

CHOOSING A LIFE THAT MATTERS: “FEAR GOD, NOT MEN”

Proverbs 2:1-8, Revelation 20:11-15, Matthew 10:26-31

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“The reverence and fear of God is the starting place for wisdom.

“If a driver is going 80 mph and notices a police car parked up ahead on the side of the road, they will slow down. In fact, a whole series of things goes into motion. First the driver’s heart starts beating a little more heavily. His brain tells his leg to get off of the accelerator and ease down on the brake, being careful not to slam on it. His eyes look down at the speedometer to ensure the speed is decreasing and then they move to the rearview mirror to see if he has been caught or not.

“The policeman’s presence has produced a healthy respect for the law. When an officer is present, drivers adjust to the law because of respect for the officer’s authority. A driver may not like that authority, may not want that authority affecting their life, or might even be rebellious against that authority – but he still respects it.

“What would most people think about a person who speeds up to 90 mph when they see a policeman? They would call him a fool. Why? Because that driver is showing no reverence for the law. They are in blatant disobedience to the law they live under.

“Many Christians live their lives according to their own set of laws because they do not respect God or acknowledge His rule over **every area** of their lives. Just as a driver should fear the authority of a police officer whether they see that officer or not, a Christian shows true fear of God by how they acknowledge His authority. Truly fearing God means that **God is the reference point** wherever the Christian goes or whatever they are involved in.”¹

How we view and understand God determines how we will live and move and have our being. “A.W. Tozer wrote, ‘The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us.’ The threshold for sin is lowered or raised in proportion to our view of God...When we lower our view of God, we lose our sense of being accountable to Him.

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 121, #360)

This makes it easier to excuse all sorts of evil in our lives – from ‘little white lies’ to infidelity, and all points in between. We sin more easily when we think less of God.”²

When we look at God with a very low view of His authority and position and power, we not only give up on following His will and His ways, we begin to use comparison with others as the standard to which we can live our lives. As we use other Christians’ lives to judge whether or not we’re doing ok, then we have given up on God’s standards and made Man’s standards greater than God’s. Again Mr. Tozer states clearly, “We have accepted one another’s notions and copied one another’s lives and made one another’s experiences the model for our own.”³ As we use other peoples’ standards as the guideline for how we should live our own lives, the whole Christian community begins a downward slide away from God’s will and God’s ways by becoming soft on sin. The more we rely upon what others do to guide our lives, the further we move away from how God desires us to live. We desperately need to regain our fear of the Lord.

In the daily reading through the Bible this week of Daniel 3, we read the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego disobeying the mandate of King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down and worship the 90 foot tall golden idol that he had made. They told the king, “*Your Majesty, we will not try to defend ourselves. If the God whom we serve is able to save us from the blazing furnace and from your power, then He will. But even if He doesn’t, Your Majesty may be sure that we will not worship your god, and we will not bow down to the gold statue that you have set up*” (Daniel 3:16-18). They feared God more than they feared King Nebuchadnezzar. They had a high view of the wonderful God of the universe.

But what does it mean to fear God? “To fear God means to be in awe of Him, to revere Him. Yes, God is our friend, but we are certainly **not His equal**. God is above us in every way. He is holy, almighty, sovereign, righteous and just. He ‘can destroy both soul and body in hell’ (Matt. 10:28).”⁴

But we don’t hear much of that in our society today. Instead, we hear more about wanting to be

² (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing a Life That Matters*, [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2017] pg. 34)

³ (Ibid., pg. 35)

⁴ (Ibid.)

“buddy-buddy” with God and we want just enough of Him in our lives to protect us and encourage us with His love. BUT TO FEAR GOD? To abide by His laws and follow His ways? We’re much too intelligent for that! (Sarcasm) We want just enough of God to make **US feel good**, but not too much that might transform us out of our sinful lives into His holiness. Just a little bit of God, please?

Fearing God is found in four ways; 1) Reverential awe of God’s nature, 2) Awareness of God’s presence, 3) Holy dread of displeasing God, and 4) Growing hatred of evil. Let me explain them

1) **A reverential awe of God** is understanding and accepting and claiming God for who He is, not the way that we want Him to be. We see His tremendous power working in the world, see His wondrous miracles, watch His transforming presence turn lives around 180 degrees, and comprehend His holiness, AND THEN we strive after all those attributes to be in our lives, too.

Unfortunately, “cultural Christianity means to pursue the God **WE WANT** instead of the God who **IS**. It is the tendency to be shallow in our understanding of God, wanting Him to be more of a gentle grandfather type who spoils us and lets us have our own way. It is sensing a need for God, but on our own terms. It is wanting the God we have underlined in our Bibles without wanting the rest of Him, too. It is God relative rather than God absolute.”⁵

Reverential awe of God understands God **AS HE IS** and subjecting ourselves under His authority, under His power, under His presence so that we follow all His ways and live the way He wants us to live.

2) **Being aware of God’s presence** is understanding that God is everywhere all the time. There is nowhere that God is not present. Psalm 139:8 says, “*If I ascend to heaven, **You are there**; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, **You are there**.” And when God is there, wherever there is, He is fully there, knowing all that is going on, knowing everything. He is ALL there.*

As we develop a fear of God, we come to understand that no matter where we are, what we are doing, God is there, ready to help us, ready to comfort us AND ready to correct us. If we are in

⁵ (Patrick Morley, *Man in the Mirror*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989])

rebellion to His will and His ways, we are ready to have God help us and support us, but we **don't** want Him to change us or correct us. But if we seek Him and desire to follow His ways, His presence with us will give us direction for our life, protection from evil and guidance to our thoughts and words. His being there will **encourage** us, and give us the foundation we need to live for Him. Then, no matter where we go, He's always there, all the time, God with us.

