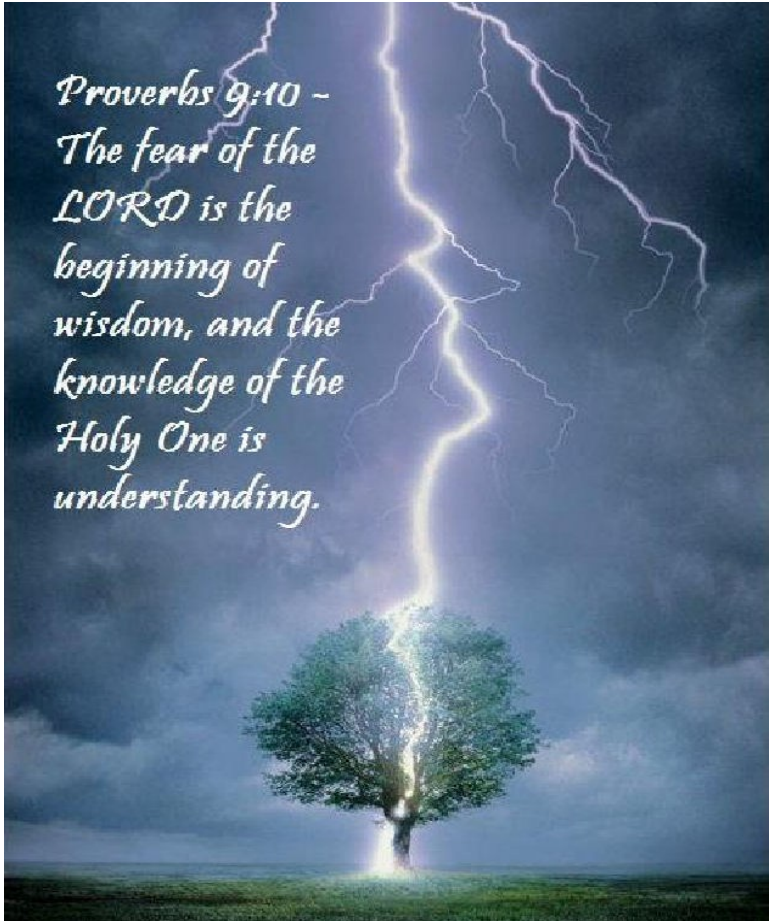


The Fear of the LORD:

Is it important? What is it?
How do we develop it?

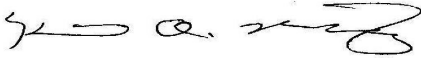


Sermon preached by
Pastor Kevin Redig
At Vistoso Community Church
Sunday, January 22, 2012

Author's Note:
The Fear of the LORD

I am not sure you will hear a message on *The Fear of the LORD* taught in the “seeker-friendly” environment that seems to have become the norm in many churches, but it is a very powerful Biblical concept for the “disciple-friendly” congregation, and I am so thankful to be able to teach to a congregation that received it so graciously. I trust it will encourage you as well.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church



Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the 1984 edition of the NIV Bible.

Introduction

Where do you turn when you need information? Perhaps you need directions to a destination with which you are not familiar, or maybe you need some medical information. I would be very surprised if the term *Internet*, or *Google* did not immediately come to mind! Now let me refine the question a bit more—how about if you need to understand something difficult? What about if you need wisdom regarding some aspect of life? Again, it is very likely that you are thinking “I can find everything I need to know on the internet!” Amazingly, the Bible asks almost the same questions:

*But where can wisdom be found?
Where does understanding dwell? Job 28:12*

Although Job posed these questions many years ago, I hope you can see they are the same kinds of questions we have to answer today. One thing I can tell you for sure—from God’s perspective, the answer is not the Internet! Of course, the Word of God typically answers the questions it raises, and this is no exception:

*The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and
knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10*

Not surprisingly, we have two different answers to where wisdom can be found, and they are neither similar nor compatible. The world has its wisdom, which, of course, includes all ofknowledge. On the other hand, the Scriptures tell us that the *Fear of the Lord* is the place to start. I say “not surprisingly”, because this is exactly what the 55th chapter of Isaiah tells us to expect.

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your
ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are
higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your
ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
Isaiah 55:8-9*

So God has told us in advance that His way of looking at things—His thoughts on a given subject—are not only different than ours, but also are higher than ours. It is that concept of *higher* that gives us a compelling reason to see what God has to say!

