I'm saying. And I believe this is true even in the olden days, in the days of the apostles, where people took advantage of God's grace.

It's not something new to the 20th century or 21st century. Even there, there were people who, when they heard the message of God's grace, they said, oh, let us do evil that grace may abound. And Paul says, you fellows are charging us with preaching that.

Shall we sin that grace may increase? See, it says here in Romans, verse 8, chapter 3, verse 8, verse 7. But if through my life the truth of God is abounded to his glory, why am I being judged as a sinner? Why not say, as we are slanderously reported and some affirm that we say, that let us do evil, that good may come. That means some were slanderously saying, this gospel that Paul is preaching is one that encourages sin. See, he was preaching the gospel of free grace.

And he says here, some have slanderously reported and affirmed that what we are preaching is, it doesn't matter if you sin, because you know you're justified. Like I said, it doesn't matter if you cheat in the exam, because you'll pass. And then you can ask God to forgive you and you'll be justified.

And you will be just as if you had never cheated in the exam. Isn't that wonderful? That you can commit everything you want to live for yourself and live just like any rotten old sinner in the earth, indulging yourself and then ask Jesus to just forgive you and cleanse you. And it will be just as if you had never done those things.

You know why God has allowed it like that? He's testing us in ways we don't realize. I heard a story once, it's only a parable, of people crowding outside the gates of heaven on the final day, wondering who will be allowed to go in and who will not be allowed to go in. I mean, that's not how it's going to be, but it's a parable which teaches us something.

And you know, a lot of people who had denied themselves, stayed away from sin, were glad that they had done that because that would allow them to enter God's kingdom, cleansed in the blood of Christ. And then a rumor started coming through the crowd, from heaven as it were, that God's decided that it didn't matter if you lusted with your eyes, He's still going to take all of you in who lusted with your eyes and lived for money. And then there were a whole lot of people saying, Boy, I wish I'd known that when I was on earth.

I mean, imagine telling me that right after I've died and come to heaven. Imagine how much I could have lusted, how much I could have lived for money. And then the word came, all those who thought like that, that rumor was circulated with a purpose, to find out who really wanted to do it, but didn't do it just to get to heaven.

Are you like that? Do you think Jesus lived a holy life just to get to heaven? What does it mean to partake of God's nature? You know, real holiness lies in the motive. What is the motive with which you are living a holy life? There could be many motives. I want to live a holy life because I might get caught by somebody in the church if I sin.

Okay, you live a holy life, but you're afraid of getting caught. There are people who don't commit adultery because they may get AIDS. They're not holy.

Even if they never commit adultery all their life, they're not holy. They're afraid of AIDS. They're afraid of getting caught by their wives or caught by some brother.

Deep down they really love to do it, but they don't do it because they're afraid it'll break up their marriage or something like that. And these fellows are not holy. These are people who are just self-seeking, people who live for themselves.

Imagine that they have repented. They've never repented from their self-centered life. There are people who want to be holy because they lose their testimony.

Oh, if I do this, I lose my testimony. And then there are other people who want to be holy because they want God to use them. If I'm not holy, God won't use me.

These are all selfish reasons. The Bible says, Be holy. God says, I'm holy.

Never mind whether you're used or your testimony or anything. My Father in heaven is holy. I claim to be his child.

In reverent awe, I live all my life. Let me show you another verse in 1 Corinthians. Sorry, 2nd Corinthians, chapter 5. In 2nd Corinthians, chapter 5, it says, and verse 11, 2nd Corinthians 5, 11, Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, and we are made manifest to God.

Knowing the fear of the Lord, that's really something. That means, this is new covenant. And he says that in connection with the previous verse, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be rewarded for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Therefore, therefore means, because I'm going to appear at the judgment seat of Christ, and I'm going to be rewarded for everything I did in my body, good or bad, ooh, that brings a solemn fear of the Lord in my heart. And I persuade men. I say, hey fellas, remember this, you're going to stand before God.

Don't think with all these justification gimmicks, you're going to stand there for everything you did in your body. Therefore, verse 9, we have only one ambition, whether we are in heaven or on earth, home or absent, I want to please Him. Why is it many in our church do not have a burning passion only to please God? Why is that? I fear it's because we have moved out of old covenant to new covenant.

