

Yirat Shamayim: A Call for a Revival of the Doctrine of The Fear of the LORD

by Peter F. Connell

INTRODUCTION

Fear! Trembling! Alarm! Quaking! Dread! Terror! This litany of words brings a certain feeling and connotation with them. Spoken together with any sort of pathos, they can certainly even begin to evoke the feelings themselves. They cause your chest to tighten—your breath to become more stilted. Used in dime-store novels they bring the reader to experience the terror that is going on in the mind and heart of the fictional character whose life they are following. Yet use the term “the fear of the Lord,” and we stir up conceptions and feelings more akin to “high regard” or “reverence”—rather than to the traditional meaning of the word “fear.” Many of us in the Apostolic Pentecostal movement have been taught that the term “the fear of the LORD,” and the variants used many times throughout the Scriptures, simply means “godly awe or reverence.”¹

When I say that we have been *taught* this—I mean to say that the subject has been *mentioned* in passing, nearly always with the brief explanation that “fear” does not mean “fear”—but “reverence.” One can search nearly in vain for Apostolic literature—whether it be doctrinal theses,

¹ David F. Gray, *Questions Pentecostals Ask Vol. 1* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 2005), p.28
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books, Sunday school literature or magazine articles—that deals with the subject in any depth. I am of the opinion that—not only is our understanding of the fear of the LORD generally inadequate—but that our emphasis upon it as a doctrine is inadequate as well—and both must be *revised* and *revived*.

This paper will be an attempt to relate how that the doctrine of the fear of the LORD has been inappropriately relegated to a side issue; that our conception of this doctrine is, largely, a misconception; that the doctrine of the fear of the LORD—what devout Jews have called *Yirat Adonai* or *Yirat Shamayim* (literally “fear of Heaven”) —is actually a *central* doctrine of our Bible that has been too-long neglected—and neglected to our detriment; and that this dearth of a proper understanding of and *emphasis* upon the fear of the LORD in our teaching and preaching has contributed to—and *is* contributing to a spiritual decline in many churches. In this paper I shall attempt to:

1. properly define what the fear of the LORD is (and what it is *not*);
2. describe how central the doctrine of the fear of the LORD was in Old Testament theology and the theology of the Apostle Paul’s day;

3. describe the effect that the fear of the LORD (and a proper understanding of the fear of the LORD) had upon Old Testament patriarchs and prophets—as well as on the New Testament church and their evangelistic efforts;
4. identify that the fear of the LORD is a subject that must be taught, and then must be “caught” as a matter of the human will, in that one must “choose the fear of the LORD;”²
5. call on pastors and teachers to teach the doctrine of the fear of the LORD as *central* to our theology and to integrate this doctrine more centrally in their preaching and teaching generally;
6. call on pastors to *cultivate* the fear of the LORD in their churches through teaching and preaching, the biblical administration of church discipline, and the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit in our churches;
7. describe how a dearth of the proper perspective and emphasis regarding the doctrine of the fear of the LORD is the root cause of many departing from the paths of holiness, flippantly discarding the “old paths,” thumbing their collective noses at Elders, and,

² Proverbs 1:29

lately, pursuing missional³ or emergent church philosophies—
rather than being led of the Spirit.

WHAT IS “THE FEAR OF THE LORD?”

Mention the fear of the LORD and any student of the Bible almost immediately thinks of Proverbs 9:10 which states that “[t]he fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” When we consult modern biblical commentary we see a theology regarding the fear of the LORD that seems incompatible with the language of the Scriptures and seems to reflect the indifference of early Catholic expansion—an indifference that carried somewhat into modern Judeo-Christian thought and into western thought in general.

The expansion of this root indifference is captured in the thoughts penned by German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer—who was influenced by Pentecostal theology in the United States⁴ before his return to Germany and his ultimate martyrdom under the Nazi regime. In his classic, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he intimates that the modern Church pushes and peddles a

³ The term “missional” is only about twelve years old and is evolving. Author Reggie McNeal, in his recently released book, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009) indicates that the focus is a shifting of church-based to community-based leadership and the advance of missions such as feeding the hungry, etc. (Introduction and p. 1-6) although these “missions” were not a part of the great commission to the Church (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, Acts 1).

