

In the Early Church



The Fear of the Lord (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme for this Week: The Fear of the Lord. I believe this is a theme which must inevitably challenge each one of us to reexamine our personal relationship with the Lord, myself included.

In my talk yesterday I shared with you on the part that The Fear of the Lord played in the life of Jesus. And primarily I quoted from Isaiah chapter 11, verses 1-3, where we read these words concerning Jesus as the predicted Messiah:

> "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. [And then we move on into the place that the Spirit of the Lord will play in the life of Jesus.] The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." (NKJ)

We see there the seven aspects of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord. The first one, the Spirit of the Lord Himself, the Spirit that speaks in the first person as God. Then the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The culminating aspect of the Holy Spirit resting on Jesus is The Fear of the Lord.

And that's the particular thing that's singled out for emphasis in the comment of the next verse, "His delight is in the fear of the Lord." And I pointed out yesterday: if Jesus, the sinless Son of God, needed the fear of the Lord; and if the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, imparted that to Jesus; then how much more do you and I stand in need of the fear of the Lord if we are going to lead a life that is glorifying to God and pleasing to Him?

Well, today we're going to on and we're going to take the early Church as our pattern; and we'll be considering the fear of the Lord in the early Church as it's described for us in the New Testament. The first passage we'll look at will be in Acts chapter 9, verse 31. This is a description of the early churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. They had passed through a time of persecution that had been stirred up mainly by Saul of Tarsus, who had been converted and become the Apostle Paul; and out of the time of persecution they had entered into a time of rest and blessing. And this is how the

writer of the book of Acts describes this. Acts 9:31:

> "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified [or were built up]. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." (NKJ)

Now I want you to notice that balance. It's something that runs all through Scripture. It's something that doesn't really fit in with our normal, carnal way of looking at things. The balance is between the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. We've seen already from the example of Jesus that it's the Holy Spirit who puts in us the fear of the Lord. But it's the Holy Spirit, likewise, who comforts us. And what I want to emphasize today, out of this lesson from the early churches, that we must never separate these two things: the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Many of us would say, "Well, what I really need is comfort, encouragement, truth." But if you receive comfort and encouragement without the fear of the Lord in your life, it will not do for you what you really need. It's liable to make you careless or proud or puffed-up. It will not produce by itself the result that is needed, the result that God intends. The comfort of the Holy Spirit has to be balanced by the fear of the Lord, the reverent awe of the Lord, which is also inspired by the Holy Spirit. We must not separate these. And I want to suggest further that we should not reverse the order. Do not put the comfort before the fear. That's the tendency of natural inclination and everyone of us says, "I really need comfort, I need encouragement, I need help." But the divinely-inspired Word of God puts the fear of the Lord and then the comfort. I believe that's where safety lies for every one of us.

And then I want you to notice the results. It says, "...the churches had peace, they were edified and they were multiplied." They grew in numbers. So there are three results in the Christian church, in the lives of Christians, of the balance between the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, we have peace. And do you remember I pointed out to you earlier in these talks, that the other kinds of fear do not impart peace. That's a distinctive aspect of the fear of the Lord that it imparts peace. Secondly, they were edified or built up, they grew stronger. And third, they were multiplied, their numbers grew.

Now we hear today a lot about church growth and I believe in church growth. I believe churches should grow, but I want to suggest to you that this is really the divine pattern for church growth. It's the fear of the Lord balanced with the comfort or encouragement of the Holy Spirit producing; first of all, peace; second, edification or upbuilding of the believers; and third, numerical multiplication. And I want to offer my opinion, that if we achieve multiplication without the fear of the Lord, to start with, the results will be very superficial and very temporary. I have seen churches grow like mushrooms and wither like mushrooms too. And they withered because they were not rooted in the fear of the Lord.

