

3 Reasons to Fear God

Exodus 3:1-9; Matthew 10:38; Proverbs 1:7
Kevin Laser, March 10, 2019

It's good to see you, and it is a privilege to be with you this morning. And the greatest privilege is though, to open up the Word of God and to do it together with you this morning. I have the honour this morning of preaching on the fear of the Lord. And in one sense, it is very much an honour, but on the other sense, it is very much a sermon that I would probably choose not to preach if I could make that choice. But the Lord put it on my heart. I've been thinking about preaching on the fear of the Lord at some point, and I didn't know when that point was. But Jeremy asked me to preach today, and I thought, "Well this might be a good opportunity for that." So, that's going to be the topic of the sermon and the message this morning. We are going to be looking through a whole variety of verses this morning. So, I suggest you get your fingers ready. And we are going to just dive into the Word of God and find the joy and the pleasure that comes with fearing God.

The phrase "fear of God" or "fear God" it's in the Bible many times. Moses talked about it, the prophets spoke about it, the apostles wrote about it, Jesus Himself commanded it, and the early church believers preached on it. It's a topic that's actually often downplayed, and it's dismissed as something that's relevant just to the Old Testament, often - that the God of the Old Testament is a God of anger. The God of the Old Testament is full of wrath. All He sees is our sin and therefore, we need to fear Him. But now, many Christians claim that the New Testament says that we need to focus on the fact that Jesus is love. Jesus is compassion, God is forgiving, and that now is the new focus. Out with the old, in with the new. And because He's loving and compassionate, therefore, He doesn't need to be feared.

In reality, that's actually far from the truth. And that's contrary to Scripture. In fact, today, we are going to see that the fear of God is woven throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, and it applies to everybody. You, me, everybody that's lived in history.

I have four children that love to ask the questions and one of the things that I've learned is that it's good to ask questions. And so, when it comes to the Scripture, I encourage you to ask lots of questions of it. The truth of God's Word in fact, does not need to be defended or protracted by removing questions from the Word of God. The truth of God can stand up to any and all questions. And so, there's a variety of questions that we're going to look at this morning when it comes to fearing God. Here's some of those questions.

What does it mean to fear God? What does it look like in a person's life when they do fear God? Doesn't the Apostle John say that love casts out fear? How in the world does that fit in with fearing God? Is fearing God just for nonbelievers or does it apply to believers as well? Isn't fearing God an Old Testament focus and now, there's a new season in history where God wants us to focus exclusively on His love and compassion and mercy? Talking about the fear of God, isn't that going to scare people away if we want them to become Christians? That's a good, valid question. And then the last question that I'm going to look at that we're going to talk about (that is actually going to be the overarching question today) is why should we fear God? Today, we're

going to look at three reasons why we should fear God and we're going to answer these questions as we do our study this morning.

First of all, God is holy and we've sinned against Him. Second of all, God is a judge. He is the judge, He's the perfect judge and we can't avoid the appointment that we have with Him. And thirdly, God blesses those who fear Him. Those are the three points that we're going to look at today.

One of the first places in the Bible that the fear of God and man intersect in terms of a story in the Bible that we're going to look at is with Moses. And that's what we've read this morning. In Exodus chapter 3 here, God reveals Himself to Moses in this bush that's burning, and it's not being consumed. And Moses is obviously curious. He's wondering, he wants to know "What's this all about?" So, he looks over there to see what is going on. First of all, "Why is this on fire?" perhaps. Second of all, "Why is this fire not consuming the bush?" And the reason the fire isn't consuming the bush is because this is God. This is God in the fire. This is, if I may say, a manifestation of God. And when we approach God, God comes in the unnatural, so to speak, in many ways.

And to give a little bit of history, Moses had just killed an Egyptian. It was seen. Somebody saw it. He was afraid. He fled for his life to Midian. He goes to Midian, he meets some ladies at the well, ends up marrying one of them. Jethro was his father-in-law. And then he is out shepherding the flock, and this is what he sees. And God says to him this, he says, "Do not come near here. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place in which you are standing is holy ground." This is holy ground because God is holy.