Now perhaps you are thinking, “Come on! Do we really need to take what God has to say on the subject of wisdom into account? After all, we live in a highly developed and sophisticated time in human history! Knowledge is growing at an exponential rate, and we have our fingers *right on the pulse*. Could some antiquated idea like the *Fear of the Lord* possibly still be the beginning of wisdom? Is it really important in the day in which we live?”

That series of questions brings us right to the title and subject matter of this message: *The Fear of the Lord: Is it important? What is it? How do we develop it?* I will try to answer these questions in the following pages.

1. *The Fear of the Lord: Is it Important?*



I want to try and answer this question from both the negative and the positive approaches.

First, the negative—in each of the following arenas, I think it is fair to say that, “**There is no Fear of God before their eyes.**” (Psalm 36:1) And of course, it is not just the blatant rejection of God that I want you to see, but also to think through the ramifications and consequences of these statements.

- **In the realm of science:** “There is no such thing as the supernatural and you had better just get used to it.” (biologist and author Richard Dawkins)
- **In academia:** “One of the best things this university has done for me is that it allowed me to become an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” This is actually part of a recruiting video used by one of our nation’s most prestigious universities—not as you might expect from the east coast, but the Midwest. As the video closes, a young lady looks straight into the camera and makes this startling statement.

This statement is startling, not because it is totally unexpected, but rather, because University officials believe that this is the kind of thing that is going to draw the best and brightest to their Campus. I can almost guarantee that this same Campus has inscribed somewhere on one or more of its academic buildings: “Then you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free”, which is a quote from John 8:32. Don’t they realize they can’t have it both ways? If the truth really does set you free, then they are advertising themselves as an institution where you can come and be “bound with error” which strikes me as a very strange approach to recruiting!

- **In the arts:** On the one hand, the Bible has always treated two things as sacred—specifically, human life and sexuality. On the other hand, it is probably safe to say that Hollywood does not place a premium on the *Fear of the Lord*—how do they, as well as other artistic media treat life and human sexuality? The graphic violence, horror genre, and pornographic content that are so pervasive across the board provide an obvious answer to that question.

- In politics:** Although Arthur Schlesinger was not a politician, he advised politicians at the highest levels, and you can see the foundation of his approach given during a speech at Brown University: “The mystic prophets of the absolute cannot save us. Sustained by our history and traditions, we must save ourselves, at whatever risk of heresy or blasphemy.” As a teacher of God’s Word, I believe he means—me, and all others who try to faithfully teach the Word, when he refers to the “mystic prophets of the absolute.” In essence, he is saying, don’t listen to the Word of God. Instead, even if it sounds like blasphemy, we are going to have to save ourselves! And make no mistake about it, when he says “history and traditions” he means recent history and traditions and not the *Fear of the Lord* which was an intimate part of the approach to founding this nation exhibited by our Founding Fathers. One simple question—how well does “saving ourselves” seem to be working out for us as a nation?
- In religion:** Finally, the inroads of Eastern religions into our culture have provided a way of “being good” without having God—of being “ethical” without having absolutes. In short, instead of a response to a Holy God, it is possible to shape one’s behavior to a subjective view of what’s best for oneself.



So in one arena after another we have systematically turned from any kind of *Fear of the Lord*. Again, I ask the question—“How well does that seem to be working out for us? How bright does our future look?”

Let's return to the question at hand, "Is the Fear of the Lord Important?" and attempt to answer it from the positive standpoint. In order to do this, I am simply going to let the Scriptures speak for themselves. The *Fear of the Lord* is:

- the beginning of wisdom . . . Proverbs 9:10
- a guide, fountain, and lengthener of life. . . various Proverbs
- the key to the treasure of salvation and security. . . Isaiah 33:6
- the basis of blessing. . . Psalm 112:1
- a way to avoid sin. . . Exodus 20:20

And there are many, many more verses that I could quote! Now here is a simple question for you to ponder—do these things strike you as important? Is it going too far to say that things like: wisdom, abundant life, salvation and security, blessing are not just important, but essential? Of course they are! And that answers the first question we have raised—the *Fear of the Lord* is absolutely essential, not just because of the very nature of the things it addresses, but for the horrific consequences of its neglect.

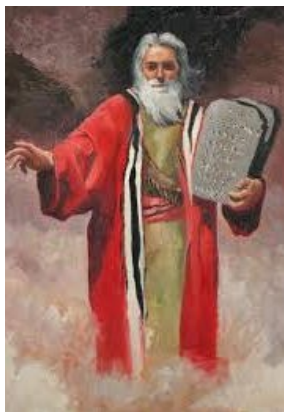
11. *The Fear of the Lord: What is it?*

Let's start by addressing what the *Fear of the Lord* is not! To begin with, it is not a purely Old Testament concept. Consider Acts 9:13, which not only describes the early New Testament church, but also the positive impact of the *Fear of the Lord* within the developing church.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace. . . and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. Acts 9:31

Second, the *Fear of the Lord* is not fear in the sense of being afraid, as one is afraid of some kind of calamity. Look at what Moses told the people in Exodus 20:20.

