

What It Is



The Fear of the Lord (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

My theme this week will be 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.

In my introductory talk yesterday, I began by pointing out four things that the fear of the Lord is not. And I am just going to go through them briefly before we move into the positive. First of all, it is not natural fear. And I gave the example of being on a roller coaster or a soldier going into battle; which are completely natural circumstances in which people normally feel fear. Secondly, it's not demonic fear. Paul says, "God has not given us a spirit of fear." So there is a spirit of fear which doesn't come from God. And I suggested three marks of demonic fear. First, it proceeds from Satan, not from God. Second, it holds us back from obeying God. Third, it's tormenting.

The third kind of fear that is not the fear of the Lord is what I called religious fear, taught by man. Isaiah speaks about this. He says, "These people draw near to Me [that's the Lord] 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." So that's a kind of religious fear taught by the commandment of men, not proceeding from the Lord. And I suggested these three marks of religious fear. First, it's taught by men and not by God. Second, it's superficial, it affects outer conduct but not the heart. Third, it does not produce the kind of obedience God desires.

The fourth kind of fear that I spoke about that is not the fear of the Lord is mentioned in Proverbs 29:25:

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

And I suggested three marks of the fear of man. First, it makes man more important than God. Second, it holds us back from obeying God. Third, it's the very opposite of trusting God. And so we saw there were two features common to those last three kinds of fear; that's demonic fear,

religious fear and the fear of man: first, they tend to keep us from obeying God. Second, they do not produce peace in our hearts. On the other hand, the fear of the Lord has these two distinctive marks: First, it motivates us to obey God; second, it produces peace.

Now today I'm going to approach our theme from a positive perspective. I'm going to explain what the fear of the Lord is. And I'm going to begin with an example from the world of the senses but I'm going to apply it to the spiritual realm. One of the problems about speaking about things in the spiritual realm is we can't apprehend them with our senses. Consequently we often need to start from something that we can apprehend with our senses and then see how it has a parallel in the spiritual realm. That's really the main application of the parables of Jesus. He referred to familiar things in the natural realm and then showed that they had a parallel in the spiritual realm. So I'm going to talk about something from the natural realm, but I'm going to seek to use it to illustrate the fear of the Lord.

I want you to think of a towering craggy mountain, rising up steep out of the sea. And I want you to picture yourself on the very pinnacle of this mountain. On one side you look down on the wave far below and you can just see the white foam, and you know that they're dashing against the base of the mountain but you can hardly hear the noise, you're so far up. On the other side, you look away from the sea landward, and you see a beautiful array of fields and forests, stretching out as far as the horizon with the sun shining on them. And you could use a number of different adjectives to describe your situation. For instance, you could speak about it being beautiful or being exhilarating or being inspiring or being unique. It has no exact parallel anywhere else. It's just one unique place in the earth. And you enjoy all this. You're uplifted by it. You're exhilarated by it, but at the same time somewhere deep inside you, you have this continual realization, one step in the wrong direction and you'll be dashed to pieces on the crags and plunged into the sea. Now you've no intention of taking that step, yet the very thought of it produces in you a kind of gasp and an involuntary tightening of your diaphragm.

That's just a little picture in the natural of the fear of the Lord. Of course, God is infinitely greater than anything He's created but when we think of that tremendous mountain with the beautiful vista and the exhilaration; that's what God can be in our lives. We would, in the natural, delight to stand on the top of that mountain and enjoy the view, but at the same time there's always just an element of risk attached. Suppose I were to step in the wrong direction, what would happen? And you gasp. And if you're like me, and I've been in some situations somewhat like that, there's an involuntary tightening of your diaphragm, and you almost take a step backwards just to make sure you don't take that fatal step forwards.

Well, somehow, for me, that gives a picture of what the fear of the Lord is like. It's mixed with tremendous enjoyment of His favor, of His glory, of His power, all of which are available to you in a positive way. But you're always aware of the fact that you must not take the wrong step in the wrong direction because it would be final disaster. Related words that we might use in English (but they are not powerful enough) would be "awe" or "reverence." Perhaps awe is as near as we can get. It's not really a full expression of what the fear of the Lord is.