God's holiness caused Moses to hide his face for he was afraid to look at God. He saw that this is God Himself manifested in the fire, and that this is unnatural but supernatural. It was holy ground because God is holy, and Moses was aware that God is different than him. God can come in the form of a fire that doesn't consume. God is different. And he responded by hiding his face in reverent awe and fear. God was in the burning bush that wasn't burning up, and he saw that this was a moment where he needed to fear. Hebrews 12:21 says this, "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, 'I am full of fear and trembling.'" In the presence of a holy God, the proper respect, the proper attitude, the proper perspective is one of fear and it is one of trembling.

Later, God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle in which the Ark of the Covenant was also built. And it represented the throne of the Almighty in heaven. It was overlaid with gold and inside were the Ten Commandments. Inside were some manna from Israel's years in the wilderness, and Aaron's rod, which miraculously budded. On top of the ark, were two statues. These were the cherubim, angels in heaven with outstretched arms, and between them was a place called the "mercy seat". This is where God's presence was manifested. This was the most precious part of the tabernacle. And God says in Exodus 25:22, "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I have commandment for the sons of Israel." The ark was so special, so sacred that God commanded that nobody touch it and nobody look inside of it. It says that in Numbers 4:15.

Unfortunately, some didn't fear God and obey that command. One example is of a man named Uzzah. They were moving the ark and at one point it looked like it was going to fall off the cart that they were transporting it on. God had actually indicated before, commanded them very clearly, don't carry it on an ark, but rather carry it on poles so it'd be on the shoulders. So, they started by transporting it in a very disobedient way. But then along the way, as the oxen go, it looks like the ark's going to fall off. So, Uzzah comes over and he reaches and it says this, Second Samuel 6:6, "Uzzah reached out toward the ark and he took hold of it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark." Part of fearing God, my friends, my brothers and sisters, is recognizing His holiness and recognizing that His holiness is not to be treated casually. He is not to be partially obeyed, but fully obeyed. We can't pick and choose his commands. We can't choose which ones we want to obey. We can't even tweak them to adjust our preference. God is holy and we need to obey his commands fully.

When people sinned, you see the law was broken, which required God's judgment, and once a year the priest entered the holy of holies to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. When the blood was sprinkled on the ark, it demonstrated that God's mercy was put into motion, and that the mercy of God triumphed over judgment. It says that in James 2:13.

You see God is holy. What does that mean? God is holy. It means that He is separate from the common. He's not of the ordinary. He's not of creation. He is separate from all of those things. In fact, He is in a class all by Himself. He's in a group, a category that is exclusive to Him alone. There is no other in the same category. He is absolutely unique and infinitely valuable and He's not just at the top and there's a line and we happen to be in the bottom, because the line would connect us with Him in that way. He's not just sort of at the top of the line and we're at the bottom of the line. No, He's in a group and a class in a category exclusive to Himself, and we're in a group called the creation. He's not created, He's infinite. He is infinitely valuable. He's holy, He's pure. We've sinned, we are the creation. He is the alpha, He is the Omega, the beginning and the end, which is why He says to Moses, "I AM who I AM. And it is 'I AM' who is sending you to Pharaoh to let My people go." If this isn't enough to convince you that God is holy, let me read a few verses for you.

In Psalm 147:5, it says this, "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit." Is that not a great contrast to us? He understands everything. He knows all things. There's nothing in all of creation that He is unaware of. First John 3:20 says that God knows all things. Who else can say that they know all things? God is omniscient. God is holy. Jeremiah 32:17 says this, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You." Things are often hard for us, are they not? We work, we sweat, we cry, we need rest, we need refreshment. Nothing is too hard for God. When God made creation and He spoke it into existence, He did it effortlessly. He didn't break a sweat. He didn't need to call in the troops. He spoke and it happened. God is omnipotent. He is the Almighty. He is holy. Psalm 139:7-10 says this. It says,

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take to

the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest parts of the sea, 10 even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.

You see, He is everywhere at the same time my friends, everywhere. And it doesn't matter where you are in all of creation. You could go to the farthest reaches of the universe and He is there. And may I daresay, you could go to the deepest, darkest part of hell, and His wrath is there. God is omnipresent.

This is the God that Moses was talking to and he had a right to be afraid of God. His holiness is so great, so exclusive and so distinguishing in fact, that one day all nations are going to come to God and worship Him. Because it says in Revelation 15:4, "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed." You see, God is drawing people from all nations, all tribes, all languages to His Son right now and throughout all of history, and He's doing it effortlessly and with impeccable timing.

