

Walking in the Fear of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, November 3rd, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. So for those of you who are here this morning, look around.

Give each other high praise. Congratulations. You remember daylight saving time and the change. And with the enthusiasm of the greeting time I saw, everyone even managed to sleep well.

So that's a good thing. This morning, we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World. And through this series, we have been exploring the book of Acts. Our focus passage this morning is found in Acts 9, verse 31.

So if you want to turn to Acts 9, verse 31, as you can tell, we're progressing through the book. We started at 1, verse 1, right? And now we're at 9, 31. So let's hear that now.

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.

[1 : 08] And Paul, writing to the church at Philippi in Philippians 2, verse 12, says, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

The fear of the Lord. So I don't know that the concept of fear and trembling in connection with God is a very popular concept today. Or even one that's taught very often or that people seek to understand.

And so we're going to do that a little bit together this morning. I think people generally prefer to hear about God's love, God's tolerance, right? Do you feel like God tolerates your behavior sometimes? I know he tolerates mine. Or God's patience, right? We look at all of those qualities of our Father, our Heavenly Father. And those are the ones we tend to skew towards.

So when we point out that God's righteous indignation, His holiness, His justice, are equally important in Scripture, folks may tend to get nervous.

[2 : 21] People may tend to resist or even minimize those aspects of God's character. Even suggesting, I've heard people say this before, well, my God isn't like that.

My God isn't cranky or mean or doesn't yell at me. He doesn't disapprove of me. Hmm. That doesn't sound like the God that I know. So it may be that the emphasis on God's love and mercy in the past few decades, that's where we've seen it, right?

Certainly in the 80s, 90s, and more contemporary times. In reality, that may very well be a pushback on the hellfire and brimstone messages that maybe came in a previous generation.

And many of you will remember those days, right? God is coming for you, so accept the Lord or else. That was kind of the message at times.

But it could be, though, some of you have heard me say this before, could it be that the pendulum has somehow swung too far in the other direction? Maybe it's actually gone to the opposite extreme of where it should be.

[3 : 30] Do contemporary churches and preaching in any way convey a sense of fear and trembling as it relates to Christians or the Christian life? Do we understand what that means and how it fits into how we should be as followers of Christ?

And if not, could that be possibly a factor that explains why many Christians seem somewhat apathetic in their service? Somewhat apathetic in their commitment to God and His call on their lives.

Because if God is forgiving and loving and I'm way over in that camp, I'm maybe not concerned that I'm not doing what God has called me to do.

Matthew 10 verse 28 says, Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Have we forgotten who the Bible clearly tells us over and over that we should fear if we are negligent in our service? Our sermon this morning is titled, Walking in the Fear of the Lord.

[4 : 44] And I hope to accomplish three things together. I'm going to seek to properly help us define what is meant by this phrase, the fear of the Lord. Then we're going to identify why the fear of the Lord should be important to us as followers of Christ.

Then, I'm going to suggest to you how we can develop a healthy fear of the Lord without going to either extreme and being in constant fear and anxiety or being largely apathetic about it.

Does that make sense? Does that sound okay? So let's start with defining the fear of the Lord.

Terror, terror, fright, fearfulness, agitation, horror, alarm, panic.

These are all synonyms, you can look them up, for fear. The Oxford Dictionary gives an English definition of an unpleasant emotion, fear is, caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain or a threat.

So what about a biblical perspective? The Hebrew word that is related to fear is yurah. And this is used in the Old Testament to describe fear or terror.

[6 : 04] It suggests an awesome or terrifying thing or object that causes fear. And it also suggests a fear of something divine. A fear of God.

And one that suggests respect, reverence, or piety. The Greek word is phobos. And it's used somewhat similarly to describe fear, dread, terror.

In fact, something that strikes or causes instant terror for us. So when people use the phrase, the fear of the Lord, it's usually meant to indicate reverence or awe.

That's how it's usually meant. But does that cover it? Does that definition actually even go far enough? Fear or awe? Because the terms reverence and awe are good ones.

