The Joy of Fearing God

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Date: 29 January 2023 Preacher: Jeremy Sarber

[0:00] So last Sunday evening, Pastor John referred to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the manifesto of the kingdom. I've also heard it referred to as the ethics of the kingdom.

Why the ethics of the kingdom? Jesus begins, blessed are the poor in spirits, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, and so on. To be clear, he's not describing how one enters the kingdom.

He's not suggesting that we must earn our way into the kingdom by mourning and being meek and being persecuted and so on. Instead, he's describing those who belong to the kingdom.

Generally speaking, those in the kingdom will be characterized by meekness and hungering and thirsting after righteousness and being merciful and so on.

As we continue our study of godly fear, how do you suppose God-fearing people are characterized? What makes them distinct?

[1:07] What is the manifesto of God-fearing believers? What are the ethics of people who fear God? Jerry Bridges uses the term fundamental traits.

What are the essential, fundamental traits of God-fearing people? Now, we'll only consider the first today, but perhaps it is the most fundamental of them all.

It is foundational to a God-fearing life. If you meet someone who truly fears God, you can be sure that he or she will possess this trait.

And I should go further to say that if we want to grow in our fear of God, we should study and we should focus on this trait in our own lives.

What is the first and most foundational characteristic of the God-fearing person? It is the commitment to live all of life under God's authority.

[2:08] First, it is a recognition of his divine and sovereign authority. And second, it is a willingness to submit to his authority in every area of life.

We may be the masters of certain domains, but he is the master of every domain. We see this from the very beginning of Scripture.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He formed this world from nothing. He spoke it into existence. He created the dust, and then he brought the first man out of the dust.

So from the very beginning, any notion that man could be the supreme authority in this world is just dashed to pieces. All we have to do is look around and realize that we did not create this world.

We did not create ourselves. Perhaps. Evidently, this world belongs to someone else. Someone with far superior power than our own. Perhaps that's what Paul is getting at in Romans 1 when he says, For God's invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

[3:27] Has mankind given God thanks? According to Paul, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God. Apart from God's saving grace, sinners, remarkably enough, have the ability to look around at a world they never created, and they have only very limited control over and think to themselves. This is mine.

I'm the supreme ruler here. I'm the God of this domain. I have sovereign control over my life. That's absurd, of course. But blind is blind, I suppose.

As we continue reading in Genesis, God reasserts His authority in more direct, explicit terms. He tells Adam, You may surely eat from every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

So beyond the explicit content of that command, what is God telling Adam? He's saying to Adam, I'm in charge here. You will submit to my authority as God, or there will be consequences.

[5:04] To be clear, God is not merely claiming authority. As we learn later in the book, His authority is very real. He had the power, He had the authority to issue the command, and He had the power, and He had the authority to punish Adam when Adam disobeyed that command.

God shows us, in only the second chapter of the Bible, that He created this world with an authority structure built into the design of His creation.

This world was never in a free-for-all, if you will. We were never at liberty to do anything we want, anytime we wanted. That was never the case.

Even before God established the first form of civil government, or the first religious institution. Even before the covenantal headship-submission relationship of marriage, before He brought that into the world, there was God, and there was man.

There was a structure of authority in place there. God was the supreme Lord and Master. Adam was the inferior creation expected to live in submission to God's rule.

[6:21] Now, this is not a very popular idea these days. Jerry Bridges notes, We live in a day of bumper sticker slogans.

Some are amusing and elicit a chuckle from us. Others are repugnant and disgusting. Some are downright dangerous, such as question authority.

Have you seen that one? When I was in school, growing up in the era of punk and grunge music, I would often see students doodling the symbol for anarchy, you know, on their books and folders.

It was cool to be rebellious, and I suppose it has been for some time, you know, to smoke cigarettes, to drink alcohol, to listen to devilish music, use profanity, get tattoos, piercings, whatever.

Whatever your parents didn't want you to do, that's kind of what we were bent toward doing. And this has been the way of American teenagers for a long time now, but somewhere along the way, it seems like people just stopped growing out of that contrarian spirit.

[7:31] When we see stories on the news of mass looting and rioting, I can't help but notice that most of those videos do not appear to show a group of teenagers.

They seem to be adults. And if that weren't enough, pretty soon after, we get the commentary from the media and possibly even government officials who do not condemn the behavior, but often praise it, excuse it at the very least.