Turn to Isaiah chapter 6 if you would, because we're going to look at somebody else who had an encounter with God. He had a vision that God had given to him, of Himself, of God being Himself on the throne. And this is the account of Isaiah and the vision that he received. It says in Isaiah chapter 6:1,

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood before Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."

4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filled with smoke. 5 And then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." 6 And then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and he said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity has been taken away and your sin is forgiven."

"Holy, holy, holy..." The Father is holy, the Son is holy, the Spirit is holy. Isaiah is emphasizing the independence of God, the separateness, this fact that God is like no other. And no other is like Him. But you notice what they don't say? They don't say, "Love, love, love." They don't say, "Grace, grace, grace," nor do they even say, "Judge, judge, judge." Why? Because in His holiness, He perfectly is all of those. They don't need to say anything else because everything falls under the umbrella of His holiness. If He were not perfectly loving, He would not be holy. If He was not rich in grace and compassion, He wouldn't be holy. If He was not the faithful, impartial judge, He also would not be holy. And so, all they need to say is, "Holy, holy, holy."

But look at Isaiah's response, he's overwhelmed with God's holiness. "Woe is me for I am ruined!" He says, "I'm a man of unclean lips." He knows that not only are his lips unclean, but

his heart is unclean. He's just like you and me. He sees God in His holiness. He sees God in His splendor and he recognizes that he is a sinner, that he is guilty of offending the high king of heaven.

But look at God's response through the angel. All Isaiah did is confess. He didn't plead his case, he simply confessed. And God responded with bringing a coal (this is maybe where it gets a little scary in this vision) coming to his lips, but it is a symbol of the forgiveness of God. But it's also symbolic of the fact that isn't our repentance sometimes very painful? It's a painful experience to repent, to have this daily repentance. Do we not sometimes grow weary of it? Do we not sometimes wish that we were done with it? And yet God in His grace, when we repent of our sins forgives. It's that simple.

Mankind has sinned. The Bible says that we are evil, it says that we're full of iniquity, that we are separated from God, and that we've offended His holiness. We've transgressed His perfect law and we've fallen short of His glory. God, on the other hand, He's righteous, He's pure, He's sinless. He is a just judge of sinners and yet He's full of mercy and full of grace and forgiveness to those who honestly confess their sin to Him and confess that they need Jesus. God in His holiness my friends, will not put up with sin, which is why we need to fear Him and give Him the reverence and the awe that He alone deserves. To fear God starts by recognizing His holiness. But as an outflow of His holiness (point number two) is the fact that God is the judge.

Open with me to Matthew 10:28 if you would please. The context here is that Jesus is speaking to His disciples and He's going to send them out to the lost sheep of Israel. They're going to be persecuted, they're going to experience tribulation for the fact that they bear the name of Jesus, and it's going to be a difficult road for them. It's a high cost of discipleship. Jesus was hated, Jesus was maligned. He was falsely accused and His disciples were not above that. Jesus knew that they might feel afraid of suffering at the hands of mankind and to that, He says in verse 26, "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

Do we not often find ourselves afraid of other men, men and women? We live in a sense of fear. "What if I do this? What if I share the Gospel? What will they think? Will they still like me? Will they still treat me good? Will I still keep the contract?" And on and on it goes, right? There's a sense in which we're afraid of others. We may lose something. It may cost us. And yes, following Christ will cost. It's guaranteed.

But look at what Jesus says in verse 28, because He says to them, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both the body and the soul in hell." This is a command He gave to His disciples as they were going out to preach the Gospel to the lost sheep of Israel.

Jesus spells it out pretty clearly that we're not to fear men, not to fear what men think of us. Yes, live at peace, but we are not to be governed by a fear of what others might think of us. Fear God, in fact, who knows everything. Every action that you have ever done has been recorded. Every thought, He knows. Even the motives of your heart, He knows what those are. But many try to

silence their conscience and actually suppress this truth, but there is actually no place my friend to hide from God.

To those who deny this truth, to those who reject this and suppress this, He says this, God says this through the apostle Paul. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatever a man sows, he will also reap.” You see, it's very simple my friends, the wages of sin is death. It's inescapable. And we need to revere God and be in awe of Him for He is the judge of mankind. There's not a single sin in the history of humanity that will go unpunished. Either the person who has trusted in Christ will have Christ to take the punishment for them or the person who is not trusting in Christ, will need to bear the punishment, the full wrath of God upon them for every single one of their sins, for all of eternity in a place called the lake of fire.

