

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEAR THE LORD?

I've been doing a lot of thinking about the importance of having a healthy "fear of the Lord" and how that should be evidenced in the life of the believer. How does that fit in with Bible prophecy? Frankly, it provides a litmus test for examining oneself as to whether you are in the faith and prepared to meet the Lord when He returns.

2 Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."

Personally, I believe that His return to take the body of believers home to heaven in the rapture is "near." According to the words of Jesus recorded by John, that return will be suddenly, without delay.

Revelation 22:20 "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

According to the signs of the times that I have discussed recently on this blog, that time is certainly not that far off.

It seems that many in the leadership of the "church" today are intent on focusing on a loving God without addressing the importance of possessing a healthy "fear" of God. Scripture clearly instructs us to fear the Lord. Though that may sound like a negative, it is actually to one's benefit to have a healthy fear of the Lord.

Psalms 33:8 "Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."

Psalms 34:9 "O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him."

Psalms 89:7 "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."

Ecclesiastes 12:13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

I think most everyone thinks, and rightly so, of the fear of the Lord in terms of an attitude of awe and reverence. The purpose of this series of posts is to discover what scripture says about how that awe and reverence should be evidenced in our lives.

One of the most obvious and primary ways of showing a healthy fear of the Lord is to obey Him. Scripture is replete with instructions telling us how to live in obedience to His will. The word "obey" often provokes negative thoughts about restriction rather than freedom and authority rather than love. In reference to God's authority and His will for our lives, obedience will provide a safety zone

in which we can live in complete freedom with the promise of His loving provision.

Deuteronomy 5:29 "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!"

Deuteronomy 28:1–2 "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God."

Psalms 111:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments...."

In light of the growing influence of evil spirits that is to be expected as the time for Jesus' return gets ever closer, it is important to recognize that we are to obey God rather than men as exemplified by the midwives who ignored Pharaoh's command to drown the Jewish baby boys.

Acts 5:29 "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

Exodus 1:17 "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive."

I fully expect that the persecution of true believers in Jesus, those who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior and cling to the truth of His word, is soon going to be prevalent throughout the world. Lip service is still given to the importance of religious freedom, but public opinion is quickly narrowing to include all religions except true Christianity based on the inerrant word of God. Sad to note is the fact that much of the foundation for that mindset is predicated on undermining the authority of the word of God and is coming from within the professing church.

To command obedience one must be recognized as possessing the authority and power needed to enforce compliance. The first chapter of the Bible attests to the power and authority of Almighty God as the Creator of heaven and earth.

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

His power and authority were in great evidence through the plagues directed against Egypt that forced Pharaoh to give the Jewish people their freedom. None was more spectacular than the parting of the waters of the Red Sea.

Deuteronomy 11:2–4 "And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, And his miracles, and his acts,

which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD hath destroyed them unto this day;"

One of the primary reasons God chose to work such mighty miracles on behalf of the people of Israel was to instill a healthy "fear" of Him into His people and all the people on earth.

Joshua 4:24 "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever."

In other scripture we are encouraged to fear the Lord based on the awesome evidence of His power and authority as shown in the creation.

Jeremiah 5:22 "Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?"

Jesus wasn't very politically correct; He was very direct in declaring that we should fear God because of His authority and power regarding our eternal destiny.

Matthew 10:28 "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Jesus worked miracles to prove His power and authority and to encourage people to accept Him as their Savior as evidenced by the words He spoke when He raised Lazarus from the dead.

John 11:41-43 "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth."

This truth was also affirmed by the Apostle John.

John 20:30-31 "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

A healthy fear of the LORD is evidenced through our acknowledgment of and submission to His power and authority in our lives. Scripture in fact tells us that obedience gives evidence of our love for God.

Daniel 9:4 "And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments...."

John 14:21 "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me...."

The Spirit takes it a step further when He instructs us through the scripture to serve God in love. To serve God includes both obedience and worship according to Webster. It is acting with a desire to bring pleasure to God through our obedience.

Deuteronomy 6:13 "Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him...."

To serve God in love is to serve with "all thy heart and soul." In other words, it is service done with a total focus on pleasing Him without thought as to how it will benefit you. Selfless service is done in truth with no hidden agendas.

Deuteronomy 10:12 "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,

1Samuel 12:24 "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you."

