

I have the opportunity to fill in for Jim this morning. Before we get started I would ask that you be in prayer for our High School Summer Camp this next week. We have 40 students signed up to go to camp with us and your prayers mean so much. Camp is such a unique time to get away for a little bit and focus on deepening our relationships with God and I would ask that you be lifting up the students and the staff going this year that God would be preparing our hearts for what He has planned.

This morning our Bible Study will be a little different. Instead of teaching through a passage, I want to go over a topic. We will be studying the fear of God. This concept first came to my attention in the Wednesday Night Bibles Study through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. And it seemed to keep popping up.

It was while we were studying through the book of Nehemiah that this concept of fearing God, really started to flesh out.

One of the first times it stood out to me was at the beginning of Nehemiah in his response to how the exiles are doing in the promised land.

#### Nehemiah 1:4-5 ESV

(4) As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

(5) And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, **the great and awesome God** who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

As I was studying this passage one of the commentators I read quoted the verse out of the King James and there was a fascinating difference.

#### Nehemiah 1:5 KJV

(5) And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, **the great and terrible God**, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

The great and the Terrible, what does it mean that God is terrible. The Hebrew word is יָרֵא yârê', wîch means "to **be feared, be honoured, dreaded, terrible; awesome,**

This Word carries the Idea of fear, fearing God. A lot of the English translations use the Word Awesome, as in awe-inspiring. It makes sense because there are a lot of negative connotations with the concept of Fear. What is fascinating though is verse after verse in the Bible describe the necessity for believers to have a healthy Fear of God.

### Psa 25:11-14 ESV

- (11) For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.
- (12) **Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.**
- (13) His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land.
- (14) **The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him**, and he makes known to them his covenant.

Here we are told that friendship with God a deepening intimate walk with him is reserved for those who fear Him. WE are also promised that it those who fear God are going to be directed by God.

This is a major theme in scripture. Yet as I started to read these verse I had to admit that I had never given fearing God much thought, or really even had a definition in my mind for what it meant to fear God.

This morning we are going to work through this concept and I am going to try to build a case for what fearing God is and isn't. But just so we have a starting place I wanted to give this simple definition.

Fearing God is having a high view of who God is. Fearing God involves seeing God for who He is and giving Him the proper respect that it is due Him.

Scripture has so many verses about fearing Him.

### Pro 14:26-27 ESV

- (26) **In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence**, and his children will have a refuge.
- (27) **The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life**, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

We are told that we can have a strong confidence in our fear. This seems like a contradiction, fear is not something that we have confidence in, usually the opposite is true. When we are afraid we lose confidence.

Again we have to be willing to change our concept of fear. Right here we are told to have a confidence in it and it is the fountain of life. Having a fear of God involves major blessings.

We could see verse after verse with this language about fearing God. I want to do one more from the Old Testament because as I was amazed at how many popular passages, and some of my favorite verses had the fear of God throughout them.

### Psa 103:8-18 ESV

- (8) The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
 (9) He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.  
 (10) He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
 (11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, **so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;**

These are very famous verses about God's abounding forgiveness and love for us but notice whom it is for, those who have a fear of God.

- (12) **as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**  
 (13) As a father shows compassion to his children, **so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.**

There it is again. Verse 12 is one of my favorite verses about how God removes our sin from us and the restoration that can be found. And then hiding in the next verse is the promise of God's compassion for those that have a fear of God.

- (14) For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.  
 (15) As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
 (16) for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.  
 (17) **But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,** and his righteousness to children's children,  
 (18) to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

Three times in this passage the fear of God is used to describe the incredible benefits that are given to believers, God's forgiveness, His compassion and His steadfast love. One thing I found myself doing naturally as I was reading these verses is I would insert different Words into the verses subconsciously instead of fear.

Often I replaced it with loving God.

**"so the LORD shows compassion to those who *(love Him)* fear him.**

**"But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who *(love him)* fear him."**

This is wrong all of a sudden these verses became about me and what I can do for God. They are nicer to listen to this way. Loving God does not seem near as intimidating as fearing Him.

