

Fear of Man—The Fear of the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2026

Preacher: Paul Houk

[0 : 00] All right, we'll go ahead and get started here.

I was telling Mindy that when I came a couple weeks ago, I don't know if some of you were! in here, but I thought the class started at 930. And so we got here at like 934, me and the kids, and the room was packed out.

The seats available were up here. I was like, man, this is packed out for 934, you know, and didn't realize that he had already been going for like 20 minutes. So, but the kids, I didn't have to, you know, box the kids over the year in front of everybody.

So that was, that was good. But, um, okay. So over the last few weeks, we've been going over different ways that we fear men. Um, if you weren't able to make it to any of those, I encourage you guys to go back and give them a listen.

Uh, if it helps me, I go on Spotify. You can find all of, all of the stuff on there. So if you're not able to make it, it's, it's always helpful to do that. Um, at the risk of repeating some things that you guys may have heard the last month, I'm going to quickly kind of hit on what the fear of man is.

[1 : 17] Um, more along the lines of what we might see on a day to day basis. Uh, and the title just in case, uh, you know, is overcoming the fear of man with the fear of the Lord.

So it's going to kind of be what we're talking about today. So if you're like me, you might hear the fear of man and think, well, this probably doesn't apply to me.

I'm not a very fearful person, but as we're going to kind of see later, the way that we use the word fear today is not always the same way that the Bible applies it.

So last month when, uh, I was working up in Nashville, uh, we were on storm restoration and we were hiking back into the woods to this cabin that was not accessible to trucks.

So we were walking way back in, into here. I mean, I don't know, maybe a mile back in, into the woods. And as I got close to the cabin, I kind of, the guys that were with me were, were pretty far behind me.

[2 : 18] A Belgian Malinois came running out from behind the shed right towards me. Um, if you don't know what a Belgian Malinois is, it's the number one dog used by the military and the police.

Um, even Navy SEALs use them in their operations. Uh, and I knew what a Belgian Malinois was. Uh, I had seen many videos of them running full speed.

They call them fur missiles, like running full speed and ripping somebody to the ground. But these guys were wearing these big bomb suits. I was not wearing a bomb suit. So I genuinely felt fear.

Uh, I mean, it was coming at me and it was about, I don't know, 30 feet in front of me. And I hollered back to the guys behind me. It was like, hey, uh, I'm, I'm going to need some help here.

And let me tell you, they were pretty reluctant to come to my help. They, uh, cause in this situation, I mean, the last place guys, he's the one that's, that's in trouble. And I was in last place at this point.

[3 : 19] Uh, but this is not necessarily the, the kind of fear that we're talking about this morning. Uh, Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. So you're right.

You didn't die. Yeah. I had that down. I skipped that part. I wanted you to think about the whole time. Like, how did he survive? Uh, no, I, I walked, I literally walked backwards for about a hundred yards, like slowly.

Cause I mean, I was waiting. I was like, this thing's going to take off. And I've seen guys run from him. It doesn't help. Like running is not an option. So I'm like, you know, it's fight or flight. My best option is probably to fight, but it, it, it stayed at the cab and it didn't follow me.

So I survived. I survived. So from this book that we've been going over, um, the, the, the, Ed, Ed Welch says this about the fear of man. He says, fear in the biblical sense is a much broader word.

It includes being afraid of someone, but it extends to holding someone in awe, being controlled or mastered by someone, worshiping someone, putting trust in someone or needing someone more than needing God.

[4 : 33] So if we're honest with ourselves, you know, we are all familiar with this definition of fear to a certain extent. Uh, you know, consider Robert. He lives in a big house in a subdivision.

The mortgage is higher than what he can afford, but he wants to prove to everyone that's doubted him in the past that he is successful. You know, Teresa, she'd like to go to church, but she feels like her kids don't have nice enough clothes and she's afraid that people are going to judge her as a mom.

Jay, he liked his car, but now that he started this blue collar job, he's got to go out and buy a truck because he feels like that's going to earn him respect from the blue collar guys that he works with. And Hannah, uh, she likes to listen to worship music when she's alone, but when her friends are with her, she feels like it's a little bit weird. So she turns to mainstream radio.

Rodney knows his boss is unethical and involving him and ripping off a company that they work for. And he knows if he confronts him, it'll probably cost him a promotion or even his job in the future.

[5 : 42] So he remains silent. You know, these are just a few of the countless examples that we might be confronted with on a day-to-day basis. If you were to take one day and consciously think about all of the times you consider what others think of you, I bet it's more than you realize.

We often do it subconsciously. There's those that they may be tempted to put up their chin and be like, I don't care what anybody thinks of me. And, you know, they brashly speak their mind.

They do their thing. But even they are strongly considering what others think of them, whether they'll admit it or not. So no one needs to be taught the fear of man.

