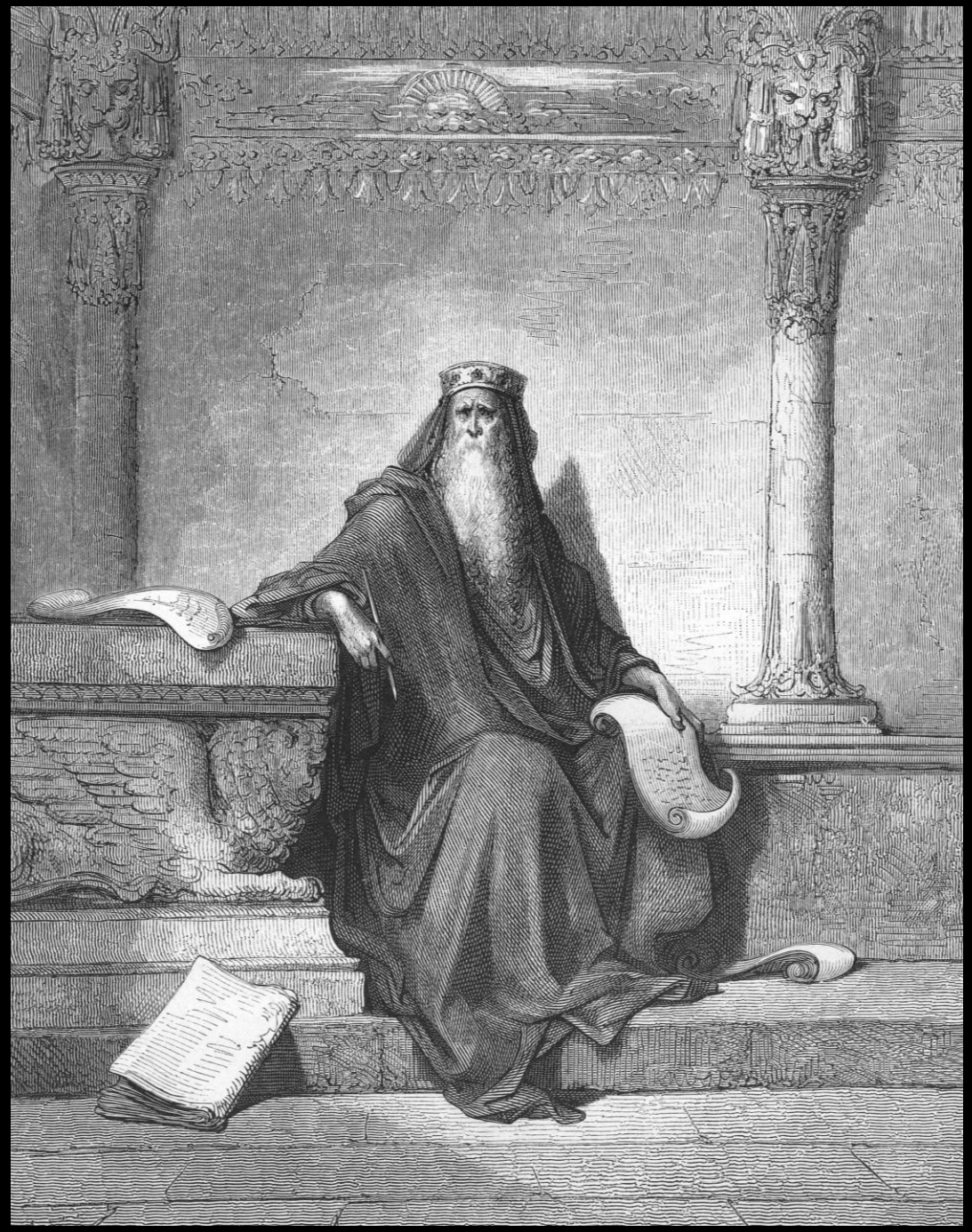


Words to the Wise:
A Topical Study of the Book of Proverbs

Fearing God

“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: } I. Author (1:1)

To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of
understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior,
righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the
naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion—a wise man
will hear and increase in learning, and a man of
understanding will acquire wise counsel—to understand a
proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. } II. Purpose (1:2–6)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.” } III. Motto (1:7)