⁴ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p107
Walter J. Hollenweger, *Theology Today*, <http://tj.sagepub.com/content/43/1/28>, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1986), p 29-33

“cheap grace” that proclaims “forgiveness of sins...as a general truth,” and “the love of God” as “the Christian ‘conception’ of God.”⁵ This pervasive school of thought spread with the spread of what I call “apparent Christianity” (that ‘Christianity’ that seems to be most readily apparent in secular and religious history). Bonhoeffer further stated: “*As Christianity spread, and the Church became more secularized, this realization of the costliness of grace gradually faded. The world was Christianized, and grace became its common property. It was to be had at low cost.*”⁶ This was a spread of cross-less Christianity; and without the Cross there seemed to be little need for a central doctrine of the fear of the LORD. In effect—the very central doctrine of Yirat Adonai (or Yirat Shamayim)—the fear of the LORD—that was held by the patriarchs, the prophets and first-century church was removed from Christian thought, relegated to a side issue, and quickly dismissed as merely being “religious reverence”⁷ and the like.

Although the words of the biblical texts carry a much stronger connotation to the term “the fear of the LORD” (and its variants) than mere “reverence”—modern (16th-century and later) commentary seems to remove that connotation by attempting to “*balance*” the language of the texts by

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1963), p.45

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 49

⁷ Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*, e-Sword Edition, v. 7.9.8., Proverbs 1:7 commentary

superimposing the doctrines of the love and mercy of God upon them. This, in my opinion, is tantamount to the watering down of a vital doctrine.

One noted theology professor, Robert B. Strimple, noted in his March 2001 article, *The Fear of the Lord* in *New Horizons* magazine that the subject of the fear of the Lord is commonly, if not universally understated in biblical commentary. For example, he takes exception regarding Scofield's comments at Psalm 19:9 which states, "*the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever,*" in his once-popular Scofield Reference Bible. The author writes:

*Scofield's comment is this: "The 'fear of the Lord' [is] a phrase of Old Testament piety." Now what does such a comment imply? That "the fear of the Lord" is a phrase of Old Testament piety is obviously true and undeniable. But one fears that the implication of the comment (and the reason for making it) is that "the fear of the Lord" was a characteristic of Old Testament piety as distinguished from New Testament piety. I want to remind you that that is false and to be rejected clearly and vigorously.*⁸

⁸ http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH01/03a.html

Such comments and descriptions as Scofield’s abound in modern biblical commentary—together with the rationale stated. Consider this commentary from Jamison, Fausset, Brown Commentary:

*“‘the fear of the Lord.’ This means reverent trust, love and obedience towards Him. Such reverent fear presupposes the knowledge of how infinite in power, majesty, and goodness God is.”*⁹

Yet another commentary says of the phrase “serve the LORD with fear” from the second Psalm: *“This simply means that in my service, reverence must find a place.”*¹⁰ Yet the fear of the LORD was much more than a mere reverence in the life and theology of the devout. From the early days of the Patriarchs through the days of the prophets the fear of the LORD was *central* to their religion—and from the days of the earliest synagogues into the era of the first-century church “Yirat HaShem” (literally “fear the Name,” as “HaShem” was pronounced in place of the tetragrammaton or Adonai in everyday usage) was spoken by devout Jews every morning upon waking.¹¹

The word “fear” has been translated from many different words in both the Old and New Testaments. Among those words are *pâchad* (meaning

⁹ Jamison, Fausset, Brown, A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993) Vol. 2, p. 413

¹⁰ James Smith, Robert Lee, Handfuls on Purpose (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971) Series XII, p. 300

¹¹ <http://www.ou.org/about/judaism/di.htm#hashem>

alarm, dread, and terror, from a root word meaning “make to shake”¹², *yir’âh* (meaning fear, reverence, exceedingly fearful—from a root “to tremble”)¹³, *môrâh* (which means dread, terribleness, terror)¹⁴, *chûwl/khool* (which means to fall grievously with fear, to writhe in pain, to travail with pain, and to tremble)¹⁵, *phobeō/phobos* (meaning to be afraid, fear exceedingly, terror)¹⁶, and *ekphobos* (meaning to be frightened out of one’s wits, sore afraid).¹⁷ While one word carries the connotation of reverence, that is the *weaker* connotation—and a connotation has not been attributed to a fear toward God by authoritative Greek scholarship.¹⁸ The word “fear,” in the Scriptures, does not merely reflect the thought of “godly reverence;” rather, by-and-large, “fear,” when used in reference to man’s reaction to and interaction with God, means **fear! Petrifying, terrifying, gut-wrenching fear!**

We shall see—as we look at the Scripture—that this was both the *theological* understanding and *practical* understanding of the fear of the LORD throughout the timeframe in which our Bible was penned. It is

¹² James Strong, S.T.D, LL.D., The Exhaustive Concordance (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1980) Hebrew Dictionary, p. 94

¹³ Ibid., p. 52

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 63

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 37

¹⁶ Ibid, Greek Dictionary, p. 76

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 27

¹⁸ Joseph H. Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 656

imperative that this understanding—this *sense*—be restored to the Church, both theologically and in everyday practice and living. We need a baptism of the fear of the LORD!

