

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (28) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#17d. Three Great Foes: First, the World (part 4)**

Introduction:

In our consideration of the Christian’s three great spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, for several weeks we have addressed the first of these—the world. When we speak of the world as the spiritual enemy of the Christian, we are speaking of the influence upon us of *the culture of this fallen world, with its ideas, values, and practices that are in opposition to the will of God*. The fallen world has its ways of thinking. These ways are often in conflict with, even in contradiction with, the ways of God. The world would have us think as it thinks, put value on what it values, desire what it offers, behave as it would have fallen people live.

The world as the spiritual foe of the Christian takes on many forms. We have addressed several of these. Last Lord’s Day, we began to address the errant way of the world to live in *the fear of man*, which is in contrast with God’s prescription, which is to live in *the fear of God*. Put in other words, *it is the will of God that we be motivated and that we act with the desire of gaining God’s approval rather than living to obtain man’s approval*.

We showed from the Scriptures that the fear of God is a characteristic of godly people. But the fear of man, although present to a degree in everyone, is a general characteristic of unconverted people. People of the world are declared to have “no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). We gave attention to two biblical figures, each epitomizing these two ways of living. Whereas John the Baptist was governed by the fear of God, King Herod was governed by the fear of man. But considering the importance of this subject, it would do us well to explore it further. And so, today, let us examine further what it is to live in the fear of God.

Please turn to **Psalm 103**. Here we read of King David’s devotion to God for all the mercies that God had bestowed upon him. He voices this psalm on a personal note, using the first person, “my” (vs. 1, 2). But beginning with verse 3 it is as though he steps back and addresses his own soul, calling to its attention the great blessing that God had wrought on its behalf. The “your” and “you” in verses 3 and 4 are singular pronouns; David was addressing himself, that is, his own soul. And then beginning with verse 6 and following, David broadens his praise of God, including along with him others who know God. God is good to all His people, that is, “those who fear Him.” He then describes and depicts God’s people as “those who fear the Lord” (Cf. vs. 11, 13, 17).

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!

²Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And forget not all His benefits:

³Who forgives all your iniquities,

Who heals all your diseases,

⁴Who redeems your life from destruction,

Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,

⁵Who satisfies your mouth with good things,

So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

⁶The LORD executes righteousness

And justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷He made known His ways to Moses,

His acts to the children of Israel.
⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious,
 Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
⁹He will not always strive with us,
 Nor will He keep His anger forever.
¹⁰He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
 Nor punished us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,
 So great is His mercy toward *those who fear Him*;
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
 So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
¹³As a father pities his children,
 So the LORD pities *those who fear Him*.
¹⁴For He knows our frame;
 He remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵As for man, his days are like grass;
 As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
¹⁶For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
 And its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
 On *those who fear Him*,
 And His righteousness to children's children,
¹⁸To such as keep His covenant,
 And to those who remember His commandments to do them.
¹⁹The LORD has established His throne in heaven,
 And His kingdom rules over all.
²⁰Bless the LORD, you His angels,
 Who excel in strength, who do His word,
 Heeding the voice of His word.
²¹Bless the LORD, all you His hosts,
 You ministers of His, who do His pleasure.
²²Bless the LORD, all His works
 In all places of His dominion.
 Bless the LORD, O my soul! (Psa. 103:1-22)

God's people are characterized as "those who fear the Lord." What this simply means is that Christians are people who live to please God, rather than to please man. This is what our Lord meant when He said, "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" (Matt. 10:28). We are to love God supremely and strive to become holy in our lives, for this is what pleases Him. Paul encouraged Christians "to be perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord" (2 Cor. 7:1). The point is this, if we desire to become holy in life, to grow closer in fellowship and likeness of the Savior, then we will do so through the fear of God. It is very important that we develop a biblical sense of the fear of God in our own hearts and in the hearts of our children.

The question, then, that is before us is this: *How should we understand the fear of God and how may this grace be developed within us?* We will address this question, but first let us emphasize a few fundamentals about our subject.

I. Reasons that we should be characterized by the fear of God

Why should we fear the Lord? Because...