—Proverbs 1:1–7

The Fear of the LORD:
The Interpretive Key



"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

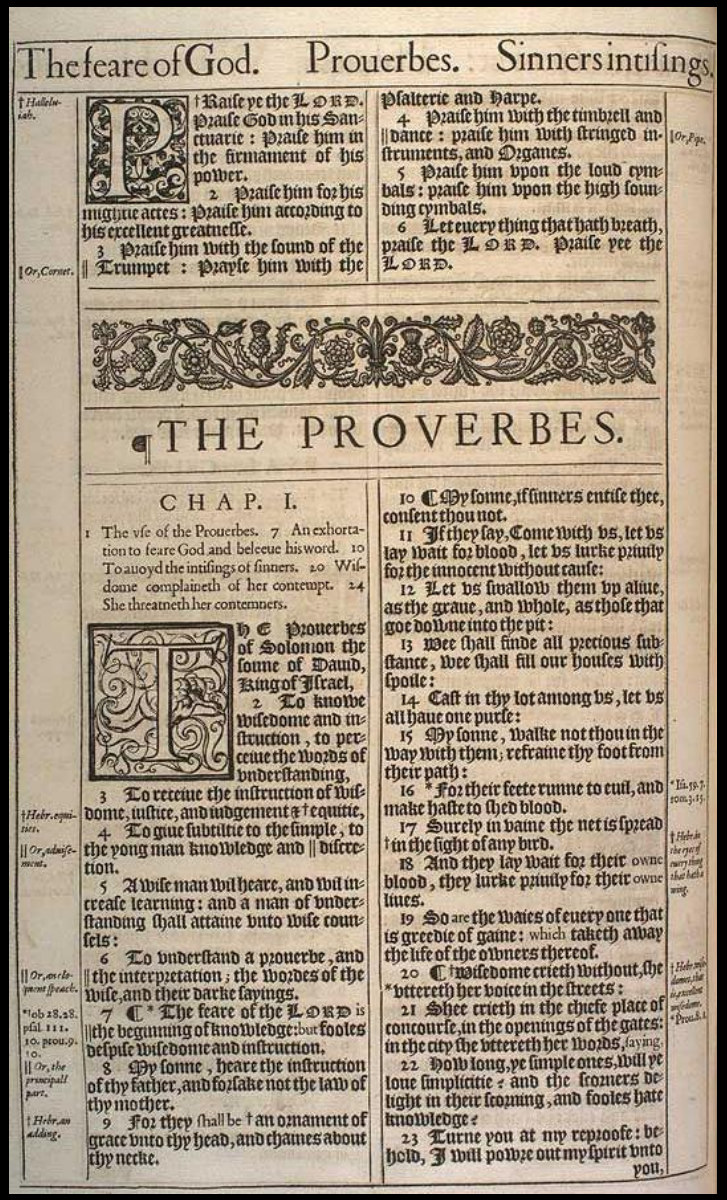
"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised."

What is the "fear of the LORD"?
Some Starting Definitions

"It is that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father's law." —Charles Bridges

"That filial relationship which, in the most positive of senses, puts us securely in our place, and God in His." —Derek Kidner

"The fear of God in which godliness consists is the fear which constrains adoration and love. It is the fear which consists in awe, reverence, honor, and worship, and all of these on the highest level of exercise."
—John Murray



The feare of God. Prouerbes. Sinners intisings.

† Hallelu-iah.

† Raise ye the LORD. Praise God in his Sanctuarie: praise him in the firmament of his power.

2 Praise him for his mightie actes: praise him according to his excellent greatnesse.

3 Praise him with the sound of the || Or, Cornet. Trumpet: prayse him with the Psalterie and Harpe.

4 Praise him with the timbrell and || Or, Pipe. dance: praise him with stringed instruments, and Organes.

5 Praise him vpon the loud cymbals: praise him vpon the high sounding cymbals.

6 Let euery thing that hath breath, praise the LORD. Praise yee the LORD.

¶THE PROVERBES.

CHAP. I.

1 The vse of the Prouerbes. 7 An exhortation to feare God and beleeue his word. 10 To auoyd the intisings of sinners. 20 Wisdome complaineth of her contempt. 24 She threatneth her contemners.

