

The Cross and the Fear of The Lord

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[0:00] Last week we started a new series on the fear of the Lord. It's roughly based on two books, The Joy of Fearing God by Jerry Bridges,¹ And another book by Paul Tripp called Awe,¹ What it has to do with everything.

And last week we started to see that the fear of the Lord is a good thing. It's a good thing. We can have the tendency to think that the fear of the Lord is, or when we approach it we can think of it in a negative way.

But we started to see what a blessed thing it is to fear the Lord. Many of God's promises are attached and signed and delivered to those who fear the Lord.

And so the fear of the Lord is the gateway, is the doorway to experiencing many, many, many of the blessings of God. And so fear of the Lord can feel or seem like a bad thing because fear is generally something we want to avoid, isn't it?

We don't want to be afraid. But right off the bat we need to see that the fear of the Lord is something to rejoice in, something to delight in, something to be glad in.

[1:18] And so we saw last week all of those promises of it being the way to the blessed life, the happy life, the favored life. Now, just as a way of review, what were some of the promises that God made for those who feared Him?

What were some of the categories of promises for those who fear Him? Provision. Provision. Very good. Provision. No good thing.

He'll deny no good thing. They'll lack nothing for those who fear Him. Provision. And again, we don't want to think of that so much or primarily as just merely physical.

Every spiritual good thing that we need, God promises to provide for those who fear Him. So provision includes everything you need. Everything you need for life and godliness.

Everything you need to think about your past. Everything you need to live in your present.

Everything you need to think about as you think about the future. Everything you need for your hard situations, for your good situations.

[2:23] He promises to provide for those who are in this relationship of, I fear the Lord. So what's another promise or category? Protection.

Protection. We'll go with protection. Right? The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him. He promises to protect them. Not only physically, but spiritually.

What else? Wisdom. We'll call it guidance. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. How do we know what God wants us to do in certain situations?

Well, Psalm 25 says the Lord confides in those who fear Him. He comes and He imparts His wisdom to those who are fearing Him.

So do you need day-to-day wisdom? Do you need to know the way to walk? Well, it begins by fearing the Lord. It's the beginning of all knowledge.

[3:25] So we'll call that guidance. What else? Compassion. Psalm 103. Three times it promises the Lord's compassion and unfailing love to those who fear Him.

So what is God's demeanor? What is God's heart? What is God's posture towards those who fear Him? Psalm 103 says, As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is my love for those who fear Him.

So we have compassion, mercy, pity in our need, in our weaknesses. What else? There's one more.

We sort of put it on at the end. It's from Malachi. Blessings? Oh, God listens. Yeah, He listens and He hears those.

We looked at that under protection. He hears the cry of those who fear Him. What does God do for those who fear Him? What do we see in Malachi chapter 3?

[4:34] He honors them. I think it was Malachi chapter 3. He honors them. Remember, those who feared the Lord gathered together and they talked to one another. And the Lord heard.

He listened. And He heard. And He had a scroll of remembrance written down. That was a scroll of, this is something remarkable. This is something to remember. This is something to honor. The fear of the Lord is the way to please God and the way to have Him honor you.

And that is not a bad thing to want to have God honor you. The fear of the Lord. So that's one interpretive tool.

That's one sort of lens that I want you to have on your mind as you're looking, as we're thinking about this topic of the fear of the Lord. That the fear of the Lord is not a bad thing.

It's not something that I should be leery about. Instead, it's something to delight in. We're going to see a little later, but Jesus delighted in the fear of the Lord, Isaiah 11 says.

[5:34] So that's one way I want you to feel and see as we begin this study. Now, today's lesson, I want to give you another interpretive tool, another lens, another way of looking, and something that I want to rest on your heart as you begin, as we begin this study on the fear of the Lord.

And here is that lens, that the fear of the Lord is the outworking of the gospel. The fear of the Lord is the outworking of the gospel.

The fear of the Lord in your heart and in my heart comes from appreciating and believing and trusting in the gospel. So the more you believe, the more you trust in the fullness of Jesus Christ. That you say, he is all that I need. He has everything I need. He is my savior. He, his sacrifice, his love, his grace, his death, his resurrection, his reign, his intercession.