It comes very naturally. Whether it's failure, rejection, humiliation, or harm, there are many ways that we can fear others in an ungodly way.

And when we were young, we called it peer pressure. But as adults, we define it as people-pleasing. So Proverbs 29, 25 says, The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

[6 : 53] The word snare in this verse is something that catches you unexpectedly, something that entangles and restricts. That's what fearing other people's opinion and rejection does.

At first, it seems harmless and normal. But before you realize it, it keeps you from obeying God. It brings anxiety and bondage.

It controls your decisions. So what are we to do about this? Let's look at the book of Isaiah. The Lord tells his people, he says, Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.

But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear. Let him be your dread. The only way to overcome the fear of man is with the fear of the Lord.

The Bible references the term fear of the Lord around 80 times. It's one of the most common themes in Scripture. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, Moses was repeating God's commands to the Israelites.

[8 : 07] And he says, Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and commandments, which I have commanded you, all the days of your life, that your days may be long.

It says, That you may fear the Lord your God. This is a foundation for God's commandments to his people. We can also see in the first chapter of Proverbs, he says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

The book of Proverbs is known for a book being full of wisdom about how to navigate our daily lives. And he says that fearing God is the only place to start.

I remember growing up and I was reading passages like this and not understanding the gravity of it. I mean, after all, our culture says that God just wants to be our friend.

He just wants the best for me, right? He plans to prosper me, doesn't he? Why in the world would I fear him? Even many pastors today say that God loves and accepts you as you are.

[9 : 40] Over the last 100 years, God has been gradually reduced to this nice old man who simply wants to help people accomplish their dreams. Or like a seven-year-old who is sad when you just don't pay attention to them or do as they ask.

As Christians, we must ask, Is this the same God of the Bible? Or is this a man-made God who endorses fleshly desires and happiness?

On the other end of the spectrum, does it mean that we should be afraid of God? In Exodus 20, we can see a helpful contrast between being afraid of God and having the fear of God.

It says this in Exodus 20. Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off.

And they said to Moses, You speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us, lest we die. Moses said to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of Him may be before you, that you may not sin.

[10:58] So, you know, we can tell from Moses' response. He says, Do not fear. But then right after that, he says, So that the fear of Him may be before you.

So, we know he's talking about two different types of fear here. Being afraid of God drives people away from God. They hide from Him, as the demons do.

Or they try to conceal their sin and hide from Him like Adam did in the garden. But being afraid of God in this way is also not biblical either.

The right fear of God is the exact opposite. The Holy Spirit produces in us a wonderful fear that wins and draws us to God.

So, Ed Welch, from this book that we've been going through, he defines the fear of the Lord this way. The fear of the Lord means reverent submission that leads to obedience.

[12:02] It is interchangeable with the worship of God. It is reliance on Him, trusting in Him, hoping in Him. This includes a deep understanding of our sin in the eyes of a holy God, knowing that He is just to punish rebellious sinners, yet having confidence in His great mercy and forgiveness towards those who humble themselves before Him, repenting and believing in the redemption found through Jesus Christ.

Interchangeable with the worship of God. Reverent submissions, what we're talking about. Charles Bridges, he also puts it like this. He says, What is the fear of the Lord?

It is that affectionate reverence by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his father's law. A right fear of God produces love for God.

A right fear of God produces worship to God. A right fear of God produces humility before God. And a right fear of God produces obedience to God.

So we're going to look at three different ways that we can grow in the fear of the Lord. So the first sort of right fear is a trembling response to God as the creator.

[13:35] If you look with me to, if we look at the last few chapters in Job, we get one of the longest speeches from God apart from when He gave His people the law.

It's a speech meant to help Job to understand His greatness and power through creation. So I'm just going to read a section from chapter 38.

I don't know if you guys have it. This is God talking. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it? Or on what were its bases sunk?

Or who laid its cornerstone? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out of the womb?

[14:32] When I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band? And prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors? And said, thus you shall come and no farther.

And here shall your proud waves be stayed. Have you commanded the morning since your days began? And caused the dawn to know its place?

That it might take hold of the skirts of the earth and the wicked be shaken out of it. It is changed like clay under the seal and its features stand out like a garment.

From the wicked their light is withheld and their uplifted arm is broken. Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked into the recesses of the deep?

Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare if you know this.

[15:32] One of the most obvious things that reveals the wisdom and glory of God is His creation.

David writes in Psalm chapter 19, he says, The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor are there words whose voice is not heard. And again, Paul famously writes in Romans chapter 1, he says, For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

For His 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.

So they are without excuse. In our modern culture full of technology, concrete, dull square buildings, and other man-made lifeless objects, we can often miss out on the glory of God's creation.

[16:54] Creation is meant to remind us on a daily basis of the power and majesty of the God that we serve. When's the last time that you gazed at the stars?