But do they suggest any room for trembling? Because that's what the Bible suggests needs to be a part of the fear of God. The suggestions of reverence and awe imply a place for trembling.

[7 : 13] But do they actually make the connection there? And when we hear the word trembling, does it suggest to us that someone has really lost all control or rational thought?

Doesn't trembling imply an extreme kind of reaction? Well, Paul says in Philippians 2 verse 12, So the clear message here is that a proper fear of the Lord should include fear and trembling.

And the Greek word for trembling is tromos, which means a trembling or quaking with fear. That fits, right? And as we get from Matthew 10 verse 28, which we already heard this morning, Jesus taught his followers that just as a person would likely tremble in the presence of someone who could take their life, Jesus taught us to fear the Lord in the same way.

So a proper fear of the Lord should include reverence and awe. It should also include a sense of, as one commentator I read said, being afraid to offend God in any way.

Is that helpful? I found that very helpful for me. Fear of the Lord being afraid to offend God in any way. Hebrews 10 verses 26 and 27 says, If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.

[9 : 01] But only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Fire and brimstone, right? Hebrews 10 verses 30 and 31 says, For we know him who said, It is mine to avenge.

I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It's a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 12 verses 28 and 29 says, Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and to worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

So we worship a God of both awesome power and final judgment, who could end our lives at any moment, but also a God of eternal compassion, a God who has endless love for us and offers redemption made possible through the blood of his own Son, Jesus Christ.

That's a balanced God. So we should literally tremble and quake at the thought of having offended God, not having sought his forgiveness.

[10 : 31] So do you appreciate the balance there? Can you see that a bit more? We should absolutely have a sense of God's love for us and his desire to have a relationship with us, while also recognizing and being humbled by his awesome power, that reality that he literally holds our

lives and our destiny in his hands.

Does that make sense? You can say yes. It's helpful for me to know that I haven't totally lost you. Yes, thank you. Excellent. So, it's important to seek to hold a balanced perspective on that, as we now consider the importance of the fear of the Lord.

Not only do we need to understand it, we need to recognize that it's critical in our lives. The book of Proverbs. I love it. I do love it. It's bursting with so much wisdom and advice for living in God's will. And it really does offer a lot of advice about learning to deal with the fear of the Lord. And I'll just whip through these, but they're all listed there if you want to look them up.

Proverbs 1.7 tells us, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge or wisdom. Proverbs 8.13 tells us, The fear of the Lord will cause a person to hate evil.

[11:53] Proverbs 10.27 tells us, The fear of the Lord will extend a person's life. Proverbs 14.26 and 27 tells us, The fear of the Lord gives us strong confidence and is a fountain of life.

Proverbs 16.6 tells us, The fear of the Lord prompts one to depart from evil when we are faithful and atone for our sin. Proverbs 19.23 tells us, The fear of the Lord leads to a contented life.

Proverbs 22.4 tells us, The fear of the Lord is the way to riches, honor, and life. Does it sound important? Sounds important, right?

So what does it look like? What does life look like without the fear of the Lord? Well, if we don't live with the fear of the Lord in mind, Scripture suggests we may be closing ourselves off to the treasures of God's will, God's wisdom, and His knowledge.

We may be more tempted to flirt with sin or evil, right? If we don't perceive consequences, or God will forgive me, God loves me more than anything. We'll be more tempted to flirt with the things that we should not.

[13:11] We'll be more likely to potentially be corrupted by the things that are against God. Our lives may ultimately wind up being shortened by our refusal or resistance to hearing and following God's Word.

God's Word is life. You walk away from it, what's the alternative? We may be less likely to come to know the love of God that gives us assurance and confidence in our salvation.

When we give in to sin, we may not be as motivated to repent and turn to God. If your default switch is switched to, oh, it'll be fine, are you as likely to repent?

We may also not be as motivated to maintain a vital and healthy connection and relationship with God. In Isaiah 66, verses 1 and 2, we read, this is what the Lord says, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.

Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things so they came into being, declares the Lord? These are the ones I look on with favor, those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word.