Those things, when those things are big in your life, and you're feeling the greatness of those things, and you're understanding the goodness of them, that the more that is an active part of your heart and in your mind, the more you're going to fear the Lord.

[6:53] It's the birth of the fear of the Lord. So the gospel gives us the ultimate lens to look at and to understand God.

So let me put it this way. Over in the next four weeks, beginning next week, we are going to be looking at four attributes of God.

Four attributes of God that when we consider them, they increase, they can increase our fear of the Lord. They can create the fear of the Lord in our hearts.

But, and you need to hear this carefully, they will not create the right kind of fear in your heart. If you aren't looking at them, if you aren't coming at them, if you aren't thinking about them, through and with the gospel, through the cross, through the death of Jesus.

So, who knows the heart of God? Who really understands God? Who is the real theologian?

[8:01] It's the person who looks at all of God through the lens of the cross that says, my God is the God who sent Jesus Christ as a sacrifice.

My God is the God that punished his son in the place of sinners. my God is the God who is so just that he punished his son to take away sin.

It's when we understand, when we're appreciating the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we begin to understand God in his fullness. And we're going to, I'm going to tell you what that means and why that's so later on as we go through this lesson.

But just first, a quote from Martin Luther. He said this, he deserves to be called a theologian. So, do you want to say you're a theologian?

That you know God? You know about God? He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who understands the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and cross and the cross.

[9:07] So, for Martin Luther, he said, there was a whole bunch of people that wanted to look at God and understand God but the cross was just sort of on the sideline.

And he said, you know what? The reality is the person who looks at God through the cross, that weighs on him, that colors everything about my view of God, that's the person that really understands God.

Jesus said, I am the door. No one comes to the Father except through me. Paul wrote, he is the image of the invisible God. We can see God through Jesus Christ.

And Paul says, that's why we preach Christ and him crucified in order to present you perfect, to bring you to God, in order to bring you to God. So people come to know God as they come to know

the glory and the beauty and the majesty of the cross.

Now, again, why is this so important? Because over the next four weeks, we're going to study these attributes like the holiness of God, the greatness of God, the majesty of God, the love of God. And those things can make God big in our eyes.

[10 : 24] And that's what we want to do. But if you, if we, if you don't hold on to Christ and him crucified, when all of that stuff comes down upon you and when you think about it again, if you don't hold on to the Father's love and Christ for you, then it will make you grow in fear.

But it won't be the right kind of fear. Let me tell you what I mean. There is a kind of fear, and the Bible talks about it, that is not the fear of the Lord.

There is a fear of God that is not the fear of the Lord. It's, it's the kind of fear, it's the natural, it's the native fear of our hearts when we're living in sin, when we're sinners.

It's the fear that still can hold on to our hearts even after we're Christians and that we have to shed ourselves of. It's the Adam and Eve hiding in the garden fear.

It's the fear that creates distance, that creates hiding, that creates shame, that it's the fear that an orphan has in his heart that says, I don't have anyone to take care of me.

[11 : 42] It's all up to me. I've got to do it. It's the fear that lives in the slave's heart that says, I'm just a slave, and so I have to do what my master says, and my master just uses me.

It's the fear that says with that lazy servant, I knew the kind of man that you are. You sow, or you reap where you did not sow, and so I hid my talent in the ground.

He was afraid of that master. He says, I was afraid. I know what kind of man you are. And the masters reply, oh, you know what kind of guy I am? That's a sarcastic comment.

You think I'm that way? Then I'm going to be that way towards you, but I'm not really that way. So, it's the fear, but it's not the fear of the Lord. It's the fear that comes from thinking about the greatness and the holiness of God, but it is not the fear of the Lord.

It doesn't come from the spirit of the fear of the Lord. And that's what I want you to see. The fear of the Lord that we are talking about in this class is the kind of fear that comes through the spirit of Christ.