But God wants us to fear Him. He desires for us to have a high view of who He is. He wants us to not reduce Him down to our level but have a reverential, holy, awe inspired fear for Him.

All of the verses I have used up to this point are in the Old Testament and it is a fair question does God talk about Fearing Him in the New Testament once Christ has come and revealed Himself.

The answer is absolutely yes. We see the early Church practice fearing God.

### Acts 9:31 ESV

(31) So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. **And walking in the fear of the Lord** and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Fearing God was so foundational to the early church that it is used to summarize their pattern of life.

We can also see that fearing God should influence how we interact with one another.

### Eph 5:21 NASB

(21) and be subject to one another **in the fear of Christ**.

This is not just an Old Testament concept it carries over to the New. At first it doesn't seem to fit what does fearing God have to do with how we treat each other?

In this context when we have a high correct view of God, or Christ we will see the love He has for people and in turn we should be willing to have that same kind of love for them.

This concept of Fearing God of thinking rightly about who He is and how amazingly huge He is, touches so many other topics in scripture. **When we start to think rightly about God we will start to think rightly about everything else.**

But we need to clarify what this fear involves. And conversely what it doesn't because there are some very interesting verses that actually have some harsh things to say about fear.

### 1 John 4:16-18 ESV

(16) So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

(17) By this is love perfected with us, **so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment**, because as he is so also are we in this world.

(18) **There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.**

At first glance this verse can seem to contradict everything we have been talking about. See we are told right here that **“There is no fear in love”**. The key to understanding this is to look at what type of fear is John talking about or to be more specific what is the object of fear.

Verse 17 encourages us **“so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment”** John wants these believers to not fear God’s judgment because they know they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. We can have confidence on the day of judgment because of His great love, He saved us. WE can be confident in this!

Verse 18 then makes total sense.

**(18) There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.**

The fear John is describing is not a healthy fear of God but a fear of being judged by God. This comes from not being assured in our salvation. When we understand how deep God’s love for us is and the incredible sacrifice of Christ and that He took our place on the cross we will have no room to fear God’s judgment because we have confidence in Christ.

Romans 8 also talks negatively about this same type of fear.

### **Romans 8:12-15 ESV**

- (12) So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.
- (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- (14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
- (15) **For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"**

When Paul says we did not receive the Spirit to fall back into fear, He is saying we have the Holy Spirit now. We have the ability to be led by God and to glorify Him not to live according to the flesh. When you live based on the flesh you are a slave to flesh and in fear of judgment.

Again though this verse is not about fear God but the fear that comes from living life based on the flesh.

I do want to clarify some things though about this idea of fearing God. We just established it is not a fear of Him judging us. It also is not a fear that leads us to withdraw or feel distant from God.

#### Heb 4:14-16 ESV

- (14) Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, **Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.**
- (15) For we do not have a high priest **who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses**, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin.**
- (16) **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We are told that Jesus identifies with our weaknesses because He shared the. He is sympathetic to what it is to be tempted. To sum this passage up He knows what it means to be human. Because Christ has such an intimate knowledge of us we are told in verse 16 to.

**“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace”**

We can confidently enter into the Throne room, Because of Christ! This does not mean that we do not have a fear of God. In fact the opposite is true. Fear God helps us see how holy, pure and perfect he is. Fearing God shows us that we have no reason in ourselves or our works that we could ever confidently enter into His presence.

But notice what the throne is called, the Throne of Grace. When we have a high view of God, a reverential awe, we know the only thing that could possibly allow me to being His presence is grace! If we think we can be there for any other reason God must not be that big not someone to be feared at least.

When we fear God we start to see everything else come into view. We are seeing God for who He actually is, someone to be feared, someone to stand in awe and wonder. What is amazing is Christ had this kind of fear of God.

