

Subject: *The Elements of Fearing God*

Scripture: *Psalm 89:1-18*

Psalm 89 is mainly about God's faithfulness, but we are going to focus on verse 7. If we keep this verse in the context of God's faithfulness to His covenant and His people we will remember two things: 1) the fear of God is not a negative thing, but a positive thing; 2) the fear of God is not only something unbelievers should be concerned about, but it is something for God's people to understand and be concerned about.

The fear of God is a subject that has been much neglected and forgotten both in the world and the church. And for that neglect we are paying a very high price. We have already considered the wisdom of fearing God and the privilege of fearing God. In this message we are going to look at what it means to fear God.

The Biblical words for "fear"

God used two Hebrew words in the OT and one Greek word in the NT in describing the fear of God. As we look at the words in the Bible we find that the fear of God is two things:

- The fear of dread and terror

There is a legitimate fear of God in which we should be afraid of Him and be gripped with a sense of dread and terror. This is not the primary fear of God in the Bible, but it is there. The first instance of this kind of fear is in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 3:9-10 ⁹ *And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? ¹⁰ And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

Hebrews 10:26-31 ²⁶ *For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. ²⁸ He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: ²⁹ Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

If a person rejects Christ and the salvation found only in Him and places himself in which the judgment of God is certain, then he should be filled with fear because it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. For a person to believe the judgment of God is coming upon him and not to fear is to reveal a hard heart and a foolish attitude toward the character of God and the threat of eternal punishment. Jonathan Edwards preached a famous sermon titled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." God used that sermon to spark a great spiritual awakening.

- The fear of awe and reverence

There is fear of God in which we have the highest awe and respect for God. This is not a fear that causes to run and hide from Him, but to draw near to Him and submit to Him in faith, love, and obedience.

The fear of God and unbelievers

In unbelievers the fear of God is the fear of dread and terror. Unbelievers have this dread and fear of God for mainly two reasons:

- The fear of death and judgment
- The fear of eternal punishment

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¹³ *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.* ¹⁴ *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Hebrews 9:27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

Matthew 10:28 *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* Jesus not only commended this kind of fear as a good thing, but He commanded it.

Luke 23:39-41 ³⁹ *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.* ⁴⁰ *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?* ⁴¹ *And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.*

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 ⁷ *And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,* ⁸ *In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:* ⁹ *Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*

The fear of God and believers

In believers the fear of God is the fear of awe and reverence for God.

Psalms 34:9-11 ⁹ *O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.* ¹⁰ *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.* ¹¹ *Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

Psalms 112:1 *Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.*

Proverbs 8:13 *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.*

Proverbs 16:6 *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.*

Malachi 3:16 *Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.*

Philippians 2:12-13 ¹² *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

Hebrews 12:28-29 ²⁸ *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.*

1 Peter 1:17-19 ¹⁷ *And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: ¹⁸ Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; ¹⁹ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

For believers the fear of God includes these things:

- Reverence for God
- Concern about sin and holiness
- Diligence concerning duty

Should a believer fear God in the sense of dread and terror of judgment. To a degree he should. The Bible teaches that professing Christians can still turn away from God in apostasy, and that should scare us. The Bible teaches that professing Christians can be self-deceived because the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That's why the Bible says we are to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. **Psalms 119:120** *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

This fear should motivate us not only for our sake, but for the sake of others.

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. ¹¹ Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*

Jude 1:22-23 ²² *And of some have compassion, making a difference: ²³ And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*

All people, believers and unbelievers, should fear God. This should be our prayer:
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure—save from wrath and make me pure.