A. God's blessing is on those who fear Him.

The fear of the Lord is set forth in Holy Scripture in many wonderful and varied ways. The very name and nature of God should lead us to fear Him. The psalmist wrote, "Holy and reverend is His name" (Psa. 111:19). And it is with a sense of fear of God that we are to come before Him to worship every Lord's Day. David wrote, "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; *in fear of You* I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Psa. 5:7). There should be a sense of solemn gravity when we come to the house of God to worship our God with His people. When we say, "solemn", we do not mean "somber" or "gloomy"; but there ought to be a seriousness about us, even as we come rejoicing in His presence.

The *blessing of God* is upon those who fear Him. He preserves and protects those who fear Him.

"Behold, the eye of the LORD is *on those who fear Him*,
On those who hope in His mercy,
To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine. (Psa. 33:18)

God is a *friend* to those who fear Him. "The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant" (Psa. 25:14). It is to those who fear Him that He bestows His salvation. "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him" (Ps. 85:9).

God has purposed to show forth His *goodness* to those who fear Him. David wrote,

Oh, how great is Your goodness,
Which You have laid up for *those who fear You*,
Which You have prepared for those who trust in You
In the presence of the sons of men! (Psa. 31:19)

B. God is to be feared in His attributes and because of them.

The sight of God in Old Testament times struck fear in the hearts of His people. There was an element of terror about many incidents, *which should not be what characterizes New Testament believers*. But even among the godly that stood before His presence, there was a holy fear about them. In His manifestation to them God revealed to them something of His glory, of His nature, of His attributes. This affected them deeply. An old Baptist preacher, **John Gill** said it this way,

God is clothed with *majesty*, and majesty and honour are before him, and "with him is terrible majesty", such as is sufficient to command an awe of him; particularly his *omnipotence*, for "he is excellent in power" (Job 37:22, 23) as also his *omniscience*, for nothing can be hid from his sight; the most enormous actions committed in the dark are seen by him, with whom the darkness and the light are alike; and his *omnipresence*, from whence there is no fleeing, for he fills heaven and earth with it; to which may be added, the *justice* and *holiness* of God, which make his majesty the more terrible and to be revered, since he is not only excellent in power, but also "in judgment, and in plenty of justice" (Job 37:23; 2 Chronicles 19:7) and a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of a just and sin avenging God, the living God, the everlasting King, at whose wrath the nations tremble, and are not able to bear his indignation (Jeremiah 10:10).

These attributes of God are to be seen by faith in the crucified, risen, and glorified Lord Jesus. John records a vision of Jesus in His present glory: In Revelation 1 we read that John heard a voice. He turned about, recording what he saw:

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. (Rev. 1:12-17)

Do we “see” Jesus in faith in His glory when we gather in His name every Lord’s Day? But not only is God to be feared in His attributes and because of them, but...

C. The works of God lead us to fear Him.

One reason we are to fear God is that He is the *Creator* of all things. The Psalmist wrote,

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.
⁷He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deep in storehouses.

⁸*Let all the earth fear the LORD;*
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
⁹*For He spoke, and it was done;*
He commanded, and it stood fast. (Psalm 33:6-9).

We should fear God because He is the *Sustainer* of all that He has created. God Himself asks in **Jeremiah 5:22f**,

²²*Do you not fear Me?* says the LORD.
‘Will you not tremble at My presence,
Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea,
By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?
And though its waves toss to and fro,
Yet they cannot prevail;
Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.
²³But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart;
They have revolted and departed.

People will not fear God for His works, yet they will reverence people in this world for the “works” that they accomplish. There is a reverence of *celebrities* that is unseemly in our society. People will revere a movie star, or a sports person, or a musician, giving him/her their attention and adoration that is altogether unfitting. They will read after the rich and famous. They will give credence to their opinions even when they speak about things they know nothing about. These celebrity worshippers become excited at the prospect of seeing their films, purchasing their music, hearing them being interviewed. ***But although God has made such a display of his greatness and goodness to them so as to show Himself worthy of fear and reverence, they live as though He were a non-entity.***

Again, **John Gill** wrote on the passage we just read,

The prophet (Jeremiah) instances in what may seem small, yet a most wonderful thing, and enough of itself to command an awe of the divine being; and at the same time the stupidity of the people is observed, who, notwithstanding the goodness of God in his works of providence towards

them, yet were wanting in their fear and reverence of him: “Neither say in their heart, ‘Let us now fear the Lord our God that giveth rain, the former and later rain in its season; he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest’” (Jer. 5:22, 24), which, though common providential blessings, yet are what should engage men to fear the Lord and his goodness; and especially God’s works of grace should have such an effect upon the hearts of his people, as they have when they come with a divine power; particularly the pardoning grace and mercy of God; “there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared” (Psalm 130:4; Hosea 3:5).

