

The Fear of the Lord
The Missing Ingredient in Modern Christianity

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries





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The Fear of God — Complete Bible Study Chart

Introduction — The Fear of the Lord — The Missing Ingredient in Modern Christianity

There is something missing from much of modern Christianity, and it is not another conference, another worship style, another counseling program, another social-media strategy, another church-growth method, or another preacher explaining how everybody can feel better about themselves by next Sunday. What is missing is older than all of that, plainer than all of that, and considerably less marketable than all of that. It is the fear of the Lord. Solomon said, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). He did not call it the advanced course. He called it the beginning. A man can learn doctrine, memorize verses, study theology, build ministries, teach classes, sing hymns, write books, and collect religious vocabulary until his shelves bend under the weight, yet if God has become small in his thinking, something fundamental has gone wrong. Christianity does not begin with man feeling important. It begins with God being recognized as God.

The phrase “fear of the Lord” makes modern ears nervous because generations have been trained to think that fear must always be unhealthy, primitive, negative, emotionally damaging, or incompatible with love. The Bible apparently missed that seminar. Scripture says, “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever” (Psalm 19:9). It says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13). It says, “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26). It says, “by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). It says, “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11). Those verses do not sound like God trying to cure His people of fearing Him. They sound like God trying to teach them how necessary that fear actually is.

Biblical fear is not the terror of a condemned sinner wondering whether God may throw him into hell at any moment after he has trusted Jesus Christ. The saved believer has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). The believer has “not received the spirit of bondage again to fear,” but “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). Eternal security is not uncertain, salvation is not probation, and Christ does not save a man on Monday only to discover on Thursday that He overestimated His ability to keep him. The blood is sufficient. The Spirit seals. The Father adopts. The Son saves completely. But none of that means the Almighty has become harmless.

That is where modern Christianity has managed to drive into the ditch on the other side of the road. In escaping the false fear that makes saved men doubt salvation every fifteen minutes, many have nearly abolished godly fear altogether. God has been reduced to an indulgent grandfather who smiles at rebellion, finances foolishness, excuses disobedience, and exists mainly to reassure everybody that nothing is really as serious as the Bible

sounds. Grace has been turned into padding around sin. Liberty has been turned into a permit. Love has been separated from holiness. Intimacy has been confused with familiarity. Men say “Daddy” while living like rebels and then wonder why the New Testament still says, “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28). Apparently the apostles did not think adoption removed reverence from the family.

The fear of God begins when a man finally gets his measurements right. Sin looks small when God looks small. Man looks enormous when God looks distant. Human approval seems powerful when divine judgment seems theoretical. Temptation becomes persuasive when heaven has been mentally moved to the basement. But Scripture keeps bringing God back into view. Isaiah saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” and his first response was not self-esteem. It was, “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isaiah 6:1, 5). Job heard God answer him out of the whirlwind and stopped rehearsing his defense. John saw the glorified Christ and “fell at his feet as dead” (Revelation 1:17). Heaven has never suffered from low thoughts about God. Earth specializes in them.

That is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Wisdom does not begin when a man discovers how intelligent he is. It begins when he discovers that his intelligence has limits and God does not. Fallen man prefers the opposite arrangement. He likes a God who can be questioned, revised, corrected, updated, interpreted around, and placed under review by creatures who forget where they put their car keys. The grasshopper writes a paper explaining why the One who made the grasshopper needs better information. Scripture calls that foolishness. Godly fear restores proportion. The creature bows; the Creator remains standing.

The fear of the Lord also changes a man’s attitude toward evil. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.” That immediately removes godly fear from the world of vague religious emotion. Fear has moral consequences. A man who fears God cannot indefinitely make peace with what God condemns without dulling that fear. He begins to hate pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the froward mouth because God names them. He stops treating sin as a harmless personality quirk. He learns that love for God will eventually produce hatred for what defiles fellowship with God. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). Modern religion wants a love that embraces everything, condemns nothing, excuses everything, and finally stands for nothing. The Bible calls that something other than love.

Godly fear also works like a fence. “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). That is one of the great preventative statements in Scripture. God is not only interested in forgiving a believer after he falls into a ditch; He gives truth designed to keep

him from climbing over the guardrail in the first place. Joseph stood in Potiphar's house with opportunity, temptation, privacy, and pressure surrounding him, yet he said, "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Potiphar was absent. God was not. Joseph did not need a security camera because heaven already had the room covered. That is the fear of God functioning as moral intelligence.

Exodus 20:20 makes the principle explicit. Moses told Israel that God's fear was to be before their faces "that ye sin not." That occurred under Israel's covenant and law, and the Church must not be confused with Israel, but the moral principle survives every attempt to make it inconvenient. Men behave differently when they believe God is actually watching. The Christian who has lost the fear of God begins asking how much he can get away with. The Christian who fears God asks what pleases Him. One studies loopholes. The other studies Scripture. One wants to know how close he can stand to the cliff. The other remembers that only a fool needs to prove how good his balance is.

The fear of the Lord cleans a believer because it reaches private territory. "The fear of the LORD is clean" (Psalm 19:9), and the same Psalm asks, "cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:12). Secret faults are where public religion has difficulty operating. Reputation can clean the outside. Fear of embarrassment can control what people see. Social pressure can make a man appear respectable. But those things cannot reach the browser history at midnight, the resentment rehearsed in silence, the imagination nobody else hears, the pride hiding behind ministry, the jealousy concealed beneath compliments, or the conversations spoken when church people are gone. The fear of God goes there because God is already there. Darkness may hide a thing from men. Darkness has never impressed Omniscience.

Second Corinthians 7:1 therefore tells believers to cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Flesh and spirit. Outside and inside. Public conduct and private corruption. God is not satisfied with a polished front porch while rats conduct business in the attic. Grace does not make filth clean by changing the label. Grace teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:11-12). The blood of Christ does not prove sin is cheap. It proves sin was expensive. Calvary should make a Christian more serious about sin, not less.

One of the strangest things Scripture says about godly fear is that it creates confidence. "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence" (Proverbs 14:26). The world imagines fear of God produces nervous, frightened people hiding from life. Scripture shows the opposite. When God becomes the largest reality in a man's thinking, everything else shrinks. Daniel could face Babylon because Babylon was not the highest court in existence. The apostles could

stand before rulers because rulers were still creatures. David could walk toward Goliath because he compared the giant to God instead of comparing the giant to himself. Men who fear God correctly become harder to intimidate because the question of ultimate authority has already been settled.

Remove the fear of God and lesser fears rush in to occupy the empty throne. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” A man refuses to fear God, then spends his life terrified of rejection, criticism, financial loss, aging, disease, death, public opinion, tomorrow, politics, the economy, social standing, and what somebody he has never met might say about him on a screen. He boasts of freedom while carrying twenty chains. Isaiah 8 gives the cure: “neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear” (Isaiah 8:12-13). The answer is not pretending the world contains nothing frightening. The answer is getting the fears in order.

That same fear reaches a man’s house. Proverbs 14:26 adds, “and his children shall have a place of refuge.” Psalm 128 connects fearing the LORD with the household, marriage, children, labor, and generational blessing in Israel’s Old Testament setting. The Church does not inherit Israel’s national covenant by hanging the Psalm on a kitchen wall, but the principle is plain: reverence toward God has household consequences. Children learn what their parents really fear. They watch what outranks church, Scripture, truth, morality, money, entertainment, sports, popularity, comfort, and convenience. A father can say “God comes first” every Sunday, but the calendar, checkbook, television, temper, and private conduct will eventually testify under oath.

A father who fears God leads differently because he knows he is under authority himself. A mother who fears God teaches by conduct long before the lesson becomes verbal. Husbands think differently about sacrifice. Wives think differently about godliness. Parents think differently about discipline. The family thinks differently about money, speech, entertainment, forgiveness, and conflict. God stops being the emergency contact called when the roof catches fire and becomes the Lord of the house. Christian families will still experience trouble. Fear of God is not a magic charm against sickness, loss, rebellious choices, grief, bills, or broken appliances. But trouble entering a house where truth already lives meets a different kind of household.

The fear of God also belongs in worship. Psalm 2:11 says, “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” That verse ruins the false choice between joy and reverence. Scripture can shout and bow in the same chapter. It can sing and tremble in the same service. Worship does not become more spiritual by becoming gloomy, but neither does it become more spiritual by becoming entertainment. When the fear of God disappears, the sanctuary easily becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, the preacher

becomes a performer, and God becomes the subject matter of a program designed primarily around how everybody felt afterward. Hebrews 12:28 says grace enables us to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” “Acceptably” means God has an opinion about the service too.

Heaven itself is not casual about God. Revelation shows creatures crying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 4:8). Elders fall down and cast crowns before the throne. Angels proclaim the worthiness of the Lamb. Heaven rejoices more purely than any earthly congregation ever has, yet nobody in heaven mistakes intimacy for disrespect. That ought to cure the idea that reverence belongs to a primitive age of religion. If glorified beings around the throne still bow, perhaps the local church can survive without treating the Almighty like the featured guest on a religious variety show.

The local church especially needs the fear of God because churches rot from the inside when they begin fearing people more than Christ. Acts 9:31 describes churches “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Again, fear and comfort are neighbors. Acts 5 records Ananias and Sapphira lying in the assembly and falling under immediate divine judgment in that apostolic setting, followed by “great fear” coming upon the church. God was making something painfully clear: He takes His church seriously. The church is “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). It belongs to Christ, and the Owner has never surrendered His right to inspect what happens inside it.

When church leaders stop fearing God, other fears begin writing policy. Fear of losing members softens preaching. Fear of losing donors alters discipline. Fear of controversy changes vocabulary. Fear of bad publicity produces concealment. Fear of culture makes doctrine negotiable. Sin gets renamed, compromise becomes strategy, and cowardice is advertised as compassion. A church can survive being unpopular. It can survive losing a building, a budget, a social position, or a public reputation. The early church survived prisons, beatings, persecution, and martyrdom. But a church that loses the fear of God has lost the very thing that might have kept every other loss from mattering.

None of this means the saved believer lives every day under the condemned fear of hell. That distinction must remain sharp or the entire doctrine becomes distorted. Romans 8:15 says we have not received “the spirit of bondage again to fear,” but Philippians 2:12 says, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” First Peter 1:17 says, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Ephesians 4:30 tells believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit “whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” There is security and accountability in the same Bible because God knows how to hold two truths at once even when theologians keep dropping one.

The Christian fears God as a son before a holy Father, not as a condemned criminal before an uncertain Judge. He knows Christ has paid for his sins, yet he also knows “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). He knows heaven is certain, yet “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). He knows the believer himself may be saved while his works suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:15). Eternal security settles the destination; it does not make the journey meaningless. A train ticket does not authorize the passenger to set fire to the carriage simply because he knows where the train is going.

The fear of the Lord therefore belongs everywhere modern Christianity has tried to remove it. It belongs in preaching because the preacher answers to God. It belongs in worship because God is holy. It belongs in the home because parents are stewards. It belongs in private life because God sees secret faults. It belongs in doctrine because human wisdom must bow before Scripture. It belongs in liberty because liberty without reverence becomes license. It belongs in assurance because security does not cancel accountability. It belongs in courage because the man who fears God has less reason to fear man. It belongs in the church because Christ purchased the church with blood.

This series is not a call back into bondage. It is a call out of trivial Christianity. It is not an attempt to make saved people doubt Christ. It is an attempt to make saved people stop treating Christ lightly. It is not a call to frightened superstition, religious gloom, or trembling before every circumstance. It is a call to fear the One who puts circumstances in their proper size. The fear of the Lord does not make grace smaller. It makes grace more astonishing because it reminds us who gave it. It does not make the cross less comforting. It makes the cross more terrible and glorious because it reminds us what sin required and what love supplied.