In our current Apostolic church culture, from the most progressive to the most conservative among us, there appears to be a general lacking of a genuine fear of the LORD. Recently one well-travelled evangelist, now pastoring, commented on how across the spectrum of our churches there seems to be—in varying degrees—a flippant disregard to the move of the Spirit in our services. He noted that admonitions to pray or seek God by either Evangelist or Pastor are commonly shrugged off—especially among younger or second or third-generation Pentecostals. We do not need to look far to see this scarcity of the fear of the LORD, it is evidenced all around us—perhaps even, to some extent, within us.

A Dichotomy, Rather Than a Balance

Above, we noted that biblical commentators have attempted to “balance” the Old Testament doctrine of “fear of the LORD” with the understanding that our God is a God of love. It is understood that our God is a loving God—a merciful God—a longsuffering God; that, indeed, “God is love.” Yet I would like to point out that this was also brought out in a multitude of *Old* Testament verses—not merely in New Testament passages.

Over 200 verses in the Old Testament speak directly about His mercy and over 25 speak directly of His love, in addition to many more indirect inferences to His love and mercy.

Furthermore, our understanding of both the “love of God” and God’s *justice or severity* should not follow the line of thought that these two attributes of God “*balance*” one another in a way that “tones down” or “blends” these attributes. Rather, there is a dichotomy in that His unmitigated love and his unmitigated severity and judgment stand on their own as singular-yet-coexistent attributes of God. Despite biblical commentary to the contrary—there IS a Divine tension between these attributes! It is a Divine tension that was played out when His love and mercy *met* His justice and severity at the Cross of Calvary! It is at the Cross where we can “*behold...the goodness and severity of God!*”¹⁹ The justice of God—the judgment of God—indeed, the *wrath* of God for our sins was poured out upon the man Christ Jesus when *He* took the punishment for *our* sins! Yet in the love of God—“*it pleased the LORD to bruise him!*”²⁰

We can and must understand that the love and mercy of God does not temper, does not mitigate, does not moderate, does not tone-down, restrain, lessen, alleviate, dilute, or diminish the justice and

¹⁹ Romans 11:22

²⁰ Isaiah 53:10

severity of God any more than the humanity of Jesus Christ diminished His deity, or His deity diminished His humanity! As Strimple said in his article, “*What a grave error it would be to imagine that the new covenant, in contrast to the old, has **replaced** the fear of God with the love of God. That would be as contrary to the New Testament understanding of the proper response to the God of holiness and mercy as it would be contrary to the Old Testament understanding.*”

Note with me the following two verses:

Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. (Psalms 100:2)

Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. (Psalms 2:11)

These verses expose for us a number of dichotomies that we need to consider. We can *serve* (Hebrew: *made to serve/servitude*)^{21,22} the LORD with both *gladness* and with *fear*. We can also *with trembling* (literally – a shudder – fear, trembling).²³ We can and should—and are even commanded to rejoice—yet our rejoicing should be *tempered* with a shuddering, an

²¹ e-Sword v. 7.9.8, 2008, Hebrew Bible from Masoretic Text

²² Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p.598

²³ James Strong, S.T.D, LL.D., The Exhaustive Concordance (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1980) Hebrew Dictionary, p. 109

inward trembling at the mighty God with Whom we have to do! It is *not* that the might or justice of God are tempered by His love—as both of these attributes of God are unmitigated and powerful. Yet in our *approach* to God there must be a rejoicing *tempered* by a fear—a boldness to enter before the throne of grace²⁴ *tempered* with the clothing of ourselves in humility²⁵—a lifting of our hands without wrath or doubting²⁶ *coupled* with a fear and trembling.²⁷

As the writer of Hebrews admonished: *Let us therefore **fear**, lest, a promise being left us **of entering into his rest**, any of you should seem to come short of it.*²⁸ In saying this he is stating—to the Church—that a lack of the fear of the Lord could make us fall short of entering heaven. He concludes later in that chapter that through the medium of faith, coupled with fear (*phobos* - terror) that we can and should enter “*boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*” It seems that an exceeding fear and terror is *necessary* if we are to

²⁴ Hebrews 4:16

²⁵ 1 Peter 5:5

²⁶ 1 Timothy 2:8

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:3, 2 Corinthians 7:15, Ephesians 6:5, Philippians 2:12