THE Prouerbes of Solomon the sonne of Dauid, King of Israel,

2 To knowe wisedome and instruction, to perceiue the words of vnderstanding,

3 To receiue the instruction of wisdome, iustice, and iudgement & † equitie,

4 To giue subtiltie to the simple, to the yong man knowledge and || discretion.

5 A wise man wil heare, and wil increase learning: and a man of vnderstanding shall attaine vnto wise counsels:

† Hebr. equities. || Or, aduisement.

6 To vnderstand a prouerbe, and || the interpretation; the wordes of the wise, and their darke sayings.

7 ¶ * The feare of the LORD is || the beginning of knowledge: but fooles despise wisedome and instruction.

|| Or, are ignorant of. * Iob 28.28. psal. 111. 10. prou. 9. 10. || Or, the principall part.

8 My sonne, heare the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.

9 For they shall be † an ornament of grace vnto thy head, and chaines about thy necke. † Hebr. an adding.

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11 If they say, Come with vs, let vs lay wait for blood, let vs lurke priuily for the innocent without cause:

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13 Wee shall finde all precious substance, wee shall fill our houses with spoile:

14 Cast in thy lot among vs, let vs all haue one purse:

15 My sonne, walke not thou in the way with them, refraine thy foot from their path:

16 * For their feete runne to euil, and make haste to shed blood. * Isa. 59. 7. rom. 3. 15.

17 Surely in vaine the net is spread † in the sight of any bird. † Hebr. in the eyes of euery thing that hath a wing.

18 And they lay wait for their owne blood, they lurke priuily for their owne liues.

19 So are the waies of euery one that is greedie of gaine: which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

20 ¶ † Wisedome crieth without, she * vttereth her voice in the streets: † Hebr. wisedomes, that is, excellent wisedome. * Prou. 8. 1.

21 Shee crieth in the chiefe place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the citie she vttereth her words, saying,

22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye loue simplicitie? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fooles hate knowledge?

