

The Fear of the Lord

Key Scripture

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Proverbs 9:10

Portion for the Journey:

Where is the fear of the LORD in our day? We live in a time when those who walk in darkness seem to prevail! Psalm 36 is descriptive of those today who are rejecting God’s Word to rebelliously choose a path that ignores the will of God. They boast there is no God and all of their ways are set on evil. Even among Christians, there are those who believe the fear of the Lord was an Old Testament characteristic relevant to the Old Covenant but no longer compatible with the grace given to the follower of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is woven with references to the “fear of the LORD” but a review of the New Testament makes it clear the fear of the Lord is an unchanging aspect of our relationship with Him under the New Covenant as well.

- Romans 1-3 describes the evil character that resides in the hearts of those who do not believe in the LORD. Paul quotes Ps. 36:1, stating “There is no fear of God before their eyes...now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.” Rom. 3:18,19
- Mary praised God that “His mercy extends to those who fear Him.” Luke 1:50
- Jesus warned His disciples not to fear man who can kill the body but are unable to kill the soul, saying, “rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matt. 10:28
- Paul called upon Christians to “make their holiness perfect in the fear of God.” 2 Cor. 7:1
- He exhorted the Philippians to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Phil. 2:12
- The Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria were described as those who were...” being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit...” Acts 9:31
- “...submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Eph. 5:21
- “...live in reverential fear of Him during your time here as temporary residents.” 1 Pet. 1:17 NLT

There are two types of fear related to God in the Bible. The definitions in the Hebrew and Greek are very similar and their meanings must be understood in context. Moses demonstrated the contrast between the improper fear and the godly fear of the LORD when he exhorted the people, “Do not be afraid (with the first type of fear), God has come to test you, so that the fear of the LORD (holy, appropriate fear) will be with you to keep you from sinning.” Ex. 20:20

1. Slavish fear is related to terror, dread, and great trembling. This is the fear of punishment that causes one to flee away. This fear is not joined with love or trust and produces terror and despair. The unbeliever will experience this fear when they face the LORD on judgment day. James describe the demons fear of God, that they shudder in fear because their fear is not united by love. James 2:19

2. Childlike fear is the healthy fear of the LORD experienced by believers and it includes an overwhelming sense of the holiness of God, reverence that demands worship, holy awe and trust because it is joined with faith in God's character through the Word and His promises. "Childlike fear...is not afraid of the punishment only, but of sin itself, of the very idea of sinning against God and grieving His heart." He explains that while childlike fear includes reverence and holy respect, it connotes more than reverence or awe. He goes on to say, "it is clear that He uses the word fear in its most direct sense, namely, a lively feeling that God is one who is dangerous...The dangerous aspect of God was connected with His holiness, that is, His hatred of sin."¹

To limit our understanding of the "fear of the Lord" to "reverence" or "awe" does not adequately describe what it means to fall into the hands of the living God with unrepentant sin on our hands. We cannot water down the meaning of the fear of the LORD by removing it from the context of the original meaning which describes this fear as that which causes terror or trembling. The concept of "fear and trembling" in connection with God is not a popular concept today. Many teach sermons about Jesus' love and grace but skirt away from issues that relate to His judgment, sin, and hell. To assure unrepentant sinners they are safe in the hands of the living God is to damn them with a false sense of peace. Rom. 8:15; 1 Pet. 1:17; 1 Pet. 3:2, 15; Phil. 2:12. Read Heb. 10:26-39

As believers, this childlike fear of the LORD should define our core relationship to God. The believer's sense of the fear of the Lord is rooted in the knowledge of God's greatness and majesty and power that makes Him comparable to nothing else. This sense of His incredible majesty calls us to a life of holiness, obedience and faith. When our relationship with God is love, joined with the "fear of the LORD" we will walk in faith and deep respect for God's sovereign rule over all of mankind. The fear of the LORD is the key to intimate friendship with God. The more we meditate on His Word, seek to know Him and His ways, the more we will discern between good and evil and find a growing sense of hatred for our sin. As we grow in the fear of the LORD, He promises to give us wisdom—to defeat our enemies, to discern between good and evil, to walk in His ways.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word of God is a two-edged sword. This means that this sword has two-sides that cut. The Word of God is perfectly balanced. We cannot take one part of His Word but must always look for the balance to be found in its completeness. For example, on one side of the sword is God's righteousness and justice, the other side is His love and grace. Through Jesus we find the perfect balance and completion of His love and His righteousness. Ps. 85:10 declares that "Lovingkindness and truth have met together, have kissed each other." This balance comes through knowing the fear of the LORD and His tremendous love, that brings us to conviction (truth) and repentance and cleansing of our sins.