Modern Christianity has spent enough time trying to make God safe. He was never unsafe because He was wicked. He is dangerous to rebellion because He is holy. He is dangerous to pride because He is God. He is dangerous to lies because He is truth. He is dangerous to hypocrisy because He sees beneath the costume. He is dangerous to self-righteousness because His standard is perfect. And yet this same God saves sinners by grace, adopts them as sons, indwells them by His Spirit, keeps them eternally, comforts them in trouble, chastens them in love, receives their prayers, and promises them an inheritance that cannot fade away. That is not contradiction. That is majesty.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Everything in this series begins there. When the fear of God returns, evil becomes hateful again, holiness becomes reasonable again, temptation becomes dangerous again, courage becomes possible again, homes regain a center, worship regains reverence, churches regain

backbone, grace regains its proper glory, and the lesser fears of this world begin shrinking. The missing ingredient is not another technique. It is not a new trend. It is not something Christianity needs to invent. It has been sitting in the Bible the whole time, waiting for men to stop apologizing for it.

Fear the Lord. Not because Christ cannot save, but because He did. Not because God is uncertain about His children, but because His children should not be uncertain about His holiness. Not because believers must crawl through life terrified of losing heaven, but because redeemed men ought to know what it means to stand before the God who gave them heaven freely. Fear Him enough to believe His Book. Fear Him enough to hate evil. Fear Him enough to depart from sin. Fear Him enough to clean the secret room. Fear Him enough to stand when the crowd bends. Fear Him enough to lead the house, strengthen the church, worship with trembling, and face tomorrow without panic. Once God returns to His proper magnitude, everything else finally finds its proper size.

1 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — Where Knowledge Begins and Human Wisdom Ends

Key Passage: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

The Bible does not begin its schoolhouse with a diploma, a library card, a laboratory, or a lecture hall. It begins with fear. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). That verse is not a decorative motto for a Christian classroom; it is God’s verdict on the entire human approach to knowledge. A man may know mathematics and miss morality. He may understand machinery and misunderstand himself. He may chart the heavens, split the atom, sequence a genome, and still stumble through life like a blind man carrying a flashlight with dead batteries. Scripture says knowledge has a beginning, and that beginning is not man discovering how clever he is. It is man discovering who God is. Until the creature takes the Creator seriously, every other measurement is liable to be crooked because the ruler himself is bent.

Modern Christianity has often tried to improve God’s public image by removing everything that makes sinners uncomfortable. The result is a deity soft enough to market, mild enough to ignore, and accommodating enough to bless whatever rebellion happens to be fashionable this year. Men speak endlessly of intimacy while scarcely mentioning reverence, of love while avoiding holiness, and of grace as though grace were God’s permission slip for casual disobedience. But the Bible never presents the LORD as a harmless religious accessory. He is “holy and reverend” in his name (Psalm 111:9), “a great

God, and a great King above all gods” (Psalm 95:3), and the One before whom “the nations are as a drop of a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15). Christianity does not become stronger when God is made smaller. It merely becomes easier to sell and harder to recognize.

There is a reason Proverbs connects fear with knowledge before it says much about success, relationships, money, speech, temptation, or judgment. If the first principle is wrong, every lesson downstream becomes distorted. A man who does not fear God will eventually redefine sin, excuse pride, soften judgment, flatter himself, and call rebellion maturity. He may use impressive vocabulary while doing it, but a polished lie is still a lie. Proverbs 9:10 repeats the principle: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Knowledge begins when God is taken seriously; wisdom begins when that knowledge governs conduct. The fear of the LORD is not one ingredient among many. It is the foundation under the house. Remove it, and the paint may remain beautiful while the walls begin to crack.

1. THE BEGINNING IS FEAR, NOT FLATTERY

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Notice what the verse does not say. It does not say the fear of the LORD is an advanced elective for unusually serious believers. It does not say fear becomes useful after a man has first learned self-esteem, social acceptance, emotional balance, and religious vocabulary. God places fear at the beginning. Before Solomon develops the dangers of strange women, dishonest gain, lazy living, proud speech, foolish companionship, or crooked business, he nails the first board to the floor: fear God. Modern man prefers to begin with himself. God begins with God. That difference explains a great deal. Human philosophy asks, “What do I think?” Scripture asks, “What hath God said?” One produces endless revisions. The other produces a settled standard.

The word “beginning” matters because it defines the proper starting point. If a carpenter is off by an inch at the foundation, he may be off by a foot at the roof. If a navigator begins with the wrong coordinates, confidence only helps him get lost faster. So it is with knowledge. A man may reason brilliantly from a false premise and arrive at a beautifully organized disaster. The fear of God corrects the premise. It tells man he is not autonomous, not self-created, not self-defining, and not the final court of appeal. “Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3). That one fact ruins the modern fantasy of self-sovereignty. The creature may vote on many things, but he does not get a ballot on whether the Creator has authority.

The tragedy of much modern preaching is that it tries to flatter men into spiritual health. Preachers tell sinners how valuable they are before telling them how guilty they are, how

gifted they are before telling them how lost they are, and how much potential they have before telling them they need a Saviour. The apostles did not preach that way. Paul stood before Felix and “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” and Felix trembled (Acts 24:25). Peter did not tell Pentecost that Jerusalem had merely experienced a difficult season; he told them they had crucified the Lord and Christ, and “they were pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:36-37). Biblical preaching does not humiliate men for sport, but neither does it powder rebellion and call it dignity. Truth begins where flattery ends.

2. KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT GOD IS EDUCATED FOOLISHNESS

The Bible has a category modern culture hates: the educated fool. A fool in Scripture is not necessarily a man with a low IQ, poor vocabulary, or little schooling. Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” That fool may have letters after his name. He may publish books, lecture students, advise governments, and wear enough academic robes to upholster a sofa. Yet if his worldview excludes the God who made him, Scripture does not congratulate him for sophistication. It calls him a fool. This is not anti-learning. Solomon himself pursued knowledge extensively. Daniel was trained in the learning of Babylon. Paul was highly educated. The issue is not whether a man learns. The issue is whether all his learning bows before the One from whom truth ultimately comes.

Romans 1 describes this collapse with brutal clarity. Men “became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21). Then comes one of the most devastating lines in the New Testament: “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22). Notice the order. The problem was not lack of data. It was refusal to glorify God as God. The mind did not become neutral when God was rejected; it became vain. A man cannot throw the sun out of the sky and then brag about how well he sees in the dark. Once the Creator is removed, creation has to explain itself, morality has to invent itself, purpose has to manufacture itself, and man has to crown himself. That is a heavy workload for dust.

This is why intelligence alone cannot save a civilization. Intelligence can build a bridge, and intelligence can build a bomb. It can cure disease, and it can devise new ways to kill. It can calculate profit without asking whether the profit is righteous. It can teach persuasion without teaching truth. Knowledge is a tool; the fear of God determines who is holding it and where it is pointed. Proverbs 1:29 describes people who “hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD.” That sounds strange until one sees that God joins true knowledge with fear. Men may accumulate facts while hating the knowledge that holds them accountable. They want information without judgment, discovery without duty, and intelligence without a throne above it. God refuses the arrangement.

3. WHAT THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS—AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Biblical fear is not the same thing as the condemned fear of a lost man expecting eternal wrath. The believer in Christ has been “justified by faith” and has “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). He is not waiting to discover whether the blood of Christ was sufficient. He is not dangling over hell by a thread called good behavior. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Eternal security does not need nervous assistance from human works. Yet the same New Testament that teaches security also says, “Perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1), and commands believers to serve “acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28). Grace removes condemnation; it does not remove reverence.

The fear of the LORD is the sober recognition that God is holy, authoritative, present, observant, and not to be trifled with. It is the inward posture that says His Word outranks my preferences, His holiness exposes my excuses, and His judgment is more important than public approval. It includes awe, reverence, trembling, obedience, and a deep reluctance to offend the One who has every right to command. Exodus 20:20 gives the principle clearly when Moses tells Israel, “God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.” The setting is Israel under the law, but the moral principle is obvious and is reinforced in the New Testament: godly fear restrains sin. A man who believes God sees everything behaves differently when nobody else is watching.

Modern religion often treats fear and love as enemies, as though one must choose between a God who is loved and a God who is feared. Scripture never creates that quarrel. Deuteronomy 10:12 joins fearing God, loving Him, serving Him, and walking in His ways in the same command. The New Testament does the same in a different dispensational setting by joining reverence, holiness, obedience, and grace. A child may love a good father deeply and still know that father’s word carries weight. In fact, contempt is not a sign of intimacy. Familiarity that produces disrespect is not spiritual maturity; it is bad manners dressed in church clothes. God is Father to the believer, but He never becomes the believer’s buddy, mascot, or religious grandfather who finances rebellion and smiles because “kids will be kids.”

4. THE FEAR OF GOD CORRECTS THE CROOKED RULER

Every man measures life by some standard. The question is not whether he has a ruler but whether his ruler is straight. Judges closes with the description of moral chaos: “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). That phrase could hang over much of modern culture like a neon sign. People no longer ask whether something is right; they ask whether it feels right to them. The self becomes judge, jury, witness, and appeals court.

No wonder the verdict is usually favorable. A man judging himself by himself is like a crooked carpenter inspecting his own crooked wall with a crooked level. He can congratulate himself all afternoon; the house is still leaning.

The fear of the LORD straightens the measuring stick because it places judgment outside the self. “The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:9). The man who fears God learns to distrust the easy excuses of his own heart. Jeremiah 17:9 warns that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” That is a poor candidate for final authority. Yet modern spirituality constantly tells people to follow their hearts as though Jeremiah forgot to attend the seminar. The Bible tells a man to trust in the LORD with all his heart and “lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Fear says, “God may be right when I feel wronged. God may be right when I feel justified. God may be right when obedience costs me something.” That is where wisdom starts doing surgery.

This correction reaches doctrine as well as conduct. A man without the fear of God will eventually adjust the Bible to protect whatever he refuses to surrender. If his tradition conflicts with Scripture, he edits Scripture. If his denomination conflicts with Scripture, he hires a committee. If his favorite teacher conflicts with Scripture, he discovers a “nuance.” If his lifestyle conflicts with Scripture, he suddenly becomes an expert in cultural context. The fear of God ends that circus. Isaiah 66:2 says the LORD looks to the one “that trembleth at my word.” That is the posture of a teachable man. He does not approach the Bible with red pencil in hand, waiting to correct God. He approaches with a bowed heart, ready for God to correct him.

5. “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES”

Romans 3:18 gives the diagnosis beneath the diagnosis: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Paul has spent the opening chapters of Romans shutting every mouth and proving the whole world guilty before God. Jew and Gentile alike stand under sin. The verse is not describing one especially wicked tribe at the edge of civilization. It belongs to Paul’s universal indictment of fallen humanity. That matters. Man’s core problem is not inadequate education, poor environment, insufficient opportunity, or low self-image. Those things may affect his circumstances, but Scripture goes deeper. The sinner does not fear God. Remove that fear, and sin stops looking dangerous because the Judge has been mentally removed from the courtroom.

Romans 3 gathers Old Testament testimony to show what fallen man is like apart from divine grace. The throat becomes an open sepulchre, the tongue practices deceit, the lips carry poison, the mouth fills with cursing, the feet run toward blood, and destruction

follows the path. Then Paul reaches the underlying condition: no fear of God. The sequence is not accidental. Where God is not feared, men become easier to deceive, exploit, hate, injure, and destroy. The fear of law may restrain some behavior. The fear of consequences may restrain more. But when a society stops believing there is a Judge above every human judge, it eventually begins testing how much evil can be legalized, renamed, medicated, celebrated, or hidden behind procedure.