23 Turne you at my reproofe: behold, I will powre out my spirit vnto you,

Five Characteristics of the fear of the LORD from the book of Proverbs

I. It Is the Foundation for All True Knowledge

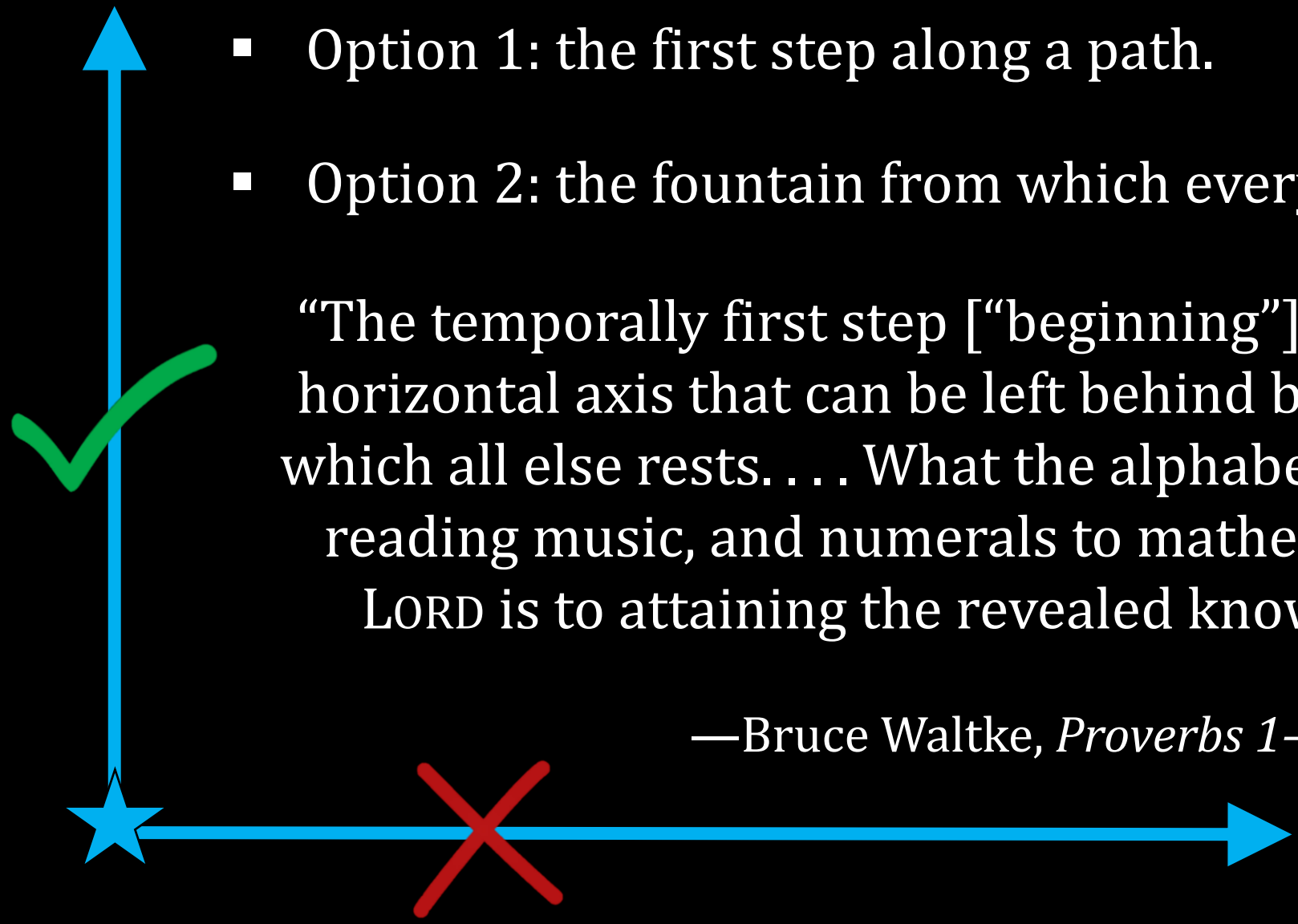
- The modern man believes that knowledge is purely *scientific*—independent from God and knowable apart from him.

- The postmodern believes that knowledge is purely *personal*—determined by and belonging to oneself.

- Fundamental to Proverbs is the recognition that real knowledge is inherently *theological*—it originates in and is possible because of God alone.

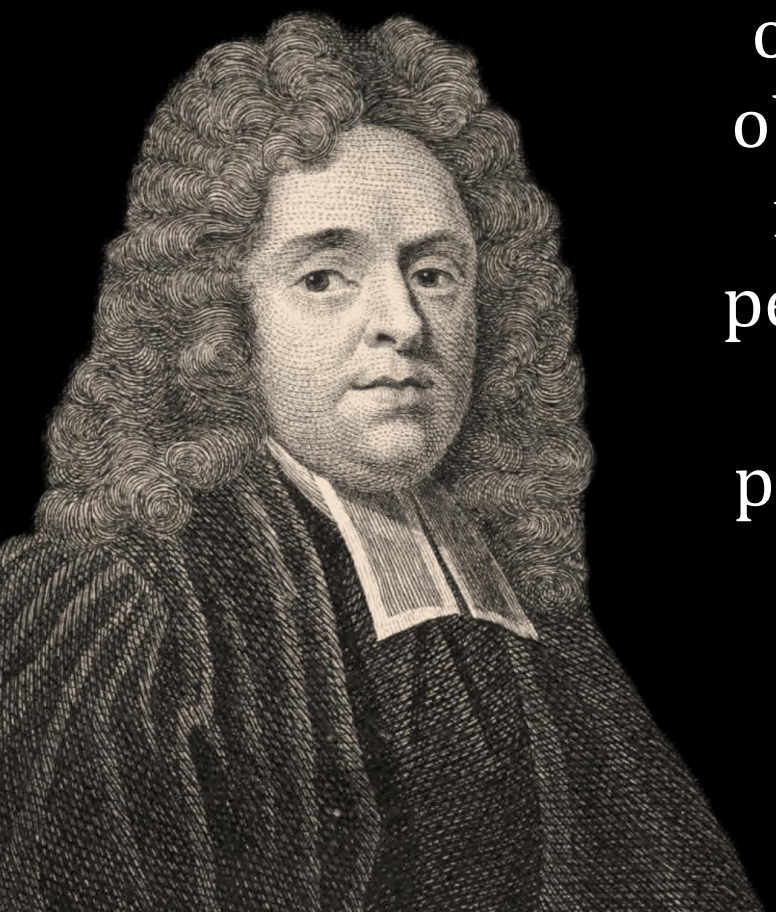
- **Proverbs 1:7 –** "The fear of the LORD is <u>the beginning of knowledge</u>; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

- How are we to understand “beginning”?
  - Option 1: the first step along a path.
  - Option 2: the fountain from which everything arises.