We should fear God because of His **judgment upon the wicked**. His Word threatens judgment upon all them who hate Him. **Deuteronomy 7:10** reads, He “He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.” David recorded his reflection of this prospect in **Psalm 119:120**,

My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments.

David was speaking not out of terror of what might happen to him, so much as he revered God for what he knew God brings upon the ungodly. Our reflection of what God is doing and will do in the lives of those who hate Him should cause us to tremble before Him. This will also move us to speak to others on behalf of Him. Paul described his own motivation, “Knowing therefore *the terror of the Lord*, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11)

But in a similar way, the prospect of God’s mercy and grace should lead us to view Him as an object of fear and reverence. This is the idea in the passage of **2 Corinthians 7:1**, which we read last Lord’s Day. Paul wrote, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Because of the promise that God would manifest Himself as a Father to us if we comply with His instruction, we should be “perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.”

II. The nature and kind of fear that we should have of God

There is a kind of fear of God that is *not* good and there is a kind of fear of God that is *very* good.

A. There is a kind of fear of God that is *not* good.

What are some bad forms of fear of God?

1. There is a *superstitious* fear of God.

Most people have some sort of fear of God, but it is not the kind of fear that God approves. Paul could say of the Athenian pagans, “I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious” (Acts 17:22), or given to the fear and worship of false deities. People may go to church, not because they reverence God, but because they are afraid of what might happen to them if they do not go to church. Churches all over this land have multitudes of people in them today because of this motivation. They do not have a godly fear, they have a superstitious fear of God. Their worship is not directed by the Word of God, but their thoughts and actions are shaped by notions and practices that they perceive will secure God’s favor toward them or that will at least forestall His judgment toward them. Their worship is characterized by intricate ritual, reciting of mindless incantations, all designed to alleviate their sense of dread and terror and soothe their conscience respecting their sin.

2. There is an *external* fear of God.

This is a formal outward show of piety. The people of Samaria pretended to fear the Lord. They had their own priesthood, their own temple, their own Scriptures, and their own ritual. But the Lord Jesus said to them, “You worship what you know not.” And of course many of the religious leaders of Judaism were characterized by an outward show of religiosity. Our Lord denounced them, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence” (Mat 23:25). We should be very afraid of having only an outward show of devotion when there is a cold indifference on the inside. A healthy dose of the fear of the Lord will correct this. It will break up the hard heart, making it tender before the Lord.

3. There is a *hypocritical* fear of God

This is when men “draw nigh to God with their mouths and honour Him with their lips”, but “their hearts are removed far from him.” This kind of pretense is usually present when the person wants something from God or wants something as a result of being seen as though he were worshipping God. In a community like this there are local businessmen who attend church regularly because that is where potential clientele may be found. Years ago I had a local business man tell me that is why he attended a Congregational church in the area. “That is where I meet my customers.”

4. There is a *servile* fear of God.

We might describe this as *a sense of terror or dread of God*. These people serve God not out of love for God but out of fear of punishment if they fail to do so. The Scriptures describe this as a “spirit of bondage to fear” (Rom. 8:15). Although many true Christians may encounter this kind of fear of God, they need not nor should they think of their relationship with God in these terms. Salvation may assure us that we are not to fear God in the sense of being terrorized by Him. Adam upon sinning said to God after He had called to him, “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself” (Gen. 3:10). But when we come to salvation, this kind of fear should not characterize us, if we are thinking rightly. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, described the coming salvation of God in this way:

⁷⁴To grant us that we,

Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,

Might serve Him *without fear*,

⁷⁵In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Luke 1:74-75).

Similarly we read in 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” And 1 John 4:18 reads, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

What kinds of things cause a sense of terror of God? This kind of fear of God arises in the soul through the following means:

1) A sense of terror before God arises from a sense of sin and the guilt of sin on the conscience, when there is no sense of forgiveness. “A wicked man, conscious of his guilt, flees when no man pursues.”

