

## Lesson 2: The Fear of God

If you look at your notes you can see that we are going to ask a number of questions about the fear of God. Then you'll notice that we'll try to define the fear of God in one sentence. Next we'll ask why we should fear him. After asking WHY we should fear him we will again turn to scripture and ask, "What does it look like to fear the Lord?" "What happens when we lose the fear of God?" And lastly, we'll consider some ways can start to walk in the fear of the Lord.

### I. Who should fear God?

This is the first point on our handout. The short definition of what it means to fear God is: *Reverent submission that leads to obedient trust AND worship.* But who should fear Him? **All should.** Let's consider a few verses about the fear of the Lord. Psalm 33:8 reads, *"Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!"* Fearing the Lord is something everyone should do. No one is exempt from the fear of the Lord. Yet, **the wicked refuse to fear him.** Psalm 36:1 says, *"Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes."* So everyone SHOULD fear God... but the wicked don't. Ultimately, we read in Romans 14:11 that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, **everyone will** fear God in one way or another at the final judgment.

### II. Why should we fear God?

1. As image bearers of the one true God, we were designed to fear God. Genesis 1:26-27 says, *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* We were created in the image of God and were meant to exercise dominion over the creation. We were designed to live in perfect fellowship with Him and devotion towards Him, as we had been given His image to bear in His world. He designed us to live with no shame towards one another, no fear of being exposed or rejected by other men. We see in verse 31 of chapter 1 that **"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."** He created man to be like Him, to bear His image, but not to be over Him, He created us so that we would be a representation of Him, although we would still live in fear of Him.
2. So, not only should we fear God because He designed us that way, we should also fear God because He's intrinsically worthy of our fear and obedience and worship. We see throughout Scripture that God alone is worthy. He alone can bear the weight of our soul's need to worship. Let's consider His worthiness for a few moments.

**Psalm 2:10-11**, the psalmist warns the rulers of the earth, *"Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear; and rejoice with trembling."* This is at the heart of what it means to serve the Lord.

**Psalm 89:6b-7**, *“Who among the heavenly being is like the Lord, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones and awesome above all who are around him?”*  
God is more awesome than all that surround Him.

**Psalm 90:11**, *“Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of You?”* God’s wrath is equal to the fear He deserves.

**Psalm 27:1**, *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”* We shouldn’t fear anyone or anything because our God saves us.

3. All Scripture is proclaiming the worthiness of our God to be feared and worshiped.  
**Fearing God is also for our good.** We often hear Romans 8:28 mentioned from the pulpit here at Emmanuel, *“And we know that for all those who love God, all thing work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”* This is how Christians should think and pray. Scripture affirms it over and over. We should fear God because it’s for our good to do so.

**Psalm 111:10 – Beginning of wisdom**, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!”*

**Proverbs 1:7 – Beginning of knowledge**, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge

**Psalm 115:11**, *“You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.”* God is a help and shield to those who fear Him.

**Psalm 115:13**, *“He will bless those who fear the LORD, both the small and the great.”*  
God will bless those who fear Him.

**Psalm 118:4**, *“Let those who fear the Lord say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”*

**Psalm 23:4**, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

**Psalm 25:14**, *“The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and He makes known to them His covenant.”*

**Psalm 27:3**, *“Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.”*

**Psalm 31:19**, *“Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in You, in the sight of the children of mankind!”*

**Psalm 33:18**, *“Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love.”*

**Psalm 34:4**, *“I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”*

**Psalms 34:9**, “Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack!”

**Psalms 103:11**, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.”

**Psalms 103:13**, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him.”

**Psalms 111:5**, “He provides food for those who fear Him; He remembers His covenant forever.”

**Psalms 130:4**, “But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared.”

**Psalms 145:19**, “He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him; He also hears their cry and saves them.”

**Psalms 147:11**, “But the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.”

**Proverbs 10:27**, “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.”

**Proverbs 15:33**, “The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.”

**Proverbs 16:6**, “By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.”

**Proverbs 22:4**, “The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.”

As we read those verses in Psalms and Proverbs, did you notice the great insight and understanding they give us regarding the fear of the Lord? The fear of the Lord is intimately tied to our own happiness and holiness. Never divorce holiness from happiness. Psalms and Proverbs actually forecast eschatological reality as they portray the kingship of God over the world and the destiny of the world to be judged in its present attempt to throw God off as its ruler. Psalms and Proverbs (as wisdom literature) instruct us that the good and rational life is living in a right fear of the Lord.

### **Questions or Comments?**

You may wonder why would we ever stop fearing God? If you have that feeling, it's a good time to ask yourself why? Why don't we fear God as we ought? If we were created to fear Him, what's stopping us from doing so?