“The temporally first step [“beginning”] in this case is not on a horizontal axis that can be left behind but on a vertical axis on which all else rests. . . . What the alphabet is to reading, notes to reading music, and numerals to mathematics, the fear of the LORD is to attaining the revealed knowledge of this book.”

—Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 181



"In order to the attaining of all useful knowledge this is most necessary: **that we fear God**. We are not qualified to profit by the instructions that are given us unless our minds be possessed with a holy reverence of God, and every thought within us be brought into obedience to Him. . . . As all our knowledge must take rise from the fear of God, so it must tend to it as its perfection and center. Those know enough who know how to fear God, who are careful in everything to please Him and fearful of offending Him in any thing; this is the Alpha and Omega of knowledge."

—Matthew Henry (1662–1714)

- **Proverbs 9:10 –** “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”
- **Proverbs 15:33 –** “The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor *comes* humility.”
- **Job 28:28 –** “‘Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom . . . .”
- **Psalm 111:10a –** “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”



Application

- Wisdom to live life successfully will only come from a reverent and teachable submission to God as He has revealed Himself in the created order and His Word.

- We must tenaciously reject the temptation to think of knowledge as something independent of God, or as something determined by self.

- “Knowledge starts with God, and then it moves toward us. He must reveal it by grace, and we must receive it in humility” (Raymond Ortlund, *Proverbs*, 32).

II. It Is the Opposite of Pride and Self-Sufficiency

- Genuine fear of the Lord cannot co-exist with autonomy.

- **Proverbs 3:5–7 –** "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil."

"trust in the LORD"
"acknowledge Him"
"fear the LORD"

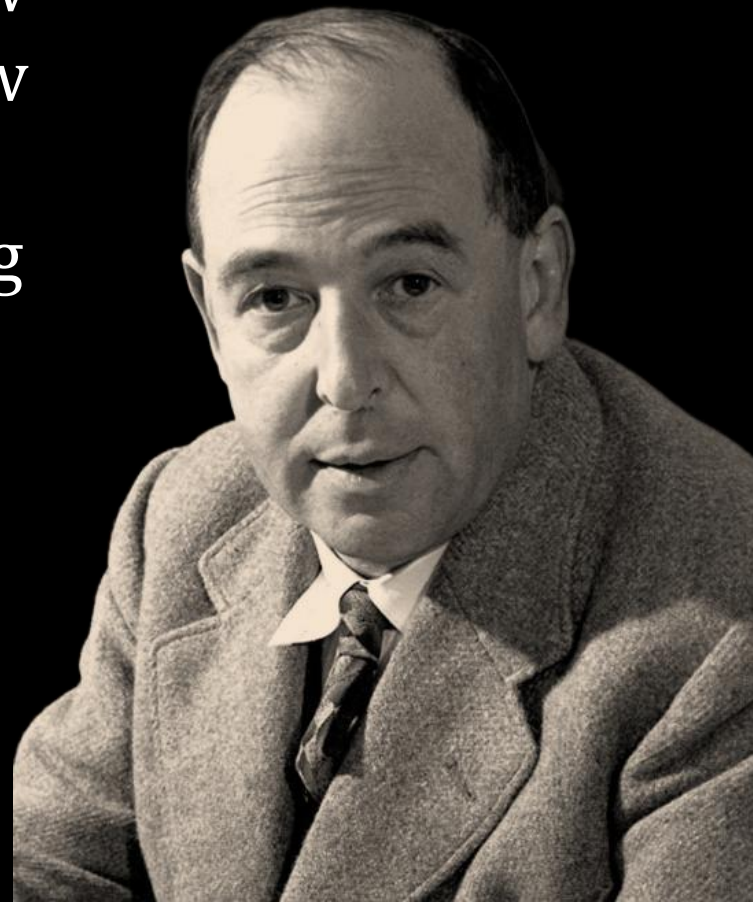


"your own understanding"
"wise in your own eyes"