2) A sense of terror before God arises from the law of God pressing itself on the conscience of a sinner. We read that the law produces wrath, in the sense that it terrifies the guilty one of the certain and fearful judgment of God that will come upon all of His adversaries. When that fear rises within the soul, people may desire that rocks and even mountains fall on them rather than face God. Their fear is a sense of terror due to having knowingly broken God’s law and knowing they are accountable and answerable to God for their transgressions.

The curse of the law of God is upon every one that is outside of Jesus Christ. Most are unaware of it. But when they are awakened to the fact that God's wrath is upon them because they have broken God's law, this terror results. The law of God accuses of sin, pronounces the sinner guilty for sin, and announces the sentence for having sinned. The Scripture says, "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). All of the curses of God rest upon the head of a person who is outside of Jesus Christ. And when someone outside of Christ is given an understanding of his condition, it can become a terrifying experience.

3) A sense of terror before God arises from a fear of death. We read that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). This is in the conscience of all. It resides in our very being. It can only be purposefully forced out of our minds by philosophy or teaching by non-Christians. We read in Hebrews that Christ came to deliver His people from the fear of death.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14, 15)

4) A sense of terror before God arises from a fear of hell and everlasting damnation. There is an intuitive sense in every human being that he must stand before God and give an account of his life before Him. This kind of fear may drive people to religion, any kind of religion. Or it may be a fear that resides in the hearts of unbelievers who have no intention of turning from their sins. They know their fate but will not turn. Yes, they are afraid, but they continue in evil nevertheless. This is the same kind of fear that demons have. Do you remember the response of some demons to the Lord Jesus? "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Mat. 8:29). They trembled before the Son of God. They had a fear of God, but it was not the kind of fear that should characterize us.

And so, there is a kind of fear of God that is not God. But certainly, as we have shown, there is a fear of God that should characterize us.

B. There is a kind of fear of God that is good.

This fear of the Lord of which we are speaking is the opposite of a terror that causes people to flee from God or only approach Him out of terror because they know there is no escape. A proper fear of God leads us to flee to God, not from God. The kind of fear that should characterize us is a "godly fear." This should characterize us because we have presently a relationship with God through Christ and we have a glorious prospect for eternity. Hebrews 12:28 reads, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably *with reverence and godly fear*." This is the same kind of fear that the Lord Jesus had for His heavenly Father. We read of Christ,

Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and *was heard in that He (Christ) feared*. (Heb. 5:7)

The Lord Jesus revered His Father in prayer and His Father heard Him and answered His prayer. This is sometimes called a *filial* fear. This fear of Christ of his Father was manifest by Jesus honoring Him, obeying Him, submitting to His will, even when He was anticipating death. This is the kind of fear that should characterize all true children of God.

III. How then, is this true, desirable, good kind of fear of God produced in us?

A. The fear of the Lord is produced in us by an awareness of our *adoption* as children of God our Father.

When we were first converted to Christ, we became God's children through faith in Christ. We no longer saw our God chiefly as Lawgiver and Judge, but rather, we came to see Him as our Heavenly Father. An awareness of this new relationship delivers the people of God from a servile fear (sense of terror), giving them a filial fear (of a family nature). Paul described this in Romans 8:17,

You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear (i.e. a sense of terror of God), but you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Those people that fear the Lord are related to Him as children. Their fear is that of children to a Father. So we read in Psalm 103:13, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him."

God is Father only to true Christians. There are many who call on God as their Father but have no biblical warrant to do so. We do not become the children of our heavenly Father by being born physically into this world, through a natural birth. We become children of our heavenly Father by being born again spiritually, that is, through the new birth (regeneration). John wrote of this:

But as many as received Him, *to them* He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12f)

And here John was not describing something you do, but rather John is speaking of something that God does for you. He causes you to receive His Son by the blessed Holy Spirit. And upon doing so, then, and only then, do you have the right to be the children of God.

B. The fear of the Lord is produced in us by *the love of God* that has been placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:5 reads that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." To the measure that the love of God is placed in the heart by the Holy Spirit, servile fear of God will diminish and even be extinguished. 1 John 4:18 reads,

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.