Old covenant people had a desire to please God. They did it with a legalistic spirit. But I want to say to you, my brothers and sisters, we are in tremendous danger of getting a one-sided picture.

Paul says, we know the fear of the Lord, and therefore, knowing that we appear before Him, we're going to give everything I did in my body. Jesus said, every idle word I speak, I'm going to give an account in the day of judgment. I believe that.

Let me show you another verse, 2 Corinthians chapter 7. This is all New Testament. We're not in the Old Testament. We're talking about New Testament verses written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 1, therefore, having these promises, beloved, which promises? Turn back to verse 17 and 18 of chapter 6. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate and don't touch what is unclean. You know, this is a promise. The condition is, come out from all that is worldly and evil and don't touch what is unclean.

And I will welcome you. I will be a father to you. You will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

Therefore, since we have such a tremendous promise that God will be our Father, we can be sons and daughters if we pull out from all that is unclean. Therefore, let us cleanse ourselves, chapter 7 verse 1, from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness. How? In the fear of God.

There is absolutely no way of perfecting holiness in the New Covenant age except in the fear of God. You know, like you've heard me often say, don't try to hate your father and mother before you've learned to honor them. The Old Covenant command was, honor your father and mother.

You've got to start there, then come to the New Covenant, Luke 14, 26, hate your father and mother to be my disciple. But when a young person who has not learned to honor his father and mother, not learned to deeply respect and love his father and mother, tries to hate his father and mother, you know what's going to happen? He's not going to be a disciple. He's going to have hatred in his heart.

Because in any case, he detests the authority of his father and mother and he loves Luke 14, 26. That's the verse for me. Hate my father and mother.

That's how these cults, these cults are built like that. People who are taught to hate their father and mother. I say, you cannot hate your father and mother until you've first learned to honor them.

And anybody sitting here who has not first learned to honor his father and mother and deeply respect his father and mother, I say, don't even try to come to Luke 14, 26. That verse is not for you. You've got to get past the Old Covenant first.

The law is our schoolteacher to lead us to Christ. And you can't get there without that schoolteacher. And it's the same thing.

Do you know the first people who heard about the grace of God were Jewish people who had learned the fear of God first. The Old Testament was all about the fear of God. And to those people who for 1,500 years under the law had been taught to be afraid of God, Jesus came with the message of grace.

And boy, was it a liberation. But today, a whole lot of people are learning about grace who haven't learned about the fear of God. It's exactly like I said earlier, teach people to hate their father and mother who haven't learned to honor their father and mother.

What's going to happen? They're not going to get it right. I believe that the true disciple of Jesus must not allow his father and mother to run his life. But he must have learned to honor them first.

I learned to honor my father and mother first before I hated them. And you've got to learn the fear of God before you can appreciate the grace of God. Otherwise you'll get a false grace.

The reverence for God is an essential component of the true grace of God. A grace of God that does not include a reverential fear of God is a false grace. How do we know that we've got the true grace of God? You know, even in the apostle Peter's time, he had to mention this in 1 Peter 5. After writing this whole letter in 1 Peter 5, he said, I want to tell you something.

He didn't write it himself. He got somebody else. I think Peter was an old man.

He got his brother. Maybe Peter wouldn't have got his Greek spellings right because he wasn't a scholar. So he asked his brother Silvanus, 1 Peter 5.12, to write down the letter.

Silvanus, you know spelling better than me. You know grammar better than me. I'll dictate and you write.

And he says, Through Silvanus, our faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying. Do you know what's the theme of my letter, Paul says? This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

There is a false grace. Thirty years after Pentecost, there was a false grace around. And Peter had to warn against that.

What is the true grace of God? Let's look at a few verses in his letter. 1 Peter 1, verse 17. If you address his father, the one who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourself in your entire time on earth in fear.

This is the true grace of God. Chapter 2, verse 1. Put aside all malice, all guile, all hypocrisy, all envy, all backbiting, slander, gossip. This is the true grace of God.

Chapter 2, verse 17. Honor all men, love the brotherhood and fear God. This is the true grace of God.

A grace of God which does not include the fear of God is a false grace. Chapter 2, verse 21. Christ has suffered for you, leaving you an example to follow in His steps who committed no sin.

Read it together. In His steps who committed no sin and in whose mouth no deceit was found. This is the true grace of God.