[12 : 52] It's the kind of fear that comes upon our hearts through the spirit of Christ. So, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11.

We looked at this passage, or I read it to you last week, but I just want to take a little bit closer look at it. Now, it's 11, verse 2, and verse 11, or verse 1, is talking about a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse and his roots, a branch will bear fruit.

That's talking about Jesus. So, this is a prophecy about Jesus and about the Holy Spirit. In verse 2, he says, the spirit of the Lord will rest on him.

The spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of power, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

Now, I just want you to notice three things about this verse very briefly. First of all, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the spirit of the fear of the Lord. there is a fear that comes from our flesh, and there is a fear that comes from the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 19] So, the Holy Spirit creates and empowers this fear that we're talking about in this class. This is his work in our hearts and in our lives.

And so, if we are going to grow in the fear of the Lord through this class, the spirit will have to be at work. Now, second, notice that the spirit that is the spirit of the fear of the Lord was the animating, was the motivating, was the empowering spirit that was on and upon Jesus Christ.

It was the spirit of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The spirit rested on Christ. The spirit led Christ. The spirit taught the man Jesus to pray, Abba, Father.

The spirit taught the man Christ Jesus to relate and to understand God as his Father, as his Abba, Father, in a real way of a father to a son.

And you'll notice third, the spirit creates delight in fearing the Lord. Creates delight in fearing the Lord. Again, the kind of fear of the Lord that we are talking about is when it comes from the spirit is something that we delight in.

[15 : 41] So think of something that you delight in. You enjoy it. It's sweet. You want more of it. You love it. That's the kind of, that's what the spirit does in our hearts.

That's what the spirit did in Jesus' heart. heart. And so, the fear of the Lord was food for his soul. Satisfied him. Filled him. The fear of the Lord encouraged Jesus.

It was something that refreshed him and invigorated him. It gave him power. It empowered him. And so we need to put that up here.

Remember that as we move on, that the spirit of the Lord is the spirit of Jesus Christ that we now share in. That when we come to Christ, the spirit comes into our hearts.

And so the spirit creates the fear of the Lord. The spirit was on, the spirit, the spirit was the spirit of Christ. And it was the fear of the Lord that was his strength and his joy.

[16:48] So keep that in mind. Everything that Jesus did, his whole ministry, the way he related to God. He did through the Holy Spirit.

It was that, the spirit that gave him a sense that I am the Father's son. And when I need something, I can pray to him. It was that spirit that said, that made Jesus want to go out to lonely places and spend long time in prayer.

Because he found a light there. His God was a big, wonderful God. Now, turn over in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. So again, I just want to keep a couple of things in your mind as we're turning. And the first is that there is a kind of fear that is fleshly. It sees God. And it makes God look big and great.

But it's not the fear of the Lord. And then there is a fear of the Lord that comes by the Holy Spirit that comes to us through Jesus Christ. Now, look at Romans chapter 8 and verse 15.

[17:59] And again, we're talking about the Holy Spirit here. And look at what it says. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you slave again to fear. But you received the spirit of sonship.

And by him we cry, Abba, Father. Now, do you see the overlap? Do you see the connection? You did not receive a spirit that makes you slave again to fear.

And so that's the fear that is part of the old life. Our old man, our old way of relating to God. It's the Adam and Eve guilty fear. It's the fear of when I'm living as an orphan that I don't have a father to watch over me and take care of me so I have to do it myself and I don't know about the future because I don't have anyone who's in the future that can take care of me.

It's up to me. It's a slavish fear. And slavery to fear. So no matter what you wanted to do, no matter how you wanted to do it, you couldn't escape that fear that God isn't really for me.

He's not going to be good to me. It's a slavish fear. The Puritans called it legal fear. They use that phrase all the time. It's a legal fear because it's a result of our legal hearts that only see God, only see God as sort of a transactional God.

[19:22] As a, if I do this, he'll do that. And if I do the right things, he'll do this for me. All his blessings, all of his grace, all of his goodness, all of his love is based upon my performance in some way.