Now I want to present to you the fear of the Lord from another point of view. I want to suggest to you that the fear of the Lord is really obedience to the first of the Ten Commandments. I'm sure you know what the first commandment is. But let me remind you that it's stated very briefly in Exodus 20, verse 3. The Lord is speaking and He says:

> "You shall have no other gods before Me." (NKJ)

And it could equally well be translated, "You shall have no other gods beside Me." Now, adhering to that commandment will bring forth the fear of the Lord in our lives. It means that we give to God total preeminence. That we never put anything else in our lives before Him, we never put anything else beside Him. We never put anything else, no influence, no person, no motivation, on a level with the Lord, with God. You see, that's very logical. If God is really willing to reveal Himself to us, and to in some way share Himself with us, and come into our lives, and if He offers us His fellowship, creatures of dust that we are, Almighty God offers that privilege to you and me. How dare we offer Him anyplace in our lives but first place! It's an insult! It's almost unthinkable that we should even be motivated that way! It's almost like standing there at the top of the cliff and deliberately taking a step in the wrong direction. The moment we put anything in our lives before or equal with Almighty God.

I want to illustrate this from a phrase that's used by Jacob in the book of Genesis. Jacob had just parted with his father-in-law, Laban. He'd taken his wives and his flocks and his herds, and he was on his way back to the land that God had promised him, and Laban pursued him in anger meaning to do him harm. But that night in a dream the Lord appeared to Laban and said, "Don't you do anything to my servant Jacob." And then next day they had a confrontation. And this is what Jacob said to Laban and I want you to listen carefully.

Genesis 31:42:

> "Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed..." (NKJ)

Jacob was, of course, the descendant of Abraham and Isaac. They were his ancestors. And he speaks about his God this way, "...the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac..." What a strange phrase and yet how meaningful. What was "the Fear of Isaac"? The Fear of Isaac was Isaac's God. Jacob's God, too. Abraham's God. But that phrase, "the Fear of Isaac" somehow encapsulate this attitude toward God.

I want to suggest to you a thought as I come to the close of this message: What you fear most is your God. You can make a thing your god by fearing it. I think some people fear cancer and make cancer their god. Some people fear man and make a god out of man as we have seen in a previous talk. But if we truly fear the Lord, that acknowledges Him as being indeed our God.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow we'll be taking Jesus as our pattern and we'll be considering the fear of the Lord in the life of Jesus.

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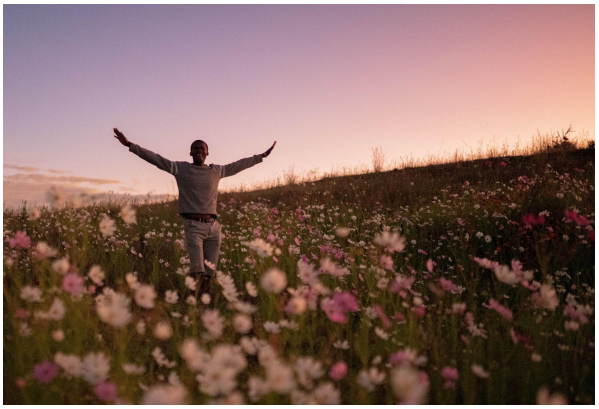

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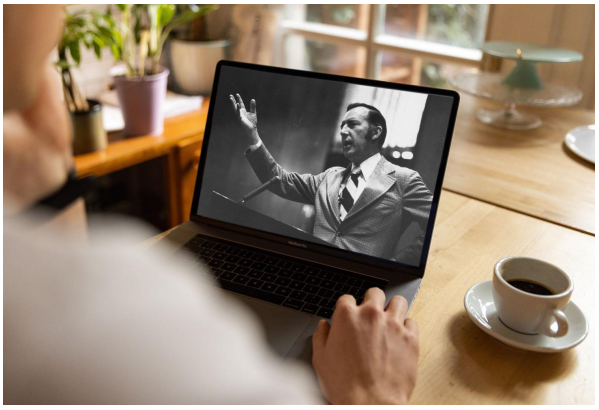

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