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the *fear of God* will be with you to keep you from sinning."



Unless you look closely at this passage, and the surrounding context, it looks as if Moses is contradicting himself. However, upon closer analysis of the context, Moses is saying do not be afraid that God is going to put you to death; but rather, understand that God is manifesting Himself to you so that you will develop the *Fear of the Lord*. And, this *Fear of the Lord* in turn will keep you from sinning.

Third, the *Fear of the Lord* is not the underlying principle of any particular academic discipline. So when the Bible says "The *Fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom . . ." it is not referring to academic subject matter; but rather, the underlying reality of the universe in which we live. This is in complete contradiction to the claims of such secular-humanists as Carl Sagan and his well-publicized mantra: "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." On the contrary—behind the cosmos is the God who created it, and the *Fear of the Lord* is the place to start with respect to orienting yourself to the way things really are!

Finally, the *Fear of the Lord* is not an end in and of itself. Consider again the Biblical list which was laid out above: The *Fear of the Lord* is the **beginning** of wisdom; the **key** to the treasure of salvation and security; the **basis** for blessing, and so on.

In other words, the *Fear of the Lord* is the place to start—it helps us to move into the essential areas of salvation, blessing and wisdom. We don't stop with the *Fear of the Lord*, but rather it helps to initiate access to what God has provided for us.

By this point, you are no doubt asking, "Well then, what exactly is the *Fear of the Lord*?" In order to answer your question, let's begin with the Hebrew word most often translated *fear*. It can have a range of meanings, which include: to be afraid, to revere or respect and to respond out of reverence. However, we are not just interested in the word *fear*, all by itself, but to what the entire phrase *Fear of the Lord* refers. And so based upon the range of meanings of the word *fear*, and after looking at the context associated with the Biblical usage of the phrase *Fear of the Lord*, I would like to suggest the following integrated meaning of the phrase.

1. The *Fear of the Lord* is a recognition of who God is! (Think about His attributes.) Consider two passages of Scripture, which reinforce this concept.

For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD?
Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? In the
council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more
awesome than all who surround him. O LORD God Al-
mighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD ...
Psalm 89: 6-8

The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what
the king of Egypt had told them to do ... Exodus 1:17

Psalm 89 makes it clear that there is no one like the Lord Almighty. In fact, He is more awesome than all else. As a result—He is to be "greatly feared", that is the proper response for us, in recognition of who He is, is to engender the *Fear of the Lord*.

From Exodus we have an applied example. The midwives were given orders from Pharaoh that they knew were in opposition to the will of God. And so, they carefully considered the source of each “set of orders” and assigned a priority to the source. Recognizing that the creator of heaven and earth takes precedence over any earthly ruler, they chose to obey God rather than man—this is what it means to have the *Fear of the Lord*.

2. The *Fear of the Lord* is a healthy reverence for Him. Again, consider several passages of Scripture.

Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him. Psalm 33:8

The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. 2 Chronicles 17:10

Psalm 33 is direct—the proper response for mankind is to revere the Lord. The passage from 2 Chronicles illustrates the same concept from a different angle. The kings of those nations surrounding Judah looked past the obvious desirability of attacking Judah for its material resources. Instead, they recognized that Judah was under the protection of a great God. Because of their respect for this God, that is, their *Fear of the Lord*, they decided to give up the futile ideal of attacking a nation protected by the Creator of the universe.

3. The *Fear of the Lord* is to respond to Him in obedience. Consider the implications of these two passages of Scripture. (You may wish to study their contexts more closely.)

Now I know that you feared God ...
Genesis 22:12

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion
of the matter: *Fear God and keep his
commandments, for this is the whole
duty of man.* Ecclesiastes 12:13

The quotation from Genesis 22 requires further information.

The few words quoted are God's response to Abraham after he demonstrated that he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to the command of God. In other words, the proof that Abraham actually had the *Fear of the Lord* was obedience to what must have been the most difficult thing he could have been asked to do. Closely related in the text is the idea that because Abraham



trusted God, he obeyed Him. In turn, his obedience demonstrated that he had the *Fear of the Lord*. Please note, in trying to break down the concept of the *Fear of the Lord* for you, I don't want to be guilty of splitting apart ideas that really operate in concert with one another. Abraham is a great example of someone who lived his life in the *Fear of the Lord*, and received the blessings for doing so, because he recognized who God was, had reverence for Him, and as a result obeyed Him. In this regard, he is a terrific example for us to follow.