Elijah is one who boldly confronted the evil kings of his day, his sense of the fear of the LORD was greater than any fear of what man could do to him. He declared, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand..." If we are to stand against the tide of darkness, we need this fear of the LORD in order to proclaim the truth about our God, His mighty judgement and power to save! We must not be afraid or ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of salvation for those who believe. We need to know and proclaim His Word—to know what He hates, what He requires of us and His incredible promises for those who fear His name. We must not misrepresent our God as a domesticated

¹ "Under His Wings" by O.O. Hallesby, 1932, Ausberg Publishing House, p. 104

house pet who is easily “handled” for He is not a tame lion! He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!! He is the King of Kings and LORD OF LORDS. He is the great “I AM” whose name was deemed by the Israelites as too holy even to speak. 1 Kings 17:1

Digging Deeper in the Word:

1. Cry out and ask the LORD to grant us greater fear of the LORD in our lives. Ask Him to teach us the fear of the LORD. Pray Ps. 86:1-12 “Teach me Your way, O Lord, I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your Name. (“Give me an undivided heart.”) See also Deut. 4:10; Ps. 90:11-12; Ps. 34:11, Ps. 86:11; Ps. 51:9-13

2. Meditate on the verses that teach about the fear of the LORD. As you meditate, pray for the LORD to fill you with a greater fear of the LORD. Pray the verses and promises the LORD makes for those who fear the LORD over you, your family, church and for this nation. (See appendix with list of verses). Isa. 8:11-13; Deut. 31:11c-13

3. David prayed that God would not let the wicked, those who had no fear of the LORD, prevail. He specifically prayed for the fear of the LORD to be upon them. “Put them in fear, O Lord, let the nations know that they are but men.” Ps. 9:20 It is time for the Church to rise up and pray!! Meditate through Psalm 9 and Psalm 10 and pray these verses as the LORD directs. Cry out for a release of the Spirit of the fear of the LORD with repentance to follow. Several specific areas that believers need to unite in prayer include:

- Pray especially for the fear of the LORD to be upon those in positions of authority who are making and interpreting the laws of the land. Ex. 18:21;
- Pray for nations who are facing incredible violence at the hands of terrorists. Pray Israel and for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for the LORD to restrain the violence of terrorist organizations and their persecution of believers. Ps. 9, Ps. 10; Hab.
- Pray for a boldness that comes from knowing that those who fear the LORD dwell under His shadow of protection. That we would be free from the fear of man and boldly confront the enemies of the Lord! 1 Samuel 17, esp. verses 26, 32, 45-47, Eph. 6:19,20; Ps. 138:3,7-8; Jer. 1:7

What is the Lord speaking to my heart?

My Prayer Response to the LORD?

Definitions of the **Fear** as used in verses from Old Testament Hebrew²

1. Pachad:

“Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you.” 2 Chron. 19:7

Means to tremble, to be in trepidation—Isa. 12:2 “While fear can make a man tremble, trust in the LORD will save a man from that fear.”

To be on one’s guard—Prov. 28:14. We ought to continually walk circumspectly, having our conversation in heaven.

Terror—Isa.2:19. If God inspires terror, that will lead one to trust and reverence Him like Isaac did—Gen. 31:53, then such terror becomes a blessing.

An attendant, a life guard: This idea is in the root of the Persian language. It is good to consider here, since we know that man likely does more because of fear than because of love or because of any other emotion.

2. Yarah or Yare is a primitive root meaning to fear, more to revere, to be had in reverence

“Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.” Prov. 15:16

To reverence, to trust—Ex.14:31 “When the people saw the great works of the LORD, they tremble and believed.”

To tremble for joy—Isa. 60:5. “This is enough to cause astonishment. People of all nations were converted to the LORD. The heart was afraid and swelled with joy.”

² Hebrew Honey: A Simple and Deep Word Study of the Old Testament by Al Novak 1965