Questioning authority has become almost a virtue in our culture. That should never be the attitude of a Christian. That should not be our default.

It cannot be the attitude of a God-fearing believer. Acknowledging particularly the authority of God is inherently, even obviously, fundamental to our faith, to everything we believe.

God is God and we are not. God is God and we are not. I'll probably never forget the passage I chose to preach at my ordination service back in 2008.

[8:48] Leading up to my ordination, I was incredibly nervous. I was supposed to preach at the start of the service and I probably made 50 pages of notes that week before, but I couldn't settle my mind on what to preach.

You know, as far as I was concerned, this had to be the greatest sermon that has ever been preached, which really wasn't the case and I would never be able to accomplish anyhow.

In fact, I did not choose my text until the opening prayer of that service. As somebody was praying, I was still thumbing through my Bible, begging the Lord to give me something. And I opened Acts 17.

The Apostle Paul, he goes to Athens and he would have undoubtedly preached Christ and the resurrection from the start, but he looks around at all of the evidence of paganism and idolatry and he realizes maybe this particular crowd needs to hear something much more basic.

So what does he do? He preaches not the resurrected Christ at first, but God, the Creator. He says, the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by hand, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

[10:21] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being. That became the text of my sermon.

But before the incarnation, before the crucifixion, before the resurrection, before Christ's ascension into heaven, there was God.

In the beginning, God, he made the world and everything in it. He gives us life, breath, and everything. It is in him we live, move, and have our being.

And implied in all of that is his authority over us. He alone made the world. And he alone is qualified to have authority alone over all.

[11:27] I believe it was John Calvin whom someone once asked, what makes God so right? What makes God so right? He has the audacity to issue commandments and tell every person on earth what is right and what is wrong.

What makes him so right? Calvin replied, God is right because God is God. Who are we to question?

God is right and what makes God so right and what makes God so right this really is one of the most basic principles of Scripture. It underlines everything. As Jerry Bridges says, we know that the Bible overall is the revelation of God's plan of redemption of sinners through Jesus Christ.

But that plan of redemption is basically the reestablishment of his authority over rebellious human beings whom he calls out of darkness into the kingdom of his son.

It's kind of an interesting way to look at it. It's true. One of the most profound lessons I learned relatively early in my Christian life was something that struck me as I was reading about the new covenant in the book of Ezekiel.

You likely remember the passage where God says through Ezekiel, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep my rules or be careful to obey my rules.

It wasn't until then that I began to really understand what God was doing in the new covenant. You see, I had this mindset that as we move from the Old Testament to the new, God was just eliminating many of his rules.

But that's not what happens. Instead, God is providing the means for us, in part, to successfully keep his statutes and obey his rules.

When he comes along in Ezekiel and he makes these promises, he's not saying, you know what, let's not worry about my law anymore. Let's just forget at least, you know, big swaths of it.

No, he's saying, you can't keep my law on your own. So here's what I'm going to do. I will intervene and make a way for you to become righteous, not in spite of my law, but according to my law.

[13:51] In other words, getting back to the subject of authority, God never really withdraws his authority. Nor does he ever give it to someone else.

God is God. He is the great I am and he will always be this God. His law will always stand and we will always be obligated to submit to his full authority over our lives.

Once in a while, Nora likes to pretend that she's mommy. Of course, I'm more than willing to play along, so if she tells me to go to bed, I go to bed. If she tells me to eat my imaginary dinner, I eat my imaginary dinner.

But there comes a point, if my pretend mommy wants to do something my real daughter is not allowed to do, game over.

Right? Our roles return to reality in an instant and I reassert my authority as her real father. I am an authority figure in her life and our otherwise harmless games do not change that.

[15:02] Titus 2.14 says, Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

According to Paul in that verse, Christ redeemed us for the distinct purpose of making us a people who, number one, belong to him.

He gave himself to purify for himself a people for his own possession. Through the gospel, God is not relinquishing his authority.

As Jerry Bridges said, he's reestablishing his authority over us in part by converting a lawless people into a submissive law-abiding people.

Second, Christ redeemed us to make us zealous for good works. I believe the NIV says eager to do what is good, which I like. It could be translated eager or zealous to work good or do good.