But fortunately, God in His great love sent His Son Jesus, to come to live on this earth, to demonstrate His great love so that this would not have to do be the fate of you. He is holy and we have transgressed His law. We are guilty of offending our creator, the high king of heaven, and God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world with justice by Jesus Christ Himself, whom the Father has appointed. In fact, He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Christ from the dead, and there's a day of reckoning coming for the nonbeliever and for the believer. Fear God, my friends, for He casts the unrighteous unrepentant sinner into the lake of fire. He has the power, He has the ability and He has the just judgment to do so.

My friends, if I could strip this sermon of these next words, I would, but I must say them. It's a place of eternal conscious torment. Do you understand this? It's a place of darkness, misery, no mercy, no mercy friends. Today is the day of mercy. Today, my friends, if you do not know Christ, today is the day. You may not have tomorrow. Today is the day. Run to Jesus. The chasm between heaven and hell, it cannot be traversed. It is impossible. Try to get to the end of the universe. And unfortunately, it says in Romans 3:18, that there is no fear of God before their eyes. The unbeliever has no fear of God. Many ignore Jesus and dismiss these truths. They lie. They say that faith and repentance is not necessary. They claim that they're good and that they don't need a Saviour. They don't see the holiness of God as something that works against the unrepentant sinner. They suppress the truth, they deny it. But God, may I repeat, says, “Do not be deceived.” God cannot be mocked.

The fear of God, this fear of God was spoken of by Martin Luther, and he calls it a “servile fear”. R. C. Sproul explains it this way. He says,

The servile fear is the kind of fear that a prisoner in a torture chamber has for the tormentor, the jailer, the executioner. It's the kind of dreadful anxiety in which someone is frightened by the clear and present danger that is represented by another person. Or it's the kind of fear that a slave would have at the hands of a malicious master who would come with his whip and torment the slave. “Servile” refers to a posture of servitude toward a malevolent owner, not a benevolent one.

Unfortunately, often the fear of the Lord is downplayed or even dismissed as something that's exclusive to the Old Testament. And because God is the God of love, we don't need to talk about it. We don't need to address it, and we don't need to be fearful people. But Jesus Himself

admonished his own disciples, “Fear Him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell.” Remember who you serve. He is the judge and He holds the keys to hell.

Fearing God is actually good for you though. Here's where we get to the good part. This fear is actually meant to keep you safe. If you fear God, it will keep you safe. God has given us many fears to protect us - and consider how these fears protect you. The fear of driving on an icy highway, the fear of running in the dark, the fear of cheating on your income tax, the fear of diving into a shallow pool or a lake, the fear of driving without a seatbelt. The fear of trusting a stranger with your young child, trusting a stranger with your health, trusting a stranger with your wallet. God gives us fear for a reason and it's meant to keep us from sin and harm. And the fear of God is also meant to bring a person to faith and repentance and to keep them from entering into sin.

So, what about the Christian though? What about the Christian? Do we need to fear God? Isn't their name written in the book of life? Haven't they been forgiven? Do they really need to fear God? Do the believers need to do this as well? Doesn't First John say in chapter 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” Yes, the believer has no fear of punishment. The believer has no fear of condemnation. The believer has no fear of being damned to hell my friends. For the believer, they are at peace. And that is why we can sing, “It is well with my soul.” For the believer, Martin Luther called this kind of fear a filial fear. And it comes from the Latin concept of family. It refers to the fear that a child has for his father. The child has a deep respect and love for his father and mother and he wants to please them. He has a fear of offending the one that he loves. Not because of punishment, but because he's afraid of displeasing the one who is the source of his security and love. Believers are in Christ Jesus, and Christ Jesus is the ark of protection and condemnation, just as Noah was the ark of safety that was protecting him and his family from the judgment of the flood. Likewise, Jesus is the ark of safety for the Christian from God's wrath to come.

Here's one of the most magnificent verses in all of Scripture - Romans 8:1. It says that, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” There's two words I want to emphasize, and it says this: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This is not a future hope of, “One day I won't to be condemned.” This is not a, “If I'm good enough, I think it will be okay.” This is a “now” and “no”. And there's no exceptions to this statement. Well, there's no condemnation unless you do this and this and this.