According to scripture, standing for truth and righteousness gives great evidence that you have a healthy "fear of the Lord."

Exodus 18:21 "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness...."

2Samuel 23:3 "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

Proverbs 14:2 "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him."

Acts 10:35 "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

It stands to reason that one who values truth and righteousness will avoid doing evil things. To avoid evil not only gives evidence of a healthy fear of God, but also attests to acting with wisdom, with discernment and discretion. To avoid evil is to abstain from being proud and arrogant and to exercise control over your tongue.

Job 1:8 "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"

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

Proverbs 8:13 “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.”

Proverbs 16:6 “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.”

When we acknowledge God’s power and authority and choose to obey Him and serve Him in love and avoid evil, we are showing honor to His name. To honor His name is to show a healthy fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 29:23 “But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.”

To honor God’s name is to sanctify it and set it apart for holy use. I am appalled at how often I hear the phrase “O my God” used as a common expression of surprise—even by Christians. The way we use God’s name gives evidence of the amount of respect we have for Him. I am afraid that we have become so comfortable in God’s love that we sometimes forget that He is also our Lord and King. He is our Abba Father, but He is also to be revered and honored as LORD—and that includes guarding against using His name in any way that isn’t meant to glorify Him.

Faith is another aspect of a healthy fear of the LORD that I think is very misunderstood. Too often it is used interchangeably with *belief* in Him, and scripture is clear in differentiating between the two.

*James 2:18–20 “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: **the devils also believe, and tremble.** But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”*

James helps us to understand that our actions prove our faith. The writer of Hebrews adds a bit more.

Hebrews 11:1&3 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen....Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

Faith produces action predicated on the evidence of God’s power and authority as revealed through His creation. It accepts the testimony of God’s word to be true as evidenced by the fulfillment of prophecy and the record of history. I really like the plain speaking of the New Living Translation of these words of Isaiah.

Isaiah 45:19–21 “I publicly proclaim bold promises. I do not whisper obscurities in some dark corner so no one can understand what I mean. And I did not tell the people of Israel

to ask me for something I did not plan to give. I, the LORD, speak only what is true and right. "Gather together and come, you fugitives from surrounding nations. What fools they are who carry around their wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save! Consult together, argue your case, and state your proofs that idol worship pays. Who made these things known long ago? What idol ever told you they would happen? Was it not I, the LORD? For there is no other God but me—a just God and a Savior—no, not one!"

Though we cannot currently visibly "see" God, the evidences to His existence, power and authority surround us. True Christian faith is rooted in evidence; it is not blind faith or faith based on the reasoning of man—as is the case with most other belief systems.

One who has a healthy fear of God will give testimony through times of worship and praise.

Psalm 5:7 "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

Psalm 22:23 "Ye that fear the LORD, praise him...."

Psalm 96:9 "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth."

Revelation 19:5 "...Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great."

Webster tells us that *worship* means to show adoration and reference and that *praise* is to magnify and glorify through words or song. I love music, and it can provide one of the most effective ways of attuning our spirit with His Spirit and through which we can share our love and appreciation of Him and for His many blessings. The Apostle Paul recognized how music reflects our heart before the Lord.

Ephesians 5:18–20 "...be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...."

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

In fact, a wonderful way to learn scripture is through songs that are basically scripture set to music. My grandchildren have memorized much scripture through the music CD's that are part of their homeschool curriculum. I have spent many wonderful hours worshipping and praising God by singing along with or just meditating on beautiful and joyful Christian music—from the old hymns to the contemporary Christian music of today. I encourage you to check out the scripture card slideshows on this website for a worship experience as you enjoy the truth of God's word framed in the beauty of His creation.

Another powerful evidence that you have a healthy fear of the LORD is your willingness to make personal sacrifices in obedience to Him. There is no greater example of this than Abraham's intent to sacrifice Isaac, the son through whom God had promised to fulfill His covenant with him.

Genesis 22:12 "And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

Paul tells us that it is only reasonable that we present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God.

Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

In other words, we are to die to self to live in submission and obedience to Him. He, in fact, tells us that this is the only reasonable response in light of the sacrifice of His Son to redeem us from our sin and give us an eternal future with Him. I remember being surprised to learn that God considers our words of praise and thanks to Him to be a sacrificial offering.