²⁸ Hebrews 4:1 The entire chapter of Hebrews 4 ties having a fear (*Phobeō* – which Thayer says to mean to put to flight by terrifying, to be struck with fear or seized with alarm; to be struck with amazement; to fear [hesitate] to do something because of fear; and finally reverence and reverential obedience. It seems likely that the latter definitions actually came into being much later than the first century) of God to our bold approach to God through faith. It is interesting to note that the writer begins with an admonition to fear and ends with an admonition in vs. 16 to enter boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and help. This chapter helps to illustrate the dichotomy of the workings of His justice and judgment with His mercy through the medium of our faith.

find His mercy and grace, and it *should* be noted that without the possibility of judgment, there is *no need* of grace and mercy. This fear is one of the elements needed in a deep and lasting repentance—without which salvation will never be realized—or maintained. Indeed, “*his mercy extends to those who fear him.*”²⁹

Paul ties such continued repentance with the fear of the Lord when he tells the church at Corinth that he rejoiced that his former epistle made them sorry after a godly sort that lead them to repentance. He said that:

*“Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what **carefulness** it wrought in you, yea, what **clearing of yourselves**, yea, what **indignation**, yea, what **fear**, yea, what **vehement desire**, yea, what **zeal**, yea, what **revenge!**”³⁰*

Somewhere in their reflection—brought about by the great boldness and direct speech of the Apostle in his epistle—they sorrowed after a godly sort—it seems that it was a reflection that *contributed to* and *resulted from* a fear of God that was induced by Paul’s strong words. We shall look more later at how a genuine fear and terror of the Lord is brought about in the Church.

²⁹ Luke 1:50, New International Version

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 7:10-11

They Fell on Their Faces

Consider from the pages of our Bible the fear—the terror—struck in the hearts of men as they encountered the living God. When Isaiah saw a vision of the LORD (Isa. 6) he was suddenly overcome with fear: “*Woe is me!*” Look at the numbers of people who *quaked* or literally *fell on their faces in fear* (the general meaning of the Hebrew word *khool*) before the LORD:

Abraham, in Genesis 17, “fell on his face” when the Lord appeared to him and said, “walk before me and be thou perfect.” While it was and is in keeping with eastern custom to bow oneself to the ground in greeting to a superior, as in Genesis 18 when two angels came outside Abram’s tent flap,³¹ **this** event evoked a violent *throwing* or *casting* of himself to the ground³²—an evidence of genuine terror.

Moses, in Exodus 3 when he had turned aside at the burning bush and the LORD spoke to him, “*hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.*” Stephen’s message in Acts 7 sheds light on this significant meeting. He said that “*Moses trembled, and durst not behold.*” Again regarding Moses at Mount Sinai we read in Hebrews 12:21, “*And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.*”

³¹ James M. Freeman, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1996), pp. 16-17

³² Gesenius’ *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p.557

Solomon and all the people present at the dedication of the temple prostrated themselves upon the ground when the glory of the Lord filled the house:

*Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, **they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.**" (II Chronicles 7:1-3)*

Jesus' inner circle—Peter, James and John—fell upon their faces at the Transfiguration of Jesus, "*sore afraid.*"³³ It was their natural reaction to what they saw and heard. And while Jesus, in His compassion, touched them and said, "*Arise, and be not afraid,*" this was after the vision had ceased, as they lifted their eyes and "*saw no man, save Jesus only.*" They had seen Him here, perhaps, as He **ought** to be seen—for Jesus did not

³³ Matthew 17:6

suddenly *become* glorious, He *always* was glorious! He is, after all, “*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day and for ever!*”³⁴ Indeed there is coming a day when, as John says in his first epistle, “*we shall see him as he is!*”³⁵ There are more examples in both the old and new testaments. Invariably, when people saw the Lord—or a manifestation of His power or holiness—as He *ought* to be seen, it struck *terror* into their hearts and caused men to want to cleanse their ways.

John later saw Jesus again, in his vision while on the isle of Patmos, and—though He had walked with Jesus for three years, had eaten with Him, beheld His miracles, heard His teaching, saw His transfigured form, stood dumbfounded at His crucifixion, witnessed His resurrection and was present at His ascension—when He saw Jesus again, he, greatly afraid, “*fell at his feet as dead!*”³⁶ It is not an exaggeration to say that what John saw and heard as he beheld the Jesus he had known for years struck **terror** into his heart! Here, it seems, that he saw Jesus as He *ought* to be seen—as He really is! Oh, that we could get a glimpse of Him as He really is! We read later in Revelation of the four and twenty elders (who I personally believe to

³⁴ Hebrews 13:8

³⁵ 1 John 3:2 – This implies that we do not *currently* “see him as he is;” but rather that a further future revelation of His might, glory, power and holiness will come at the time of the consummation of all things.