When a sense of the steadfast, unchangeable, everlasting love of God in Christ is realized in the soul, when the believer attains a confidence produced by the Holy Spirit, then fear (terror) is cast out of the heart and mind. What then abides is a desire to please Him and commune with Him; in other words, the fear of God.

C. The fear of the Lord is produced in us by true *faith and trust* in God.

The fear of God that is biblical goes in hand with faith in God. **Psalm 115:11-13** read,

¹¹***You who fear the LORD***, trust in the LORD;
He is their help and their shield.

¹²The LORD has been mindful of us;
He will bless us;
He will bless the house of Israel;
He will bless the house of Aaron.

¹³He will bless ***those who fear the LORD***,
Both small and great.

Job feared God, but at the same time he trusted God. He was able to express this faith in His God even when all of his life was crashing about him. “Though He (God) slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

III. How is the fear of God shown in the believer?

1. The fear of God is shown in a *hatred for sin*

We read in Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.” We are told elsewhere to abhor evil (Rom. 12:9). Because the person who fears God loves God, he is opposed to all that God is opposed. The Christian who fears the Lord hates evil, not merely because of its consequences, but because he sees it as contrary to God and His character. It is not a hatred of sin that he only has when he sees it in others. This hatred is for all evil, the evil that is evident in himself as well as in others. He does not condemn sin in another and yet excuse the same sin in his own heart. He despises evil itself in all its forms wherever it rears its head. David could write, “Do not I hate them that hate Thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred” (Psalm 139:21). **Proverbs 8:13** reads,

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.

2. The fear of God is shown in *departing from evil*.

The Word of God declares, “By *the fear of the Lord* men depart from evil” (Prov. 16:6). Proverbs 3:7 reads, “Be not wise in thine own eyes: *fear the Lord*, and depart from evil.” The Christian, the one who fears the Lord, desires no fellowship with evil, because he hates it. He may be tempted by it. He may be enticed by it. But he knows God’s view of the matter. He chooses to stand with God separate from evil and opposed to it, that is, if he is thinking rightly and is responsive to the grace of God that is in Jesus Christ.

3. The fear of God is shown in a *refusal to engage in evil activities*.

There is a change in behavior for the one who is characterized by the fear of God. Those who fear the Lord no longer run with the old crowd doing what they formerly did. Their friends do not understand this and think they have become weird. 1 Peter 4:4 carries this idea, “They think it strange that you (no longer) run not with them to the same excess of riot; they now speak evil of you” (my paraphrase). But because you are a true Christian, you no longer delight in those things. Before you would take pride in those things. But to involve yourself now in what you did formerly, it would be a cause of grief and shame to you. Therefore, you just can no longer give yourself the license to do what others do. You voluntarily deny yourself of activities that are not Christian and wholesome.

4. The fear of God is shown in a *carefulness not to offend God or other people*.

We are as Paul, “In this I do exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16). Those who fear God rightly are careful of their words and deeds so that they do not needlessly offend others. They who have the fear of God seek to live in a manner that no one can justly point a finger at them and say, “You have wronged me.” They guard their speech with respect to others, avoiding negative and unkind characterizations. They will tend to believe the better of someone rather than be quick to believe and pass on the rumor. They will tend to give the benefit of the doubt to others about them, rather than doubt the benefit of everything. And so, they will limit their own liberty, curtail their own speech and activities, lest through their actions they cause harm to others about them. They take to heart the admonition, “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a

stumblingblock to them that are weak” (1 Cor. 8:9). Because they fear the Lord, they guard their lives before others.

5. The fear of God is shown in a consistent observance of the worship of God.

The person who fears God, worships God, and does so only in a manner that He knows God has sanctioned in his Word. He is not as “**Nadab** and **Abihu**, the sons of Aaron, who each took his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not” (Lev. 10:1). He seeks to worship God as God Himself has prescribed. He is like the parents of John the Baptist, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who “walked in all the ordinances and commands of the Lord blameless.”

6. The fear of God is shown in a refusal to withhold anything from God.

After Abraham had been willing to offer his most precious possession to God in an offering, his own dear son, God said to him, “Now know I”, saith the Lord, “that thou fearest God” (Genesis 22:12). But in contrast like Ananias and Sapphira, who were not characterized by the fear of God, kept back a part from God and then acted as if they had not.

