

“WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?”

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Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 34:4-11; Psalm 111:10

Introduction.

Thank you to those of you who turned in questions. I got about 15 cards with about 30 questions that were all over the map, or should I say all over the Bible. Some were topics, some were issues of our day, some were specific passages of Scripture or single texts of Scripture.

This evening we will focus on one of those texts, one that is bigger than we might first think.

Let me begin asking you, what are you afraid of? We all have fears or phobias.

Phobias typically fall within five general categories:

- fears related to animals (spiders, snakes, insects, rodents, Suriphobia- fear of mice)
- fears related to the natural environment (heights, thunder, darkness)
- fears related to blood, injury, or medical issues (injections, broken bones, falls, dentist)
- fears related to specific situations (flying, riding an elevator, speaking in public, crowds)
- other (choking, loud noises, drowning)
- today social media has created some more related to being alone, being disconnected.

I came across a couple I had never heard of before:

pogonophobia, fear of beards

Pentheraphobia- Fear of mother-in-law. (Greek penthera-mother in law)

There is even a fear a duck is watching you

Most of us think of fear as something we want to get rid of, it is a negative thing, not something we want more of.

For some of us the fear of the Lord is a negative thing. Maybe we grew up afraid of God, afraid of going to hell, afraid of God's punishment for our sin, that He would make our lives miserable.

If we grew up in a home with a very strict and severe father, who was demanding, punishing, one we could never please, one who never expressing love or compassion then

we would view God the same way. We learned no sense of God's love and grace and mercy.

But sometimes someone will say about a person, he is a God-fearing man. When we hear that we think of it as positive, it is saying something good about that person and the way they live. What does that mean?

Scripture has a lot to say about the fear of the Lord and the wisdom of fearing the Lord.

The fear of the Lord.

The book of Proverbs begins with a preface, verses 1-6. So, verse 7 is the beginning of the book and being a book about wisdom it begins with a grand statement. This is Solomon's first proverb, his first word of wisdom. There is no wiser word that can be spoken.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning (or most important part) of knowledge/wisdom.”

This is a very important truth. This is not a small thing or a thing to be taken lightly. This is central to what it means to be a Christian. It is found sixteen times in Proverbs alone.

This is the beginning, this is the place to start. From this point every everything else flows. Compared to this knowledge, all other knowledge, worldly, carnal, pagan, is folly. Of all knowledge, the knowledge of God is the highest, greatest, best.

Let me illustrate this using numbers. If I write the number 000,000 what do I have? Nothing. And if I add some more zeros to it then what do I have? Still nothing. But if I put one number in front of all those zeros, say the number 2, then what do I have? All of a sudden, I have something. The only number that counts in that figure is the first number, without it the rest, no matter how many, are worthless.

So, it is with wisdom and knowledge. If I have all the knowledge in the world, all understanding, but I don't have the fear of the Lord, then it is nothing, in fact it is worse than nothing, it is folly. And the more zeros I gain without the first number only makes me a greater failure.

Consider the implications of this. Take all that is considered to be knowledge and wisdom in the world. Take all the smartest people, take all the greatest books, all the facts and knowledge of science and math and philosophy. If it ignores God it is just a bunch of zeros, it is folly.

All that is knowledge apart from God only pretends to be knowledge, there is no true knowledge apart from the fear of the Lord. What does it profit a man to gain all worldly wisdom and lose his eternal soul?

Romans 1:21-25 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images ... they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Secular scientists and scholars and philosophers have thrown God out of His creation, claiming to be wise they have become fools. Why are they called fools who don't seek it? Because they resist, reject, rebel against their greatest blessing.

The knowledge derived from the fear of the Lord delivers you from the greatest danger, it leads you along the best path, it gains you the greatest reward.

We should fear God because of who He is. He is God. That alone is cause to tremble. We should fear God because of who we are. We are rebellious sinners against a holy God. Those who don't fear God, don't know God and they don't know themselves. Adam and Eve hid for good reason, they were afraid of God, they had sinned, they were guilty.

The fear of the Lord reminds us of who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us so that in the midst of fear, we can also love God and know joy in His presence.

There are two ways to understand fear. It can mean being afraid or terrified or apprehensive about something. We are afraid of heights, of failing, of certain people or all manner of things. But the word fear can also mean to regard with reverence, awe, to venerate.

The fear of the Lord can be of either kind. It can be a servile, *frightful fear* like between a slave and master. A fear of punishment. A dread that comes from sin and guilt. The ungodly and unrighteous fear the Lord and His coming wrath. They try to flee from His presence or ignore Him.