Who when He was reviled, verse 23, He did not revile in return. This is the true grace of God. Wives, chapter 3, verse 1. Be submissive to your husbands even if they don't obey God's word.

This is the true grace of God. Wives, verse 3, chapter 3. Don't let your adornment be braiding the hair, wearing gold, putting on dresses. This is the true grace of God.

Husbands, verse 7. Live in an understanding way with your wife as a weaker vessel, giving her honor. If you don't give honor to your wife as a weaker vessel, you have not understood the true grace of God. And further, chapter 4, verse 1. Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourself with the same purpose.

Because when you suffer in the flesh, you finish with sin. This is the true grace of God. So that, verse 2, all the rest of your life on earth, you live for doing God's will.

This is the true grace of God. Is that the grace of God being preached today? I want to encourage all of you to read 1 Peter. And remember this last sentence as the heading of that.

This is the true grace of God. And as you go through 1 Peter, at every sentence you say, this is the true grace of God. This is the true grace of God.

This is the true grace of God. I tell you, by the time you finish that letter, you'll be delivered from false grace. If you're serious about it.

I'm serious about it. I don't want to spend my earthly days deceiving myself that I'm doing God's will when I'm not. Deceiving myself that I'm enjoying God's grace and defeated by sin.

See, I told you, there's a reason for my saying this. As I've observed this church over the last 28 years, I've seen a number of people have declined after we have become free from legalism. Do you know in the first 15 years, a lot of people who are here almost knew nothing about movies and movie stars like they know in the last 5 or 6 years.

Do you think we're getting closer to God? Do you really think we're getting closer to God? You've got to be crazy. Off your head. The days of legalism were better because we are under no covenant.

We think it's freedom. If you had gone and asked Jesus about the movie stars or whatever type of drama stars there were those days, he wouldn't know. He wouldn't know.

He'd be out of that conversation. I'm not here to judge you. God's not given me that responsibility.

All I say is don't fool yourself. Ask yourself whether the law has really been your school teacher to lead you to Christ or you've jumped out of legalism into something else, out of the frying pan into the fire. God has got something better for us.

It's not a life of bondage. My life is not bondage. I'm completely free from the fear of men.

I don't live in fear that God will judge me. I have zero discouragement, zero getting offended and zero condemnation of myself. That is a new covenant life.

We don't condemn ourselves. I'm not saying I never slip up and fall. I don't think anybody will be able to say that until Jesus comes.

But there's a reverent fear. The closer I get to God, the more I reverently fear. The more I'm free from the spirit of the world and the spirit of the love of money by which the devil controls this world, the spirit of the entertainment world, the spirit of this world which is seeking to dilute the effectiveness of Christians.

A lot of Christian preaching today is human psychology. Get people to feel nice. I don't want to get you to feel nice if you're living in sin.

Paul spoke once to the Corinthians and said a phrase which has come to my mind. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. He's speaking to a Christian church which is supposed to be in the new covenant, but I don't think the Corinthians were in the new covenant at all. They had moved out of old covenant to no covenant.

And what was the result? There were all types of things in their midst which did not happen in Old Testament times except like when Israel was worshipping the golden calf. All those things happened. But when they had a God-fearing king and a God-fearing prophet in their midst, Israel never did those things that the Corinthian Christians were doing, talking about the grace of God.

He said, it's actually reported that there is immorality among you. And this is the phrase I want you to notice. Immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the heathen.

Think of that phrase. Immorality of a kind that does not exist even among the heathen. Immorality of a kind that does not exist even among the heathen.

Not all heathen. I'm sure there were debaucherous wicked heathen people even in those days. But what he's saying is, among some decent heathen people, decent unconverted godless atheists, don't do some of the things you Corinthians are doing.

What type of grace are you fellows in? That's what Paul told the Corinthians. And he said, the little leaven will leaven the whole lump. He goes on further to say in verse 6, Don't you know? You're boasting about all your justification and grace is not good.

Don't you know that a little leaven will leaven the whole lump? How much leaven do you need to put in a big size dough from which you want to make bread? Very little. The whole thing blows up in the oven. You don't need much.

And sin is like that. You tolerate a little bit of sin in your life, a little bit of worldliness, and say under the guise of freedom, I'm free from the law and I'm sick and tired of this legalistic life. I'll tell you, I'm sick and tired of the legalistic life too.