7. The fear of God is shown in a high view and high value of Holy Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

Isaiah recorded in the last chapter of his prophecy: “Thus says the LORD:

‘Heaven is My throne,
And earth is My footstool.
Where is the house that you will build Me?
And where is the place of My rest?
²For all those things My hand has made,
And all those things exist,’
Says the LORD.
‘But on this one will I look:
On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit,
And *who trembles at My word.*’” (Isa. 66:1, 2)

Having a sound, biblical fear of the Lord, will separate us from the world, one of the three great enemies of our soul. The fear of the Lord will preserve us so that we not run with the world, which will most certainly be damned on the Day of Judgment. May our Lord produce, retain, and enhance a true fear of Him in our souls.

“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested.” (Rev. 15:4)

Some thoughts of
John Gill
on
The Fear of God

I. The springs and causes of the fear of God, or from whence it flows.

A. It is not from nature, nor is it in natural men; the want of it is a part of the description of corrupt nature, and of men in a natural state; “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18) it may be said of the heart of every natural man, what Abraham said of Gerar, “Surely the fear of God is not in this place” (Genesis 20:11) and which may be concluded from the wickedness that is in it, and that by what comes out of it; “The transgression of the wicked”, discovered by his words and works, his life and actions, “saith within my heart”, suggests this to my mind, speaks as plainly as well can be, it is an observation of David, “that there is no fear of God before his eyes” (Psalm 36:1).

B. It arises from the grace of God, it is a gift and grant of grace; “O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me”, or “who will give such an heart?” (Deuteronomy 5:29) none but God can give it, and he has promised it in covenant; it is a blessing of his grace, which he has provided in it; “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever. I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jeremiah 32:39, 40). In consequence of which promise and covenant,

C. It is implanted in the heart in regeneration; it is put there by the Spirit of God, where it was not before, and where it never could have been, had he not put it there, and it appears as soon in a regenerate man as any grace whatever; upon first conversion there is quickly found a tenderness of conscience with respect to sin, and a carefulness not to offend God; and indeed “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10). No man is truly wise until he fears God, and as soon as he fears the Lord he begins to be wise, and not before; yea the fear of the Lord is wisdom itself; it is that wisdom and truth which God desires and puts into the inward and hidden parts of the heart (Job 28:28; Psalm 51:6).

D. The word and prayer are the means of attaining it; the fear of the Lord, as it is a duty, and expressive of worship, is to be learned; “Come ye children, hearken unto me”, says David, “I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (Psalm 34:11). The law of God, and especially the whole of doctrine both legal and evangelical, is the means of learning it (Deuteronomy 4:10; 17:19) and therefore is called the fear of the Lord, Psalm 19:7, 9 but as a grace it is diligently sought after and earnestly importuned of God; the heart must not only be instructed but united to fear the Lord, and which is to be prayed for (Psalm 86:11 Proverbs 2:3-5).

E. It is encouraged, promoted, and increased by fresh discoveries of the grace and goodness of God, “They shall fear the Lord and his goodness”; the goodness of God made known, bestowed, and applied, greatly influences the fear him (Hosea 3:5) especially an application of his pardoning grace and mercy, “There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared” (Psalm 130:4).

II. The happiness of those that fear the Lord.

There is scarcely anyone character by which the people of God are described, under which more promises of good things are made unto them, than this.

A. First, with respect to things temporal. Godliness in general, and this part of it, the fear of the Lord, in particular, has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come.

1. It is promised they shall have no want, not of temporal good things, “O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him” (Psalm 34:9,10) not of any good thing; that is, which is suitable and convenient for them, and God in his wisdom sees fit and proper for them; and rather than they shall want, he will do wonders for them, and open sources of relief they never thought of (Isaiah 41:17,18 43:19,20).

2. Though they may have but little of the good things of this world, yet “better *is* little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith”, Proverbs 15:16 this with the fear of God and with righteousness is better than great revenues without right, and better than the riches of many wicked (Proverbs 16:8; Psalm 37:16).