It says also in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And again, I want to emphasize two words, “Having been,” it's a past tense. If you're a Christian, the moment you trusted in Christ, you were justified. It's not a future hope, it's not a fanciful idea. It's a sure thing that in God's eyes, you have been justified and are at peace with God. Therefore, the fear of God for the believer is not of damnation or condemnation. That fear is done away with. There's no fear of the second death in the lake of fire. The Christian is at piece. Instead, the fear of God for the believer is one of awe and reverence. There is submission and respect for who God is, and it's an acknowledgement of His holiness and it's a fear of offending that holiness. The believer loves God and dreads the results

of violating that holiness. And this fear also stems from His holiness, because He is holy, we too, need to fear Him, not just the unbeliever.

However, it would be foolish, my friends, absolutely foolish to think that since we are saved, that our sins don't have consequences. As believers, we know that the sins of our lives still result to some degree in death, do they not? Death of relationships, death of trust, death of joy, death of hopefulness, death of joyfully entering into God's presence, death of evangelizing the lost, death of desiring to read God's Word for fear that He'll confront us with our sin. Death of unhindered prayers resulting from ourselves holding onto our own sins. Even I may add (as we'll look at some Scriptures here), death of health.

Paul says that we need to examine ourselves and take in the Lord's Supper, and if we partake in an unworthy manner, that God may actually bring judgment on the believer. Some of the Christians in Corinth were participating in communion in a sinful manner, and Paul says this in First Corinthians 11:30, "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." Sometimes our sin may result in a loss, perhaps even of our health or our strength. And God says that if He chooses, it may even be the death of our body. God doesn't treat sin lightly my friends and therefore, the Christian needs to fear Him as to keep His commands.

The Apostle Paul says in Second Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether they're good or whether they're bad." He says in Second Corinthians 3:12-15,

12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The judgment for the believer is a judgment of rewards. Our deeds will be judged as either being done in love and in faith for God Himself, and they will be deemed to have eternal value. Or our deeds will be judged to have not been done in faith and in love for Him, and they will be deemed to have no eternal value. But the deeds that we do in love and in faith and in righteousness and submission to our Lord and our master, you will be rewarded. And He will joyfully, lavishly reward you for you have feared your God.

God should be revered and be held in awe since He will judge the believer's life and reward him. Every believer has been given an opportunity to serve Him, and may we as believers, fear the humiliation of not using our talents to serve God for things that are of eternal value. May we actually fear not producing much fruit for our much-loved master. May our love and service for Him give us much joy as we enter into the joy of our master.

Another kind of fear that the believer ought to have though, is the fear of being disciplined. Just as an earthly father will discipline his children, God lovingly disciplines His children. Even a

child fears disappointing his father and mother and he knows that the discipline process is an unpleasant one. It's filled with sorrow and yet God is reasonable and just and right and loving even to discipline His children. Hebrews 12:6 says, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son that He receives." Verse 10 says, "but He disciplines us for our good so that we may share in His holiness." And verse 11 says that we are being trained by this discipline and that this discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. His love is so great that He disciplines us so that we are trained in His holiness and His righteousness. Later in Hebrews...(and I might quickly say, why is this so essential?) Because later in Hebrews, the writer says in chapter 12:14, that without holiness, no one will see God. It's absolutely necessary that we be disciplined so that we might be made holy as He perfects our life.

Point number three, this is my favourite point, because here's where the blessings come. Fearing God brings blessings. Often, we tend to think that fearing God means that we need to live in some sort of a dread, some sort of insecurity, some sort of an unsureness where we're constantly fretting; where we're immobilized, where we're insecure and unsure about things in all sorts of ways, and where we never think, "I'm good enough," and we just sort of shut down. That's often how the fear of the Lord is sort of portrayed - that this just sort of immobilizes a person. But that's not what God intends. That's not what the Bible speaks of as a fear of God that He wants us to have. Often, people actually think that the fear of God is a curse upon us. When in reality, the Bible actually says that there are rich blessings and many blessings for those that fear Him. It's often seen unfortunately as something that restricts their freedom, but in fact, the fear of God gives us the exact freedom that we need to love God and serve Him and be all that God wants you and I to be.