The gospel does not cure this by teaching man to admire himself. It brings him face to face with the righteousness of God and the mercy of God in Christ. Romans 3 moves from universal guilt to justification “freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). The sinner who sees the holiness of God and his own guilt does not need a motivational slogan. He needs blood. Christ provides it. The cross is where modern sentimental religion gets corrected permanently. If sin were a minor flaw, Calvary was an overreaction. If man merely needed encouragement, Christ did not need to die. The cross declares simultaneously that God is more holy than man imagined, sin is worse than man admitted, and grace is greater than man deserved.

6. WISDOM BEGINS WHEN MAN GETS SMALL

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). Wisdom starts when man steps down from a throne he never owned. Pride says, “I will decide.” Fear says, “God has spoken.” Pride wants to negotiate commandments. Fear asks how to obey them. Pride wants a Bible that can be consulted when convenient. Fear receives Scripture as the final authority. That does not make a believer mindless; it makes him properly minded. The smartest thing a creature can do is agree with his Creator. Job was an accomplished man, but after the LORD confronted him, Job said, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth” (Job 40:4). That is not intellectual suicide. It is intellectual sanity.

Human wisdom becomes ridiculous when it forgets scale. Isaiah 40 says God sits “upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers” (Isaiah 40:22). Yet the grasshopper keeps publishing papers explaining why the One on the throne needs to update His views. Men live seventy or eighty years, forget where they put their keys, misread one another’s motives, fail to predict next week, and then announce with great confidence what the eternal God should have said. There is humor in that, but it is graveyard humor. The fear of God restores proportion. It reminds the creature that limitation is not an insult. We are not diminished by admitting God knows more. We are delivered from the exhausting stupidity of pretending we are omniscient.

This humility produces practical wisdom because it makes correction possible. Proverbs repeatedly contrasts the wise man who receives reproof with the fool who despises it. A person who fears God can be corrected because his identity is not built on always being right. David could say, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness” (Psalm 141:5). That is mature language. The fool wants applause; the wise man wants truth. The fool asks whether correction felt nice; the wise man asks whether it was biblical. Churches become shallow when correction disappears, homes become chaotic when authority is mocked, and Christians become brittle when every rebuke is treated as an attack. The fear of the LORD gives a man enough humility to hear truth before consequences have to shout it.

7. RECOVERING THE FEAR OF THE LORD IN MODERN CHRISTIANITY

If the fear of God is missing, it cannot be replaced with better music, smarter branding, warmer lighting, shorter sermons, larger screens, or another leadership conference. Those things may change an atmosphere; they cannot create reverence. The fear of God returns when God’s people return to the Bible’s presentation of God. Isaiah saw the Lord “high and lifted up” and cried, “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isaiah 6:1, 5). John saw the glorified Christ and “fell at his feet as dead” (Revelation 1:17). These were not atheists encountering religion for the first time. These were servants of God overwhelmed by the majesty before them. A church that constantly talks about God in casual terms will eventually treat Him casually. Language trains posture.

Recovering godly fear also requires preaching the whole counsel of God. If men hear only promises and never warnings, only comfort and never chastening, only heaven and never judgment, only grace and never holiness, they will build a partial God in their imagination and then worship the product. Paul told the Ephesian elders, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). All means the pleasant passages and the painful ones, the promises that lift the head and the warnings that bow it. A preacher who removes everything sharp from Scripture is not protecting sheep; he is declawing the Shepherd. God’s people need to hear that the same Father who loves His children also chastens them, the same Saviour who died for them will judge their service, and the same Spirit who comforts can be grieved.

Finally, the fear of God must move from sermon notes into daily conduct. Proverbs 23:17 says, “be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” Not during the invitation only. Not while the organ plays. All day long. That means fear in business decisions, private entertainment, online speech, family conflict, financial choices, secret thoughts, church conduct, and moments when no human eye is present. Joseph said, “how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). That sentence is the language of godly fear. Potiphar was absent, but God was not. A believer who remembers that fact

carries a sanctuary with him everywhere he goes. The fear of God turns private moments into holy ground.

CONCLUSION

The fear of the LORD is not an embarrassment left over from a primitive age of religion. It is the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of wisdom, a restraint against sin, a cleanser of conduct, a source of confidence, and a mark of people who understand that God is actually God. Modern Christianity did not improve itself by minimizing fear. It merely removed one of the Bible's great protections and then wondered why reverence collapsed. When God becomes weightless in the mind, everything else becomes heavy. Public opinion becomes heavy. Temptation becomes heavy. Circumstances become heavy. Human approval becomes heavy. The man who will not bow before God eventually bows before something smaller. Idolatry does not abolish worship; it merely lowers the object.

The answer is not to invent a trembling theatrical religion where believers live in constant uncertainty about whether Christ has saved them. That would deny the finished work of the cross. The answer is to recover the biblical balance the Bible never lost. The believer is accepted in Christ, secure in Christ, loved by the Father, indwelt by the Spirit, and still commanded to walk in reverence. "If ye call on the Father," Peter writes, "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). Fatherhood does not cancel holiness. Grace does not cancel government. Security does not cancel accountability. The blood that gives boldness to enter God's presence is the same blood that should make sin look expensive. Cheap Christianity has usually begun with cheap thoughts about God.

So the first lesson of this series is also the doorway to everything that follows: fear the LORD. Not because He is cruel, but because He is holy. Not because Christ failed to save, but because salvation did not turn the Almighty into a toy. Not because believers are slaves awaiting condemnation, but because redeemed men should know better than to treat their Redeemer lightly. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). That is where the crooked ruler gets replaced, where pride loses its chair, where wisdom opens its Bible, and where the creature finally remembers his proper size. The man who begins there can learn. The man who refuses to begin there may know ten thousand things and still miss the first one.

Key Passage: “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” (Proverbs 8:13)

Proverbs 8:13 does not leave the fear of the LORD floating around in a religious fog where everybody can define it according to temperament. Scripture puts boots on it. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.” That is remarkably plain, which is probably why modern religion has worked so hard to make it complicated. God does not say the fear of the LORD is to feel vaguely spiritual, speak softly during prayer, decorate the house with Bible verses, or become sentimental whenever somebody mentions grace. Fear produces a moral reaction. It causes a man to hate what God hates. Not people—evil. Not sinners as though we were righteous by nature—sin. The verse immediately names pride, arrogancy, the evil way, and the froward mouth. God does not merely dislike these things. Wisdom says, “do I hate.” A Christianity incapable of hatred for evil has misplaced something Scripture considers fundamental.

That language makes the modern religious mind nervous because our age has tried to make love the only virtue and hatred the only sin, without asking what either word is directed toward. The Bible is more sensible. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). Love and hatred are not always opposites; sometimes one requires the other. A man who loves children hates abuse. A man who loves truth hates lies. A man who loves purity hates corruption. A physician who cares about life hates disease enough to cut it out instead of complimenting it. Yet modern Christianity has produced a strange doctor who pats the tumor, apologizes to the infection, and worries that surgery might seem judgmental. Scripture will have none of it. The fear of God teaches the believer that evil is not a misunderstood guest needing a better seat at the table. It is an enemy.

This does not mean the believer is saved by hating enough evil or maintaining a sufficient level of moral disgust. Salvation in this present Church Age is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:9). The man in Christ is justified by faith, eternally secure in the Saviour, and accepted in the beloved. But the grace that saves does not retrain the conscience to admire what nailed Christ to the cross. Titus 2:11-12 says the grace of God teaches believers to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts.” Grace is not God lowering His opinion of sin; grace is God providing salvation from it. The believer who fears the LORD does not try to earn heaven by separation. He separates because heaven has changed whom he belongs to.

1. THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS TO HATE EVIL

The immediate setting of Proverbs 8 presents wisdom speaking, crying openly and declaring what is true, excellent, righteous, and better than riches. By the time we reach

verse 13, wisdom has already established that her words contain nothing froward or perverse. Then comes the definition: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil." God joins wisdom and moral discrimination because a wise man does not merely identify evil academically; he develops God's attitude toward it. The Bible does not train a believer to become an expert cataloger of sin while remaining personally comfortable around it. A rat catcher who develops affection for rats will not remain much use in the profession. Knowledge without moral response produces spectators. God wants saints who recognize evil, reject evil, and refuse to make peace with evil when it knocks at their own door.

To hate evil means more than avoiding the sins likely to embarrass us publicly. Men are often willing to condemn whatever they are not personally tempted by. The miser can preach against drunkenness with tremendous conviction. The gossip can denounce adultery between phone calls. The proud man can thunder against worldly dress while making sure everybody notices his own spirituality. Proverbs 8:13 starts closer to home. Pride. Arrogancy. The evil way. The froward mouth. God begins where respectable religious people become uncomfortable. The fear of the LORD does not hand us binoculars to inspect everybody else's backyard; it gives us a mirror. Real holiness becomes serious when a man hates the sin that flatters him, excuses him, entertains him, and hides comfortably inside his own habits.

That hatred is not emotional theatrics. Some people can shout loudly against sin and then quietly practice it when the crowd goes home. Biblical hatred means taking God's side against it. Amos 5:15 says, "Hate the evil, and love the good." Romans 12:9 tells believers, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Those are active words. Abhor it. Cleave to the good. The Christian life is not moral neutrality with a Bible under one arm. God calls the believer to discriminate between what pleases Him and what does not. An age that congratulates itself for having no absolutes has not become broad-minded; it has merely removed the guardrails and painted the cliff as freedom. The fear of God puts the rails back where Scripture put them.

2. PRIDE AND ARROGANCY: SIN IN SUNDAY CLOTHES

The first sins specifically named in Proverbs 8:13 are "pride, and arrogancy." That ought to arrest every religious man before he gets busy condemning somebody else's wickedness. Pride can walk into church wearing a suit, carrying a King James Bible, singing every hymn, and knowing exactly when to say "Amen." It can preach, teach, write, donate, serve, and still stink before God. Proverbs 16:5 says, "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD." Pride does not need a nightclub to operate. Give it a pulpit and it will manage just fine. That is why the fear of God has to reach deeper than external separation. A man can separate from half the world and still be inseparable from himself.

Pride is especially dangerous because it can feed on spiritual success. The believer learns doctrine, avoids obvious sins, becomes useful, gains influence, and suddenly begins admiring the instrument instead of the Hand using it. Scripture warns, “Knowledge puffeth up” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Knowledge is good, but knowledge without charity and humility can inflate a man until he needs two pews—one for himself and one for his opinion of himself. The fear of God punctures that balloon. Paul asked, “what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). Salvation was received. Ability was received. Opportunity was received. Breath was received. A man boasting in himself is like a hammer bragging about the house while the carpenter stands beside it.

Arrogancy is pride after it has found a microphone. Pride thinks too highly of itself; arrogancy begins behaving as though everybody else ought to agree. God hates it because it competes with the humility truth ought to produce. James 4:6 says, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” That should put a chill through any Christian determined to impress people with his spirituality. Imagine having God Himself resisting you while you congratulate yourself for being useful to God. The fear of the LORD teaches a man to hate the pride that makes him unteachable, easily offended, hungry for praise, and irritated when somebody else receives credit. God is not interested in polishing our ego. He intends to crucify its claims.

3. THE EVIL WAY: SIN IS A ROAD BEFORE IT IS A WRECK

Proverbs 8:13 does not merely say God hates isolated evil acts. It says He hates “the evil way.” A way is a path, a course, a direction. Scripture repeatedly deals with where a man is going, not simply the latest footprint he left behind. Proverbs 4:14 warns, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.” Sin rarely begins by announcing the destination. It offers the first step. Then another. Then another. Nobody wakes up eager to destroy his testimony, wreck his home, harden his conscience, and grieve the Holy Spirit. He simply begins walking a road whose destination Scripture already printed on the sign.