3. Yea wealth and riches are promised to be in the house of that man that fears the Lord, and that by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life (Psalm 112:1,3 Proverbs 22:4) which can only be understood of some, not of all that fear the Lord; unless spiritual wealth, riches, honour, and life, are intended, since the fear of the Lord itself is the good man’s treasure (Isaiah 33:6) it is a treasure of itself.

4. It is said that the man that fears the Lord shall eat of the labour of his hands, and he shall not only be happy, and it shall be well with him in his person, but in his family; his wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of his house, and his children shall be as olive plants round about his table (Psalm 128:1-4).

5. They that fear the Lord are in the utmost safety; in his fear is strong confidence, and they have no reason to be afraid of anything; they shall not be visited with evil, yea the angel of the Lord encamps round about them and protects, defends, and delivers them from all dangers and from all enemies (Proverbs 14:26 19:23; Psalm 34:7).

6. The fear of the Lord prolongeth days, or adds unto them (Proverbs 10:27) which was always reckoned a great temporal blessing; the wise man says of a sinner, “though his days be prolonged”, as they may be, and he not happy, “yet surely”, says he, “I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him” (Ecclesiastes 8:12) be their days more or fewer.

B. Secondly, with respect to things spiritual, much is promised to them that fear the Lord, and they are spoken of as most happy persons.

1. The Lord is said to take pleasure in them that fear him, as having the utmost complacency and delight in them, being his special and peculiar people, his Hephzibah in whom he delights, his Beulah to whom he is married (Psalm 147:11.)

2. They are accepted of him, and are acceptable to him; “Of a truth”, says Peter, “I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34, 35) his person is accepted with him in Christ the beloved, and his sacrifices of prayer and praise are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ.

3. The heart of God is towards them; he has a sympathy and fellow feeling with them in all their distresses, trials, and exercises; in all their afflictions he is afflicted, and he comforts and supports them; “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him” (Psalm 103:13).

4. The eye of the Lord is upon them for good; “the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him” (Psalm 33:18) not only his eye of providence, which runs to and fro throughout the earth to show himself strong on their behalf, to protect and defend them, and to avenge himself on their enemies; but his eye of

special love, grace, and mercy, is upon them, and is never withdrawn from them, but is ever delighting in them and caring for them (Psalm 103:11,17; Luke 1:50).

5. His hand is open and ready to communicate to them; he “gives meat to them that fear him”, spiritual food, the blessings of his covenant, of which he is ever mindful; the comforts of his Spirit in which they walk who walk in the fear of the Lord; he gives them grace, fresh and rich supplies of it, and at last gives them glory; and in the meanwhile withholds no good thing from them, to support their faith, encourage their hope, and engage their trust in him and dependence on him.

6. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him”; the secrets of his heart’s love to them, and of his gracious designs towards them, are disclosed unto them, by which he uses them as his most intimate and bosom friends; and he will show them his covenant, the blessings and promises of it, and their interest in them (Psalm 25:14) what is said of Christ the head of the covenant, is true of all the covenant ones in their measure (Malachi 2:5) to which may be added, that the Lord grants the requests and fulfils the desires of them that fear him, hears their cries and saves them (Psalm 145:19).

7. They are remembered by him with the favour he bears to his own people, with his tender mercies and lovingkindness, which have been ever of old; he remembers them when in a low estate, and brings them out of it; he remembers his promises to them, and fulfils them; “a book of remembrance is” said to be “written before him, for them that feared the Lord” (Malachi 3:16.)

8. It is promised to them “that fear the name” of the Lord, that “unto” them “the Son of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). Christ the Saviour shall come and show himself with a discovery and application of pardoning grace and mercy; nay, one that “fears the Lord”, though he “walks in darkness and hath no light”, yet he is encouraged to “trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God”, (Isaiah 50:10).

9. “Salvation”, a fresh view of interest in it, a renewed application of it, as well as the full enjoyment of it, “is nigh them that fear” the Lord, Psalm 85:9 for that is nearer to them than when they first believed, and had the fear of God first implanted in them, and were set a seeking after it, and had first hope of interest in it.

10. Great and good things are laid up for such persons in the heart of God, in the covenant of grace, and in the hands of Christ, and in heaven; even a blessed hope, a crown of righteousness, and things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard of, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive of; “O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!” (Psalm 31:19).