Stood next to a powerful waterfall, feeling the mist of the waterfall on your face as the roar of the water drowns out all other noise. Watch the sunrise and listen as the bird starts saying, and the world comes to life.

What about the miraculous honeybee watching as she drifts from flower to flower, flying over 500 miles in her 42-day lifetime for one teaspoon of honey?

Think about that next time you just throw honey into your coffee. That's a lifetime of work. But when we, if you want to grow in the fear of the Lord, these are just a few examples.

But when we look at creation, when we admire creation, don't just stop there. Be amazed at the creator by, with a word, he spoke it into being.

[18:00] Creation with a loud voice sings, the Lord God reigns. He is sovereign over all things. If God can speak into existence the miracle of life in everything we see, then he can be trusted with his will in your life.

Jesus drives us home by saying, you think God is only sovereign over the birds of the air or the flowers? He's sovereign over your life too.

Another way that we can grow in the fear of the Lord is to know that he is holy. That God is not just a bigger, better version of us.

When the word says that God is holy, it means that he is morally perfect and separated from sin.

But it also means that he is completely set apart.

He is different than us. Or as theologians say, that God is other. He's other. He is creator. We are creatures.

[19:11] We have limits. He has no limits. We derive life from him, but he derives life from no one. In his book on the holiness of God, R.C. Sproul says, holiness is not simply one attribute among many.

It is the attribute that describes God's very essence. The people of Israel, they understood this to the point where they wouldn't even write or say God's name.

When your Bible says, LORD, in all caps, it's the covenant name of God, Yahweh. But ancient Hebrew scholars would abbreviate his name to YHWH as a sign of reverence for the holy God.

An incredible perspective on the holiness of God is found in the book of Isaiah, where he receives a vision of the throne room. I'm going to take a second to read it because it's so powerful.

This is in chapter six. He says, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

[20:26] And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two, he covered his face.

And with two, he covered his feet. And with two, he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke.

And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost. I'm a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

[21:25] And he touched my mouth. And he said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. And your sin is atoned for. One could argue, this is one of the most awe-inspiring,

fear-producing passages in all of the Bible.

We don't have time to break it out, cover all the incredible components of it, but we're just going to look at a few major points. So first, what do the seraphim say? They say, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. The repetition of the word holy here, it might not seem like a big deal to us, but repetition of a word in Hebrew was a big deal.

One of the ways that they would emphasize the importance of something was to say it twice. We see this when Jesus begins a statement saying, Truly, truly, I say to you, it means, listen up, pay attention.

It signified foundational truth and authority. But to say something three times was almost unthinkable. Nowhere else in scripture do we see an attribute of God repeated three times.

[22 : 51] The angels are declaring that the Lord God, who is the holiest of holies, in all ways, glorifies himself through all things.

As they worship, the seraphim, who seem to be the highest order of angels that minister to the Lord, are so aware of his holiness that they cover themselves in reverence.

Feet in ancient times represented kind of a creatureliness, a lowliness. And so when they cover their face and they cover their feet, they are doing so as in humility.

And they are, they're shielding himself from their glory, his otherness, as creator and sustainer. If the angels who dwell in his presence respond with this humility, how much more should we as sinners who have committed treason against God's holy standard?

We see Isaiah, who according to human standards, he was one of the most righteous men of his era, God's chosen prophet, to deliver his word to his people.

[24 : 07] Yet when Isaiah is in the presence of God, he is totally overwhelmed with his own sinfulness. The phrase, woe is me, in the original text, translates as a declaration of judgment.

It means, I stand condemned. And then he says, I am undone, which means, I am ruined. I am cut off. R.C. Sprouls, he puts it like this.

He says, when we encounter real holiness, we don't compare ourselves to other people. We collapse. When man is confronted with the holiness of God, it's a traumatic event.

He doesn't say, wow, what a cool spiritual experience. He falls on his face, totally aware that he deserves the eternal wrath of God.

John Piper, he says it like this, to fall into the hands of a living and angry God who has infinite power is the most terrifying thought in all the universe.

[25 : 21] And the appalling thing is that virtually no one thinks about it. And it is coming for so many. The wrath of God is a foreign concept to many people, believers and non-believers.

It's not the typical topic of conversation at the coffee shop. We've all heard many times that God is love. But if we don't know about God's wrath, then it cheapens his love.

It waters down the gospel. If God's wrath didn't exist, then there would be no need for the gospel. After all, what do we need to be saved from?

Next time you ask somebody, are you saved? What if you were to finish that sentence to, are you saved from God's wrath? God's wrath? It's not a popular concept.

But if we're going to have a biblical understanding of the fear of the Lord, we need to understand his wrath towards sinners. You have heard it said that God hates sin, not the sinner.