The fear of God therefore teaches a believer to judge direction before disaster arrives. That is wisdom. Proverbs 22:3 says, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself.” The fool, by contrast, wants to know how close he can stand to the edge without falling. He asks how much worldliness is acceptable, how much compromise is permissible, how much questionable entertainment is technically not forbidden, and whether one more step really matters. That is like a man testing thin ice with both feet while congratulating himself that he has not drowned yet. The fear of God changes the question. Instead of asking, “How much can I get away with?” it asks, “Where does this road go, and why am I walking toward it?”

The evil way also includes patterns a culture has normalized. Isaiah 5:20 pronounces woe upon those who “call evil good, and good evil.” Once language is reversed, consciences soon follow. Sin becomes lifestyle, rebellion becomes authenticity, covetousness becomes ambition, immodesty becomes expression, bitterness becomes self-protection, and pride becomes confidence. The labels change while heaven’s dictionary remains stubbornly unedited. God is not required to update His holiness because society issued new terminology. The Christian who fears Him learns to recognize the old poison even when somebody pours it into a fashionable bottle. Evil does not become good because enough people clap for it.

4. THE FROWARD MOUTH: WHEN REBELLION LEARNS TO TALK

The fourth thing named in Proverbs 8:13 is “the froward mouth.” That word belongs naturally beside pride and the evil way because the mouth advertises what the heart has been storing. Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). Proverbs gives enormous attention to speech because words expose character. A man may hide intentions for a while, but eventually the tongue opens the cellar door. Froward speech is crooked speech—perverse, contrary, deceptive, resistant to what is straight. God hates it. That includes lying, manipulation, corrupt communication, filthy language, malicious gossip, bitter accusation, and the clever twisting of words to make wrong look reasonable.

Modern life has given the froward mouth technological assistance. A man who once needed a street corner to spread foolishness can now reach thousands before breakfast. Social media has not created the heart; it has simply installed a louder speaker. Christians ought to remember that Ephesians 4:29 still says, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.” A keyboard does not provide a dispensational exemption. Neither does anonymity. The believer who fears God understands that every clever insult is not automatically righteous boldness, every rumor is not “discernment,” and every harsh sentence is not preaching merely because somebody attached a verse to it. Truth can cut without lying, exaggerating, or becoming carnal.

The fear of the LORD also disciplines private speech because God hears conversations no congregation hears. Malachi 3:16 records those who feared the LORD speaking one to another, and “the LORD hearkened, and heard it.” That same God hears the muttering, complaining, flattering, whispering, and backbiting men assume evaporates once spoken. Psalm 141:3 contains a wise prayer: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” Some mouths need less inspiration and more security at the entrance. A man who fears God learns that words are not cheap simply because they cost nothing to

pronounce. Matthew 12:36 warns that men shall give account for idle words. The tongue may be small, but Scripture never treats it as harmless.

5. LOVE THAT CANNOT HATE EVIL IS NOT BIBLICAL LOVE

Psalms 97:10 says, “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil.” God places the two commands together without embarrassment. Modern sentimental religion would like to erase the second half because hatred sounds unfriendly, but biblical love possesses moral structure. Paul says charity “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6). Biblical love cannot celebrate what destroys the object loved. A parent who loves a child does not lovingly approve everything the child desires. A shepherd who loves sheep does not negotiate with wolves for a more inclusive pasture. Love that refuses to confront destruction is not tenderness; it is negligence wearing perfume.

Jesus Christ Himself demolishes the notion that love means moral approval of everything. The Lord who loved sinners also told the woman taken in adultery, “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). He could forgive sin without renaming it. He could show mercy without pretending adultery had become virtue. At Calvary, divine love and divine hatred of sin meet with terrifying clarity. God loved sinners enough to give His Son, but He did not wave sin through customs with a smile. Sin required blood. “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). If God’s love simply overlooked evil, the cross would be unnecessary. Calvary proves both how deeply God loves sinners and how seriously God judges sin.

The believer must therefore reject the counterfeit choice between holiness and compassion. We can hate evil without hating the people trapped in it. In fact, refusing to call poison poison is not compassion toward the poisoned man. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore the fallen “in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” There is no room there for smugness. The Christian points at sin with one hand while remembering what he was saved from with the other. “Such were some of you,” Paul reminds the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:11). The fear of God creates moral clarity without self-righteousness. Grace keeps the surgeon from despising the patient; holiness keeps him from falling in love with the disease.

6. SEPARATION IS NOT LEGALISM WHEN GOD DRAWS THE LINE

Because modern Christianity often confuses grace with looseness, any serious call to separation is quickly accused of legalism. But legalism is not simply obeying God. Legalism is using works where God did not put them—especially as a means of justification or as a human system that replaces biblical truth. The Church Age believer is saved by grace through faith apart from works. Yet the same Paul who taught justification by faith also

wrote, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22) and “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Apparently the Holy Ghost did not receive the memo that separation had become unfashionable.

Biblical separation begins inwardly before it becomes outwardly. A man can avoid bars, gambling halls, dirty movies, corrupt company, and a dozen other outward evils while carrying pride, jealousy, greed, resentment, and lust comfortably under his church clothes. God is not impressed because the outside of the cup received extra polishing. Second Corinthians 7:1 tells believers to cleanse themselves “from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Flesh and spirit. Visible and invisible. Public and private. The fear of God goes into rooms human reputation never visits. Holiness that exists only when somebody is watching is theater, and God has never confused stage lighting with sanctification.

At the same time, inward holiness is not an excuse for outward compromise. Some Christians talk as though God only cares about the heart and therefore the body may attend any place, watch anything, wear anything, say anything, and associate with anything. That argument would surprise Paul, who commanded believers to “glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Both belong to Him. The fear of the LORD creates sensible boundaries because the believer no longer treats liberty as permission to graze beside every ditch. Christian liberty means freedom to serve Christ, not freedom to see how much Egypt can be packed into a suitcase before heaven notices.

7. WHEN THE FEAR OF GOD RETURNS, TOLERANCE CHANGES

Modern culture has made tolerance into a supreme moral commandment, but Scripture never commands tolerance toward evil as though evil possesses civil rights inside the Christian life. The believer must be patient with people, longsuffering with weakness, merciful toward the fallen, and charitable toward differences Scripture allows. But Romans 12:9 still says, “Abhor that which is evil.” There is a difference between bearing with a weak brother and making peace with wickedness. One is charity; the other is compromise. Our age has blurred the distinction until some Christians now apologize for having convictions at all. A fence is considered hateful until somebody realizes there is a cliff on the other side.

When the fear of God returns, a believer’s tolerance changes first toward his own sin. That is where genuine revival starts. David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). He did not ask God to begin with Saul, Joab, Absalom, or the Philistines. He opened his own house for inspection. It is easy to become a professional examiner of everybody else’s failures while keeping our favorite sins in a locked cabinet. The fear of God

brings the key. It makes a man less tolerant of his pride, his careless speech, his secret lust, his spiritual laziness, his bitterness, and his excuses. A man who hates evil biblically will eventually have to declare war on the enemy behind his own ribs.

That fear also changes churches. Acts 5 records Ananias and Sapphira lying about their gift, falling under divine judgment, and “great fear” coming upon all the church (Acts 5:11). That historical event belongs to the apostolic period and is not a template for predicting immediate death every time a believer lies today, but the lesson is unmistakable: God does not treat impurity in His assembly as harmless. Churches that fear God stop measuring success merely by attendance, budgets, excitement, and public approval. A full building can still be spiritually empty. A loud ministry can still be weak. God is not impressed by statistics when truth has been sold to obtain them. Better a small lamp burning cleanly than a stadium filled with smoke.

CONCLUSION

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13). That sentence leaves no room for a Christianity that praises God with the lips while making treaties with what He condemns. Fear changes taste. It changes tolerance. It changes speech, conduct, priorities, associations, and the secret negotiations of the heart. Pride becomes ugly because God hates it. Arrogancy becomes repulsive because God hates it. The evil way stops looking adventurous when Scripture shows its destination. The froward mouth stops looking clever when heaven calls it crooked. The fear of God does not merely teach a believer a new vocabulary; it rearranges his affections. He begins learning to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

That hatred must always remain biblical. It is never permission for cruelty, bitterness, personal vengeance, or hatred of human beings Christ died to save. Ephesians 6:12 reminds the believer that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood.” We preach the gospel to sinners because we remember that we were sinners needing mercy. We oppose falsehood because truth matters. We rebuke sin because souls matter. We maintain separation because holiness matters. And we do it knowing that every good thing in us came by grace. The Christian who hates evil should never forget that Christ loved him while he was still guilty. That memory keeps conviction sharp without making the heart hard.

Modern Christianity does not need another method for making sin more comfortable in the pew. It needs the fear of the LORD restored to the conscience. Once God becomes weighty again, evil loses some of its charm. Once holiness becomes real again, compromise stops looking sophisticated. Once Calvary is understood again, sin stops looking cheap. The believer who truly fears God cannot cuddle what crucified his Saviour and call the

arrangement maturity. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). There is the balance. Love the Lord. Love sinners. Love truth. Love righteousness. And precisely because those things are loved, hate what corrupts, deceives, defiles, and destroys them. That is not fanaticism. That is the fear of the LORD.

3 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — The Fear That Cleanses a Believer

Key Passage: “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” (Psalm 19:9)

“The fear of the LORD is clean.” That is not religious poetry tossed into Psalm 19 for decoration. God deliberately connects His fear with cleanness. The world thinks fear contaminates a man, but Scripture says the right fear cleans him. It cleans his thinking about God, his thinking about himself, his attitude toward sin, his private habits, and his willingness to tolerate what God condemns. Psalm 19 has already declared that “the law of the LORD is perfect,” that “the testimony of the LORD is sure,” and that “the statutes of the LORD are right” (Psalm 19:7-8). Then comes the fear of the LORD, “clean, enduring for ever.” When God’s Word exposes who God is, reverence follows, and reverence begins scrubbing places human reputation never reaches. Soap can wash dirt from the hands. Fear of God gets into the conscience.

David understood that cleansing reaches deeper than appearances. Near the end of the same Psalm he prayed, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Psalm 19:12). There is the problem respectable religion prefers not to discuss. Secret faults. Things concealed from the congregation, the spouse, the children, the preacher, the employer, and the public. A man can keep his shirt pressed, his Bible marked, his testimony polished, and still maintain a back room in the soul where he stores things he hopes God will ignore. But God does not need a search warrant. Hebrews 4:13 says, “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” The fear of God cleans because it destroys the comforting fiction that darkness provides privacy from heaven.

For the saved believer, this cleansing is not an attempt to earn salvation or remain justified by personal purity. The Church Age saint is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and accepted in the beloved. Practical holiness does not purchase eternal life; eternal life creates a new obligation toward holiness. Paul therefore writes to believers, “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). That verse will not fit the modern

idea that grace makes God casual about Christian conduct. Grace does not issue the believer a white robe so he can enjoy rolling in the mud. The Father who saved him remains holy, and a child who remembers that fact begins taking contamination seriously.

1. THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS CLEAN

Psalm 19 presents God's revelation as something pure, righteous, trustworthy, and desirable. "The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8). Then verse 9 says, "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever." Fear belongs naturally beside the purity of God's Word because biblical fear comes from seeing God accurately. A distorted God produces distorted worship. Make God harmless enough, and sin becomes harmless beside Him. Make God merely therapeutic, and holiness becomes optional. But let Scripture reveal Him as holy, righteous, all-seeing, and worthy of obedience, and suddenly the stains become visible. Dirt does not disappear because the lights are turned off. Turning the lights off merely makes dirty men more comfortable. The fear of the LORD turns the lights back on.