[14:32] Without a personal sense of fear of the Lord and the way that we've come to understand it this morning, Scripture suggests we simply cannot please God. Psalm 103, verses 17 and 18 says, but from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

As the psalmist declares there, only those who fear the Lord, only those who keep his commands, will truly receive his everlasting love.

But in recognizing all of this that we have so far this morning, how do you develop a proper and balanced fear of the Lord in your life? Without allowing, as I said at the beginning, that pendulum swing to happen, all the way back to the other extreme of judgment, fire, and brimstone.

Where's the balance? Where's the center point? Developing the fear of the Lord comes through, shouldn't be a shock, God's word.

Romans 10, 17 says, Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. Seems like God's word is the key.

[16:01] Is that, are you hearing that like I am? Deuteronomy 31, verses 10 to 13 says, Then Moses commanded them, At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the festival of tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing.

Assemble the people, men, women, and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns, so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God, and follow carefully all the words of this law.

Their children who do not know this law must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God. As long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

A balanced fear of the Lord, Scripture makes clear, comes through God's word. And as we read the word of God, we can ask him to help us gain a better understanding of how we should fear him in balance with his great, great love for us.

So the Apostle Paul helps shed some light on this balance. Romans 2, verses 4 to 11. Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

[17 : 33] But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath. When his righteous judgment will be revealed, God will repay each person according to what they have done.

To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil. First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. But glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good.

First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. Despite what the sons of Zebedee thought. Can we sit next to you, Lord?

That's not how it works, Jesus said. Peter gives some important additional context in 2 Peter 3, verses 7-14, which says, By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

[18 : 57] But do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness.

Instead, He is patient with you. Hear this, my friends. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

[20 : 06] So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him.

When it's used properly, the Word of God is what helps us maintain an appropriate balance in our focus on the fear of the Lord.

Now, why do I say used properly? Maybe this will seem obvious to you, but to maintain an appropriate and balanced perspective and avoid the extremes, we must read part of God's Word? Just the New Testament part? No, all of God's Word. God's character, God's truth, God's power is revealed across the canon of Scripture.

Some people read only the portions that reveal God's love and mercy, but have no fear of the Lord. They may have developed an overly familiar perspective on Jesus or the Father that skew towards the inappropriately familiar and even casual.

[21 : 16] without a sense of the immense power and authority they hold. I think I've shared this with you before. A friend of mine who's a pastor doesn't really like contemporary Christian music.

Why? Because he said there are too many, get ready, Jesus is my boyfriend songs. And I said, oh dear, what do you mean?

And he said, think about the degree of familiarity that is found in most contemporary Christian music. Is God a mighty fortress? As Martin Luther said, should we fear the Lord in that way?

Or is Jesus our best friend? Is Jesus someone with whom we have become so comfortable and complacent that we've forgotten he is the one who calmed the storm?

Others may focus on the fire, the hell, the brimstone passages of God's word with a legalistic view that there is no love without judgment first.

[22 : 22] Those folks may have missed out on a perspective that God everlastingly loves us. His kindness exists forever. So the one extreme develops an attitude of permissiveness, right?

It belittles God's holiness and justice in many ways, while the other develops this horrifyingly restrictive perspective of terror that forgets God's grace and compassion.

You feel God is looking over your shoulder ready to snuff your life out at a moment's notice. It's not either extreme, folks.

Even in the passage that we just heard from Romans and 2 Peter, the context of each speaks very clearly of God's grace and forgiveness for all those who will repent.

So we need to be careful, no question, how we use the word of God, but we must use it. Why do we need to fear the Lord?

[23 : 27] I believe it's so that we will work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Our relationship with God and our focus on his word and his commands is essential to our calling as followers of Jesus.

And we need that focus to truly work out our salvation, as Scripture says, with a degree of fear and trembling, recognizing the eternal weight and consequences that it bears.

so let's continue walking in the fear of the Lord, asking him to remind us of all that means and to help us maintain a balanced perspective that he most wants for us.

Amen. Amen.