Now in the New Testament the fear of the Lord is also inculcated in us as Christians in our personal relationships. There's a brief but very important verse in Ephesians 5:21 speaking to us about how we need to relate to one another. It says:

> "...submitting to one another in the fear of God." (NKJ)

It's very important that you see two things. First of all, God requires us to have a submissive, humble attitude toward our fellow believers. Second, the reason we're to have this attitude is the fear of God. If we look at our fellow believers and assess their characters and their problems, many times we might say, "I don't see any reason to submit to a person like that. I'm just as good as he is and maybe better!" But if you think like that, you're not thinking in the fear of the Lord. The reason why we are to submit to one another is because we fear God. God says we're to submit to one another. And if we don't submit to one anther, then we are not walking in the fear of God.

I have seen many Christians, apparently successful, with powerful ministries, who were in no way prepared to submit to fellow believers or even fellow ministers. And about that I just have to make one comment on the basis of Scripture. They may be successful, but they're not walking in the fear of the Lord and I suspect their success will ultimately be short-lived.

Moving on now in the New Testament, I want to give you one final great, unchanging reason why all of us need to cultivate the fear of the Lord in our lives. This reason is stated by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 17-19:

> "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear; [Notice those words 'conduct yourselves in fear'] knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish

and without spot." (NKJ)

Notice, first of all, that those words are not addressed to sinners. They're addressed to God's redeemed, believing people. It's to them that Peter says, "Conduct yourselves here during the time of your sojourning in fear." And he gives two reasons why we need to have this attitude of reverent fear. First of all, he says we're all going to have to give an account of ourselves to God, our Father. He says, "The Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work." There is a judgment ahead of us. It's not a judgment of condemnation, but it's a judgment of evaluation of our lives and services, our faithfulness. And we need continually to bear in mind in every one of us, that there's going to be a time when as the Apostle Paul says, "We shall give account of ourselves to God of the things done in the body whether good or bad." I believe that is a realization that everyone of us needs to have continually before us.

And then the second reason is the price that God was willing to pay for our redemption. "We were not redeemed with silver or gold. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." The most precious thing in the universe was paid for our redemption. That should cause us to live in the reverent fear of the Lord lest we do anything that would displease or dishonor the One who paid such a tremendous price for us.

Let me give a very simple illustration. You go to a store and you buy a very cheap watch, a few dollars. You're not really very concerned how you handle that watch. But suppose you go to another store, a real high-classed store, and you buy a really expensive, beautiful watch, maybe it's a gold watch and it's got many jewels in it. You pay a high price for it. Let me ask, which watch are you going to take more care of? Obviously the one you paid the high price for. And that's why we need to be careful how we live because of the tremendous price that God paid through the blood of Jesus for our redemption.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow we'll be looking at the fear of the Lord from yet another aspect as the only source of wisdom.

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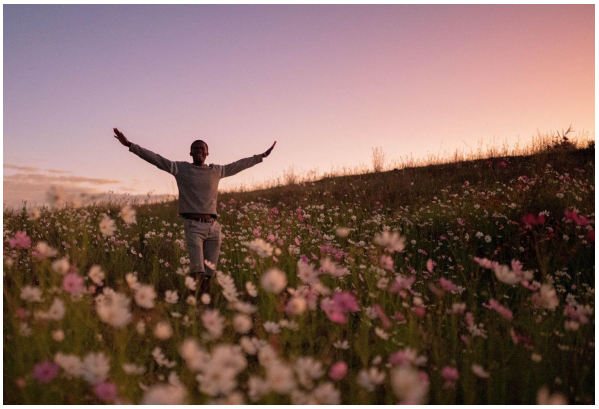

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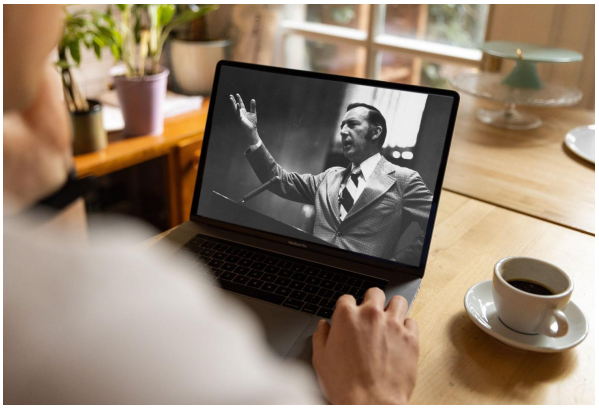

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