3) The fear of God also brings us to the **Holy dread of displeasing God**. Now this is the first thing that most people think about when they hear the term, "Fear the Lord." But having a tremendous awe of Who God Is and knowing that God Is Present everywhere all the time, this is not a bad thing for us, because it helps us become aware of our sinfulness. God has set up guidelines for us to follow IN ORDER TO KEEP US SAFE AND HEALTHY, but when we disregard these guidelines and go our own way, God allows the consequences to catch up with us. God desires that we follow Him ALL THE TIME, so when we become aware of our sin that displeases God, we find His discipline to bring us back to His ways. And as we become aware of our sinfulness, we begin to recognize our desperate need for the Savior to redeem us from the "*wages of sin, which is death*" (Romans 6:23).

4) The fourth way the fear of God displays itself is the **Growing hatred of evil**. Proverbs 8:13 says it clearly, "*The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.*" So as we become aware of who God is, know that He is present with us all the time wherever we go, and comprehend how much our disobedience to His Law displeases God, we begin to see the larger scope of sin taking place all around us. As we see the devastating result of sin in the lives of people and countries all around us, we come to hate evil, no matter what form it shows itself. The closer we get to God, the more we delight in doing His will and the greater hate we have for the evil in our world.

But just as our fear of the Lord gets us started on the path toward wisdom, our rebellion of the Lord God sets us on a downward progression away from God. "When we do not fear God, we lose our respect and awe for who He is, and as a result we do not live our lives as if in the presence of almighty God. As we forget who God is and lose our sense of accountability to Him, we make a play to become our own authority. Then, with God nudged aside, we redefine our purpose and commitments to suit

ourselves. This yields a self-serving interpretation of Scripture and selective obedience. If executed over a lifetime, we'll leave the legacy of compromise and a wasted life.”⁶

But let's look at the value of having a healthy fear of God. Listen to these benefits of fearing and following God. *“The fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4); it prolongs life (10:27). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...” (Prov. 1:7). It “...builds faithfulness ... and keeps us from drifting away from God” (Jeremiah 32:36-40). It “...brings the fulfillment of our desires” (Ps. 145:19). It “...is a prerequisite for leadership...” (Ex. 18:21). It “...is foundational to relationships” (Eph. 5:21). It “...brings a clear conscience and a good night's sleep” (Prov. 19:23). “the fear of the Lord brings God's favor” (Ps. 147:11). It “...protects against danger and evil (Ps. 33:18-19; Prov. 16:6) and injustice” (2 Chronicles 19:5-7). It “...delivers us from the fear of man” (Matthew 10:26-33). So the fear of God is not meant to restrict our lives but to direct and fulfill them.*⁷

So how do we develop a healthy fear of God? Let me leave you with four practices that you can use to find the fear of the Lord. 1) **Pray and seek God** to show you what it is to fear Him. If you ask God for wisdom and understanding to know Him, He is ready and willing to provide you with what you need to begin making a life that matters. We heard great words in Proverbs 2 today, *“My [child], if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek [Wisdom] as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God” (2:1-5).*

2) **See God's authority** displayed through His judgment of sin. Revelation 20:11-15 brings this whole concept to light as we look beyond this moment to the end of this time here on the earth when God will judge all people. It is those who have sought out His forgiveness and claimed Jesus as God's Messiah and the Savior of this world who will find their names written in the book of life and be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. It is our choice of what we will do with Jesus that will take us

⁶ (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing a Life that Matters*, pg. 42)

⁷ (Ibid., pg. 43-44)

beyond this life to eternal judgment and damnation or eternal redemption and forgiveness.

3) To get an idea of how we can receive the fear of the Lord, **study biblical characters and their transformational encounters with God.** Look at how Noah listened to and obeyed God in Hebrews 11:7. Discover how God gave Moses the 10 Commandments in Exodus 34. Watch how David confessed his sin and prayed for a clean heart in Psalm 51. Observe Jonah's disobedience that led to his being cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish in Jonah 1:13-17. Catch how Isaiah was transformed by a vision of the holiness of God in Isaiah 6:1-7. Study how Saul became Paul when he encountered God and became His messenger in Acts 9. And see how John was in awe as he prophesied of the honor and glory that God will receive in Revelation 4:1-11 and 5:11-13. These are but a few that the Bible gives to us to understand the value of having the fear of the Lord in us.

4) Finally, **read the account of those who spent their lives seeking God** and learning to fear Him. Read A.W. Tozer's book *The Pursuit of God*, J.I. Packer's book *Knowing God*. Check out Elisabeth Elliot's book *Through Gates of Splendor*, or Brother Andrew's book *God's Smuggler*. Or look at *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, or Timothy Keller's book *The Reason for God*. And study Charles Colson's book *Loving God*. Each of these authors proclaim how God revealed to them His awesome nature so that they might come to have the fear of the Lord. Read about the Reformers, or the great saints of the church, both old and new, and find how they pursued God and found strength to live a life that mattered. Then you will see how good it is to Fear God and Not Men! Then, you will find how God can and will lead you out of sin into the glory of His presence.

Let me leave you a quote from Senate Chaplain Richard Halverson. He says it right; “[People] who fear God face life fearlessly. [People] who do not fear God end up fearing everything.” That about sets it straight. Fear God and you will never have to worry about fearing anyone, or anything else, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.