

## *Fear of the Lord is Wisdom*

Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. (Ps. 33:8)

### **Fear the Lord Thy God**

Fear is defined as a human emotion caused by an expectation of evil or impending danger. This fear is realized at a very early age. A child for example, fears falling and learns ways to protect himself or herself from danger. Fright, also connected with fear, is defined, sudden and violent fear; terror. These emotions however are not the fear that the Bible speaks of. Biblical fear, or the fear of God, and the fear that is in human emotions are in direct contrast.

### **The Fear of God is Not Fright**

Luther teaches; "Being afraid of God is different from fearing God. The fear of God is a fruit of love, but being afraid of Him is the seed of hatred. Therefore we should not be afraid of God but should fear Him so that we do not hate Him whom we should love. . . . Therefore the fear of God is more aptly called reverence. For example, we revere those whom we love, honor, esteem, and fear to offend."

Also Luther, writing on the Fourth Commandment, says: "But honor is higher than mere love and includes a certain fear, which unites with love, and causes a man to fear offending them more than he fears the punishment. Just as there is fear in the honor we pay a sanctuary, and yet we do not flee from it as from a punishment, but draw near to it all the more. Such a fear mingled with love is the true honor; the other fear without any love is that which we have toward things which we despise or flee from, as we fear the hangman or punishment. There is no honor in that, for it is a fear without all love, nay, fear that has with it hatred and enmity. Of this we have a proverb of St. Jerome: What we fear, that we also hate. With such a fear God does not wish to be feared or honored, but with the first, which is mingled with love and confidence.

### **Fear of the Lord is Wisdom**

"And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Job 28:28

Many places in scripture man is placed in direct comparison with God. Here we recognize our earthly limitations and stand in awe of him. Apostle Paul reminds us that, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (1 Cor 1:25) The Prophet Isaiah compares man and God in this way, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:8-9 In spite of this, we can, as Luther teaches in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer, approach God as children approach their dear parents.

Solomon wrote, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Prov. 9:10

### **The Fruits of Holy Fear**

Through faith we comprehend the great measure of grace afforded us. We understand that God has given freely of his love. This constrains us to serve him. And this is also what God requires of us. It is written, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deut. 10:12)

God wants us to serve him with an undivided heart, Jesus said that "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24) The desire to serve and obey God is born of love that is kindled by the comprehension of God's grace and love for us. Jesus said "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23)

The desire to serve God is made manifest in our lives. We serve Him in our words and deeds alike. God also teaches us to revere Him with outward signs of respect: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:30)

As a point of illustration, we might look at the life of Moses when he was called by God to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. God, remembering the oppression of the Children of Israel, manifested himself to Moses in the wilderness as a fire burning within a bush, yet not consuming it. Intrigued by this phenomenon, Moses edged closer and was startled to hear his name called out. But the speaker, God, warned him to take off his sandals, for the very ground on which he was standing was holy. It was an act of reverence, required by God, following an ancient custom practiced whenever one entered a holy place. (Exo. 3:5)

Joshua also felt the presence of God as did Moses and Abraham. "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." (Jos. 5:13-15)

Today, God's children also want to revere and serve the Lord as the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews relates, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb 12:28). And as the Psalmist writes "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." (Ps 89:70)

## **How do we serve God?**

A child of God hungers for the word of God for it nourishes and strengthens. And the sole purpose of going to services is to be nourished and fed. In making preparations for services many things come into consideration. Here it would be good to remember the speakers in prayer, and that God's will would be revealed through them. God gives the office of the ministry a high order, Paul writes "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (1 Tim 5:17) We need comfort and guidance on our journey to heaven.

It is also out of respect for God's word we would be seated and settled before the opening song. It can be very distracting to the other service guests, when long after the song starts people continue to stream into the church. Also, the opening song is often a prayer that God would open his word, and bless the services. The congregation joins in this prayer.

Another matter one might consider is where he/she sits at services. Am I in the hearing of God's word? It may be a habit for some to remain outside, or in areas that our friends may be. In such situations one becomes easily distracted. It can also become distracting to the other service guests.

And lastly we will consider, appropriate dress and appearance for services. Too often our dress and styles of dress become our first concern. First of all, what is appropriate dress? And why does it require consideration? Is, for example, beach attire (like shorts and tank tops) appropriate for services? I could comment on other specific styles of dress, and what might or might not be appropriate service attire, but perhaps it could be a point of discussion for the congregation. I believe our dress does in some way mirror/reflect the content of a person's heart. It is according to God's word that our dress would be to the honor and glory of God.

Another matter I might mention, and the elders would have even more experience than I, is how the levels of respect in society have changed over the years. To what degree, however, is open for discussion. As one example, however small, is the wearing of hats. As a young boy I remember many times being reminded to take off my hat as I entered a public building. Now it is common that hats are worn in buildings, and also in homes. This is not a great matter, however it illustrates how things have changed. Many of these kinds of customs have disappeared, and have been replaced by a set of standards that are much more relaxed. This has affected the society in which we live, and in turn touched the lives of the believers.

Also studies have shown a direct link between dress and attitude. Many articles have been written recently addressing the decline in American dress codes, or standards, seemingly becoming too relaxed. This has led to a decline in many areas of concern. Studies have shown a direct link, for example, to gang activity and dress. A recent study in California revealed a big drop off in violent activity when the school adopted a dress code. For this reason many schools have adopted a dress code for students, and many others are watching closely to see the results.

In these outward ways we show our respect to the Heavenly Father. With the changing times that we live, the child of God needs to remain watchful, Jesus in his time admonished "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (Mk. 13:37) This remains wholesome instruction yet today. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Heb 10:25)

## **The Blessings of Fearing God**

The blessings of God are innumerable to those that love Him. Think how fortunate we are when the mysteries of God's kingdom and the secret of salvation are revealed to those that fear Him. The Psalmist writes, "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." (Ps. 25:14)

Thus the child of God can serve God with a joyful heart, for God promises to honor those that honor Him. "Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Sam 2:30) And "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." (Ps 147:11)

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! (Deut 5:29)

Eric Jurmu

Introduction at Congregational Evening  
2/25/2000 - LLC Phoenix Winter Services