

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
Sunday, January 2, 2022
Scripture: Proverbs 3: 1-18

Sermon: The Beginning

We fear the powers that God Almighty has shown us. We run for cover during a storm, we hide from lightening, we stay away from wild animals that God created, but we do not choose to fear God.

In Proverbs 9:10 it reads, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

Most people in our country and in the world do not fear God. Has “fearing the Lord” become a thing of the past? People sin and commit all kind of evil acts, but yet, many do not fear the punishment or the judgment of the Lord. Many people don’t even think about the Lord as they conduct their lives and make decisions. Those of us who are aware of God’s love and grace must never cause us to disregard his holiness, righteousness, and justice.

One of the most important spiritual concepts found throughout the Bible is the “fear of the Lord.” Throughout the Bible, God connects fearing the Lord with a correct understanding of his great power.

What is the “fear of the Lord?” What does it mean?

Simply, “fearing” the Lord has a strong connection to being obedient to God’s will. By fearing God, we can avoid being trapped by the natural pull toward going our own way, defying God and giving in to the inviting ways of immoral behavior.

In Deuteronomy 6:1-2 it says, “These are the commands, the decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all His decrees and commands that I give you, so that you may enjoy long life.”

Certainly, fearing the Lord isn't an easy concept to understand. We fear God because he alone holds the power over the destiny of our souls but fearing the Lord doesn't mean living in a state of constant anxiety or dread of God.

Because Jesus paid the price for our sins, as believers, we know God doesn't condemn us. Still, God's holiness and power cause us to humbly revere him, just as we show a healthy fear or respect for fire or raging waters.

To "fear the Lord" involves understanding several things about a believer's relationship with God.

First, we must recognize that God is loving, merciful and forgiving; but he also is holy, just, and righteous. Knowing God and understanding his character means accepting the fact that His justice and holiness of character will cause him to judge sin. So, fearing the Lord is to appreciate his character.

Fearing the Lord means being in reverent awe of his holiness, to give him complete reverence and to honor him as the God of great glory, majesty, purity, and power.

Throughout the Bible, God connects fearing the Lord with a correct understanding of his great power.

After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, God wiped out the Egyptian army that pursued them. Exodus 14:31 says, "And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant."

In Acts 9:31 it mentions fear of the Lord as a key part of the early church. "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers."

True fear of the Lord causes believers to place their faith and trust in him alone for salvation. Fearing God can produce confidence, hope and trust in him, which are necessary when we are looking to God for mercy, forgiveness and spiritual direction.

To fear God involves recognizing that God is angry about sin and has the power to discipline those who stand arrogantly against him and break his commandments and laws. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they were afraid and tried to hide from God's presence. This type of fear of the Lord is to be afraid, especially if you are caught on the wrong side of God's justice.

If we truly fear the Lord, we will obey His commands, live according to his Word and we need to say "no" to sin. One reason why God inspired fear in the Israelites at Mount Sinai was so that they might learn to avoid and reject sin and to obey God's law. In his final address to the Israelites, Moses repeatedly connected fearing God to serving and obeying God. In Ecclesiastes, the whole duty of humans is summarized by two simple requirements: "Fear God and keep His commandments." On the contrary, anyone who is content to live wickedly or defy God does so because "there is no fear of God before his eyes." We see this everyday on the news with the acts of violence towards others.

God instructs his followers to teach their children to fear him by training them to hate sin and to love God's commands. The Bible states that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

The fear of the Lord helps us separate from sin, becoming spiritually mature knowing what is morally right.

People who truly fear God will praise and honor him as Lord of all creation. Fearing God brings a humble confidence and overwhelming comfort. The New Testament links the fear of the Lord with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. Those who don't fear God will have little or no sense of his presence and protection. Those who fear God and obey his Word will experience a deep sense of spiritual security and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

With the coming of Jesus Christ, God's people can properly understand how wonderful blessings arise from the fear of God.

Knowing that Jesus was punished for our sins, he took our place, reminds us that God is to be feared and yet is also love. Since God is love, He took our sins upon Himself, removing them from us as far as the east is from the west.

As Christians, we are members of the New Covenant, and we know that our inability to obey his commandments once condemned us. Now, these same commandments are written upon our hearts.

With grateful hearts, we want to obey God's commandments, and we will receive the blessings promised to us when we do so. A healthy fear of God is a wonderful thing, and it is a doorway to life and many blessings.

Rather than a barrier to intimacy, fearing God opens the door to a closer relationship with God. The "fear of the Lord" is the key that unlocks the door to God's spiritual riches and to wisdom!

Today, as we are at the beginning of a new year 2022, we need to start with a healthy fear of the Lord and encourage others to fear the Lord as they think about their actions and how they affect others.

As we start this New Year and come to the Lord's Table, let us all remember how much God loves us and wants the best for us and how important it is to "fear the Lord," for it is then we will be drawn closer to our Lord and follow in his ways.