³⁶ Revelation 1:17

represent the Church, based on their declaration in Revelation 5:9³⁷) who, multiple times, “fall down” in worship!³⁸ Undeniably, when we “shall see him as he is,” we will fall on our faces before Him! Isaiah saw the LORD high and lifted up; and when he saw this powerful manifestation of God he immediately proclaimed “*Woe is me!*” He immediately understood his sinful condition before a holy God! Likewise, when we see Jesus as He ought to be seen, we will want to clean up *our* act; and when He washes us, we can say rightly with Isaiah, “*Here am I, send me.*”

Indeed there are many places in the old and new testaments where we can see a spontaneous—almost visceral—fearful reaction to the manifestation of God’s power and might and holiness³⁹; and it would serve us well to keep His power and might and holiness in mind—*cultivating* the fear of the Lord in our hearts and minds.

³⁷ Here the four and twenty elders worship the Lamb saying “*thou...hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*”

³⁸ Revelation 4:10; 5:8; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; and 19:4

³⁹ 1 Samuel 11:7, 2 Chronicles 14:4; 17:10; 20:29, Isaiah 2:19-21 in addition to those passages cited above.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD IN OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

As stated in the Introduction, the doctrine of the fear of the LORD was central to Old Testament and New Testament theology, and had a significant impact upon the actions and preaching of the Patriarchs and Prophets as well as upon the New Testament Church and their evangelistic efforts. In what we have covered so far, we can see that the doctrine of the fear of the LORD was central and vital in the lives of central biblical figures.

Yet we have really only scratched the surface, as there is a rich and vibrant thread of the doctrine and practice of the fear of the LORD that runs throughout the biblical narrative. From father of all living, Noah, who “*moved with fear*”⁴⁰ to the saving of both his house and, by it, the human race; to the patriarch Abraham falling upon his face, and to whom the LORD said, “*now I know that thou fearest God*”⁴¹; to the great leader Moses, who exceedingly feared and quaked upon Sinai⁴²; to the many admonitions in the law⁴³ and of prophets⁴⁴ and kings⁴⁵ to fear the LORD; to the admonitions of

⁴⁰ Hebrews 11:7

⁴¹ Genesis 22:12

⁴² Hebrews 12:21

⁴³ Exodus 18:21; Deut. 6:2; 13; 24; 8:6; 10:12; 20; 13:4; 14:23; 17:19; 31:13; Joshua 4:24; 24:14

⁴⁴ Nehemiah 5:15; 1 Samuel 12:14; 24; 2 Samuel 23:3; 2 Kings 17:28; Isaiah 2:10; 19:21; 11:2-3; 33:6; Jeremiah 5:20-31; Hosea 3:5; Jonah 1:9;

Jesus during His earthly ministry⁴⁶; to the Apostle Paul—who fell to the earth trembling at the voice of Jesus on his encounter on the road to Damascus,⁴⁷ and then walked in fear and trembling⁴⁸—and later admonished the Church, *many* times, to fear;⁴⁹ to Peter, who taught the church the fear of the Lord in word and in deed⁵⁰; to Jude who told us to “save with fear.”⁵¹ to the entirety of the early church walking in the fear of the Lord⁵²—we see the fear of the Lord being *prominent* in their thinking—and it affected their behavior. The fear of the Lord was *integral* to their faith; and their *faith* was *dependant upon* their fear of God.

The Fear of the Lord was Paramount to the Evangelistic Efforts of the Early Church

The Church of the living God started in its embryonic form during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. His disciples and soon-to-be Apostles heard His teaching, saw His miracles—some of them quaked as they witnessed His transfiguration. They were present when He fed the 5000, and shortly after

⁴⁵ 2 Chronicles 19:7-9; Psalm 15:4; 19:9; 22:23; 25:14; 27:1; 33:8; 18; 34:7-11; 36:1; 66:16; 85:9; 103:11;-13; 17; 111:10; 15; 115:11-13; 118:4; 135:20; 145:19; 147:11; Proverbs 1:7; 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:16; 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; Ecclesiastes 8:12; 12:13

⁴⁶ Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5

⁴⁷ Acts 9:4-6; 22:7-10; 26:14-16

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11

⁴⁹ Romans 11:20; 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5:21; 6:5, Philippians 2:12; 1 Timothy 5:20; Hebrews 4:1; 12:28

⁵⁰ Acts 2:43; 5:3-11;29; 1 Peter 2:17

⁵¹ Jude 1:23

⁵² Acts 9:31

“feared exceedingly” when He, by the Word of His mouth, calmed a great storm. They witnessed His crucifixion and were terrified and affrighted and prostrated themselves at His first appearing after the resurrection.⁵³ In all of this, they *learned* the fear of the Lord. It was to stay with them throughout their ministry and be pressed into those whom they influenced. As we shall see—the fear of the Lord can and should be *taught*—and they *did* teach it!