And of course let's not forget the admonition of the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, who summed up what he learned from a life-time of observation in the passage from Ecclesiastes quoted above. The whole duty of man can be summed up by our need to obey God and walk in the *Fear of the Lord*! Consider this passage carefully, and I think you will see that obedience flows from the *Fear of the Lord*.

I have tried to introduce you to a functional understanding of the *Fear of the Lord*, and not only that, but one that can be readily applied. Specifically, the *Fear of the Lord* is:

1) A recognition of who God is; 2) A healthy reverence for Him; and 3) An obedient response to Him.

I also want you to recognize the corollary—for if the *Fear of the Lord* is a recognition of who God is, reverence for Him and an obedient response to Him—then the absence of the *Fear of the Lord* has also been described. Specifically, it would be to live as if God is either not there, or if He is, He is irrelevant. This is precisely the description given in the first chapter of Romans of those who refuse to respond to the clear disclosure of God provided through “general revelation.”

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... .

Therefore, God gave them over ... Romans 1:18-f

Of course, we can see the same thing being played out on a massive scale in the very day and place in which we live!

III. How do we develop the *Fear of the Lord*?

Proverbs 2:1-5 provides a concise answer to this question and is an excellent place to begin what should be a lifetime pursuit for the Christian! Notice the series of conditional “if” statements that occur in the first four verses, as we work our way down to the result clause of verse 5.

1. First, we must place a premium upon the Word of God.

My son, *if* you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, ... Proverbs 2:1

We must turn to the Word as our source of truth, as the place where God has both revealed truth to us and preserved it through the centuries for our benefit. Then as the Spirit reveals the truth of God's Word to us—the Hebrew literally says, tuck it away in a secret place as something of great value.

2. As we hold the Word in esteem, we will naturally submit to it.

So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding... Proverbs 2:2

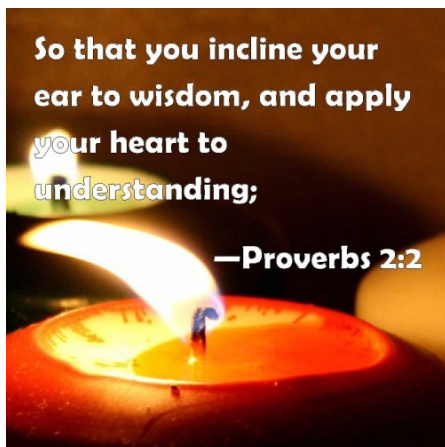
I love the illustration in this passage! I can picture many situations in which I have been forced to *grin and bear it*.

However, at some point, my wife will turn to me with some comment or observation. Immediately, I will “incline my ear” toward her, to make sure I catch every part of what she has to say—because I value it! This is the picture presented in Verse 2. As we treasure what God has

to say—we naturally “lean” towards it. We know that it is a beacon of truth in a world of error. We work hard to make sure we have correctly understood what He has to say so that we can make correct application in our lives.

3. We need to take the Word of God personally!

Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding,...Proverbs 2:3



Can you sense the passion in this passage? Here we have a picture of the individual who is not only esteeming the Word of God and attempting to submit to it, but spends time in prayer because he or she is so intent on getting it right! Intent on knowing the heart of God!

3. Lastly, we need to be diligent!

If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; . . . Proverbs 2:4

Once a treasure hunter knows there is something of value to be found—they never rest until they have uncovered it. So too we need to be diligent in our search for wisdom from God because we know that He has given us:

“everything we need for life and godliness”. 2 Peter 1:3-4

Did you follow the four conditions? If we treasure the Word of God, if we submit to its authority, if we make it our personal pursuit, and if we diligently search—then and only then:

you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. Proverbs 2:5

It is my prayer that as the result of this study, your heart will be drawn to do those things that lead to a healthy and beneficial *Fear of the Lord*. In closing, I have asked a series of questions to which I have developed a series of answers. These are, of course, just the beginning of what needs to be a life-long pursuit. Let me close by providing just one more piece of guidance. The *Fear of the Lord*: Is it important? What is it? How do we develop it? The Holy Spirit says:

Come you children, listen to me, and I will teach you the Fear of the Lord. Psalm 34:11

**Come, you children, listen
to me: I will teach you the
fear of the LORD.**

—Psalm 34:11





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