Proverbs 1:7 says that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge; fools despise wisdom and knowledge and instruction." God promises that all who fear Him, will gain wisdom. Do you want to be wise? Fear God. Seek Him in the Scriptures. Pursue Him. Hold Him in high esteem. Know His Word. I liked John Piper's definition of wisdom. He says this, he says, "The greatest human wisdom is the factual knowledge and the situational insight and the necessary resolve that together have the greatest likelihood of success in achieving the intended righteous goal." True wisdom takes into account the facts. True wisdom takes into account the situation. True wisdom puts God's commands then into action. Obedience.

Proverbs 10:27 says that the fear of the Lord prolongs life. Here's another wonderful blessing. Fearing God often results in the preservation of life. As you submit to God, it means that you're not likely to get caught up in sins and criminal activities that may actually shorten or end your life. Here's some actions that can shorten and end a person's life. Driving recklessly over the speed limit in disregard of the law, driving intoxicated, taking illegal drugs, or even abusing illegal drugs, choosing assisted suicide, engaging in sexual immorality - yes, diseases from that can shorten one's life. Ending the life of an unborn child, acting in violence against somebody. Right? All of these things, we can think of other things. These are just a few samples. God in His wisdom, desires to protect us from our sinfulness. His love is so great that He says, "Fear me."

Fearing God though starts with the attitude of the heart. Because it says in 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 says, "By the fear of the Lord one keeps from evil." You see a rich blessing

of fearing God is that it keeps us from sin. Very simply, it keeps us from sin and its consequences. The command of the Bible is not just to flee evil, but to hate it. It is an attitude of despising sin. The sin that's out there and the sin that's in here. It's an attitude of the heart that loves God and that submits to Him, but it seeks Him and it flees from sin.

Proverbs 14:26 says this, "And in the fear of the Lord, there is strong (and I emphasize the word 'strong confidence') and His children will have refuge." You see, as we walk in obedience to the truth, we will have integrity. What we say matches up to what we do, and there's confidence in knowing that we have done what is right. We have no worry of being accused of wrong and being found out of some sin. There's a transparency to our life where we are not going around trying to hide our sins. It doesn't mean that we publicly proclaim our sins. We don't need to be foolish, but it doesn't mean that we hide our sins and try to stuff them down and ignore them and deny them.

To fear God means that we deal truthfully with God and others. And when we have sinned, we confess our sin and we deal with it righteously, and we recognize that it is not good to hide it. We have confidence and joy knowing that we are doing what is right and we're walking by faith. And when we hold onto our sin, our heart is anxious and filled with turmoil. We don't want to confess it because with our pride, we sometimes secretly love it. Don't we? That's maybe a bold statement. But sometimes, there are sins that we like that we shouldn't. We don't want it to be exposed and being enslaved to that sin, we hesitate to speak out against that sin. Our conscience bothers us, but we lack a strong confidence. We fret in our hearts and we grow weary of our nagging conscience. But when we confess to God, we experience the refreshing forgiveness that He gives to us.

Eternally, we have also a strong confidence because we are now in Christ who is our safety and our refuge. Our sin, our guilt, our punishment has been placed on Christ and we are confident that there's now no punishment left for us. We believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead as proof of God's justice that it is satisfied, and that His death has fully atoned for our sins. We believe that He is the way, that He is the truth and that He is the life, and that He is our immovable rock and refuge.

Proverbs 19:23 says, "The fear of the Lord leads to life so that we may so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil." Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and [He] rescues them." There's a protection of God for those who fear Him. What a blessing. What a blessing. Proverbs 22:4 says, "The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honour in life." And Isaiah says in chapter 33:6, that the fear of the Lord is treasure. Do you want treasure? Because if you fear the Lord, the Bible guarantees that you will have treasure. I'm not talking about your bank account or the car that's sitting in your driveway. I'm talking about what lasts. The things that are eternal.

Let's look at Abraham as we close. Abraham was a man that we can learn from as someone who trusted the Lord. Abraham was a man who feared the Lord, and we see this by his trust and obedience. God came to him one day and told him that he would be blessed and that a great nation would come from him. In fact, He says many nations would come from him. And in Genesis 15, God promises him a son. And 25 years later, when Abraham is about 100-years-old,

his wife finally gives birth to Isaac. This is the only son that Sarah gives birth to. In fact, it was through the line of Abraham and Sarah that the Messiah would one day come. So, this is critical.