- **Proverbs 12:15 –** “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes . . . .”
- **Proverbs 26:12 –** “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”
- **Judges 17:6 // 21:25 –** “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”
- **Psalm 36:1–2 (Rom 3:18) –** “Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. For it flatters him in his *own* eyes concerning the discovery of his iniquity *and* the hatred *of it.*”

“In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 96





APPLICATION

- Wisdom to live life successfully will only come when we recognize that “our own understanding” is not the secret to success but the guarantee of failure.

- The fear of the LORD requires us to treat our natural intuition, feelings, logic, and opinions as one of the greatest threats to wisdom that we will ever encounter.

- “The worst sort of clever men are those who know better than the Bible” (Charles Spurgeon).

III. It Reflects the Moral Character of God

- Those who possesses “that affection reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law” inevitably begin to reflect His moral character.

- They will begin to *hate* the things *God hates*.

- **Proverbs 3:7 –** “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.”

- **Proverbs 8:13 –** “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.”

- **Proverbs 16:6 –** "By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil."

- **Proverbs 23:17 –** "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always."

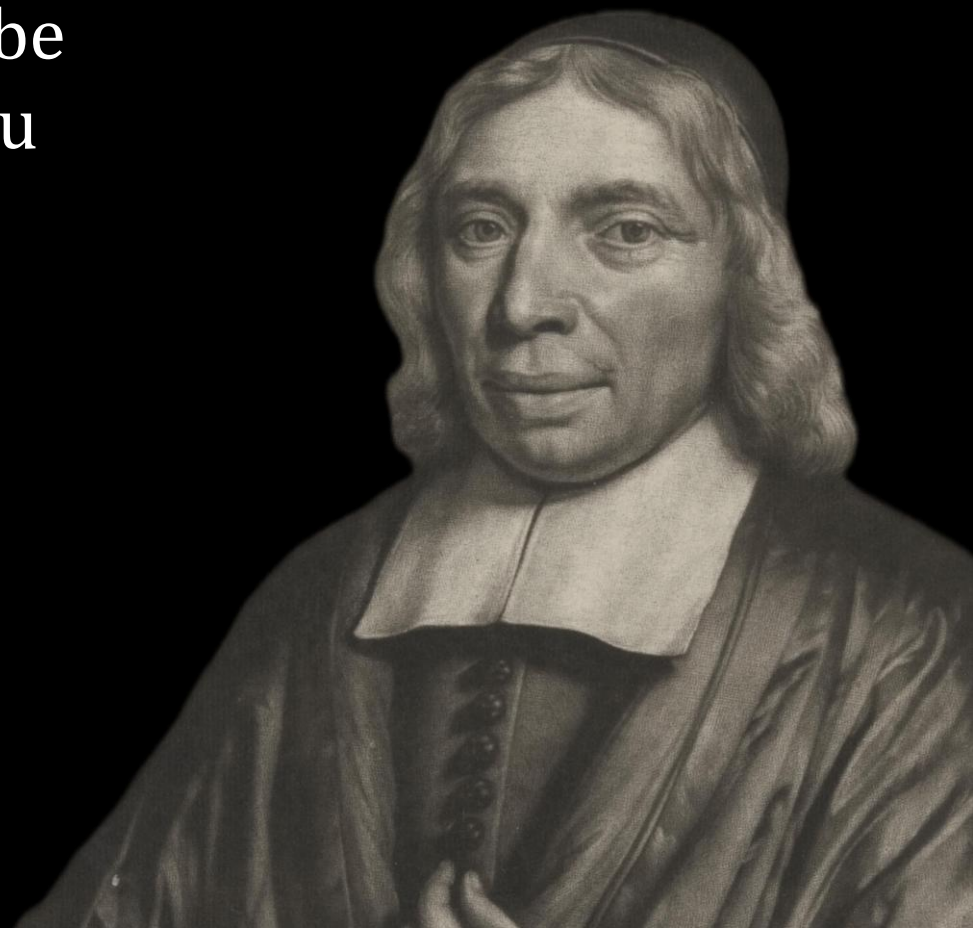
- They will begin to *love* the things *God loves.*

- **Proverbs 14:2 –** "He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him."