[26 : 30] But ultimately, God throws the sinner into hell and not the sin. Psalm chapter 5, verses 5 through 6, says, Hebrews 10, 31, says, it is a fearful thing.

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Romans 1, 18, says, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The problem is many hear these verses and think that they don't apply to them. Most people in their own eyes think that they're good. So when the Bible talks about God's wrath against the wicked, it must be talking about the people who are wicked and really deserve it.

That's why knowing the holiness of God is so important because our goodness, like Paul says, our goodness before the holy God is His filthiness.

Apart from Christ, we were the wicked. We were rebellious. We were total enemies of God who have committed cosmic treason against His perfect law.

[27 : 58] God's wrath against sinners is not an emotional tantrum. God's wrath is a controlled, measured response to our sin.

Wrath is His righteous response to our sin. We deserve shame. We deserve ridicule. We deserve judgment.

It's only when we grasp the eternal wrath that we do deserve, that we can truly worship Jesus for the free gift of grace that we did not deserve.

Say that one more time. When we grasp the eternal wrath that we deserved, then we can truly worship Jesus for the free gift of grace that we did not deserve.

this holy, eternal God who created all things with the word, filling the earth with His glory, reigning over all things, all-knowing, all-seeing, chose to step down because of His great love for us and bear the wrath of God in our place.

[29 : 07] You think the Romans hung Jesus on the cross? God hung Jesus on the cross. The Holy Son of God wasn't beaten, ridiculed, and crucified because you were so special.

It was because you were filthy, running towards eternal damnation, and it's what you deserved. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He had loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2, 4-6.

Now, those who will repent and believe can draw near to the Father. Through Jesus, He will have a relationship with us. Because Jesus lived a perfect life, He became the perfect sacrifice.

God's wrath was poured out on Jesus instead of those who have been redeemed by His blood. You see how this impacts our fear of the Lord? In Christ, God's people are no longer driven by terror, the fear that has to do with punishment.

[30 : 24] Instead, we're filled with a reverential awe and worship motivated by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. then, our obedience to His word flows from a heart of thankfulness that says, I will boast in Jesus alone and seek to glorify Him in all things.

So, our fear in the Lord is inspired by awing and worshiping at His power and glory and creation.

our fear of the Lord is built by having reverence and humility before a perfectly moral God.

And our fear of the Lord is built by understanding God's terrible wrath towards sin. But instead of punishment, He draws us near as a loving Father because of the redemption we have in Jesus Christ.

So, how do we put this into application that affects our daily lives? One of the great blessings of growing in the fear of the Lord is we think less often about ourselves.

When our hearts are being filled with the greatness of God, we have less room for the question, what are people going to think of me? In this book, Ed Welch puts it like this.

[31 : 53] He says, If you have ever walked among giant redwoods, you will never be overwhelmed by the size of a dogwood tree. If you have ever been through a hurricane, a spring rain is nothing to fear.

If you have ever been in the presence of the Almighty God, everything that once controlled you suddenly has less power. The point here is that God's view of us should hold a much higher place in our life than other people's opinions.

When we formulate our value based on how other people perceive us, we are like a ship with no anchor. We drift around, pushed by the current of people-pleasing, until suddenly we find ourselves on dangerous shores.

But when our value is found in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, we stay anchored on the shores of the Lord's satisfaction. This truth is what shifts our daily priorities.

Now Rodney, instead of being afraid to confront his boss for unethical practices, he can boldly hold his boss accountable without fearing repercussions. He can trust in the Lord's sovereign plan over his life, seeking to please him above anything else.

[33 : 14] Robert, through the fear of the Lord, desires to live in obedience to God's word. This helps turn his heart away from materialistic things as a source of validation.

And instead, he invests in things of eternal value. The peer pressure that Hannah feels from her friends begins to fade. When she considers the holiness of Jesus and the sacrifice he made for her to have new life, it enables her to live unashamed.

And Jay, instead of looking for respect by attempting to fit in with his co-workers, now cares more about living out the gospel and encouraging his co-workers to think about what truly matters. In the same way, when we stop looking to others to fulfill our felt needs and we replace it with the fear of the Lord, the only one with the ability to satisfy every need, then we can live a life that's pleasing to him.

Let's live with this Westminster Catechism in our hearts. It says, what is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

[34 : 33] I mean, this is accomplished in our lives when we worship at the greatness of who he is in creation, have a deep reverence and humility for his holiness and tremble in thankfulness and obedience in the truth that we were saved from God's eternal wrath through salvation in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, we want to humble ourselves before you.

You are a holy God. Lord, we have sinned against you. Lord, we thank you for your gift of grace through Jesus Christ that now we can approach your throne room.

We can trust you. We can worship you. Lord, enable us to be obedient to you. Draw us to yourself so that we would care more about your opinion of us than the opinions of others.

Lord, help us to live a life that is pleasing to you. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.