

Introduction:

Far too often, we talk about the five steps of salvation: Hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. While this little mnemonic device may be helpful in some aspects of evangelism. It really misses the numerous steps we walk when we travel from sinner to saint. If we want to move from sinner to saint, we must pursue God's wisdom. **Proverbs 8:34-36** explains that wisdom is where salvation and life begin. But what is the beginning of wisdom? **Proverbs 9:10** says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (ESV). In the first part of this lesson, we saw a picture of fear. In this one, we want to examine what this fear is going to look like in practical ways in our lives.

Discussion:

I. Mistaken extremes in fear of the Lord.

- A. Sadly, our common idea of the fear of the Lord is perverted by Satan. There seem to be two extremes that take the day when talking about the fear of the Lord. Both have a hint of true fear, but actually miss the mark.
- B. The first is *abject dread and terror*. This one treats God like an abusive father whose children never know what they are going to get when he walks through the door. They may run up to their father for a hug and receive one in kind or they may get kicked across the room. They cower in fear never knowing which father is coming home. They do everything they can to please their father lest he hurt them, but they never know if they are doing the right thing. Eventually, they are either broken by the fear or they abandon home to get away from the rule of their father. I believe this is the kind of fear that is defeated by love in **I John 4:18**.
- C. The second is a knee jerk response to the first. Knowing that the first kind of fear described is bad and not biblical, some water down the fear of the Lord and claim it is *merely reverence*. This leaves the idea that fearing the Lord means little more than speaking His name in hushed tones and trying really hard not to laugh at jokes about God and His religion. We may talk about being in awe, which we will in a moment, but with the modern usage of "awesome" (and I'm as guilty as the next person of this), we are left with the feeling that we love God the way we love a good cheesecake. They're both so awesome. Passages like **Matthew 10:28** should forever remove this weak idea of fearing the Lord from us.
- D. So what does the practice of a biblical fear of God look like? What does it involve? Let's consider what the Bible actually says about the fear of the Lord.

II. Awe

- A. Despite our overuse and therefore watering down of the term, awe is perhaps the best description of the fear of the Lord. Awe beyond belief. **Psalms 33:6-9** equates fear of the Lord and awe. The whole earth should fear the Lord and be in awe of Him because He created the whole earth.
- B. Webster defines awe as "Fear mingled with admiration or reverence; a feeling produced by something majestic, sublime, etc." Sadly, as I said earlier, our overuse of this term is bleeding it of its usefulness. Even dictionary.com has demonstrated this as they list the "slang" definition as "very impressive." When we are talking about God we need to put the awe back in awesome. Not everything can be awesome. Your Chipotle burrito is not on the same plane as God. Finding out that an old friend is dropping in on you is not on the same plane as God. The latest iPad is not on the same plane as God.
- C. In **Psalms 33:6-9**, we learn that when we come into the presence of God we are coming into the majestic presence of the one who spoke the universe into existence. Which, of course, means He has the power and authority to speak it out of existence. God is not merely very impressive. God is awesome, awe-inspiring.
- D. We sing the song "I Stand in Awe" and think we are really hitting on the meaning of it when we all stand up in the chorus. And it only shows we don't grasp the meaning at all because that "stand" is not literal. The idea of "stand in awe" in **Psalms 33:8** is patently not that we are so amazed by God we stand in His presence. It is merely an English idiomatic expression that is supposed to convey dwelling in a state of shocked awe, fear mingled with admiration. Those who are really in awe of God fall to their knees in prostration. When we are very impressed, we might stand. If a dramatic performance is very impressive, we stand and clap. If a choral performance is very impressive we give a standing ovation. But when we are awed in the presence of God, when we have fear mingled with admiration because of the pure creative majesty and sublime power of God, we fall in prostration before Him. Everyone else always has, why would we be different?