It's the legal fear. It's under the law, Paul calls it, when your hearts are under the law. You're under slavery to the law, saying, if I do this, if I do that, God, or if I don't, God won't love me, God won't accept me.

It's a suspicion of God. A suspicion of God. He's really someone we have to buy off with our obedience or our works, and that's the only way he'll turn to me and be good to me.

And when, now here's the thing, when you're under that, when you're looking at God suspiciously, you can't see him as he is. You can't see him.

Now, we know that, what that's like interpersonally, don't we? If, if, don't you notice, if someone has a grudge, if someone is suspicious of another person, you see it all the time, like in politics, like, no, if, if your opposite party says anything, what are they?

[20:42] They're lying. They're cheating. They're, it's like, it's impossible for that person to do anything good. Regardless of the evidence, regardless of the facts, regardless of common grace, suspicion makes us see people in a worse light than what they are.

And when we are under this kind of spirit, it's impossible for us to know God as he really is. It's like his whole character gets warped. So, you know, those circus lenses or, you know, you go to the fair or whatever and those weird mirrors that make things look distorted, like everything is sort of there, but it's all distorted.

It all becomes frightening. And so, his love, when we're under this fear of this is what God's like, his love just shrinks.

His love shrinks. And his generosity, his free grace to just people in general, disappears. And his grace just sort of becomes this impersonal packet of strength that he'll send me if I need help and I ask hard enough, instead of being mercy and grace that comes out of his heart, his greatness, his

greatness turns into this frightening, daunting thing that I don't want to think about. And his throne, instead of becoming something that I draw close to because it's a throne of grace, it's a place where I find help for my hour of need, his throne becomes wrapped in dark clouds. [22 : 26] And I don't know what I'm going to get. And it's frightening. And instead of patience, our fear paints him as exacting and impatient.

He's just a strict disciplinarian that wants us to fall in line. Psalm 103 where it says, he remembers that we are dust. When you are living in that kind of fear, it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't register. And so that was our basic view of God before Christ. That's what we are recovering out of.

And over the years, over the occasions, over the situations of our lives, we are slowly beginning to learn to trust him, aren't we? That he's not like that.

No, he's like this instead. What I thought about him was wrong. And what I was missing, now I'm starting to see. But that all comes when the Spirit of Christ comes into us and sets us free from that slavery to fear.

[23 : 31] And so the Spirit of Christ sets us free from fear. Now, I want you to think about that. The Spirit of Christ sets us free from fear. But Isaiah 11 says that the Spirit is the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

So how do you put those two things together? The Spirit of the Lord makes us fear God and the Spirit of the Lord takes away that certain kind of fear of God.

Do you see what's going on here? He takes away one kind of fear and he gives us another kind. Well, how does that happen?

Well, it happens as we come to Jesus Christ. It happens as we begin to believe the gospel of the cross and the resurrection and the person of Jesus Christ. It comes when instead of feeling like slaves, now we feel like sons.

So, turn over to Galatians chapter 4. Galatians chapter 4. And, actually it's not Galatians chapter 4.

[24 : 39] I didn't even bring my right Bible so it's not even on the right side of the page here. I'll just read it to you. I can't find it at this moment.

Oh, here it is. It's chapter 4, verse 6. Thank you. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out Abba, Father.

And so you are no longer a slave, but a son. And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Formally, formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how is it now that you're turning back to those weak and miserable principles? You see, no matter how much, just look at that verse 8, formerly, when you did not know God.

You see, no matter how much we knew about God, we didn't know God. We didn't know Him. It was impossible.

[25 : 51] The slavish fear blinds our hearts and keeps us away from God. And so we don't know Him. We don't have a relationship with Him. We think He's one thing and He's something else.

We see Him as someone we can't really be close to. And so our fear warps our whole view of God. And so we definitely didn't ever say with Jesus, Abba, Father, have mercy, help me.

God was never a loving Father in our minds. Remember, the Father had two sons in the prodigal son story. And this is what happens. We were either, one, I can't live here.

I can't be here. I gotta get out of here. Life is out there. And then the other son who stayed home said, I've been slaving for you for all these years and you've never given me anything to even celebrate with my friends.