Peter taught the fear of the Lord in His preaching—being plain about the judgment of God. The clear message of the love of God did not diminish the plainness of his speech—and, fearing God more than men, he preached a message that angered “*them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,*”⁵⁴ and decided it was better to “*obey God rather than men.*”⁵⁵—even when it meant beatings, imprisonment and death! Peter was unafraid to follow the Holy Ghost in the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira; and the result was that “*great fear came on all the church, and on as many as heard*” of the judgment being poured out. The result was an apparent increase in faith and miracles and the ministry being magnified.⁵⁶ The fear, the terror, of the Lord was good for the church! It was instrumental in the rapid growth of the church! And that same element is largely missing from

⁵³ Matthew 28:9 Analytical Literal Translation; Luke 24:37

⁵⁴ Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4

⁵⁵ Acts 5:29

⁵⁶ Acts 5:3-16

the Apostolic church today! This is not to say that we do not have any semblance of the fear of the Lord, but it is clear that we have too little!

Strimple stated,

“Sometimes it seems—incredible though this is going to sound—that having no fear of God is the root sin of the evangelical church in America today, the root cause of its moral flabbiness and ineffective witness! Although it is too strong to say that there is no fear of God, it does seem that there is too often very little fear of God.”⁵⁷

How could a conservative Apostolic minister not concur that this is likewise the case in the Apostolic movement where, for many, there is an “*ends justify the means*” focus on church growth; where entertainment dominates the focus of many youth groups and organizational youth events; where sermons are garnered from internet sites instead of in earnest prayer and study; where sheep-stealing has seemingly become far too commonplace; where some preachers think little of telling a lie if it will further their purposes; and where, in ever widening circles, principles of ministerial ethics are too often regarded as passé? I do not mean to paint the entire Apostolic movement with a broad brush—yet to say that these things

⁵⁷ http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH01/03a.html

are occurring in our movement with greater frequency is clearly a justifiable consideration to the observant. These are symptoms of a serious lacking of a genuine and healthy fear of God in our midst.

The first century church was not perfect—and not every saint of God developed and maintained a fear of God—but the leadership within the church (and I do not speak of elected leaders here) led in the fear of God, walked in the fear of God, taught the fear of God and witnessed in the fear of God! Paul said, “*Knowing therefore the **terror** of the Lord, we persuade men!*”⁵⁸ What drove a man like Paul to sing and pray his way through to a revival at the Philippian jail, to face stoning, and shipwreck, and perils of every sort for the sake of the gospel? **Paul himself said, it was “*knowing therefore the terror of the Lord!*”** The context of the preceding two verses tells us that he had in mind, when saying this, the judgment seat of Christ and the fact that he must give an account of the things that he had done in his body—and that he wished to be accepted of Him who had called him.⁵⁹

Do we know “the terror of the Lord” as Paul did? This is, again, much more than “respect” or “reverence!” I agree with Lawrence Eyres who gave the following account:

⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:11

⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

“More than forty-five years ago I preached a sermon on the fear of God. At the close of the service, I chatted with a one-time visitor. He liked the sermon, he said, but ‘respect would be a better word than fear.’ Of course, I defended my word. We parted amicably, but it made me think: respect is appropriate between equals. I have a neighbor who is an ardent Roman Catholic. I disagree with him. Still I respect him. We remain good neighbors. But I fear God: I dare not disagree with him. Those who do not fear God do not know him.”⁶⁰

Paul feared the Lord; and that fear *compelled* him to persuade men! I have heard often that the love of God is a better motivator than fear; that while fear may be useful in bringing someone to an altar of repentance it is the love of God that keeps us coming back. I disagree with that premise—both on a biblical basis and on a practical, experiential basis! As for evangelism—it was *fear* that motivated Paul to persuade men with the gospel! Consider the preaching of the Apostles and other New Testament preachers to the lost. Invariably, in preaching the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ—they preached about the sins

⁶⁰ http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=225

that their hearers needed to repent of if they were to be accepted of Him. They preached the judgment and justice of a holy God!⁶¹

If we are to be what our Lord called us to be we will need to have the fear of the Lord more central in our theology, and teaching, and preaching and practice! We will need to cultivate the fear of the Lord in our midst—and it will take *diligence*!