[16:15] The idea is not that Christ saves us to continue in sin. He doesn't save us so that we're free to continue living in rebellion against the authority of God.

Not at all. No, he redeems us to enable our submission to God's authority. To work good or to do good is to live rightly under God's authority and rule.

Now, to be clear, living in submission to God's authority also means we live in submission to the authority of his Son.

Some of us may think this is an obvious point. But consider the Great Commission in Matthew 28 where Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

[17:26] Jesus says, all authority, all jurisdiction, all power to rule has been given to me by the Father. What the Father says, I say.

What I say, He says. Our commands are the same. Our authority is the same. And what is the commission He gives as one who shares in God's authority?

Make disciples teaching them to what? Observe all that I have commanded you. In other words, the act of making disciples is designed to bring others into submission to Christ's authority.

John Brodus, a pastor of the 19th century, he said about the Great Commission, to disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of pupil to teacher, taking his yoke of authoritative instruction, accepting what he says as true because he says it, and submitting to his requirements as right because he makes them.

We see then that Christ's intimated authority is not only the basis of our duty to disciple others, but the basis of all true discipleship.

[18:54] Christ's authority is the basis of all true discipleship. this actually makes a lot of sense. What did the Apostle Paul say in Romans 10?

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is what? Lord. And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The truth is, of course, Jesus is Lord, whether we confess it or not. And furthermore, there is coming a day when everyone will confess it.

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But more to the point, Christian discipleship cannot exist apart from submission to Christ's authority. I like what Jerry Bridges says about this.

[19:54] He writes, we do not, to use a popular expression, make Christ Lord of our lives. We do not make him Lord of our lives. He is Lord.

Our duty is to acknowledge his lordship and submit to his authority. That's discipleship in a nutshell. So we can disregard any notion that Jesus is merely a wise teacher.

We can disregard any notion that he's just a teacher of some pretty good ethics. His words bear the power and authority of almighty God.

We cannot submit to God the Father unless we also submit to Christ his Son. And we shouldn't miss this because scripture repeats it time and time again.

Matthew 28 18 again. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Jesus says. Ephesians 120. God seated Christ at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

[21:13] And he put all things under his feet and gave him head over all things to the church. Philippians 2 9. God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord.

Colossians 2 10. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.

1 Peter 3 22 Jesus Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels authorities and powers having been subjected to him.

And on and on it goes. It's almost surprising how many times the Bible reiterates the authority the head ship of Christ.

The very fact that scripture refers to Jesus as Lord really tells us all we need to know. He is Lord. He is Master.

[22:32] So living in submission to God means living in submission to Christ. And living in submission to both means living in submission to God's word.

in our day it has become somewhat popular to diminish the authority of scripture. And I say in our day this has been going on for a very, very, very long time.

A few years ago one well-known pastor suggested the New Testament bears more authority over us than the Old Testament. His reasoning is that we now live under the New Covenant so that would obviously be true but recently that same pastor has been suggesting primarily for the purpose of relating to unbelievers that we should not use the Bible at all as our starting point.

Why not? Well, unbelievers don't believe the Bible. They don't believe scripture is authoritative and you can probably see the all-too dangerous slippery slope that this man is on.

Of course, as I said, this is hardly a new problem. What was Satan's first temptation in the Garden of Eden? He tempted Eve to question God's word.

[23:47] Did God actually say? Now in a sense, you might say he didn't deny the authority of God's word. He just called into question the precision of it.

You know, yeah, I'm sure God said something like that. But are you certain you've interpreted him correctly? In recent years, I've heard a surprising number of Christians or perhaps so-called Christians warning people not to make an idol of the Bible.

What do they mean by that? Sometimes they mean that we should not treat the totality of scripture as authoritative. But that's precisely what scripture is.

It is God's authoritative word. All scripture is breathed out or inspired by God. They are words from his mouth.

2 Peter 1.21 says, For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[25:04] People who claim we're making an idol of the Bible will often have a variety of ways to explain what they mean. More often than not, I have discovered, they are trying to stress that Christ is authoritative.

Our authority, they say, is a person, not a book. Not a book. We submit to Christ. And while we do submit to Christ, we know that we are supposed to submit to his word.

And that is the primary way we submit to Christ. Jesus himself said, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. He goes on to say, Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.

I love that verse. John 14.24, I love it because Christ expresses a perfect harmony between the Father, the Son, and the scriptures. If we love Jesus and believe he is our authority, we will keep his word.

