

FEAR GOD – LOVE GOD

We know that, in life, it is important not to be foolhardy; rather to have wisdom and, with regard to wisdom, we have read that to begin to be wise we must fear the Lord and that understanding results from the knowledge of God:

Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. [NASB]*

We have to remember that fear of God must be fear, not just some respectful reverence for a fatherly figure: this is unproductive. If we characterize the “fear of God” as “reverential awe,” — as one might have for a dignitary or a powerful politician (perhaps a very powerful one) — or as the feeling one might have for an oversized and gentle Santa Claus, we have not experienced the “fear of God.”

The Hebrew term in **Proverbs 9:10**, “yir’ah” is much stronger: for example, we find it — as “yare” — in **Psalms 23:4** [“I will fear no evil”]. Evil is not something for which one normally holds “respectful reverence.” Rather we are scared to death of evil.

There is nothing wrong with fearing the Lord. In fact, He is the only one we should fear, as Jesus told us:

Matthew 10:28 *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” [NRSV]*

The fear of God must be such a fear that, when matched with the recognition of God’s kindness and tolerance and patience, leads to repentance. This is summarized by Paul, who, in the letter to the Romans, after having warned them against:

Romans 1:29–31 *Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. [KJV]*

continued and wrote this:

Romans 2:3–6 *But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the*

day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to each person according to his deeds: [NASB]

So we see here how it is that: **1]** the fear of the judgment of God joined to **2]** the revelation of His kindness leads us **3]** to repentance.

When we have repented, we shall be reconciled and refreshed by the presence of the Lord (as Peter taught in Solomon’s Colonnade):

Acts 3:19 *“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” [NASB]*

At this point, we let His love cast out fear:

1 John 4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. [ESV]*

Thus, fear of the Lord is the beginning: there is no other beginning.

However, fear is only the beginning, an excellent beginning; but fear must lead to repentance and then to the next step, which is recognition of the great love and care of the Lord. If one abides in the fear, one does not progress.

Most important: “whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” That is our aim: to be perfected in love.

Such love is an all-encompassing love that casts out all fear. We must not take such love for sinners, as we are, lightly, because it is made possible only by the extraordinary suffering of Christ on the Cross.

Therefore, it is not only unproductive, but thoroughly blasphemous to retain fear: it makes the Cross of no effect.

After repentance and reconciliation, how do we learn to love God? Let us continue reading what follows the last verse above:

1 John 4:19 *We love him, because he loved us first. [GNV]*

Thus, the starting point is to recognize that He loved us first. “because”: the cause of our loving Him is that He loved us, before we would love Him.

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by*

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [NIV]

The fundamental expression of the love of Jesus is the Cross: it is only owing to the Cross that we have been reconciled to God and that our sins have been taken away.

1 Timothy 2:5 *For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity — the man Christ Jesus. [NLT]*

We are assured that our knowing the Lord Jesus Christ is not a happenstance; it is not a whim of ours that may change, rather it is God's own will:

John 15:16 *"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." [NRSV]*

The first step is that God loved us, lost sinners as we were; the second step is to realize that, if God's love for us was so great that He sacrificed His Son on the Cross in order to rescue us, how much more will He do for us, now that we are reconciled to Him:

Romans 8:32, 34–35, 38–39 *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [NASB]*

Indeed, we must remember that we shall have tribulations and suffer persecution for the Lord's sake, but His love will cause us to succeed:

Romans 8:36–37 *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [NRSV]*

We are further assured of the strength of God's love by the words of Jesus to the disciples, at the time of the Last Supper:

John 15:9a *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you ..." [NRSV]*

We know that the love of the Father for His Son was the greatest; in the same way does Jesus love us: His love for us is no less than the love the Father had for Him.

Third and final point, we must note how Jesus continued:

John 15:9b *"... Now remain in my love." [EXB]*

This is our job; to remain in His love it is our responsibility. His job is to love us as the Father loved Him. Our job is to remain in His love: it is not His responsibility.

So, we may ask: how might we "remain in His love"? This can be accomplished by simply obeying His commandments.

John 15:10, 12 *"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 12 My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you." [GNT]*

And how is such love shown?

John 15:13 *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." [NASB]*

The Lord is telling us here that the expression of the love that He commands us to have is the denial of our own (interests, possessions, pleasures, even of life, if needed) in exchange for His own.

John 12:24–25 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." [NASB]*

In sum, genuine fear of God is critical because it leads us sinners to repent and to receive salvation, reconciliation and eternal life thanks to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

Then love for the Lord is the essential foundation of our ability to obey Him and do His commands. And the reason that Jesus told us all this is that we may share in the joy that He had:

John 15:11 *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." [GNT]*

A new world is opened up for us.