III. *In the Rebellious, Dread*

- A. No doubt, there is what we might call a negative side of this fear. We saw **Matthew 10:28** just moments ago that claims we should fear the one who can kill our bodies and cast our soul into hell. Awe includes this, but it is not the aspect of awe that fills the faithful. It is the aspect of awe that governs the rebellious.
- B. Consider **Jeremiah 5:20-31**. In **vs. 23**, this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart. We are not dealing with faithful servants who stumble and struggle. We are dealing with rebellious and stubborn people who pursue their own courses instead of God's. This awe should produce trembling, dread, and utter fear. They are not in proper awe of God (see **vs. 24**), all that is left for them is utter terror.
- C. While this is for those who are outside of the covenant with God, those who are in God's covenant must recognize that if we decide to abandon God's way, rebel against Him, recklessly pursue our personal passions, we have abandoned the true awe of God and are subject to this terror. **I Samuel 12:14-25** demonstrates this tension. In **vs. 14**, Samuel tells the Israelites to fear God. That is, be in awe of God. Then the people are shown a sign of God's majestic and sublime power. In **vs. 18**, they fear God. Then in **vs. 19**, the people express their fear. But in **vs. 20**, Samuel says, "Do not be afraid." But in **vs. 24**, he commands them to fear the Lord again. What is the point? The point is when we are in awe of God (a proper fear mixed with admiration) we do not have to be terrified of God (an abject dread of God's wrath). But if we are not in awe and therefore rebel, thinking somehow we can overpower God or pull one over on Him, all that is left is a certain terrifying expectation of God's complete and powerful judgment (see **Hebrews 10:26-31**).

IV. *In God's Children, Delight:*

- A. I know this is shocking. But while the fear of the Lord comes out as dread in the hearts and minds of the rebellious, in God's people it is seen as delight. We, in fact, delight to fear the Lord. In **Nehemiah 1:11**, Nehemiah asks God to listen to the prayers of those who delight to fear God's name. In **Isaiah 11:3**, it says that the Messiah (remember the Messiah is God, the Son) delights in the fear of the Lord.
- B. Consider an amazing parallel in **Psalms 66:9, 11**. In one verse, the earth is told to tremble, but in the other at the same time it is told to rejoice. But how can this be? I mean, we can understand the dread of the rebellious, but how can fearing God ever be a delight? When we think about being motivated by the fear of the Lord, we get it all wrong. We think that is simply obeying because we are afraid of going to hell. That is not the fear of the Lord; that is the fear of hell. We will not find long term motivation to surrender to God when what we are afraid of is His punishing stick, hell.
- C. So how does this awe get attached to delight and rejoicing? We who are God's covenant people are aware that all that majestic, sublime, magnificent, terrible, awesome power is directed to our blessing, our good, our benefit. Allow a microcosmic illustration. Have you ever seen lightning strike? I don't mean in the distance; I mean nearby. When I was young, lightning struck outside of a house we were staying in. While we were eating, we saw it flash past the window, we heard the immediate deafening boom. It was amazing. It was awesome. My heart was pounding, the hairs on my arms stood on end, my skin went cold. I wanted to duck under the table. I was in dread. I never wanted to be that close to it again. But every day, I walk into a room, flip a switch and delight in the light that the very same electricity produces for my benefit. You should be in awe of electricity. If its unfiltered power were directed against you, you would be fried to a crisp. But, when its power is used for your benefit and good, it is delightful. Please understand that doesn't even hold an electric light to the awesome power of God directed for your good.
- D. Consider a shocking passage about the fear of the Lord in this vein. In **Joshua 4:19-24**, God explains why the Israelites needed to establish the 12 stone memorial once they crossed the Jordan. It was so when their children asked what that stack of stones was about, they could explain that God had delivered them from Egypt by letting them cross the Red Sea on dry ground, and handed the Promised Land to them by letting them cross the Jordan on dry ground. This memorial was to accomplish the amazing purpose "that all the people of earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (ESV). Are you as surprised as I am that a story of loving deliverance is the basis for Israel's fear of God? What's there to be afraid of? God delivered them. We would expect God to talk about some time of judgment on Israel to be the basis of their fear. Now, think about what this means. When our children see us eat the bread and drink the cup and ask us what it means, we need to let our children know: "Our God delivered us from our sins by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for us. He struck down the power of sin, destroyed the power of death, and was resurrected so that we can be resurrected. This was so that everyone will know the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever." Here is the point. God's glory, majesty, power, holiness is awesome. But what is even more awesome is when He directs that power toward us for our good as He did for Israel drying up the Red Sea and the Jordan, and as He does for us in Jesus Christ.