We will treat his word as authoritative over us. And furthermore, Jesus' word is God's word. The word that you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.

[26 : 23] In other words, we can't submit to God's authority without submitting to Christ, and we can't submit to Christ's authority without submitting to his word. That is the God-breathed Bible.

By the way, when you hear someone warning us not to treat the Bible as an idol, I just suggest that you listen closely.

Listen closely. In my experience, if you listen closely, or you listen long enough, you'll discover there's a reason they want to diminish the authority of Scripture. You may find that there are parts of Scriptures they don't like, and would rather not submit to.

They would rather not think of it as authoritative, but as Martin Luther once said, the authority of Scripture is greater than the comprehension of the whole of man's reason.

Now, once we acknowledge the authority of Scripture, we then have to submit to its authority. And, granted, that's the much more difficult part.

[27:35] Martin Lloyd Jones said the evangelical is a man of one book. He starts with it, he submits himself to it, this is his authority. In other words, whatever it says, we believe.

Whatever it says we must do, we do. Why? It is God's word. It is God's word. Specifically, it is God's word to us. There are many things he hasn't revealed to us, but the Bible gives us what he has revealed to us, and we are obligated to submit.

Remember, we are talking about this in the context of fearing God. John Bunyan says, it is not the knowledge of the will of God, but our sincere complying therewith that proves we fear the Lord.

To merely acknowledge God's word as authoritative, that's one thing, but to express a true, godly fear of our Lord requires submission.

I believe I talked about the Pharisees last week. You know, they knew the Old Testament scriptures very well. Jesus said they searched them, they studied them. But in some respects they refused to submit to them.

[28:55] And we see the cracks as we go along in the Lord's ministry. Christ often accused them of keeping some laws very, very well, very strictly, while neglecting other really big, glaring ones.

When they engaged Jesus in a theological or ethical debate, how did Jesus respond? He went right back to scripture, didn't he? He showed them their errors from scripture, things they had evidently missed or refused to submit to.

And ultimately, we see their refusal to submit to scripture's authority when they rejected the Messiah. That was the biggest sign of them all. Whatever moved them to study the Bible and to keep at least portions of God's law, their rejection of Christ, reveals their hard-hearted refusal to submit to God's authority, to his word, to his scriptures, to his son, namely the authority of Christ and his word.

Did the Pharisees truly fear the Lord? The evidence says no. Their lack of submission says no.

Throughout the New Testament, it, we see both Christ and the apostles relying on the authority of scripture, heavily relying on the authority of scripture.

[30:23] Here's an example Jerry Bridges supplies in his book. When the apostle Paul goes to defend the financial support of pastors and ministers, he quotes the Old Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 9, he writes, who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit?

Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does the law say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

Now what I find interesting about that example is the passage Paul appeals to in the Old Testament doesn't have any obvious connection to the support of ministers.

[31:37] But what Paul is doing is he's insisting that even the principles of Scripture are authoritative.

Not just the explicit commands but the principles. As we all know, the Bible doesn't have an explicit command for every situation we may face. Right?

There's been many times we wish we could just turn to a single verse and it would give us the answer exactly what we need to do and sometimes that verse just doesn't exist. It's not there. In many cases we have to rely on biblical principles to guide us and even those implicit principles bear authority over us according to Paul.

chapter 1 in paragraph 4 of the Baptist confession states, the authority of the Holy Scripture for which it ought to be believed depends not upon the testimony of any man or church but wholly upon God who is truth itself, the author thereof.

Therefore, it is to be received because it is the word of God. Now, briefly, in the time remaining, I want to consider another sphere of authority.

[33:00] I've had to think carefully about how to frame this because as I said, God doesn't share his supreme authority. He doesn't give that away. He has, however, put into place other authority figures, sub-authority figures, if you will, intended to carry out his will and give society necessary structure.

Specifically, I'm talking about human authorities. So, civil government, church leaders, husbands, fathers and mothers. Human authorities are relevant because to resent any authority ordained by God himself is to resent God's authority.

And I think we'll see this in Scripture. when Paul speaks of government, in Romans 13, for example, he says, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.

And those who resist will incur judgment. Actually, turn with me to Romans 13 for a moment. Let's read this.