This fear is clean because its object is clean. Men can possess sinful fears—fear of man, fear of circumstances, fear of rejection, fear of death, fear produced by unbelief—but the fear of the LORD is different. It springs from recognizing the holiness and authority of the One who cannot lie, cannot sin, and cannot be corrupted. Isaiah 6 shows the effect when Isaiah sees the LORD "high and lifted up." The prophet's first response is not self-congratulation. He cries, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). He saw God clearly, and then he saw himself clearly. That order matters. Men who have small thoughts of God usually maintain flattering thoughts of themselves.

The fear of God does not stain a believer with hopeless dread; it washes away casualness toward sin. Psalm 130:4 says, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Notice that forgiveness does not abolish fear. It produces it. A man who understands the mercy shown him does not have less reason to reverence God; he has more. Calvary should not make sin look trivial. It should make sin look expensive. Christ did not shed His blood because our rebellion was a minor personality defect. The price tells you something about the purchase. A believer standing beneath the cross ought to learn both assurance and seriousness there. Grace comforts the conscience about condemnation while the fear of God cleans the conscience from presumption.

2. HOLINESS IS PERFECTED IN THE FEAR OF GOD

Second Corinthians 7:1 is addressed to believers, not to lost men trying to earn justification: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Paul does

not tell them to perfect salvation. Christ accomplished redemption. He tells them to perfect holiness. Position and practice must be distinguished without being divorced. The believer is sanctified in Christ positionally, yet he is also commanded to pursue practical sanctification in daily conduct. Modern Christianity often loves the first truth because it costs nothing after believing, then suddenly develops theological allergies when the second truth reaches the television, the browser, the conversation, the wardrobe, the temper, and the secret imagination.

Paul says “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.” That covers considerably more territory than outward misconduct. Fleshly filth can be visible: fornication, drunkenness, corrupt behavior, bodily indulgence, filthy communication, and other sins committed through the members. Spiritual filth can hide behind a respectable face: pride, envy, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, resentment, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and secret rebellion. A man can avoid the tavern and still be drunk on himself. He can keep his body out of adultery while allowing his imagination to rent an apartment there. He can speak against worldly corruption while harboring bitterness for twenty years. God cleans the whole house. He is not interested in a spotless front porch while rats hold a committee meeting in the attic.

The phrase “in the fear of God” tells us what gives practical holiness its seriousness. The believer remembers whose child he is and before whom he lives. First Peter 1:15-17 says, “as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,” and then adds, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Holiness and fear travel together. Not fear that Christ will revoke eternal life every time a Christian stumbles, but fear of grieving a holy Father, suffering chastening, losing reward, damaging testimony, and wasting a life purchased by blood. The careless Christian says, “What can I get away with?” The fearing Christian asks, “What pleases Him?” One looks for loopholes. The other looks toward the throne.

3. SECRET SIN IS NOT SECRET TO GOD

Psalm 19:12 asks, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.” David understood that a man is capable of hiding things even from himself. The heart can excuse motives, rename lust, baptize resentment, and turn self-interest into supposed principle. Jeremiah 17:9 warns, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Yet modern Christianity frequently tells people to trust their hearts as though the prophet had made a clerical error. The fear of God makes a man suspicious of his own excuses. He knows his conscience can be dulled and his reasoning recruited as defense counsel for the very sin standing trial.

There are sins men hide because exposure would cost them something. Reputation, marriage, ministry, friendships, employment, influence, or public respect may depend upon the secret remaining secret. The fear of man therefore encourages concealment, while the fear of God encourages confession and forsaking. Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” God already knows what is behind the curtain. Confession does not inform Him; it agrees with Him. A man may delete a history, close a window, erase a message, clear a browser, destroy a receipt, or rehearse an alibi, but none of those buttons are connected to heaven’s memory. God was in the room before the temptation arrived.

This is why the fear of God has such cleansing power in private life. Joseph’s great statement in Genesis 39 was not, “What if Potiphar catches me?” He said, “how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). Potiphar was absent. God was present. That is the entire battle in one sentence. A Christian whose holiness depends upon witnesses will eventually sin whenever the witnesses leave. But a believer who walks before God carries accountability into every locked room. The safest filter on a screen is still a heart that fears God. The strongest lock on temptation is still the conviction that heaven has no blind spots. You cannot surprise Omniscience after midnight.

4. THE FEAR OF GOD CLEANS WHAT ENTERS THE EYES

The believer’s eyes are gates, and what enters them does not always leave quietly. David said, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes” (Psalm 101:3). That verse was not written in the age of streaming video, smartphones, endless advertisements, social media feeds, and private screens, but the principle has aged remarkably well. Modern technology can deliver more filth into a bedroom in five minutes than earlier generations could have encountered in months. The problem is not that technology possesses a devil of its own. The problem is that fallen flesh appreciates efficient delivery systems. The fear of God forces the Christian to ask what he is voluntarily placing before eyes that belong to Christ.

Jesus said, “The light of the body is the eye” (Matthew 6:22). Job made “a covenant with mine eyes” (Job 31:1). These passages remind us that sight participates in moral life. Entertainment is not morally neutral simply because the credits roll afterward. Images instruct appetites, normalize behavior, weaken disgust, stir lust, feed covetousness, and plant thoughts that return when the screen is dark. A Christian can become offended when a preacher names what he watches while remaining strangely unoffended that the Holy Spirit had to sit through it with him. That is a peculiar arrangement. First Corinthians 6:19 says the believer’s body is “the temple of the Holy Ghost.” A temple ought to have some standards about what gets projected on the wall.

Fear cleans the eyes by restoring embarrassment before God. When a believer begins asking, “Would I want Christ visibly seated beside me while I watch this?” he has not become legalistic; he has remembered reality. Christ does not become absent merely because He is invisible. Colossians 3:5 commands believers to mortify sinful members and specifically names “inordinate affection” and “evil concupiscence.” Practical holiness requires saying no to appetites grace did not sanctify by forgiving us. The Christian should not need a detailed catalog listing every forbidden program, image, website, or genre. Sheep do not need a map of every ditch when they recognize the Shepherd’s voice. The fear of God develops spiritual taste, and clean taste eventually stops craving garbage.

5. THE FEAR OF GOD CLEANS THE MOUTH AND MIND

Cleansing also reaches speech. Paul tells believers, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (Ephesians 4:29), and later says, “neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient” (Ephesians 5:4). The mouth is often where hidden contamination leaks out. Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). People frequently excuse careless words by saying, “That just slipped out.” Exactly. Something cannot slip out unless it was somewhere inside. The tongue is not an independent contractor. It works for the heart. The fear of God cleans conversation because the believer remembers that heaven hears what men dismiss as joking, venting, gossip, sarcasm, or “just being honest.”

James 3 describes the tongue as “a fire, a world of iniquity” (James 3:6). That is strong language for an organ weighing only a few ounces. A Christian can wound a spouse, discourage a child, divide a church, poison a friendship, destroy a reputation, and spread a lie without ever raising a fist. Gossip travels faster than truth because gossip rarely stops to verify the address. The fear of God places a guard at the gate. Psalm 141:3 says, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” Some believers would experience immediate revival if that door received a stronger hinge and remained shut fifteen minutes longer.

Behind the mouth stands the mind. Philippians 4:8 commands believers to think upon things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. That is not optional mental decoration. Thoughts feed affections, affections encourage choices, and repeated choices become patterns. Second Corinthians 10:5 speaks of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” The fear of God understands that holiness is lost in the imagination before it is lost in public. A man rarely commits suddenly what he has not first permitted mentally. The mind is the drafting room where many sins are designed before construction begins. If you want a clean building, inspect the blueprints. God does.

6. GRACE NEVER MADE CONTAMINATION HARMLESS

Romans 6 asks the question every distorted view of grace eventually raises: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Paul’s answer is wonderfully complicated: “God forbid” (Romans 6:1-2). Two words are sufficient when the question is foolish enough. Grace does not make sin safe. Grace delivers us from sin’s condemning penalty and gives us a new relationship to its power. The believer is told to reckon himself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God. Salvation is not divine permission to keep polishing the chains Christ broke. A man who uses grace as an excuse for rebellion has turned medicine into a reason to remain sick.

The New Testament repeatedly combines grace with holy conduct. Titus 2:11-12 says, “the grace of God that bringeth salvation” teaches us that, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly.” Grace is a teacher, and its curriculum includes denial. Modern religion sometimes presents grace as the kindly teacher who cancels every assignment, removes every standard, gives everybody an A, and then congratulates the class for spiritual freedom. Paul apparently attended a different school. Biblical grace says no to ungodliness because grace knows what sin cost. The blood of Christ is not a detergent advertisement for people determined to jump back into the sewer.

First Corinthians 10:23 says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.” Christian liberty requires discernment. The mature believer does not merely ask whether a thing is technically permissible. He asks whether it helps, edifies, masters him, wounds conscience, damages testimony, feeds the flesh, or hinders fellowship with God. Some things may not carry a chapter-and-verse prohibition and still be unwise. A man does not need a verse saying, “Thou shalt not drink from that puddle” when he can see the oil floating on top. The fear of God gives spiritual common sense where legalistic checklists fail. Holiness is not living by one thousand man-made regulations. It is living consciously before a holy God.

7. REVIVAL BEGINS WHEN THE HOUSE GETS CLEANED

Second Chronicles 7:14 belongs doctrinally to Israel and the land promised to that nation, and it should not be stolen from its covenant setting and pasted carelessly over the Church. But Scripture everywhere demonstrates a practical principle: genuine spiritual renewal involves humility, confession, repentance, and turning from evil. Revival is not merely louder singing, longer meetings, emotional displays, packed buildings, or a preacher losing his voice by Thursday. Noise can accompany revival, but noise can also accompany a football game. God is interested in hearts. James 4:8 tells believers, “Cleanse

your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.” That language is not entertainment. It is housecleaning.

Churches often pray for revival while protecting the very sins revival would expose. People want God to visit but hope He will stay out of certain rooms. They want power without purity, blessing without brokenness, and spiritual excitement without any disruption to cherished habits. But when God worked deeply among His people in Scripture, hidden things came into the light. Acts 19 records believers bringing occult books and burning them publicly after the Word of God prevailed mightily. They did not organize a committee to study whether keeping a few volumes might be culturally sensitive. Conviction made the decision. When fear of God returns, people stop negotiating with things they already know are wrong.

Personal revival begins when one believer becomes more concerned about offending God than impressing men. Psalm 139:23-24 gives the proper invitation: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me.” That is a dangerous prayer for somebody determined to remain comfortable. God may put His finger on bitterness we have justified, entertainment we have defended, speech we have excused, pride we have decorated, or habits we have hidden. The fear of God does not run from that inspection. It welcomes it. A dirty room does not become cleaner by arguing with the flashlight. It becomes cleaner when somebody finally starts throwing things out.

CONCLUSION

“The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever” (Psalm 19:9). Godly fear cleans because it restores the believer’s awareness of God’s holiness, God’s presence, and God’s authority. It reaches beyond appearances into motives, imaginations, appetites, conversations, entertainments, and hidden habits. The world can teach a man how to improve his image. Religion can teach him how to polish his testimony. Only truth applied to the conscience before God can make him want the secret room clean. Psalm 19 moves naturally from the purity of God’s revelation to the cleansing of secret faults because Scripture does more than inform. It exposes. Hebrews 4:12 calls the Word of God “quick, and powerful,” discerning “the thoughts and intents of the heart.” God does not merely wash the windows. He inspects the basement.

