

“The Fear of the Lord, Part 1”
(Proverbs 1:1-7)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

What kind of a man or woman,

Young man or young lady,

Or child do you need to be

To please the Lord?

When He searches the earth,

What is He looking for?

What is He looking for in you?

Is it enough that you're trusting Jesus?

It's true that you're saved by grace through faith alone,

And not by your works,

But does that mean your works aren't important?

They are the necessary evidence that you're saved,

But is that all they are?

They are also the measure of your love for Him.

The more you love Him,

The more you will want to be like Him,

The more you will want to serve Him,

And so the more you will catch His eye.

Some believers are more useful to Him than others.

A quick look at the Bible is enough to show you

That the Lord was able to use some more than others.

A look at church history tells you the same;

As well as what we see in the world today.

It's true that some of this usefulness

Has to do with the Lord's gifts and calling.

If He's intending to use you more,

He gives you greater gifts to begin with,

As well as opportunities.

But it's also true that a great deal of your usefulness

Comes from the effort you put

Into growing into the image of Jesus Christ.

The more you grow in your love and devotion to the Lord,

The more you cultivate love for your neighbor,

The more you hate this world

And turn from it to seek the glories above,

The more you learn and apply His truth,

And the more you believe what He says

And act on His Word,

The more useful you will be to Him

And so the more pleasing.

Is it important to be pleasing/useful to Him?

This is why He made you.

Why He sent His Son to suffer and die for you.

This is what He calls you to do –

The path He calls you to walk on.

If you would rather please yourself

And use your gifts to benefit yourself,

You've stepped off that path

And you know by now from Pilgrim's Progress

What happens when you step off that path.

If you love Him,

This is what you will want to do.

Maybe this sounds boring to some of you –

It's not enough of an adrenaline rush.

But it is the greatest adventure.

The greatest heroes

Who have done the greatest things in history,

Are those who have followed the Lord

With all their heart.

He is willing to take you

As far as you're willing to go for Him.

B. Preview.

This morning, then, let's consider another characteristic

The Lord is looking for in you:

He wants you to fear Him –

To tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:2).

The fear of the Lord is something

That has been largely lost in our day or misunderstood.

So we're going to look at it this morning.

This evening,

We'll consider how this fear

Will affect the way you live.

II. Sermon.

A. So first, what does it mean to fear the Lord?

It's important to know especially in light of what Solomon tells us:

It's where true knowledge and wisdom begin.

What kind of wisdom are we talking about here?

Not the wisdom of the world –

Not the road to material wealth –

Although the Lord tells us

He does bless those who obey Him materially –

Nor is it a map on how to gain the honors of this world –

Although the Lord sometimes
Does give glory to those who humbly serve Him
Even in this world.

He's talking about the kind of wisdom you need
To please God, to be useful to Him.
If that's what you want,
Then listen to what he says.

To whom is he speaking?
To everyone that needs this wisdom!
First, to the naïve – those who are still young and inexperienced with life.

He wrote this mainly for his own children
That they might inherit God's blessing –
That it might be well with them,
And they that might live long on the earth (Eph. 6:3).

Since he was king,
And kings are to be fathers to their subjects,
He also wrote this to the church of his day.

But again, since this is the inspired Word of God,
And God, our Father, has recorded this for His children,
He wrote this for us as well.

But in case you think you've outgrown this book,

Because you're no longer a youth,

Realize you never will:

He also writes, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel" (v. 5).

So what is the first lesson we need to learn

In how to please God?

He writes, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

What is the fear of the Lord?

It can mean different things in different contexts.

If you don't yet know the Lord,

Then the kind of fear that will put your feet on the path of wisdom

Is the same kind that Pilgrim had when he lived

In the City of Destruction – the fear of God's judgment.

There's a reason why the Lord

Sent John to preach the Law/repentance

Before He sent His Son to preach the Gospel;

Why He has His ministers –

And all who bear witness to the Gospel –

Share first what He requires in His Law,

Before they offer the Gospel;

Why He sends His Spirit into the world

To convict it regarding sin,

Righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

People need to know *why* they need a Savior

Before they will ever reach out to the Savior.

There must be a reason for people to turn

Before they will ever do so.

Can that reason be the love of God,

Or love for Jesus Christ,

Or a desire for the things above?