But I don't want to jump out of that into the fire. I want to jump out of that into the new covenant. That is where the devil trips us up.

A false freedom where we think of God's love, God's love, God's love, God's love, and you go through a whole year without ever hearing about the fear of God. Reverence of God. It says we got to offer to God a service with reverence and awe.

I've been amazed at, you know, the Apostle John. There was a man who had walked with God for 65 years. I want to ask you a question.

How many of you believe that you are more spiritual than the Apostle John? Oh, there's nobody here so crazy to think that. Man, 95 years old, walked with God, suffered for Jesus. We're not holier than him, right? How many of you would worship an angel? Anybody here who would worship an angel? And if you by mistake did worship an angel, and you're corrected, hey, don't worship me.

Half an hour later, would you make the same mistake again, worshipping an angel again? You know that John did that? He worshiped an angel and half an hour later, he did it again. Does that mean you're more spiritual than John? I'll tell you why he did it. It was a mistake.

I don't believe worship to angels. But the man has such a reverent awe of God, which many of us don't have. He was so taken up with it, he forgot himself and he worshiped.

We who are so casual, who slap Jesus on the back and say, hi, you're my friend, we won't do that, will we? We probably won't even bow down before Jesus. We'll just put our arm around him and say, hi. That's the trouble.

John was different. We got so friendly with Jesus that we've lost our reverence for him. I fear that's happening.

I thank God it's not true of everybody. And as I say, this does not apply to everyone. But if your life has got, in the past few years, sin of a kind which is not even mentioned among decent, heathen people, I'd say to you, better wake up.

Don't just be fooled with all this justification theology. It's true, but it may not apply to you. I'm just trying to save you from deception.

I'm just trying to save you from surprises at the judgment seat of Christ. I want you to be ready for that. I want you to understand repentance.

I remember in the early days, many people who came to CFC would say, Brother Zach, we never knew what repentance was till we came to this church. We never knew what sin was till we came here. Still saying that.

I hope there's, of course, we also speak about God's love, but it's a love which passionately desires holiness in our life. See, perfect holiness is like perfect health. Any father wants his child to be perfectly healthy, not 90% healthy.

I didn't want any of my children to be 90% healthy. And if you're a good father, you want perfect health. That's what God desires for every one of us.

He wants us to be 100% free from the love of money, 100% free from bitterness, jealousy, strife, pride, arrogance, hypocrisy, insincerity, 100% free from every one of these things, not from most of these things. I don't want my children to be free from most diseases. Look at holiness like health.

And there are laws of health. You know that. You can't eat what you like and be healthy.

You can't drink any type of water and be healthy. Why are we careful with filtered water? It's a law of health. You can't live in any sloppy old way without any exercise and expect to be strong and healthy.

No. And there are laws of holiness too. We can't just live as we like and say, oh, I'm justified.

Maybe you're justified, but you're not holy. And that's a great tragedy in our day. If we proclaim holiness, I believe the light of God should be shining brighter in our midst than in any other place.

Otherwise, we've got to just humble ourselves. It's all a theory. So, I believe that in this year we need to seek God earnestly about some of these things.

Think of this verse in Ephesians in chapter 5, verse 21. Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Is there a place for that in your life? The fear of Christ that I have to be subject to my fellow believer? In the fear of Christ that I don't tread on into his boundary? I recognize his boundary? Just like I would not interfere in another person's married life or try to separate a husband from his wife? I want to recognize boundaries.

Be subject to one another. That brother, even if he's younger than you, has got a boundary. Respect it.

Why do I respect it? Because I fear Christ, who is the head of the body. The fear of Christ. We think these are Old Testament verses.

No. Ephesians 5. Let me show you another verse. Philippians chapter 2, verse 12.

My beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. This is New Testament. With fear and trembling I have to work out what God works within me.

What God works inside me, I've got to work out, not casually, but with fear and trembling. Another New Testament verse. Hebrews chapter 4. Hebrews chapter 4. Therefore, let us fear, lest a promise of entering God's rest has been given to us, and we never make it.

We come short of what God wants us to enter, a life of victory. That's what he's speaking about. You see the previous verses.

He's talking about people who didn't enter the life of victory, but perished in the wilderness for 40 years. He's talking about the land of Canaan. He says, let us fear that God's promised a life of victory for you, and you don't enter it.