Hebrews 13:15 "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

Anything we do to show our gratitude to, worship of and submission to God is a sacrifice; it is something we freely offer. The word *sacrifice* implies that something is being given up for something else. When we take the time to truly praise God with "the fruit of our lips" and express our gratitude for His love, mercy, grace and forgiveness—not to mention our many material blessings—we are "sacrificing" or freely giving of our time, energy and thought to focus on Him over anything and everything else.

The proverbs of Solomon have much to say about fearing the Lord. He tells us right off that this fear is the only foundation through which we can even begin to learn true knowledge and wisdom.

Proverbs 1:7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Proverbs 2:2-5 "...incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD...."

So just where should we search for knowledge and wisdom? In the word of God.

Psalms 119:103-104 "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way."

Proverbs 2:6 "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...."

Our actions toward others provide another indication as to whether or not we have a healthy fear of the LORD. Paul tells us that we are to submit to one another in accordance with the authority established by God. This includes the authorities established by men, since they are ordained of God.

Romans 13:1 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

It is also important for those in the body of Christ to submit to one another in love and the fear of God. It is our treatment of one another that provides the most powerful testimony to the world of unbelievers.

Ephesians 5:21 "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

1 Peter 5:5 "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

John 13:35 "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

I believe one of Satan's greatest successes has been the creation of division and discord in the professing church. When the unbelieving world looks on and sees that those who claim Jesus Christ as Savior can't live with love for one another and are so divided regarding the authority of the truth of scripture, why should they want what we have?

One other sign of a healthy fear of the LORD is contentment with what we have. We are not to envy those who are living according to this world.

Proverbs 23:17 "Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

1 Timothy 6:6-10 "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

God has promised to be sufficient for our every need, to sustain us and never to forsake us.

Philippians 4:19 "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Psalms 55:22 "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

Hebrews 13:5 "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you.""

Considering the culture in America and much of the world today that promotes possessing more and more, God's children stand out as distinct when they live with contentment. It testifies to the truth that things can't make one happy—only living in submission to the LORD with a focus on spiritual treasure rather than earthly treasure can do that.

Matthew 6:19–21 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

I remember my surprise once I finally took note of the fact that God had a special book in which He recorded the names of those that fear Him.

Malachi 3:16 "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."

I believe this is a different book than the Book of Life, though you would think that they would mirror each other. Sadly, that is not necessarily the case. The Hebrew for *thought* includes *value*. It would seem that there are many true believers, those who have placed their faith in Jesus, who choose for whatever reason not to invest in that relationship; they are too distracted by the concerns, responsibilities and pleasures of this world. This would seem to be those that were referenced by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

*1 Corinthians 3:13–15 "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: **but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.**"*

There are others who delight in that relationship and whose lives give evidence of the value they accord His name. According to Malachi, this evidence includes the desire to talk about Him and His truth with other believers. Honestly—How often is the LORD or the word of God the focus of your conversation with other believers?

As we conclude our study on this subject, I would like to share a couple of more scriptures that summarize much of what was identified as giving evidence of a healthy fear of the LORD in our lives.

Psalms 34:11–14 “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”

2Corinthians 7:1 “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

If we in the body of Christ could just control our tongues, avoid evil as defined by the word of God, and seek peace, we could go a long way toward teaching those around us about how to have a healthy fear of the LORD. Our whole life should be dedicated to cleansing ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh and spirit as we seek to perfect holiness in the fear of God. We have no valid excuses for our failures. God has promised to empower us to be overcomers, but it is up to us to avail ourselves of that provision.

*1 Corinthians 10:13 “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but **will with the temptation also make a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

*Ephesians 6:13–17 “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; **Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench ALL the fiery darts of the wicked.** And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:”*

It is important to note that the shield of faith is identified as most important. It was the critical piece of armor that would have delivered Eve from Satan’s deception in the garden. Satan’s darts come in many different forms, but they are all tipped with the same few poisons—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Without faith we do not have access to the other pieces of armor.

I pray that this study on fearing God has encouraged you to examine your life and determine that you are prepared to meet the LORD when He returns. I know that I can improve in many of these areas, and I am sure you can too. I have asked God to do whatever it takes in my life to make me a vessel of honor and glory before Him.