Why can't you just share what Jesus has done?

Why isn't that enough?

It is for those who are already converted.

The problem is that unbelievers don't desire spiritual things –

They are foolishness to them (1 Cor. 2:14).

It's not going to give them the proper motivation.

What will?

The fact that they're on their way to judgment,

That they will face God's wrath,

That they will suffer in hell for eternity.

The Spirit uses the Law

To strike fear in the hearts of the unbelieving

That they might seek the Lord and live.

For them, this is the fear

That leads to God's wisdom.

Does this have any application to the church today?

Yes, because not everyone in the church is saved.

Now it's true that everyone in the New Covenant is saved,

But not everyone in the visible church

Is necessarily a part of the New Covenant.

That's why there are very real warnings in Scripture

To the churches – to the visible saints –

To strike fear into their hearts –

That they might come to Christ.

We have one of the clearest examples in Hebrews 10,

Where the author writes, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has

insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.’ And again, ‘THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (vv. 23-31).

The author didn’t write this merely to terrorize them,
 But to motivate those who were tempted
 To go back to the Old Covenant system to save their lives,
 To cling to Christ for their salvation.

It’s application to those outside the church is clear.

B. But it has another use in the church:

He also uses these warnings

To keep/guard those who are His true to the faith:

It’s one of the ways He keeps our feet on the path of righteousness.

This is the second sense

In which we should understand the fear of the Lord.

There are at least two elements to this kind of fear.

The first we might call a filial fear –

That which we owe to Him as His sons and daughters.

It’s the same kind of fear –

Though on a much smaller scale –

That we felt towards our parents –

At least if our parents cared enough about us

To discipline us.

Many parents today
Tend to use only positive reinforcement
When disciplining their children –
You do what's right,
You get a reward.
We should use this, of course –
At times it can be very helpful.

But the Lord tells us
We should also use negative reinforcement –
You do what's wrong,
You get disciplined.

“He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13:24).

The fear of discipline –
Not punishment,
But corrective discipline –
Can be a powerful motivator.

The Lord uses positive reinforcement on us –
He shows us a great deal of love,
And He has given us many promises
Of blessings for obedience
To move us to obey.

But He also uses negative reinforcement –

He disciplines us

So that we will fear Him,

As further motivation to obey Him.

The author to the Hebrews writes, “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness” (12:9-10).

This is one element of this fear –

Fear of being chastened by Him –

But there is another.

God is no mere earthly father:

The kind of fear He should evoke in our hearts

Should be as much greater as He is than man.

As God, you owe Him fear.

In this context, we call it reverence.

The old Webster’s Dictionary defines the fear of the Lord

As applied to God, in this way, “The fear acceptable to God, is a filial fear, an awful reverence of the divine nature, proceeding from a just esteem of his perfections, which produces in us an inclination to his service and an unwillingness to offend him.”

Notice, it is a filial fear –

The fear a child has for a parent –

But also an awful reverence of the divine nature,
That rises from a proper understanding
Of who and what He is.

Who is God?

He's not the genie in a bottle
That many make Him out to be;
Or the One who doesn't care what we do
As long as we believe in His Son.

He is the infinitely holy and righteous God,
Who cannot overlook sin,
But must justly punish every transgression of His holy will.

He is the One with infinite power, knowledge and presence,
Who not only knows what we've done
But has the power justly to deal with us for these things.

The fact that both of these things are true –

That He is a faithful Father,

And that He is the Holy God –

Should produce the desired result in us:

Fear that leads to obedience:

As Webster puts it: “An inclination to his service and an unwillingness to offend
him.”

Is it any wonder Solomon tells us

That this is the starting point of knowledge/wisdom?

The Lord will draw you in the right direction with His infinite love,

But He will also push you in the same direction

With the fear of what He may do to you

If you stubbornly refuse to walk in His ways.

Let's close with the example we read earlier.

Remember, it was written to the church

And so is addressed to you –

It is a warning of what could happen to you, but for His grace,

Unless you fear Him and turn from your sins:

“Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD. They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil” (Prov. 1:24-33).

Fear the Lord!

Turn from your sins!

Trust in His Son!

And follow Him!

This is the kind of person

The Lord is looking to use.

This evening,

We'll consider further how this fear

Will motivate us to go the right way.

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