Let us fear. How many of us have a fear that I might not come into this life of victory that God has promised for me? That's Hebrews 4. Take this matter of preaching. 1 Corinthians chapter 2. A lot of us share God's word here and there.

Paul says how he preached. He says in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 3. When I came preaching to you, I was with you in weakness and in fear and in trembling. Preaching with fear and trembling? Where do we hear of that today? People who preach, afraid lest they may say something God doesn't want them to say.

Afraid lest they may just waste people's time, bore people. Just imagine if all the preachers, even in our churches, began to preach with a little more fear that I don't want to say anything more than what God wants me to say. I'm feared that I may bore people, I may waste people's time.

I may say something out of my head. I may say something without any preparation, just casually. Oh God, give us that fear which Paul had.

We've lost it. We need to retrieve it. There were days when we had turned the steering wheel so much that we went way off to one side into legalism.

Let me tell you my fear. In correcting that, we've turned the wheel back to the left and some of us anyway, we've gone way off to the other side. And that's why there's more sin perhaps in your life today than there was 10-15 years ago.

Perhaps there's more interest and knowledge of the world and the entertainment world and the money world than there was 10-15 years ago. If that doesn't apply to you, your life has become more godly, wonderful. That is true freedom.

So I want to encourage you to examine your life as you begin the new year. Did you fast more in the days of legalism than now? How much did you fast in 2003? Do you remember how it was in the early days when we were a little more legalistic? Jesus fasted. The apostles fasted.

Was there more prayer in your life in those days than today? Was there more diligent daily reading of the scriptures in those days than today? Was there more judging of yourself regularly in those days than today? Then I'd say, those days are better. Get back to those days and ask the law to lead you to Christ. Those days are not the best, but better than no covenant, that's what I'm saying.

The best is when you come into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. For we are free. Free from fear, free from seeking to please men, free from rules and regulations and laws, desperately desiring to please God.

In reverence and in awe, in our life, in our words, respecting one another, honoring one another, fearing lest we say something God doesn't want us to say, go someplace God doesn't want us to do. Oh for a healthy, reverential fear of God, fear that we may hurt Him with the prayer, Lord point out anything in my

life that makes you sad. There is no condemnation in any new covenant message.

Absolutely none. Condemnation is an old covenant thing. There is no bondage in a new covenant message.

A new covenant is meant to free us, first of all, from sin. Jesus came to save us from sin. He came to deliver us from this world system.

He came to save us from the fear of men, from trying to please men. He came to save us from the wretched love of money that trapped millions of people in the world. He came to save us from all these things, to make us Christ-like, to build a fellowship among the godly.

That's what He came to do. Dear brothers and sisters, pursue it with all your heart. Let there be such a repentance in your life over past failure that will bring sorrow and sin, maybe days of fasting and seeking God.

I want to encourage you to do it. I want to encourage you, if you can do it, to set aside one day a month to seek God in this year. Or at least some hours in one day a month, just to seek God and to evaluate your life once every month, to see where you stand, to get along with God, to get out of the trap of this busy world.

And don't let the devil just keep on tormenting you saying, oh, that's legalism, that's legalism. To seek God is not legalism. To spend time to seek God is not legalism.

To fast and pray to seek God is 100% new covenant. Let's not let the devil deceive us by anything we seek to do. Allow him to call it legalism.

Dear brothers and sisters, I'm concerned. I'm concerned that standards are slipping. The reverential fear of God is disappearing.

Let's restore it. Come back to the center of the road. We don't want to go to the one side of legalism or the other side of worldliness or false liberty.

We want to walk right through the middle, enjoying God's love day by day, rejoicing in His love, rejoicing in His acceptance of us. But never taking advantage, with deep respect for our Heavenly Father. Father in heaven, those who know you best, fear you the most.

We want to be in that number. Oh Lord, our Father, we want to be holy because you're holy. This year is going to be different.

We're going to walk in the liberty of the new covenant, especially liberty from sin. Help us, we pray, to seek you with all of our hearts because you're a rewarder, those who diligently seek you. We can't do it, but we know by the power of your Holy Spirit, as you write your laws upon our heart and mind, we can live this life.

Jesus died that we might live this life. We don't want to frustrate the grace of God in our lives. Thank you Father and Jesus.

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