- **Psalm 112:1 –** "How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in His commandments."

“The fear of God is the fountain of all the holiness which delights you. Sinful lusts will lose their potency, corruptions which surface will readily be subdued, you will be stopped in the middle of sinning, and you will find yourself included toward the practice of all manner of virtues.”

—Wilhelmus à Brakel





Application

- Wisdom to live life successfully will grow hand-in-glove with the imitation of God's moral character, which is only produced by the fear of God.
- This fear is not a *flight from God*, nor a *fight against God*, but an *attraction* to Him *as God*—such that the child willingly conforms to His likeness.
- "I can know if I truly fear God by determining if I have a genuine hatred of evil and an earnest desire to obey His commands" (Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, 52).

IV. It Produces a Harvest of Rewards

- Proverbs emphasizes the logic of *cause-and-effect.*
- **Proverbs 1:28–29 –** Destruction comes upon men because "they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD."
- **Proverbs 13:13 –** "The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, but the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded."
- **Proverbs 10:27 (a full life) –** "The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened."
- **Proverbs 14:27 (a full life) –** "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death."

- **Proverbs 14:26 (peace and stability) –** "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge."

- **Proverbs 19:23 (peace and stability) –** "The fear of the LORD *leads* to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."

- **Proverbs 22:4 (earthly success) –** "The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life."

- Remember: the proverbs are not blank-check guarantees but general principles; Proverbs does acknowledge the suffering of the righteous.

- Nonetheless, there is a definite correlation between the fear of the LORD and success in life—rightly defined.



Application

- Living a successful life and enjoying its rewards are the *product* of a fundamental disposition: *the fear of the Lord.*

- This fear is *intrinsically valuable*—but it is also the *cause* that brings about a certain *effect.*

- Nonetheless, this fear cannot be treated simply as the means to a more desired end, for “better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and turmoil with it” (15:16).

V. It Cancels out All Other Fears

- The cure to anxiety is not the eradication of all fear, but the exercise of the right kind of fear *toward God*.

- **Proverbs 3:25–26 –** "Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught."

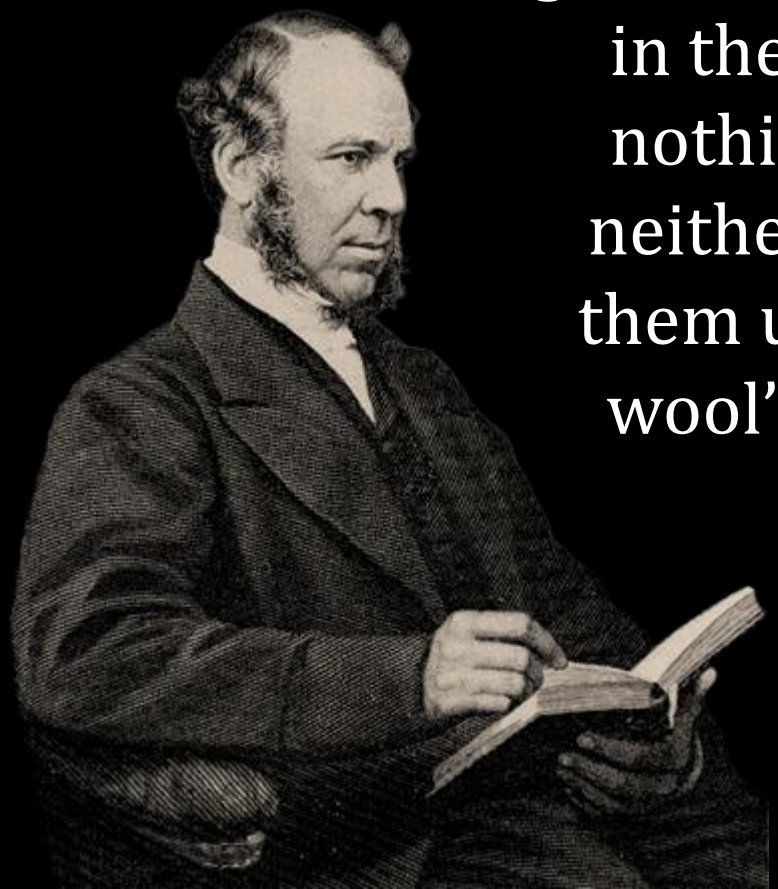
- **Proverbs 14:26 –** "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge."