### **III. Fear of God Lost: What Happens When We Don't Fear God?**

#### **A. The Worst Exchange**

Let's recall the scene of Adam and Eve in the garden after the fall. They stopped fearing God, and as Paul says in **Romans 1:23**, *"Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."* Genesis 3 clearly tells us in verse 7, *"Then, the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together made themselves loincloths."* DO NOT read this as merely meaning that Adam and Eve suddenly realized that they weren't wearing any clothes. Verse 7 is telling us that Adam and Eve are now spiritually dead. This is the account of a tragedy, and the birthplace of man-made religion. Their sin led to exposure, and the realization of judgment, so they attempted work to cover themselves over. Isn't every man-made religion ever since, man's elaborate attempt at making himself right before God? Adam and Eve, in one sin, had gone from the pinnacle of God's creation, who alone were able to worship and experience communion with the triune God, to being physically alive – but spiritually dead—and cut off from God. They now deeply fear being exposed by God. They are ashamed in His presence (v. 10).

#### B. Alienation from God

Creation was good, but at the Fall (man's rebellion against God) everything changed. After the Fall, man was thrown into fear of other men. At the Fall, Adam and Eve chose to give up the perfect fear of the Lord. In the Fall they learned a new fear of the Lord, a fear of His wrath and judgment and they learned a fear of man, a fear of rejection and exposure and physical harm. When we give up a proper fear of the Lord, we have no choice but to fear others. It is not as though there is a middle option of not fearing the Lord *and* not fearing people. When we give up the right fear of the Lord, we are making a claim to be like God. That's a claim that we must defend. But no one can.

#### C. Alienation from each other

Not only had Adam and Eve alienated themselves from God, but they had also alienated themselves from each other.

- i. The very intimacy for which they were created in marriage had been shattered.
- ii. Their nakedness brought about a fear of rejection.
- iii. This rejection was so deep that it led the image bearers to fearing that other people will actually physically harm us (Genesis 4:8). Instead of giving life, the image bearers turned on each other in the first act of murder as Cain killed his brother Abel.

### IV. How Can We Get it Back?

I want us to see the Fall for the cataclysmic event in Scripture that it is. It changed everything. The creatures were now naked and exposed. They were still living, but were now spiritually dead. They had fundamentally lost what it meant to be human. And this is the very beginning of the narrative of Scripture. You must get a sense of the desolate place the earth suddenly became when image bearers in the garden rejected the good and righteous King of the garden and instead assert their own rule.

This is desperately tragic. Yet, God in his grace promises redemption, what all humanity now desperately needed. Jesus Christ brings the redemption our hearts seek. In sin, we live subhuman lives. Jesus Christ comes and lives the fully human life. He fears God the Father. He does for us what we were created to do. Just as in Adam, we all sinned. So, in Christ, for those who repent and believe, we are righteous.

A. The greatest exchange.

In Genesis 3, Moses uses the language of nakedness. Just as we are naked as sinners before God, so in Christ we are clothed in righteousness. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ (**2 Cor. 5:21**) as His righteousness is imputed to us through justification. So, just as we stripped ourselves of the unmarred image in the fall, through the gracious redemption achieved through Christ, we are clothed anew with the perfect righteousness of Christ. It is his death and resurrection that make it possible for those who repent and believe to begin fearing God in the way we were originally designed to fear Him.

Someone once said, *"When we try to cover and protect ourselves through fearing others, it is as though we are holding up pebbles to hide ourselves behind. Meanwhile there is a Mount Everest of covering offered to us in Christ."* Believer, meditate on the righteousness and redemption provided through Christ. This will free you from living the subhuman life that we so easily give ourselves over to.

**V. What Does the Fear of God look like in Action?**

Scripture has much to say and many examples of fear of God in action. What does it look like to fear the Lord? It looks like:

Giving praise - Psalm 22:23, **You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!"**

Listening to truth – Psalm 66:16, **"Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what He has done for my soul."**

Being quiet – Psalm 76:8, **"From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still."**

Having a teachable and undivided heart – Psalm 86:11, **"Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth."**

Following His precepts – Psalm 119:63, **"I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts."**

Hoping in His word – Psalm 119:74, **"Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word."**

Understanding His statutes, Psalm 119:79, **"Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies."**

Standing in awe of His laws – Psalm 119:120, **“My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments.”**

Walking in His ways – Psalm 128:1, **“Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!”**

Being humble – Proverbs 3:7, **“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”**

Hating evil – Proverbs 8:13, **“The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.”**

Walking upright – Proverbs 14:2, **“Whoever walks in uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him.”**

The fear the Bible speaks of also works itself out in the lives of His people.