Abraham dearly loved his son, Isaac, and this would be the heir that the promise would come through. He didn't have any other children with Sarah whereby this promise would come through. It was in a sense his only child. And God was specific that this promise would come through this one son. His entire life, he had no children. And then God comes to him and He gives him an amazing promise and makes a covenant with him, and He does a miracle by giving Abraham and Sarah their son in their late age.

And then the remarkable thing happens. God asks him to do the unthinkable, the unthinkable. He tells Abraham to take his one son of promise and to sacrifice him. To take him and have him be placed on the altar to be a burnt offering. Unbelievable, how could this be? God asking him to sacrifice this one son that he's waited for so long, 25 years? We know how the story ends, but Abraham didn't at the time. Just like you and me, he had to walk in faith and obedience, and that's exactly what he did. He went early in the morning. He traveled with his son on a three-day journey and he made every effort to do exactly what God asked.

We can imagine what he was thinking and wrestling with in his heart and his mind. However, there was no record of him humming and hawing, is there? No record. Taking time to get counsel from others on whether he should obey God or not. He didn't argue with God. He didn't plead his case. He didn't say, "Well, God, here you said this and now you're saying this. I'm taking this. I'm not taking that." Even though it seemed to very much contradict each other, to negate each other in a lot of ways from Abraham's perspective, he's like, "Okay, this is the command, I'm doing it." Rather he quickly obeyed and he did so fully. He listened to God and he chose to obey the command rather than his own feelings. His love for God was greater than his love for his own son. He feared God more than he feared his wife.

Just as Abraham was about to slay his son, God called to him and provided a ram that was stuck in the bushes instead of Isaac, the perfect substitute. And notice what God says to Abraham in Genesis 22:12. He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son."

Abraham had a treasure from his fear of God. In fearing God, he fully trusted. He had a treasure of trust. His fear of God was demonstrated in his obedience and his love for God, exceeded his love for his own family. And no one could rob Abraham of this treasure of fearing God. He loved his son dearly, but he loved God even more. And his love for God was filled with a deep abiding trust. He trusted in God's provision. Even when given a command that would be emotionally gut-wrenching to obey, he trusted and obeyed. How could he obey? Well, Hebrews 11:19 tells us. It says that Abraham had faith that God is able to raise people from the dead, and in that moment, and I emphasize in that moment, that point of obedience, God gave him the grace to trust Him.

God's grace is sufficient for the moment that it's necessary. I don't need the grace today for tomorrow. It's not like God has to give me a dump truck load of grace today and it's going to spill in tomorrow and hopefully into Tuesday as well. It's grace that's full and complete for this very

moment, and that's why I don't need to worry about tomorrow. Because tomorrow, if I need more grace, He'll give me more.

You see, although we like to think of God in friendly passive terms, in comfortable, warm, encouraging ways, we are commanded to fear Him. This is not an option, my friend. Let me ask you, do you fear God? Does His holiness bring fear and trembling to you? Does it make you bow down low before Him? Do you offer yourself in full surrender when you see His holiness? Does it move you to faith and obedience? Does the purity of His holiness cause you to have the same attitude and response that Isiah had? Are we filled with awe and deep reverence, for there was only one who is holy and each must face Him one day? Either as a judge who is filled with wrath because we are unrepentant and we have not trusted in Christ as our Lord and Saviour, or we will face Him as a judge, as He joyfully and lavishly rewards you for your acts of love and service for Him.

How do we approach God? Do we do it flippantly? Do we do it casually? How do you approach the Bible when you open it up? Is it casual? Is it with deep reverence? Is it with the awe that God deserves? Or is it with a familiarity? "We know it, we'll skim over it. I've read it before. It's not that important." Let me ask you this, how do you see God's commands? Do we treat them lightly like Uzzah did? Do we try to do things our own way? Do we sometimes think that we know a better way than what God himself has said? Or do we think that maybe, unfortunately, we can adjust His commands, we can tweak it a little bit because it would be a little bit more comfortable? It would cost less? Brothers, sisters, may our hearts be filled with a deep love for Him, and may we always remember what it says in Psalm 112:11 – "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His command." Amen. Let's pray.

Father, You are great and You are holy. Teach us to fear You. In Jesus' name, amen.