#### Heb 5:5-7 NKJV

- (5) So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.”*
- (6) *As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”;*
- (7) **who, in the days of His flesh**, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, **and was heard because of His godly fear,**

This is actually a pretty amazing statement. Christ when he was here on earth prayers were answered in part because of His fear of God.

The Word used here for fear, is actually unique compared to all of the other ones we have been looking at. This Word carries with it that the fear and awe of God lead to obedience.

**ESV “reverence”**

**NIV “reverent submission”**

**NASB “Piety”**

Christ having a fear of God was actually prophesized about Him in the Old Testament.

### Isaiah 11:1-3 ESV

- (1) There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
- (2) And 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 the fear of the LORD.**
- (3) **And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.** He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

Christ is God and yet He knows the type of Fear that God deserves. This gets into a dynamic that is present in the Trinity that is beyond our comprehension.

Fearing God should be a major part of our relationship with Him. We should desire to think rightly about who He is. Fearing God keeps us from lowering God down and this is something that comes very natural to us. I want to look into an example of this with the Nation of Israel and it is actually in the book of Exodus.

God has led the nation of Israel to the foot of Mount Sinai. And He wants to reveal part of Himself to them and give them the law. But the scene in which God does this is amazing.

### Exodus 19:16-19 ESV

- (16) On the morning of the third day there were **thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.**

This isn't normal lightening this is an awesome display that is so fearsome the people are trembling.

- (17) Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, **and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.**

Moses leads the people out to the base of the mountain to meet with God.

**(18) Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.**

Keep trying to imagine what this scene would have been like. There is loud thunder and flashes of great lightning. The top of the mountain is on fire and the smoke is rising up in grand display (**think of forest fires**). And because of all this the mountain is trembling meaning earthquakes.

**(19) And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder,** Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

On top of everything else described there are loud trumpet blasts. God is showing the nation a glimpse of His power. Remember they are standing at the foot of this mountain watching everything that is happening.

Verses 20 – 25 God and Moses talk and God describes to Moses where the people should stay and where the priests should go. And warns Moses to make sure the people do not try to rush up to the mountain towards God.

#### **Exodus 20:1-2 ESV**

**(1)** And God spoke all these words, saying,

**(2)** "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Then God speaks to the entire nation, the Ten Commandments. I always remember this being just with Moses but as we have seen God is wanting to interact with His people. He has them stationed at the bottom of this mountain and speaks out to them what His law is and how they are to live. This was not just private between God and Moses.

Now if you look down to verse 18 you see the people's response to this sight.

#### **Exodus 20:18-20 ESV**

**(18)** Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, **the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off**

They are terrified at what is going on. They are not trying to run up to the mountain they want to stand far off they want to get away from it. God is too grand.

**(19)** and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."



They tell Moses you go up and interact with God because He is too great for us to handle we cannot handle this interaction with Him.

(20) Moses said to the people, "**Do not fear**, for God has come to test you, **that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.**"

Moses tries to encourage the people and say God wants you to see how big He is. Do not fear Him in the sense that He will Judge you, realize he wants a deepening walk with us we are His people. He wants you to have a healthy fear of Him.

In fact this fear will keep you from sinning. You will think too big of God to sin against Him. **The fear of god is directly tied to our sins. I cannot view God correctly and be in Sin.** I have to minimize Him in order to be comfortable sinning. God wants Israel to see His power and see He is a God to be worshiped.

#### Exodus 24:17-18 ESV

(17) Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD **was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.**

(18) Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. **And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.**

Moses is gone for 40 days and the mountain is still on fire. Other verses talk about the cloud (that had been leading them) enveloped the mountain. Moses is gone 40 days but incredible things are still happening in the sight of the people. But the people respond in Chapter 32.

#### Exodus 32:1 ESV

(1) When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods **who shall go before us.** As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, **we do not know what has become of him.**"

The nation of Israel has been on their own forty days. They can still see the fire and cloud on top of the mountain but they have worries that this all powerful God that was shaking the mountains has killed Moses. Remember their knowledge of who God is and what He is like is extremely limited at this point. They know his power but they really don't know His character.