I'll read the fuller passage starting at verse 1. This is Romans 13. I'm reading from the ESV. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

[34:30] Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this, you also pay taxes for the authorities, our ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

Pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Now, I don't have time to thoroughly expound this passage, but I think we can draw a few basic lessons from it nonetheless.

Number one, the first thing Paul says is that we should submit to the governing authorities. Submit, submit, submit. And number two, and this is the reason we submit, God has ordained the governing authorities.

[35:46] He put them in place. He purposed them. Again, he has put human authority at various levels in order to give structure and stability to what is very clearly a fallen world.

And this is especially true when we're talking about civil government in a mostly unbelieving world. Unbelievers do not submit to the supreme authority of God.

So, according to his wisdom, God has ordained human authorities, as we learn here, to keep evil in check. That's a big part of what they're doing or supposed to do.

So, number three, God ordained governing authorities to punish evil. Look at verse three again. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval. For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.

[36:50] I don't know whether you're familiar with Tim Chalice, a Christian writer, but at the start of the pandemic in 2020, back when lots of people were writing a lot of negative things about the government.

Chalice wrote one titled, Thankful for God's Good Gift of Government. Let me read just an excerpt. God's delegated authority, the necessity of submission, the role of government in acting to protect and preserve the health of the people, the call for respect and honor.

I find myself joyful, grateful. I am joyful to obey the mandates of my government as it tries to lead through a grueling, opaque situation. I'm grateful for God's good gift of government and grateful even for my government.

Behind it, I see him in its authority. I see his. Of course, this government will lead imperfectly. They will make poor decisions.

They will make mistakes. They will even act sinfully at times. They are, after all, human beings and subject to every kind of frailty, sin, and limitation. But God was not unaware of what was in the heart of men when he commanded through Peter, be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him.

That's in 1 Peter 2. And that pretty well expresses the attitude we should have toward civil government. Even in the cases where the Bible calls for our civil disobedience, our rebellion, if you will, against the human authorities, we still are supposed to possess a posture of humility and respect and submission.

You know, think of Daniel. We don't see them dragging him to the lion's den kicking and screaming, do we? Look again at verse 5 here. Therefore, one must be in subjection not only to avoid wrath, but also for the sake of conscience.

In short, submitting to God's authority requires we submit to human authorities that he has ordained for our good. Of course, this is true not only for civil government, but also for church leaders and for family authorities.

Consider Hebrews 13, 17. I have to move really quickly now. Which says, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. So here we see a biblical mandate to submit to church authorities, church leaders.

[39:39] We also find an authority structure within the family, don't we? Consider Ephesians chapters 5 and 6. I won't read it in full, but children, they submit to their parents.

Wives submit to their husbands. We've learned that husbands submit to Christ, and according to 1 Corinthians 11, even Christ submits to God the Father. It goes all the way to the top. There's an authority structure in the workplace as well, which the Bible also addresses in Ephesians 6.

So in short, a God-fearing person will strive to live all of his or her life in submission to God's authority.

That is, submission to his Son, submission to his Word, submission to those human authorities that he has ordained and put into place. But I want to leave you with a positive thought about this.

I realize that when much of our culture hears talk about authority and submission, I think images of slave masters and tyrants and their slaves may be what comes to our minds, you know?

[40:56] That's why I question authority. That's why that bumper sticker exists. Nobody likes that mental image. But we need to take a closer look at the one to whom we are called to submit.

Right? Briefly. In Galatians 2.20, Paul says, The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

Just let that sink in for a moment. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. So the one who claims authority over us, the one who has supreme authority over every authority, the one whose name is above all names, the one who's in command, the one who gives us the rules, the one who punishes the wrongdoers, he willingly loved and gave himself for us.

That doesn't sound like a tyrant to me. In other words, his authority actually springs from compassion. It springs from a merciful, sacrificial heart of love for us.

Now comes the question, why in the world would we ever want to resist his authority? When we understand that not only has he given himself for us, but obviously he's most interested in what is best for us.

Why would we resist his authority? So let's do the the Kirkwood Almighty. Absolutely. I don't think so. If we do it, but we do it next to him. Well, we■■. Now come ahead and■ and see you guys elsewhere. Right- desktop. We want to enjoy on time speaking Quelqu ■■■■ Upd■■■■ WikipediaThere■ So ourar So people forgetting on time on session of sessions