The saved believer does not pursue cleanliness to purchase acceptance with God. His acceptance rests in Jesus Christ. He pursues holiness because the Father who accepted him is holy, because the Saviour who purchased him is worthy, because the Spirit who indwells him can be grieved, and because his life will be reviewed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of

Christ.” That judgment is not the Great White Throne and does not determine whether the believer is eternally saved. But it does mean Christian living matters. Works matter. Motives matter. Stewardship matters. A grace that abolishes condemnation never abolished accountability.

Revival therefore begins somewhere quieter than a crowded platform. It begins when a believer closes the door, opens the Bible, gets honest before God, and stops defending what the Holy Ghost has been condemning. It begins when he fears grieving the Father more than losing a habit, when he would rather have fellowship with God than friendship with contamination, and when “secret” stops meaning “safe.” Soap can clean the hands. Reputation can clean the public record. Religion can clean the outside of the cup. But “the fear of the LORD is clean.” It goes where men cannot go, exposes what men cannot see, and teaches a redeemed sinner to desire purity even when nobody is applauding. That is not bondage. That is what happens when a saved man remembers that his Father is holy.

4 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — The Fence That Keeps a Man from Sin

Key Passage: “And by mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” (Proverbs 16:6)

A fence does not exist because everything on the other side is imaginary. It exists because there is something worth keeping out, something worth keeping in, or something dangerous enough to require a boundary. Proverbs 16:6 gives one of God’s great preventative doctrines in one blunt sentence: “by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” Notice the direction. Evil is present, temptation is real, the flesh still has appetites, opportunity may exist, and yet a man departs. Something gets between desire and action. Something tells him to back away before the first step becomes a road. Scripture calls that something the fear of the LORD. Modern Christianity has spent years tearing down the fence because somebody thought boundaries looked unfriendly, and then acts puzzled when sheep wander into traffic.

The fear of God does not mean a saved man lives every day wondering whether one wrong move will erase the blood of Christ and send him to hell. The Church Age believer is justified by faith, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Eternal security rests in Christ, not in the believer’s ability to maintain a flawless record. But security is not immunity from consequences. A son does not cease being a son because he disobeys his father, yet disobedience can still bring chastening, broken fellowship, wasted opportunity, damaged testimony, loss of usefulness, and loss at the

Judgment Seat of Christ. Hebrews 12:6 says, “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” God’s fatherly discipline does not deny grace. It proves that grace did not turn the family into an asylum without rules.

That is why love and fear belong together. Love draws the believer toward God; fear warns him against charging headlong into what God hates. Love says, “I want to please Him.” Fear says, “I dare not treat Him lightly.” Love looks toward the Father’s heart; fear remembers the Father’s holiness. Remove either one and the Christian life becomes distorted. Fear without assurance can become bondage. Love without reverence becomes sentimentality. Scripture gives both the embrace and the boundary. A child who knows his father loves him does not therefore conclude that the father’s commands have become suggestions. If anything, love makes obedience more reasonable. The fence is not proof that the Father hates the child. Sometimes the fence is one of the ways the Father keeps the child alive.

1. THE FEAR OF GOD MAKES MEN DEPART

Proverbs 16:6 says men “depart from evil.” That is stronger than merely feeling uncomfortable about it. Departure involves movement. A man sees the road and leaves it. He hears the invitation and refuses it. He recognizes the danger and puts distance between himself and it. Modern religion often specializes in feelings about sin without much departing from it. Men confess that something is unhealthy, unfortunate, unwise, complicated, regrettable, or “not God’s best,” while continuing to feed it every evening. Scripture uses plainer language. Evil is evil. The fear of the LORD does not merely teach a man to discuss evil more accurately; it gives him a reason to get away from it.

The same principle appears in Proverbs 14:16: “A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.” There are two men in that verse. One fears and leaves. The other boasts and stays. The fool’s confidence is not courage; it is ignorance wearing a grin. He believes he can handle the temptation, manage the compromise, control the appetite, flirt with the danger, and stop whenever he chooses. He stands beside the pit explaining how good his balance is. Wisdom does not need to prove anything at the edge. It backs up. Some of the greatest spiritual victories in a Christian’s life will never make dramatic testimonies because nothing spectacular happened. He saw trouble coming and went the other way.

Departure also means the believer stops demanding that God provide a lightning bolt before he obeys obvious truth. Some Christians want every temptation handled by an extraordinary spiritual experience because ordinary obedience seems too plain. But Joseph did not hold a conference on sexual purity while Potiphar’s wife grabbed his garment. He “fled, and got him out” (Genesis 39:12). Sometimes the most spiritual

response to temptation is a pair of functioning legs. You do not need a forty-day study on whether fire burns before removing your hand from the stove. The fear of God makes sin serious enough that obedience does not have to wait for a committee meeting.

2. JOSEPH FEARED GOD WHEN NOBODY ELSE WAS IN THE ROOM

Joseph gives one of Scripture's clearest pictures of preventative fear. Potiphar's wife propositioned him repeatedly, and Joseph answered, "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). That sentence reveals what governed him. He did not say, "What if Potiphar finds out?" He did not say, "What if the servants gossip?" He did not calculate whether Egyptian law might expose him or whether the scandal could hurt his career. The highest consideration was God. That is the fear of the LORD in action. Human surveillance had failed. Divine surveillance had not. Potiphar could leave the house. God could not.

Joseph also called the temptation what it was: "great wickedness." He did not rename it chemistry, loneliness, unmet emotional needs, a complicated relationship, or a mistake waiting to happen. He saw sin clearly because he saw God clearly. That is why the fear of God is such a strong preventative force. When God becomes small, sin gets renamed. When God becomes weighty, excuses lose their charm. The temptation did not become physically impossible for Joseph. He had opportunity, privacy, persistence from the woman, and every earthly reason to believe he might escape immediate detection. Yet fear put a wall where circumstances had removed one. The strongest fence is often the one inside a man who knows God is watching.

Then Joseph fled. He did not stay to prove his spiritual maturity. He did not try to counsel the woman through her feelings. He did not explain that he could stand there because he had excellent self-control. He left his garment and ran. Modern pride sometimes mistakes proximity to temptation for strength. Scripture calls avoidance wisdom. First Corinthians 6:18 tells believers, "Flee fornication." Second Timothy 2:22 says, "Flee also youthful lusts." God apparently has less confidence in the flesh than some Christians do. The man who fears God does not boast about how close he can get without falling. He knows the flesh is not a pet lion. It is still a lion.

3. EXODUS 20:20 — FEAR THAT YOU SIN NOT

When Israel stood trembling at Sinai, Moses said, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not" (Exodus 20:20). At first glance that sounds contradictory: "Fear not," and then, "that his fear may be before your faces." But there is no contradiction. Israel was not to live in hopeless terror as though God had appeared merely to destroy them, yet the manifestation of His holiness was intended to

produce reverence that restrained sin. This was Israel under the law in a covenant setting specific to that nation, and it must not be confused with the believer's standing under grace. Still, the moral principle is plain: godly fear can keep a man from transgression.

God wanted His fear "before your faces." That is vivid language. He wanted awareness of Himself close enough to affect behavior. Men sin boldly when they manage to move God out of sight mentally. The adulterer forgets Him. The thief forgets Him. The liar forgets Him. The gossip forgets Him. The proud man forgets Him. Psalm 10:4 says of the wicked, "God is not in all his thoughts." That does not mean the man has never heard of God. It means God carries no governing weight in his calculations. The fear of God reverses that. God comes back into the equation before the choice is made, not merely after the wreckage appears.

The preventative power is important. God is not only interested in forgiving sin after it happens. He also gives truth designed to keep men from committing it. Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." First John 2:1 says, "these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." Scripture is not fatalistic about Christian conduct. Grace does not shrug and say, "You are going to do it anyway, so make sure you confess afterward." God provides warning, instruction, conviction, examples, commands, chastening, fellowship, and fear. The fence has several boards. A believer who keeps sawing through them should not complain when he finally falls into the ditch.

4. JOB FEARED GOD AND ESCHEWED EVIL

The opening description of Job is striking: he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). Scripture connects those two facts deliberately. Job feared God; therefore evil was something he eschewed—something he rejected, avoided, and turned away from. Job was not sinless perfection in the absolute sense, and the book itself will eventually expose things in him that God addresses. But his settled character was that of a man whose reverence toward God affected his conduct. Fear was not a doctrine he could define while living carelessly. It had feet.

Job's fear reached into areas men often classify as private. In Job 31:1 he says, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" There is preventative holiness. He was dealing with the eye and the thought before adultery became an act. Sin usually has a childhood before it has an adulthood. Lust begins with permitted looking. Bitterness begins with rehearsed resentment. Covetousness begins with comparison. Pride begins with self-admiration. The wise man kills the weed when it is small enough to pull. The fool waits until it has roots under the foundation and then announces that gardening is difficult.

Job even connected his conduct toward servants with the fact that he would answer to God. “What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?” (Job 31:14). That is fear functioning as accountability. He understood that power over others did not place him beyond judgment. A man may outrank employees, children, subordinates, congregants, customers, or citizens and still be beneath God. Authority on earth does not cancel authority in heaven. The fear of God prevents abuse because it reminds every powerful man that he is still somebody’s servant. A boss with no boss above him is dangerous. Scripture gives every man one.

5. MOSES FEARED GOD MORE THAN HE FEARED PHARAOH

The fear of God does more than restrain private sin; it also gives courage against human pressure. Hebrews 11:27 says of Moses, “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” Moses could stand before Pharaoh because Pharaoh was not the highest authority in his mind. That is one of the great paradoxes of biblical fear: fear God properly, and lesser fears begin shrinking. A man who fears everybody except God becomes a slave to everybody’s opinion. A man who fears God can tell kings the truth.

Pharaoh had armies, wealth, political power, prisons, and the machinery of empire. Moses had a rod and the command of God. On paper, Pharaoh looked impressive. But paper does not account for the invisible God. Every tyrant becomes smaller when the throne of heaven is brought into view. That is why Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” Fear of man pressures a believer to compromise because he imagines the immediate human consequence is greater than divine displeasure. Fear of God corrects the scale.

This principle matters whenever a Christian is pressured to bend conviction for acceptance, employment, friendship, applause, convenience, or peace. The fear of man whispers, “What will they think?” The fear of God asks, “What does He think?” The fear of man counts followers. The fear of God counts faithfulness. The fear of man edits the truth until nobody gets offended. The fear of God remembers that God already spoke before the audience arrived. Boldness is not having no fear. Biblical boldness often comes from fearing the right Person most.

6. CONSEQUENCES ARE REAL EVEN WHEN SALVATION IS SECURE

The saved believer must never confuse eternal security with freedom from temporal consequences. David remained God’s man after his grievous sin, but the sword entered his house. Moses remained God’s servant, but rebellion at Meribah cost him entrance into Canaan. Samson was still a judge called by God, but sin blinded him before the Philistines

ever did. First Corinthians 11 records believers becoming weak, sickly, and even dying under divine chastening because of abuse surrounding the Lord's Supper. Scripture does not teach that every hardship is direct punishment for a particular sin, but it certainly refuses the childish idea that grace makes rebellion consequence-free.

Hebrews 12 makes the matter plain: "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). Chastening belongs to sons, not strangers. The very security some men misuse to excuse sin is the security that places them under a Father's discipline. A father who never corrects destructive behavior is not demonstrating love; he is demonstrating neglect. God is not negligent. The Christian may be able to fool a congregation, a spouse, a pastor, or a friend, but he cannot fool the Father. One reason the fear of God restrains sin is that the believer knows the Father's hand is not decorative.