**Noah** (Genesis 6:22), even though we don’t have specific accounts of what men might have been saying to Noah, we can only imagine the degree to which Noah was fearing God over man as he worked over the course of decades to construct a very large boat in his front yard.

**Daniel** (and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), there are examples throughout the book of Daniel: the decision to not partake of the king’s meat and drink, the decision to not bow down to the false idol (3:16-18), Daniel’s decision to defy the edict to stop worshipping God, Daniel’s fearlessness in interpreting dreams.

**Esther** (Esther 5:1-8), in the face of Haman’s wicked plot to destroy God’s people, Esther approached King Xerxes, knowing that her actions could lead to her own death.

**Ruth** (Ruth 2:11-12), when Ruth went to work in the fields, she was risking physical/sexual abuse.

**Rahab** (Joshua 2) worked to hide the Israelite spies, and didn’t give into the same fear that the rest of the people of Jericho had been controlled by. Also she didn’t fear the authorities within Jericho; she feared the God of Israel.

**Mary** (Luke 1:46-55) praises the Lord as she recounts His goodness and speaks of her fear of the Lord and her joy in carrying the very Son of God in her womb.

**Paul** follows the Lord faithfully from his conversion until his death at the hands of Nero as he demonstrates what it means to fear the Lord as he proclaims the gospel to the gentiles.

**Peter** [later] (Acts 10:9-11:18), God turns Peter from a man-pleasing, man-fearing individual, into one who defies everything that would have previously defined him, and he goes to the house of Cornelius. (I Peter 3-4) Peter, the one who feared, is now admonishing believers throughout the ages to not fear, but to trust the God that he has come to see as supremely faithful and trustworthy and worthy of being feared above all else.

**Jesus**

Read **Hebrews 11** as the writer recounts the heroes of the faith from the Old Testament who feared God as demonstrated by their faith. But, it doesn't stop with the Scriptures. Church history is replete with men and women who have faithfully followed God to advance His kingdom.

Polycarp and other martyrs in the early church as they bravely faced death and proclaimed the goodness and sweetness of Christ before those who would kill them.

**Luther** as he bravely stood before the ecclesiastical authorities of his day to proclaim the great truth of justification by faith ALONE!

**Jim Elliot** bravely went to the jungles of South America and gave his life proclaiming the gospel to native Indian tribes far removed from civilization.

Brothers and Sisters around the world even today being killed for their faith. And we could go on and on. Read Christian biographies.

## **VI. How do we begin to put on the fear of the Lord?**

Only a greater fear will displace a lesser fear [there will be a later lesson devoted to this]. Our main concern should not be "finding solutions" to our fear of man, but instead seeking after a deeper fear of the Lord. I think this orientation is so important. Let me repeat it as you have it in your handout. We are not merely attempting to "find solutions" to our fear of man but are seeking after a deeper fear of the Lord. If you leave this class feeling less controlled by what other people think, but with no greater fear of God, then you've missed the point! So how do we do we put on fear of the Lord every day?

1. Meditate on the gospel. The battle each day begins when we wake up, we must bring our hearts and minds under the reality of the gospel. God has graciously acted through Christ to restore sinners to Himself. The King has come. The King reigns. We no longer have to be subjects of the ruler of the kingdom of this world. Through Christ, we are subjects of the good King. Meditate on and believe the gospel and what it accomplishes.
2. Study the character of God. God is glorious and is worthy of fear. The knowledge of God is the greatest knowledge you can possess. He is perfectly good in every way. His ways are high above our ways, and His thoughts are high above our thoughts (Isaiah). He can be trusted. Do not listen to the lies of your flesh that accuse God of being less than He really is. As we study the character of God, we will be more and more conformed to His character and will rightly fear Him as we ought. The God of the Bible is revealed as: Holy, Majestic, Sovereign, Omnipotent - all powerful, Omniscient - all knowing, Omnipresent - everywhere, always present, Merciful, Kind, Faithful, Loving, Jealous, Just and Wrathful.

A few books, apart from Scripture, that provide great starting points to knowing and understanding God better are *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer and *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper.

3. Repent of pride (Prov. 3:7). I can't say this enough! Our pride goes deeper than any of us could imagine. It is rooted in the very fabric of our beings as rebels against God. Learn to doubt your own desires and to trust God. Renounce pride. It completely distorts reality as it tempts us to make much of ourselves and so very little of the sovereign God.

**Discussion Question: How does the fear of God help me when I fear man?** Find specific examples for each kind of fear of man.

To fear God is to reverently submit to Him in such a way that leads to obedience and worship. It is to happily and joyfully obey Him. To fear God is the beginning of wisdom. God alone can bear the weight of your deepest longings. He alone can receive the worship you were created to give.

**QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?**