V. Love

- A. Because of the perverted, mistaken, extreme notions of the fear of the Lord, we tend to think of fear and love as opposites. We think that being motivated by love means being motivated by the carrot of heaven while being motivated by fear is being motivated by the stick of hell. This is simply not true. True love and true fear of the Lord are not opposites. The really shocking thing the Bible teaches is that true love for God is actually the result of proper fear of the Lord.
- B. In **Deuteronomy 6:1-2**, Moses says that he is about to lay out the instruction of God for the express purpose of helping the Israelites fear the Lord. What he is about to say is about fearing God and how to do that properly. Now, notice the very first thing Moses says is appropriate fear. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (**Deuteronomy 6:4**, ESV). Did you see that? Moses essentially says, "This is the fear of the Lord, that you love the Lord."
- C. Remember that our working definition of "awe" is fear mixed with admiration produced by the majestic or sublime. Do you hear the hint of love in that definition? Awe is part admiration. It is part love. It is part longing. When you consider the awesome power, glory, majesty, holiness of God, don't you want part of that? God is everything that we are not. He has all that we want. And when we add in what we've noticed about His awesome power being directed for our benefit, how could we do anything but love the object of our fear and awe? Consider Peter in **Luke 5:1-11**. The awesome power of Jesus is demonstrated to Peter by the miraculous catch of fish. Peter understands what is going on. He is in the presence of someone who is distinct, different, awesome. Peter cannot stand in the presence of Jesus. He cries out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (ESV). But do you not sense that Peter's request for Jesus to depart is not quite as simple as that. Do you not sense that Peter wishes he were worthy to have Jesus in his presence? Do you not sense that Peter longs for Jesus, this one whom he fears? Peter is in awe. He fears Jesus' continued presence because he knows he is unworthy of it (Woe is me!), but he longs for it. How could he not love someone so awesome?
- D. **I John 4:19** says we love because God first loved us. But we need to understand that true and complete love for God does not come because any old person did something nice for us. We love because of how amazing it is that the Supreme, Sovereign Ruler of the Universe who brought the universe into existence by the Word of His mouth and will take it out of existence by the snap of His finger, who has every right to wipe us off the face of the earth leaving nothing but a greasy spot behind, whose holiness is greater than we can imagine and witness loves us so much that He removed the guilt of our sins and set us free from the power of sin by the crucifixion of His Son Jesus. This is demonstrated in **Psalms 33:18** where God equates fearing the Lord with hoping in His steadfast love. True fear of the Lord is in awe of His perfect love and therefore hopes in it and loves Him for it.
- E. Loving the Lord is not the opposite of the proper fear of the Lord, it is the consequence of it. In fact, in **Deuteronomy 6:12** we learn that the opposite of proper fear of the Lord is not love but is forgetting the Lord. It is forgetting what the awesome power of the Lord has done for us and pursuing something else as if it can do for us what God has done.

VI. Confidence and Comfort

- A. We would never think to link fear with confidence. In fact, to us fear is connected with doubt and anxiety. Further, we wouldn't connect fear with comfort. In fact, fear is, to us, very uncomfortable. But this is exactly what God connects fearing Him with. **Proverbs 14:26** proclaims that we gain confidence from our fear of the Lord. Through our fear of the Lord, we know that not only we have refuge in Him, but our children do as well. Then in **Acts 9:31**, the Christians in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were at the same time walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- B. How does this work? Note especially the context of **Acts 9:31**. The leader of the first main persecution of the Christians in that region had just been overpowered by the awesome God. How much fear had they had of Saul? How much fear had they had of being dragged off and perhaps even being put to death? Look, I'm hearing Christians act like the end of the world is coming because the mayor of Houston is subpoenaing sermons. Imagine if a preacher got stoned in public and soldiers started showing up in meeting places and dragging folks off to prison. Then imagine if the ring leader of that was converted. Would you be in awe of God? Would you be comforted by the real life demonstration that His awesomeness is directed to us for blessing?
- C. When we have the proper fear of God, we won't quake with anxiety and doubt, we'll be comforted knowing that God's awesomeness is for our good, if we will just love Him.