This is partly why when someone is in suffering telling them that God is in control is actually not comforting in itself. The Israelites here know God is big and in control, what they don't know is, his character is He good. What has happened to Moses, can he be trusted? **This is what we need to here. God is in control and God, trustworthy and faithful. He can be trusted.**

Having a fear of God is not just thinking God is big. Having a fear of God is thinking truth about Him. It is knowing who He is, His attributes. His goodness, Grace, Mercy, justice, purity etc. Having a fear of God is not just thinking He is Big but realizing the depth of who He is.

### Exodus 32:2-5 ESV

(2) So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

(3) So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

(4) And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "**These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!**"

This is the part of the story I think we can miss. Notice what the people call the golden calf. They say this is the god who brought us out of Egypt. Their intention here is not to worship a different god. They do not hold up this calf and call him baal or another deity back from Egypt.

I am convinced their intention was to worship Jehovah the true God. We can see this in Aaron's response,

(5) When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the **LORD.**"

Aaron sees the calf and says tomorrow we will have a feast to, notice the Lord the Hebrew is Jehovah that is only ever used on the one true God. In Aaron's mind they were going to use the calf in order to worship the God who brought them out of Egypt.

Notice what he asked for back up in verse 1

"Up, make us gods **who shall go before us.**"

They want a god who is manageable who they can be in his presence, they have experienced the glory of Jehovah and it was terrifying. They had to back away. They are not questioning if Jehovah is real they can look up and see the fire on top of the mountain. It's still there. They are asking for something familiar, give us a statue we can worship that doesn't terrify us that represents Jehovah.

Psalms 106 makes it clear that this is what they were wanting.

### Psalms 106:19-22

- (19) They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image.  
 (20) **They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.**  
 (21) **They forgot God**, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt,  
 (22) wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

The exchanged the awesome glory of God, for an ox. Verse 21 says they forgot God.

In their mind they were trying to worship their version of who Jehovah was. God is saying they forgot me. **If they would have had a fear of God they would have never considered an idol worthy of Jehovah.** Their view of who God is had to be significantly altered in order for them to think that worshipping Him this way was acceptable.

### Psalms 78:11-13

- (11) **They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.**  
 (12) In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.  
 (13) He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap.

They had forgotten the truth of who God really was and instead tried to create a god who could go before them a god who was manageable and not dangerous and terrifying **still Jehovah but more easily dealt with.**

I think we can see this same attitude happen all the time in our own hearts. Very rarely will we bow our knee to another God. But all too often we reduce God down and make Him manageable. We create a god in our image. And we expect Him to interact with us based on what is familiar and based on what the World tells us.

Instead of teaching God's word and presenting a high lofty view of who God is we have reduced God down to be manageable a god who is easier to interact with and is easier to accept.

Think about some of the thoughts that are unworthy of God

- I could never believe in a God who...
- My God who is love would never send someone to hell?
- Aren't I good enough for God, why won't he accept me for who I am?  
(sin has to be dealt with)
- This sin isn't that important...
- Isn't God pleased by my good works, (even if my heart is not in it)

This is what is so dangerous when we get away from the truth in God's word of how He has revealed Himself to us.

This is the same heart of the Israelites making the calf that was the modern way to worship your god it works for the Egyptians. The Israelites are trying to take what the world has told them and then use it to interact with God.

### 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 ESV

(10) **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.**

(11) **Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,** we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

### 2Co 7:1 ESV

(1) **Since we have these promises,** beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, **bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.**

Since God's Word has given us this promise of fellowship let us live it out

Dealing with the sin in our lives is stemmed from a deepening understanding of the fear of God, holiness is brought to completion the verse says the more we fear Him and value His word.

The struggle in our hearts though is that part of us fears God and part of us doubts Him when we sin this leads David to say:

### Psa 86:10-11 ESV

(10) For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

(11) Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; **unite my heart to fear your name.**

### Ecclesiastes 12:13 ESV

(13) **The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God** and keep his commandments, **for this is the whole duty of man.**