That's the fear of, that's the wrong kind of fear working in two different ways. And sometimes in people's life that fear, that slavery, that fear of the God that warps God, it's like, I'm out of here.

[27 : 05] I can't have that kind of God. And in other cases, it stays right here. It stays right here in the church. It joins the church. And the whole time it's thinking, I'm slaving away for God.

Slaving away and he never gives me anything. Paul says, you didn't know God. You didn't know him. Neither of those two sons knew the Father's heart.

You missed him. You maybe thought you knew him, but you didn't. But when the Spirit comes in, he begins by giving us a new view of God.

He does it through Jesus Christ. He does it through the gospel. The Spirit doesn't take us to the law. He takes us to Jesus, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights of sons.

And he takes us to the blood. And he shows how the cross propitiates, atones, takes care of my sin. He takes us to the curse-bearing sacrifice.

[28 : 12] And Galatians says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who was hung on a tree. Now he redeemed us in order that the blessings given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Jesus died in order that we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit, that we might have the Holy Spirit and go from curse to blessing, go from slave to son.

And so when you see your sin on Christ and when you see all of your debts on him, that's the key to changing how you view God.

That is the key to change how you view God. That's when things actually start falling in line. That's when the mirrors in the circus start flattening out and starting to show a true picture.

That's how it's born in our hearts. And it's the same fear that was in Christ's heart. That respectful, loving awe of a son for his father.

[29 : 25] It's the kind of fear that puts sweetness and grace into every one of God's attributes. It encourages us. It gives us confidence. And so now that's the kind of fear that breeds trust, breeds hope, breeds reliance upon him.

And so not is God just big. He's not just big. He's big for me. And he's not just strong.

He's strong for me. And he's not just holy. His holiness works for me. And not only is God just, but his justice like mountains high, soaring above.

love. I just read this morning in Psalm 98, Lord, I praise you for your love and your justice. He says, I love your love and I love your justice.

Well, why, how can a person say that? It's when they've seen the forgiveness of their sins. Pilgrim's progress. And so it's not a justice that is going to come crashing down on me.

[30 : 33] Pilgrim's progress at the very beginning of that story. Pilgrim comes to the mount, I forget what it's called, but it's looming over him. It's the law. It's the Ten Commandments.

It's Mount Sinai. And he's cowering, thinking that justice is going to come crashing down on me.

Well, when we come to the cross, that justice that scared me so much now is for me.

It's my hope. So every one of his attributes, his greatness, his holiness, his love, his justice, his might, they are all so big when we come to the cross, when we see Jesus.

We're feeling that. They're all so big, they make my heart skip a beat, but my poor heart skips another beat when I see all that is for me. All of that is bent in on my good.

That's my Father. So how do I know that they are all for me? How do I know that God's strength and might and justice and righteousness and holiness and love and faithfulness, how do I know they're all for me?

[31 : 43] Well, in Christ alone my hope is found. All other ground is sinking sand. He's my rock. He's my redeemer. I am his and he is mine. That's how I know because of Jesus.

That's the fear of the Lord. It's the fear that has one hand on Christ, one hand on the cross. It's seeing everything through that lens.

And so it even allows me, and maybe some of you are thinking, what about God's wrath? Well, the cross allows me to even look at God's wrath and give it its due honor, its due glory.

So before I knew Christ, God's wrath was just bad news and I hid from it. I denied it. I suppressed the truth and unrighteousness. I did all sorts of things to deal with it.

But now Paul can say, knowing the fear of the Lord, knowing the terror of the Lord, we, we persuade men. Now the wrath of God is something that motivates us to loving action instead of cowering fear.

[32 : 49] Romans 11, 22, consider therefore the kindness and the severity of God. A lot of people have one or one side of that, but they don't have both.

In our old way of fearing, we probably held on to one of those things, but we can never put them together. On the one hand, we might have said, God is just kindness itself. God's nothing but love. There's no severity. There's no wrath. There's no God dealing with men and their sin. There's none of that. God's just love. He's just complete, 100% grace.