CULTIVATING THE FEAR OF THE LORD

While there were many times in the Scriptures where we see events, miracles, visions, visitations displays of God's power that appear to induce the fear of the Lord spontaneously in the lives of those who experience those things—it seems that those events are few and far between—and that most of us will need to cultivate—to seek after—the fear of the Lord in our lives.

We have already mentioned several places in scripture where fire fell from heaven, or a man of God had a vision, or the power of the LORD filled the house—and those present quaked and trembled and prostrated themselves upon the ground in fear. Still, some of those men sinned or doubted or denied the Lord after those events! They still had a need to *learn*, to *gain*, to *preserve* the fear of the Lord. So,

⁶¹ Acts 2:23-38; 40; 3:14-23; 4:11-12; 5:29-33; 7:51-53; 8:20-23; et. al.

how does one go about “getting” the fear of the Lord? Once it is “gotten” how will it be kept? I believe that it will take, first and foremost, the ministry *cultivating* the fear of the Lord in the Church.

What do I mean by cultivating? I mean to facilitate the fear of the Lord in ourselves and in those that we influence and lead through reading and meditating on the Word—without the neglect or diminishing of those verses that speak of the fear, the terror, the terribleness, the judgment of the Lord; through renewed preaching and teaching on the holiness and judgment and justice of God; through the exercise of biblical church discipline as it is appropriate; through the promotion of the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit in our churches; through a commitment to an unfettered pulpit in our churches and meetings and conferences.

Balance is needed in our preaching. We are to “preach the word;” and that, not selectively. I believe in preaching of grace, and mercy, and love, and faith and of heaven and of pleasing God. But a question should come to mind right now: How often do we hear—or a better question would be—how often do we *preach* an old-fashioned hell-fire and brimstone message? Where in our preaching is eternal judgment, the wrath of God, the judgment seat of Christ, or a place

where “*their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?*”⁶² The preaching of the soon-coming of the Lord for a holy church has likewise been largely absent in modern Apostolic preaching. Balanced preaching produces a vibrant, God-fearing church—but it seems that this part of the balance has been lacking—and it needs to be restored!

The Fear of the Lord Must Be Taught

Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. – Psalms 34:11

The fear of the Lord is to be taught—and it is taught through directed experience and through the teaching of the Word of God.

Consider this from the prelude to the great Shema:

*Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: **That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his***

⁶² Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:44 – The context in Mark’s gospel contains the clear teaching of Jesus of conditions that would be preferred to eternal judgment and that death itself would be better than the judgment: And whosoever shall offend one of *these* little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (Mark 9:42-48)

*statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou,
and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life;*⁶³

Keil & Delitzsch Commentary (K&D) says of this passage, “*The reason for communicating the law was to awaken the fear of God (cf. Deu_4:10; Deu_5:26), and, in fact, such fear of Jehovah as would show itself at all times in the observance of every commandment. ‘Thou and thy son:’ this forms the subject to ‘thou mightest fear,’ and is placed at the end for the sake of emphasis.*”⁶⁴ K&D goes on to say of the following verse that “[t]he maintenance of the fear of God would bring prosperity, and the increase of the nation promised to the fathers.”

In Deuteronomy 4:10 Moses recalls to the people of Israel, “*when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.*”

The Lord wanted Israel to teach the law to their children during every waking moment, either by word, or by example, or by some visual reminder—keeping it always before their face—Why? That they might learn to fear Him! He knew that they would not keep the law, if they did not fear Him—and the keeping of the law was for their benefit! They were

⁶³ Deuteronomy 6:1-2

⁶⁴ Johann (C.F.) Keil & Franz Delitzsch, Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, e-sword Edition v. 7.9.8., Deuteronomy 6:2 commentary

commanded “*to have these things in [their] heart*”—and then to talk of them “*when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*”⁶⁵

The teaching was so that they would fear the LORD—and fearing the Lord was for their own benefit!