There's a positive fear of the Lord also. It's a "*filial*" *fear* that only a child of God can have. It's an attitude of reverence for the Father and the Son. It includes love, forgiveness, joy, trust and a desire to please and serve, a fear of disobeying or disappointing.

This filial fear of the Lord is a coin with two sides.

On one side, the positive side, is the desire to please God, to do His will, to love and obey Him.

On the other side, the negative side is the desire to do nothing to offend God in anything. This is the Alpha and Omega of knowledge/wisdom.

To do these two things is to fear the Lord. To not do these two things is utter folly. Those who don't fear the Lord show it by having no desire for God or to please Him, and they have no fear or dread of offending God and incurring His just and holy wrath. This is the height of folly.

There is a proper fearful side to the fear of the Lord. It is not only reverence and respect and awe. God is fearful, there is wrath and judgment on sin. We should fear sin and its consequences.

Just as we fear the discipline of our earthly father, so we should of our heavenly Father. God makes countless direct threats in Scripture with warnings of what will happen if we don't listen and obey.

There are those who run away from God, out of fear, shame, guilt, love of darkness. There are those who run to God, to escape all those things. There is a fear that drives us away from God and a fear that draws us toward God.

God is a consuming fire. God is not safe, God is not tame, but God is good. The only safety from the fire is in the fire. Fear of the Lord drives those who are wise to the purifying forgiveness of the Lord.

I remember well the huge Oklahoma thunder storms in the heat of the summer. Massive storms thunder and lightning all around, wind, hail, torrential rain. We would stand on the porch and take in the awesome display. It could be fearful, but we were safe, we were sheltered, we weren't afraid.

That is like God, majestic, full of splendor and glory, we can tremble with reverence and awe at His power and authority and wrath, but we don't cower, we don't try to run away.

But even God's threats are good, they are motivated out of love and care for our eternal souls. God doesn't just threaten to strike terror, to show how strong He is. He is not vindictive or arbitrary or reckless. God threatens for the sake of our joy. God threatens us to motivate us toward godliness, holiness, repentance, faithfulness, to reject and flee from sin.

There is another way of saying this. There are two other aspects of fear.

Fear of God or fear of everything else.

Those who fear God don't have to fear anything else.

Those who don't fear God, will fear everything else.

There is a fear that is unbelief. To fear anything else is to show lack of trust, faith, belief in God. When we fear man or when we fear the future, we are saying they are bigger than God. Trade your fear for fear, trade your fear of everything else for your fear of the Lord.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God... He will come and save you” (Isaiah 35:4).

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32)?

One of the best illustrations of this in Scripture regards the future, being able to laugh at future.

Those who don't fear God, fear the future, the unknown and most especially death. Those who fear God, don't fear the future, in fact they can laugh at the future.

Those who don't fear God, find themselves trying to be God, trying to control their lives and their future, trying to grasp onto everything that is important to them, afraid of losing control.

They are on their own, they are masters of their fate and future. No one else is going to help them.

The fear of the Lord faces down every other fear and causes them to flee.

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.” (Proverbs 14:26)

Implications, application, conclusion.

My prayer is that you are more motivated to pursue the fear of the Lord. That you will make a conscious effort to pray for it and seek it, that you will strive to get rid of every other fear and replace it with this fear.

The fear of the Lord is one of the best things you can have, it will benefit and bless you in more ways than you can imagine. This is our duty, our calling, our purpose, our joy and happiness, our life and eternal life.

Wisdom comes from God, those who fear Him receive it, those who don't receive folly. Cultivate this fear of the Lord that leads to wisdom by seeking it in Scripture, by asking for it, by trusting in God, by faith in Jesus, by being filled with the Spirit.

What does fear of the Lord look like?

There is forgiveness with you that you may be feared. Psalm 130:4

The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. Psalm 25:14

The eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love. Psalm 33:18

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and delivers them. Psalm 34:7

O fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack. Psalm 34:9

As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him. Psalm 103:13

The steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him. Psalm 103:17

The LORD . . . will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great. Psalm 115:12-13

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. Psalm 147:11

You shall fear the LORD your God, and he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. 2 Kings 17:39

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all those who practice it. Psalm 111:10

You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. Psalm 115:11

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death. Proverbs 14:27

The fear of the LORD leads to life; and he who has it rests satisfied. Proverbs 19:23

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:3

The prophet Isaiah found much delight in the fear of the Lord. May you feel as much delight as you pursue it with all your might.