There's no wrath. Or, on the other hand, some people felt God is severe. There's no kindness. He's going to judge me and condemn me and send me to hell, and I didn't have a chance. I didn't have a say. There's no hope for me. So God is severe. God is stern. But now, we can hold on to both, can't we?

[33 : 53] How can we hold on to the both? Because at the cross, we saw God's kindness and God's severity at one and the same time acting. We saw His kindness acting through His severity, and we saw His severity acting through kindness.

And so, when we come to the cross, we say, God has my heart. He is so kind. He put all my sins forever on that, on Jesus.

He's so kind. But on the other hand, God is not someone to trifle with. Not someone to trifle with. The cross opens me up to both.

It prepares me to feel both. That's what the fear of the Lord is. It's feeling the kindness and the severity of God one and the same time.

So, do you want to grow in the fear of the Lord? The path begins at the cross of Jesus. Jesus. The Spirit takes us there. The Spirit unites us to Jesus.

[34 : 58] And so, now, what is His becomes mine. And His sense of Abba, Father becomes my sense of Abba, Father. So, the Spirit again and again takes us to the cross.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, I again would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land. When we're weary and tired, wilting away, the Spirit takes us to the cross.

Because that's where all of God's attributes shine forth. That's where they all come together. And the wonderful thing is is they come together to win my heart, win my praise, win my adoration, win my love.

And so, you want to see greatness? Well, how great thou art when I see the Son giving the acceptable sacrifice. And you want to see power?

Well, here's God's power. The death of His Son. The ultimate display of weakness. Well, God's weakness is able to atone for all the sin of everyone who would ever believe.

[36 : 05] The weakness of God is stronger than the greatest strength of men. So, here God's power seduces our hearts. And you want to see holiness, sanctity, sacredness.

The cross is the place where the sinless Savior died. It's holy ground. And you want to see mercy. Well, here, you can hear God's heart in Christ's words.

Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. And you want to see wisdom. At the cross, God exercises perfect and utter justice to the last degree.

And at the same time, He says to sinners, you are right. That's cunning. That's craft.

That's doing something that we could never imagine. That's God planning His footsteps in the sea where we are past knowing His thoughts.

[37 : 12] and you want to see love. Well, you can read it in the Son's heart as He bears the load. And you can read it in the Father's heart as He lifts up the knife.

And you can even read it in the Spirit's heart as He upholds the Son in order for the Father to strike. Because it was through the Spirit that the Son offered the sacrifice to His Father.

and all of that comes together and we sing how great Thou art. And at the same time, our hearts blossom with this fear and this terror and this awe and this love.

So, let me wrap this up. There are two kinds of fear. One's slavish, one part of the old man, one part of living under the law, one that warps God, one that skews God, one that turns God into this divine, malevolent terror.

And the other is the fear of the Son of God. One is freedom. One is what it means to be made new. One is part of living under grace. One is seeing God as He is, a holy, righteous, loving, gracious, mighty, majestic King and our Father.

[38 : 31] One produces distance and hiding. The other one draws us close like a father to a son. One sees God apart from Jesus, apart from the Gospel.

And the other looks at God through the cross. One looks at the cross, one looks right through the cross and misses it. And the other looks at the cross and loves it. Now, we still wrestle with the old way of fearing God.

The old ideas about God, the old way of thinking. And that's why we need the Gospel again. That's why we need the sweet words of the Gospel again.

And that's why you need this week to remember your Savior's love for you, your God's love for you. And the reason you need to do that is because that's where the fear of the Lord begins. That's where it gets introduced into our hearts. That's where it begins to blossom. And so this week, I would just want to encourage you as your pastor, as your shepherd, as someone who cares for you, that in all your busyness of this week and everything you do, come close to God this week. [39 : 44] come to the cross. Think about it again. Set enough time apart where its shadow falls on you and it begins to change you.

Remember what was happening there. And remember everything it meant for you. Because that's where the fear of the Lord begins. We are dismissed. I'll see you next time.