And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. – Deuteronomy 6:24

Many other Old Testament passages demonstrate to us the principle that the fear of the LORD is to be *taught* (Deuteronomy 14:23; 17:19; 31:12-13; Joshua 4:24, et. al.), and that it is not innate! The New Testament is not silent on the matter as well; for in the teaching ministry of the Apostles they used epistles—many of them circulated through the churches—and they taught the church through this medium to fear the Lord. Paul admonished the church through his epistles to “*work out your own salvation with fear*

⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 6:7-9

*and trembling;*⁶⁶ to “*let us therefore fear;*”⁶⁷ for the church to “*cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;*”⁶⁸ for Timothy to “*rebuke before all,*” an elder who had been shown to be guilty of sin “*that others may also fear.*”⁶⁹

Yet it must be understood that it is not enough that the fear of the Lord be taught—it must also be *caught!* While “*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,*” and while it is also “*the beginning of knowledge*” it remains an unfortunate truth that there are still fools who “*despise wisdom and instruction.*” There will be the disobedient who will trip over the “stone of stumbling,” the “rock of offense,” being offended at the very word given that they might fear the Lord.⁷⁰

You Must “Choose” the Fear of the Lord

It is evident that, if someone can reject the Word of the Lord and stumble ahead in their disobedience, that there is a matter of *the will* involved. When the Word is taught—when the fear of the Lord is both taught and instilled through preaching and the continued manifestation of the power of God in our services—and yet is still resisted by some—it is a matter of the will. It has been said that the same sun that softens butter also

⁶⁶ Philippians 2:12

⁶⁷ Hebrews 4:1

⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 7:1

⁶⁹ 1 Timothy 5:20

⁷⁰ 1 Peter 2:8

hardens clay—and a man or woman who resists the overtures of the Lord is exercising their will to harden their own hearts. They are *choosing not* to fear the Lord.

Please consider this harsh rebuke through the mouth of the weeping prophet:

Jeremiah 5:20-31

(20) Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying,

(21) Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:

(22) **Fear ye not me?** saith the LORD: **will ye not tremble at my presence**, which have placed the sand *for* the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?

(23) But **this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart**; they are revolted and gone.

(24) **Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God**, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

(25) Your iniquities have turned away these *things*, and your sins have withholden good *things* from you.

(26) For among my people are found wicked *men*: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.

(27) As a cage is full of birds, so *are* their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.

(28) They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

(29) Shall I not visit for these *things*? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

(30) A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land;

(31) The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it* so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

This is the story of a people—a whole people!—who have not chosen the fear of the Lord. They are as the people who exercised their will and refused to hear wisdom's voice:

Proverbs 1:24-29

(24) Because I have called, and ye **refused**; I have stretched out my hand, and **no man regarded**;

(25) But ye have **set at nought** all my counsel, and **would** none of my reproof:

- (26) I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;
- (27) When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.
- (28) Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:
- (29) For that they hated knowledge, **and did not choose the fear of the LORD:**

It is **our choice** as to whether we will fear the Lord or not. One Jewish Rabbi said, *“Physical characteristics and even personality traits are all directed from above, but whether a person will be God-fearing is not dependent on the Almighty; we bear the sole responsibility for whether we have yirat shamayim.”*⁷¹ The LORD said, *“What doth the LORD require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”*⁷² It is part of *“the whole duty of man.”*⁷³

⁷¹ Rabbi Levi Cooper, World of Our Sages: The Fear of God in Our Hands, September 5, 2007 (Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies), http://www.pardes.org.il/online_learning/weekly-talmud/2007-09-05.php

⁷² Deuteronomy 10:12

⁷³ Ecclesiastes 12:13

CONCLUSION

Pastors! Preachers! First—*we* must be the ones who **choose** to fear the Lord! We must, as the Lord told Israel, “*have these things in [our] heart!*” And then we must teach them to others! The fear of the Lord was central to the lives and teaching of God’s chosen people through the ages and it must reign as central in our day as well! It is what moved Paul to travel the world at great peril, “*knowing therefore the terror of the Lord!*” We can no longer afford for the doctrine of the fear of the Lord to be relegated to a side issue, or be reduced to the level of mere reverence! We cannot afford to dilute or soft-peddle the judgment and justice of God! We need the balanced preaching and teaching and example that says, “*behold the goodness and severity of God!*” It is for the cause of a serious lack of a genuine fear of the Lord that so many Apostolic youth are backsliding, that too many of our churches are succumbing to the damnable emerging church philosophies! We must bring back preaching and teaching on heaven and hell—on mercy and judgment! We must sing songs again that teach of the altar, and of repentance, and of doctrine. We must *cultivate* the fear of the Lord in our churches and in our meetings! Each minister should take serious time for biblical self-examination and introspection and, where needed, repent over sloppy interrelation among the ministry and saints and cultivate ethical and

godly behavior. We must “*build the old waste places: and raise up the foundations of many generations; and...be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.*”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Isaiah 58:12