Then there is the Judgment Seat of Christ. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is not the Great White Throne, and it does not determine whether a saved man goes to heaven. The believer's eternal destiny rests in Christ. But Christian service, stewardship, motive, and conduct will be evaluated. First Corinthians 3 describes work being tested by fire, with reward or loss involved. The man himself may be saved, "yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). Eternal security should make a Christian grateful, not careless. There is something shameful about using the certainty of heaven as an excuse to arrive there with smoke on your clothes.

7. THE FENCE IS NOT THE ENEMY OF FREEDOM

Modern culture has trained people to think every boundary is oppression. Tell a man no, and he imagines his liberty has been violated. But roads need guardrails precisely because travelers are free to move quickly. A guardrail does not stop a man from driving; it keeps one mistake from putting the car at the bottom of a ravine. God's commandments work like that. First John 5:3 says, "his commandments are not grievous." The flesh may call them burdensome because flesh prefers the ditch, but wisdom knows the boundary is mercy.

Paul addresses Christian liberty carefully in Galatians 5:13: "ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." There it is. Liberty exists, and so does the flesh. The Christian has been freed from the law as a system of justification and from sin's condemning dominion, but he has not been liberated to serve lust. Peter says similarly, "as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16). Biblical liberty does not mean nobody tells me what to do. It means I have been freed to belong wholly to Christ.

The fear of the LORD therefore protects liberty from becoming self-destruction. A man can be legally free to walk toward a cliff and still be foolish for doing it. He can be free to waste

money, waste time, damage his testimony, weaken his conscience, indulge his flesh, and cultivate habits that eventually master him. Paul said, “I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12). The believer who fears God understands that every permitted thing is not profitable and every available choice is not wise. A fence is not bondage when a wolf is on the other side. Sometimes the people tearing down the fence simply have not noticed the teeth.

CONCLUSION

“And by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). That is preventative Christianity. God does not merely offer a mop after the flood; He tells us where the valve is. He does not merely teach confession after adultery; He tells us to flee fornication. He does not merely heal the wounds caused by corrupt company; He warns that “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33). He does not merely repair the damage caused by uncontrolled speech; He tells us to bridle the tongue. The Bible is full of fences because God understands where the roads lead. The fool sees a restriction. Wisdom sees a rescue.

Joseph feared God and ran. Job feared God and eschewed evil. Moses saw the invisible God and stopped trembling before Pharaoh. Israel was told that God’s fear before their faces would serve “that ye sin not.” Different men, different settings, different dispensational circumstances, yet one great principle runs through them: when God becomes weighty in the conscience, sin loses some of its power to negotiate. Temptation still speaks, but another Voice matters more. Pressure still comes, but another authority stands higher. The fear of God does not remove every battle. It changes who has the final word inside it.

Modern Christianity does not need fewer fences. It needs to remember why God built them. Love without boundaries becomes indulgence. Liberty without fear becomes license. Grace without holiness becomes a slogan the flesh learns to exploit. God gives His children the embrace of assurance and the fence of reverence, and neither contradicts the other. The Father who says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5) is also the Father before whom believers are told to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28). Stay near the Father. Respect the fence. The safest place in the Christian life is not as close to sin as grace will allow, but as close to God as fear and love can keep you.

Key Passage: “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.” (Proverbs 14:26)

“In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence.” To the modern mind that sounds like putting fire and water in the same bucket. Fear is supposed to make a man nervous, timid, uncertain, and ready to crawl under the nearest table. Confidence is supposed to make him bold. Yet God joins the two without apology because biblical fear is not the panic of a man running from God; it is the settled reverence of a man who has learned who God is. The man who fears the LORD has located the highest authority in the universe, and once that question is settled, lesser authorities begin shrinking to their proper dimensions. Kings still wear crowns, creditors still mail bills, enemies still make threats, storms still rise, and tomorrow still remains unseen—but none of them sits on the throne.

That is why so many people who refuse to fear God end up frightened by almost everything else. Remove God from the center and the world becomes enormous. Public opinion becomes enormous. A diagnosis becomes enormous. A bank statement becomes enormous. A government becomes enormous. A difficult conversation becomes enormous. Losing a job becomes enormous. The approval of people we may never meet becomes enormous. Men who boast that they fear no God often spend their lives terrified of being disliked, excluded, exposed, criticized, forgotten, replaced, or financially inconvenienced. They threw away the fear that could have ordered every other fear, and now a thousand little fears collect rent in the empty room. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” A man can spend his whole life escaping one prison only to move into another with nicer furniture.

Biblical fear produces confidence because it gives the believer a fixed point outside changing circumstances. The saved man does not place confidence in his own courage, intelligence, savings, connections, health, or ability to predict the future. Those things can disappear between breakfast and lunch. His confidence rests in the character, promises, presence, and authority of God. Hebrews 13:5-6 says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” There is the strange confidence. God’s presence does not always remove the enemy; it removes the enemy from the throne. Fear God rightly, and the threatening noises of this world begin sounding like what they always were—creatures making noise beneath the feet of their Creator.

1. STRONG CONFIDENCE BEGINS WITH THE RIGHT FEAR

Proverbs 14:26 does not say confidence comes from thinking highly of yourself. It says, “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence.” Modern culture has spent decades teaching

men to look inward for confidence, which is an unfortunate location if the inside contains the same fallen flesh Scripture describes. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Yet the world keeps handing men mirrors and telling them to believe in the fellow staring back. Scripture gives a better object of confidence: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Confidence becomes strong when its foundation stops being self.

The fear of the LORD gives stability because God does not fluctuate with circumstances. Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the LORD, I change not.” Men change. Markets change. Governments change. Friends change. Bodies change. Public opinion changes so quickly it can condemn on Tuesday what it celebrated on Monday. But the Christian’s confidence rests in One whose character does not require weekly revision. That does not mean every circumstance will become pleasant. Biblical confidence is not optimism with a verse taped to it. It is confidence that God remains God when the answer is delayed, the pressure increases, the crowd turns hostile, or the road disappears into fog.

A man who fears God therefore does not need to pretend he is invincible. His strength lies precisely in knowing that he is not. Paul wrote, “when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10), because divine strength operates where human boasting has been stripped away. The flesh loves a confidence speech because it enjoys hearing its own résumé read aloud. God often develops confidence by dismantling the résumé. Gideon’s army had to shrink. David went out with a sling. Paul carried a thorn. Peter had to discover that loud promises made beside a supper table could collapse beside a servant girl’s question. Strong confidence is not believing you cannot fail. It is knowing whom you can trust when you discover that you can.

2. THE FEAR OF MAN IS A SNARE

“The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25). A snare works because the victim does not initially see the trap. Fear of man seldom introduces itself by saying, “I intend to control your life.” It sounds more reasonable. “What will they think?” “What if they misunderstand?” “What if they leave?” “What if I lose the opportunity?” “What if they laugh?” One small compromise seems easier than conflict, so a man bends once. Then he bends again. Before long he is no longer asking what Scripture says but what reaction truth might produce. That is how fear of man graduates from a concern into a master.

Saul is a classic example. After disobeying God’s command concerning Amalek, he finally admitted to Samuel, “I feared the people, and obeyed their voice” (1 Samuel 15:24). There is the confession of a king wearing a crown while being ruled by a crowd. He had authority over the people politically, yet their opinion had authority over him spiritually. Fear can put

a servant's collar under a king's robe. Saul's tragedy was not merely that people pressured him. Every leader faces pressure. His tragedy was that the voice beneath him became larger than the Voice above him. He feared losing approval more than he feared disobeying God.

The cure is not becoming rude, reckless, or indifferent to legitimate counsel. Scripture commands believers to walk charitably, honor proper authority, maintain good testimony, and avoid needless offense. But none of those commands grants human beings veto power over God. Peter and the apostles stated the order plainly: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). That sentence will never become outdated because the competition between divine authority and human pressure never disappears. A Christian who has decided beforehand whose word finally governs him has removed half the enemy's leverage. You cannot easily blackmail a man with the loss of something he has already placed beneath obedience to God.

3. THE APOSTLES STOOD BECAUSE THEY KNEW THE HIGHER COURT

The book of Acts repeatedly shows ordinary men standing before extraordinary earthly power because they feared God more than consequences. Peter and John were brought before rulers, elders, scribes, and the high priestly family after the healing of the lame man. These were not friendly interviewers. Yet Acts 4:13 records that the council "saw the boldness of Peter and John." Peter had once trembled before a servant maid and denied the Lord three times. Now he stands before the religious establishment and refuses to stop preaching Christ. Something changed. The fisherman learned that the court before him was not the highest court in existence.

When commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). Notice the phrase "in the sight of God." That is the engine of their courage. The Sanhedrin saw Peter, but Peter remembered that God saw the Sanhedrin. Once heaven enters the courtroom, earthly intimidation loses some of its theatrical lighting. Men can threaten imprisonment, reputation, income, position, or even life, but they cannot enlarge themselves beyond creature size. Caesar may demand an answer; Caesar will also give one.

This confidence was not personality. Peter could be naturally impulsive, but Acts does not present human temperament as the source of apostolic boldness. Acts 4:31 says they were "filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." The Church Age believer is not promised apostolic signs or Israel's national covenant blessings, but he is indwelt by the same Holy Spirit and commanded to stand faithfully for truth. Paul

prayed for utterance “that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19). Boldness is not shouting louder than everyone else. Sometimes the boldest man in the room is the one quietly refusing to lie.

4. DANIEL KNEW BABYLON WAS NOT THE HIGHEST COURT

Daniel’s life provides one of Scripture’s clearest demonstrations of confidence rooted in fear of God. He lived under Gentile imperial rule, far from Jerusalem, surrounded by pagan religion, political intrigue, and royal authority. Yet Daniel 1:8 says, “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.” That decision came before the lions’ den, before visions, before political prominence, and before public crisis. Courage in chapter 6 was prepared by conviction in chapter 1. Men do not usually become strong at the moment of maximum pressure; pressure reveals what they have already been building.

When the decree was signed forbidding prayer to anyone except the king, Daniel knew exactly what it meant. Daniel 6:10 says that when he knew the writing was signed, “he went into his house” and prayed “as he did aforesaid.” No drama. No press conference. No attempt to appear brave. He simply continued obeying God. That may be one of the most impressive forms of courage in Scripture: ordinary faithfulness under extraordinary pressure. Daniel did not begin praying because a law forbade it, nor did he stop praying because a law forbade it. Babylon had changed its statute; Daniel had not changed his God.

The lions’ den therefore did not create Daniel’s confidence. It displayed it. The king spent the night fasting and sleepless while Daniel spent it among lions under divine protection. The man in the palace was more restless than the man in the pit. That is biblical irony worth remembering. Position does not guarantee peace, and danger does not eliminate it. God shut the lions’ mouths, but Daniel’s greatest victory occurred before he ever entered the den—when he refused to let the decree shut his own mouth in prayer. The man who fears God may still enter the lions’ den. He simply knows the lions are not in charge of the night.

5. GOD’S SIZE DETERMINES THE SIZE OF EVERYTHING ELSE

Fear grows when an object fills the field of vision. A child can make a shadow terrifying because the shadow occupies his attention. Turn on the light and the monster becomes a coat hanging over a chair. Much of spiritual fear works the same way. Circumstances become monstrous when God has been pushed to the edge of thought. Isaiah 40 corrects the proportions. God measures waters in the hollow of His hand, weighs mountains in scales, and says “the nations are as a drop of a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15). Then men spend all night terrified because one of those drops frowned at them.

