

What It is Not



The Fear of the Lord (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

The fear of the Lord, an aspect of our relationship with God that is decisive in determining the course of our life, and yet one which is seldom mentioned or explained in contemporary Christianity. By the time I've come to the end of this theme, I trust you will have learned truths that will help you for the rest of your life.

But first, let me say thank you to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So please take time to write, even if it's only a brief personal note.

Now back to our theme: The Fear of the Lord.

For many people, perhaps, this may not sound too interesting or exciting. The very word "fear" tends to produce a negative reaction. But please don't let that put you off! I'm convinced, both from the study of Scripture and from personal experience, that there is absolutely nothing in all the life of faith that carries with it greater or more wonderful promises of benefit and blessing than this very theme, The Fear of the Lord.

What, then, is the fear of the Lord? In my introductory talk today I want to approach this question from a negative point of view. I'm gong to explain first of all what the fear of the Lord is not. That's to say, I'm going to dispel some false pictures or impressions to make way for a positive presentation of what the fear of the Lord really is.

I want to speak about four things that the fear of the Lord is not. Four kinds of fear which are not the fear of the Lord. The first one is what I call "natural fear." A kind of fear which is perfectly naturally to all of us as human beings, which we normally experience in certain situations which are frightening. Let me give you a couple of examples, very simple down to earth examples. For instance, being on a roller coaster, and being at the top of the great swoop down, and sometimes they even arrange these things to happen in the dark. I don't believe there are many of us that are not gripped by a sense of fear as that roller coaster starts to swoop down the slope and you wonder whether it will make the bend or whether it will stop in time. As a matter of fact, it produces so much reaction in me that I've more or less

decided that from now I am going to stay away from roller coasters.

But at any rate that's a familiar example of a kind of fear which I would call "natural." I don't think anybody needs to be ashamed of experiencing that kind of fear, in fact, it would be almost unnatural not to feel it. I don't quite know why people get pleasure out of being made to experience fear. But that really isn't my business. I'm not a roller coaster proprietor anyhow.

The second kind of fear that I would mention is an example of natural fear is the fear of a soldier going into battle. That's something I've known in personal experience in World War II going into battle in the desert of North Africa after the initial conflict of the battle of El Alamein wondering what was lying ahead. Would it cost me my life? How near would the shells come? And I don't believe that even the bravest soldier doesn't experience some measure of fear in a situation like that. It's not abnormal. It's nothing to be ashamed of. It's a natural fear. And I would say natural fear is like natural pain. It's designed to warn us and protect us. It's for our good.

For example, I had a grandson (he's still my grandson but he's grown up now). As a small boy of about age 8 or 9, he had absolutely no fear of traffic. He would walk out on the highways and stroll along as if there were no cars going up and down the highway. And it nearly cost him his life more than once. It caused his mother many worrisome hours. He was somehow devoid of that particular natural fear of fast-moving objects coming toward him. But that's the kind of fear that is given to us to protect us.

All right, the second kind of fear which is not the fear of the Lord is what I call "demonic fear." The Scripture has quite a lot to say about this. I'll just quote one passage of Scripture, 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 7:

> "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (NKJ)

So Paul says we do not need to be under the oppression or the dominion of a spirit of fear. But that very clearly indicates that there is such a thing as a spirit, an evil spirit, a demon of fear. And I would suggest three marks of demonic fear which distinguish it from the fear of the Lord (which is what we are going to be talking about in the rest of these talks).

Three marks then of demonic fear: first, it proceeds from Satan, not from God, whereas the fear of the Lord is from God. Second, demonic fear tends to hold us back from obeying God. Satan injects that kind of fear into us to keep us from doing the things that God wants us to do. In this also, it's exactly the opposite of the fear of the Lord which motivates us and impels us to obey God and to do the things that God wants. And thirdly, demonic fear is tormenting. Elsewhere in the Scripture it says, "...fear has torment." Not all fear, but demonic fear. That's a sure mark of demonic fear; if it torments you.

There are many examples: what they call claustrophobia is often an example of demonic fear. My first wife had a fear for many years of getting into an elevator. She would rather walk up six flights of stairs than take the elevator. Then one day God showed us that this was demonic. We prayed against it and she was delivered from it and after that time she had no more problems about getting into an elevator. So that is an example of demonic fear. That's not the theme of what I am talking to you about in this series, but I just want to clear the way by pointing out that the fear of the Lord is not like demonic fear.