- **Proverbs 29:25 –** "The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."

“The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it.”

—Charles Spurgeon





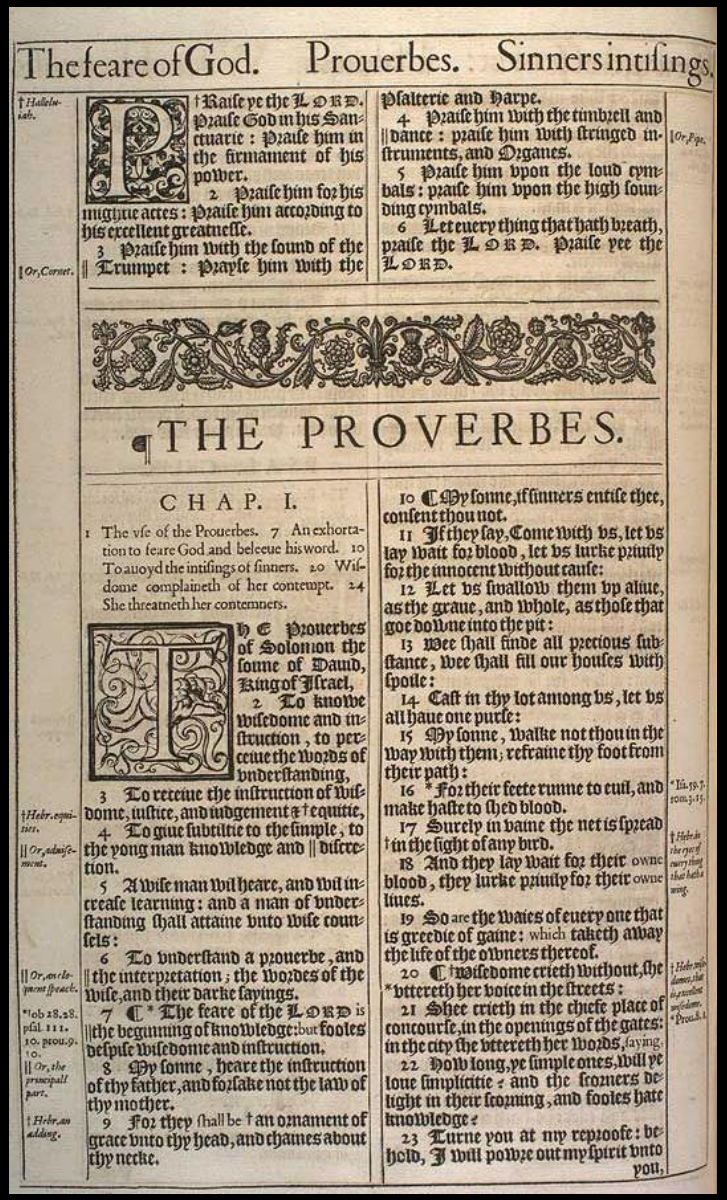
"Young man, be of good courage. Care not for what the world says or thinks: you will not be with the world always. Can man save your soul? No. Will man be your judge in the great and dreadful day of account? No. Can man give you a good conscience in life, a good hope in death, a good answer in the morning of resurrection? No! no! no! Man can do nothing of the sort. Then 'fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool' (Isa 51:7–8). Call to your mind the saying of good Colonel Gardiner: 'I fear God, and therefore I have none else to fear.' Go and be like him."

—J. C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*



Application

- If you struggle with anxiety over your health, your circumstances, your career, your family, the opinions of others, etc., the solution will not be found in medication, but in a greater fear—a robust fear in God Himself.
- Our culture has become a therapy-dependent culture because we have lost the fear of God.
- **Psalm 118:6 –** "The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"
- What do <u>you</u> fear?



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