VII. Distinction

- A. A proper fear of the Lord is practically displayed by understanding that God is distinct and different from us. As far above the earth is the heavens, so far above us is God. Consider **Ecclesiastes 5:1-3**. The word “fear” isn’t used, but it is a great description of true fear of the Lord. Those who come to the house of God need to remember one fascinating fact, God is in heaven and we are on the earth. God is supreme, sublime, and majestic. We are mundane, base, and low. God is powerful, strong, and mighty. We are weak, powerless, and frail. We must not take what we are doing right now lightly. We are coming into the very presence of the Holy, Supreme, Sovereign God. We must not do so brazenly, brashly, or impudently. We must not take this for granted. It is simply amazing that God allows us into His presence to worship, praise, and pray. He ought to pinch us off and flick us away as ticks who are trying to parasite our way into His presence. But He doesn’t.
- B. Instead, He allows us. Like Ahasuerus did with Esther, God holds out His golden scepter when we come into His presence. And we are allowed to boldly come into His presence with confidence, offering our praises, presenting our requests, even submitting our confessions. Be amazed by this. But do not miss why we are able to do this. Do not forget the awful price which God in His own awesomeness paid to secure this opportunity for us. **Hebrews 10:19-22** says we are able to be in this assembly right now, we are allowed to sing songs of praise, we are allowed to lift up prayers of confession and petition because of the blood of Jesus Christ. We did not have to pay the dues that allow us to be here today. God did that. He did it by sacrificing His own Son for us. Be amazed. Be in awe. And never, never, never take it for granted.
- C. As **Psalms 9:19-20** explains. We need to remember that we are but men. God is more than we are. He is not like us. In **Psalms 50:21**, God rebuked Israel because they took God for granted. They saw God as being like them. They thought that their worship was offered to God because He had the same needs as they did (see **Psalms 50:10-13**). They took their relationship with God for granted and their fear was mollified.
- D. And hear is the great danger for the people of God. We who read our Bibles regularly, attend worship repeatedly, pray daily, are in grave danger. That danger is that constant contact with the divine may produce familiarity and cost us our fear. Allow me to ask, are you ever amazed anymore when you walk out in the morning and get to bask in the heat and light of the sun? The sun has a diameter of 865,374 miles. It has a surface temperature of 9941 degrees Fahrenheit. It fuses 620 million metric tons of hydrogen each second. And we walk out into and if we give it a passing thought, it is probably no more than, “Boy, glad it’s not raining.” We give no thought to its power and majesty. Why would we? We’ve seen it every day and plan to see it every day for the rest of our lives. It has become familiar and is no longer amazing to us. But, I can guarantee you if we were brought in just a little closer proximity to it, our awe would likely be renewed. Beyond that, we rarely give thought to the fact that it is God in His awesome love and goodness that crafted that powerful ball and set it in our sky to shine on us. We said earlier that we think of things like delight, joy, love, confidence as opposites of fearing the Lord. We are wrong. Those are all characteristics of true fear of the Lord. We’ve already noted one opposite of fearing the Lord: forgetting the Lord. Now take note of an even more profound opposite: familiarity with the Lord.
- E. Understand that we are only allowed to come into the presence because of the spilt blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He paid for this opportunity for you to be here. Do not take it for granted. Do not come into the presence of God like it is just one more day in the sun. Do not come skipping into His presence, like you are merely rubbing elbows with someone who can give you a leg up this week. Be amazed at what is going on here. Be in awe. Remember one of the cases we started with in our previous lesson. In **Revelation 1:17**, John, who had spent years in Jesus’ presence, listening to Him teach, watching Him live, came into His presence again. He didn’t run up to Jesus like a long absent buddy, high fiving Him, calling him “dude,” and reminiscing about old times. John fell at His feet as though dead. We must not allow our familiarity with the divine to cost us our awe and our fear. Perhaps this is why in **Psalms 86:11**, David asked God to help him fear. We need God’s help to fear God properly, lest we move to the extremes and pervert the fear of God.

Conclusion:

No doubt, you expected this lesson to say that the practical working of God’s fear in our lives would be obedience. After all, there are multiple passages like **Ecclesiastes 12:13** which tells us to fear God and keep His commandments. And that certainly is a very practical expression of fearing God. But the reality is, I don’t have to list that one. After all, when I am in awe of God, dreading Him when I turn to rebellion, delighting in Him when I surrender, loving Him because His awesome power has been focused in blessing on me, confiding in Him, being comforted by Him, and being constantly amazed as I bask in the glow of His awesomeness, obedience is a trifling consequence. That will just happen. So, let me ask you, the Supreme, Sovereign ruler of all the universe sent His Son into the earth to live and die at the hands of man to pay for your opportunity to be here. Do you fear Him? Are you in awe?