The third kind of fear that I want to mention, which is also not the fear of the Lord, is what I call "religious fear" taught by man. And in the prophet Isaiah, God speaks about the Jewish people and He says one of their problems is they have this kind of religious fear that's taught by man, speaking, of course, about the Jewish people in the time of Isaiah. This is what it says in Isaiah 29, verse 13:

> "Therefore the Lord said: 'Inasmuch as these people draw near to me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.'" (NKJ)

So you see, there is a kind of fear, it's what I call "religious fear." But it's not a fear that comes truly from God. It's a fear that's inculcated by men. It's what I call a religious or even a superstitious fear. And I think there are countless millions of religious people in the world today who are in some way affected by that religious fear that keeps them from doing certain things, that causes them to behave in certain religious ways, and yet it's not a fear that comes from God. And I would point out three marks of religious fear which distinguish it from the kind of fear we're going to be dealing with the fear of the Lord.

So here are three marks of religious fear. First, it's taught by men, not by God. God does not accept responsibility for it. Second, it's superficial. It affects outer conduct, but not the heart. The Lord says about these people, "...they honor me with they lips, but their heart is far from me..." And third, it does not produce the kind of obedience that God desires. It produces a slavish attitude, not the free obedience of sons

and daughters, which is what God desires. So there are three marks of religious fear. It is taught by men, not by God; it's superficial, affecting outer conduct but not the heart; and it does not produce the kind of obedience God desires.

The fourth kind of fear which is also not the fear of the Lord is the fear of man. Proverbs 29:25 says this:

> "The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe." (NKJ)

So we see that the fear of man is not the same as trusting in the Lord, in fact it's distinguished from it. And it brings a snare; it trips us up; it keeps us from walking in the path of righteousness. Let me give you three marks of the fear of man which distinguish it from the fear of the Lord. First, it makes man more important than God. The people who have the fear of man are more concerned about what men think than they are about what God thinks. God's opinion is not so important to them as the opinion of their fellow men. Secondly, it holds us back from obeying God; it snares us when we want to walk in the path of obedience and righteousness, it's a snare. And third, it's the opposite of trusting God. The book of Proverbs says, "The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe." So they're opposites. They're not the same thing at all.

So let's look now at certain simple features that are common to these last three kinds of fear, that's demonic fear, religious fear, the fear of man. First, they tend to keep us from obeying God; second, they do not produce peace in our hearts. Contrariwise, as I'll be showing you in the remaining talks in this series, there are two marks of the fear of the Lord. First, it motivates us to obey God and, second, it produces peace.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll approach our theme from a positive perspective. I'll be explaining what the fear of the Lord is.

Radio Program

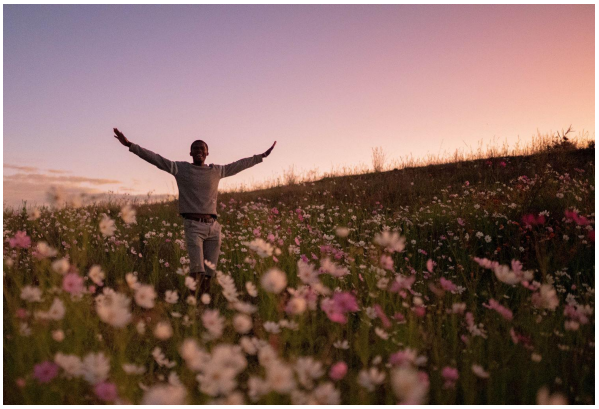
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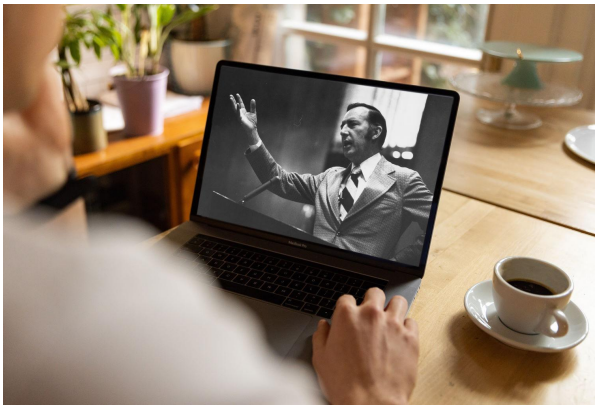
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