This does not mean trouble is imaginary. David faced a real Goliath. Israel saw a real Red Sea. Hezekiah received a real threatening letter. Paul endured real beatings, shipwreck, imprisonment, hunger, and persecution. Biblical faith does not cure fear by pretending the giant is five feet tall. It remembers that the giant is still shorter than God. David asked, “who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26). Everyone else compared Goliath with themselves. David compared Goliath with God. Same giant. Different measuring stick.

Christians often exhaust themselves magnifying the problem while minimizing the Lord. They replay the threat, study every possibility, imagine every disaster, calculate every loss, and then offer God whatever mental space remains after fear has finished furnishing the room. Scripture reverses the order. “O magnify the LORD with me” (Psalm 34:3). God cannot literally be made larger, but He can occupy His proper place in our thinking. A telescope does not enlarge a star; it corrects our perception of something already enormous. The fear of God is spiritual perspective. Once the throne comes into view, the barking dogs of earth do not sound quite so apocalyptic.

6. THE MAN WHO FEARS GOD CAN FACE TOMORROW

One of man’s favorite fears is tomorrow. We fear bills that have not arrived, conversations that have not occurred, diseases we have not been diagnosed with, losses we have not suffered, and disasters that exist only in our imagination. Jesus said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (Matthew 6:34). In its kingdom setting the Sermon on the Mount must be handled correctly, yet the principle harmonizes with Church Age instruction: believers are commanded not to live under anxious care. Philippians 4:6 says, “Be careful for nothing.”

The fear of God gives confidence about tomorrow because tomorrow is already present to Him. We enter it minute by minute; He does not discover it with us. Psalm 139 declares God’s exhaustive knowledge of the psalmist’s path, words, and thoughts. The believer therefore does not need omniscience in order to have peace. He needs to trust the One who possesses it. Human beings often want a map for the next ten years when God gives light for the next step. Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” A lamp is not a stadium floodlight. It gives enough light to keep walking.

Financial fears often reveal this same struggle. Scripture does not teach laziness, reckless spending, or refusal to plan. Paul commends labor, provision, and responsible stewardship. But there is a difference between planning and worshipping the plan. Riches “make themselves wings” (Proverbs 23:5). Accounts change. Employment changes. Economies change. The believer’s ultimate security never rested in a number on a

statement. Paul wrote, “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19), in a context of faithful giving and ministry partnership. God may supply differently than we imagine, but He has never needed our spreadsheet to remain sovereign.

7. STRONG CONFIDENCE IS NOT RECKLESSNESS BUT SETTLED FAITH

The fear of the LORD produces confidence, but not foolish presumption. Biblical faith does not leap from the temple because Satan quoted a Psalm. Jesus answered, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:7). There is a difference between trusting God and manufacturing danger so God can prove something. Daniel did not climb into the lions’ den voluntarily; obedience put him there. Paul did not seek beatings as a hobby; faithfulness brought persecution. The Christian who drives recklessly, ignores wisdom, neglects responsibility, and then calls the resulting trouble “living by faith” has confused confidence with foolishness.

Strong confidence also does not mean the believer never feels fear emotionally. David said, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (Psalm 56:3). Notice that he did not say, “If I ever experience fear, I have failed spiritually.” He said when fear comes, I will trust. Courage is not always the absence of trembling. Sometimes courage is obedience while the knees are still shaking. Paul confessed that he came to Corinth “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3), yet he preached Christ faithfully. God does not need fearless personalities. He needs faithful servants.

The strange confidence of the man who fears God is therefore settled rather than theatrical. He does not need to announce how brave he is. Daniel opened his window and prayed. Peter answered the council. Paul sang in prison. David walked toward Goliath. Their actions spoke loudly enough. A frightened world often mistakes volume for strength, but Scripture knows better. Confidence can be very quiet. It can look like getting out of bed, opening the Bible, telling the truth, paying the bill you can pay, refusing the compromise, praying over what you cannot control, and taking the next obedient step. Backbone is not always visible until pressure tries to bend it.

CONCLUSION

“In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26). There is no contradiction. The man who fears God has simply settled the hierarchy of fear. God is highest. Therefore man is lower. God is eternal. Therefore circumstances are temporary. God is Judge. Therefore human opinion is not final. God is Father to the believer. Therefore tomorrow does not arrive unattended. God is sovereign. Therefore the world is never as out of control

as headlines make it appear. Biblical confidence is not produced by denying danger. It is produced by putting danger beneath God.

Men who refuse to fear the LORD do not become fearless. They simply redistribute their fear among smaller masters. They fear crowds, rulers, poverty, rejection, illness, aging, criticism, uncertainty, death, and the loss of things they were never going to keep forever. Proverbs 29:25 warns, “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” But Hebrews 13:6 gives the believer another confession: “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” The Christian does not say that because man can do nothing. Men can imprison, slander, fire, betray, wound, and even kill. He says it because none of those things can dethrone God.

So fear God. Fear Him enough to obey when the room disagrees. Fear Him enough to tell the truth when a lie would be easier. Fear Him enough to pray when Babylon signs the decree. Fear Him enough to stand before rulers without pretending those rulers are eternal. Fear Him enough to trust Him with the bill, the diagnosis, the enemy, the family, the future, and the grave. When God becomes the largest reality in a man’s thinking, everything else finally returns to its proper size. The fear of the LORD does not put the believer under the furniture. It puts steel in his spine, Scripture in his mouth, peace in his heart, and his eyes on the only throne that never changes occupants.

6 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — The Blessing That Reaches a Man’s House

Key Passage: “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.” (Proverbs 14:26)

The fear of the LORD does not stop at the front door of a man’s private devotional life. Proverbs 14:26 says, “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.” Notice how quickly Scripture moves from the man who fears God to the children living under his influence. Godly fear has consequences beyond the individual. It affects the atmosphere he creates, the decisions he makes, the words he speaks, the boundaries he establishes, the marriage he cultivates, and the example his children watch every day. A father may tell his children a hundred times that God comes first, but the household will eventually discover whether that statement survives inconvenience. Children are excellent inspectors of inconsistency. They may not know all the theological terms, but they can tell when Sunday’s God becomes Monday’s optional accessory.

Psalm 128 likewise begins, “Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways” (Psalm 128:1), and then moves immediately into labor, marriage, children, the household, Jerusalem, and succeeding generations. The Psalm belongs in Israel’s Old Testament setting and includes national and earthly blessing connected with Zion that must not be carelessly transferred wholesale to the Church. The Christian is not promised Israel’s covenantal prosperity by hanging Psalm 128 on the refrigerator. But the passage reveals a principle Scripture repeatedly confirms: reverence toward God does not remain abstract. It walks into the home. The man who fears God takes God seriously at breakfast, in the checkbook, during conflict, in discipline, before the television, behind closed doors, and when nobody from church is around to admire the performance.

A Christian home is therefore not created merely by putting Bible verses on the wall, playing Christian music, sending children to church, or saying grace before supper. Those things can have their place, but Pharaoh could have framed the Ten Commandments and remained Pharaoh. The central question is whether God actually governs the house. Does His Word outrank convenience? Does His holiness outrank entertainment? Does His truth outrank cultural fashion? Does obedience outrank parental pride? Does forgiveness outrank the need to win an argument? Family blessing is not produced by religious decorations but by divine authority being treated as real. A home begins changing when everybody understands that Dad is not God, Mom is not God, the children are certainly not God, and the culture does not get a key to the throne room.

1. THE FEAR OF GOD REACHES BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

Proverbs 14:26 joins personal fear with household refuge: “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.” That does not teach that a father’s faith automatically saves his children. Every soul must personally deal with God. Salvation in the Church Age is individual, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not inherited through bloodline, parentage, baptism, church attendance, or family reputation. God does not have grandchildren in the spiritual sense. A child born in a Christian home is still a sinner needing the new birth. But while faith cannot be inherited, influence certainly can. A parent’s fear of God can build an environment where truth is heard, sin is identified, prayer is normal, Scripture is honored, and hypocrisy is not knowingly enthroned.

A house governed by godly fear provides refuge because the people inside it know where the final authority rests. Children need that stability more than modern culture admits. They do not need parents changing moral standards every six months according to whatever society has just declared enlightened. They need to know that truth was true before they were born and will remain true after their parents are gone. Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” A

child raised beneath that authority has been given something sturdier than parental preference. Dad may be mistaken. Mom may be tired. Society may be confused. God's Book does not wake up moody on Tuesday.

That does not mean a fearing household is grim, tense, or joyless. The fear of God does not require everybody to sit around looking as though they swallowed a hymnbook sideways. Psalm 128 is filled with blessing, labor, food, family, and peace. Godly fear creates order that makes healthy joy possible. Children can laugh loudly in a house where God is feared. Families can enjoy vacations, meals, games, music, celebrations, and ordinary pleasures. The difference is that pleasure does not sit on the throne. When entertainment demands what God forbids, entertainment loses. When convenience fights obedience, convenience gets shown the door. The house does not become less joyful because God is first. It becomes less confused.

2. A FATHER WHO FEARS GOD SETS THE DIRECTION

Scripture places serious responsibility upon fathers. Ephesians 6:4 says, "ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." A father is not merely a provider of housing, food, transportation, electronics, tuition, and Christmas presents. A pagan can provide material things. Christian fatherhood includes spiritual direction. The man who fears God understands that he is shaping souls while doing ordinary things. His children are learning from the way he handles frustration, disagreement, money, work, authority, correction, and failure. Every day Dad is preaching a sermon he may never have written. The frightening part is that the congregation lives with him.

A father who fears God will also understand that leadership is not dictatorship. Biblical authority is never permission for selfishness, intimidation, uncontrolled anger, or laziness. Ephesians 5 tells the husband to love his wife "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). That standard ruins the fantasy of a man demanding submission while refusing sacrifice. Christlike leadership bleeds before it boasts. A husband who constantly reminds everyone that he is the head while behaving like a spoiled child has confused biblical order with personal privilege. The fear of God corrects him because he knows that his own authority remains under authority. There is a Head over the head.

Joshua's declaration, "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15), belonged to Israel in a specific covenant setting, but the statement still illustrates decisive household leadership. Joshua did not take a family opinion poll to determine whether idolatry deserved a trial period. A father today likewise cannot outsource every spiritual

decision to children who are still learning what wisdom is. Parents are supposed to parent. That means saying yes when yes is right, no when no is necessary, and refusing to tremble because a child temporarily dislikes the answer. A father who fears his children's displeasure more than God's command has reversed the household chain of authority and handed the steering wheel to passengers who cannot yet reach the pedals.

3. A MOTHER WHO FEARS GOD TEACHES BEFORE SHE SPEAKS

The influence of a godly mother is equally profound. Proverbs 31 describes a woman who works, speaks wisely, serves her household, and concludes with the great distinction: "a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). The chapter does not make charm, beauty, fashion, social standing, or public applause the final measure. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain." Culture sells women a thousand mirrors; Scripture gives them one standard. The fear of the LORD outlasts wrinkles, trends, photographs, and popularity. A mother who knows that has something substantial to give her children besides an image to admire.

Children learn reverence from how a mother handles ordinary pressure. Does frustration excuse cruelty? Does exhaustion justify bitterness? Does disagreement become gossip? Does financial stress produce panic? Does somebody else's success create envy? Does correction from Scripture create humility or defensiveness? These are lessons taught without a chalkboard. Second Timothy reminds us that Timothy had known the holy Scriptures from childhood and identifies "the unfeigned faith" that dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Paul does not suggest those women could save Timothy for him, but their spiritual influence mattered. A Bible-believing mother can plant truth deeply before the world begins planting weeds.

A mother who fears God also understands that nurturing is not the same thing as indulging. Biblical love does not mean protecting a child from every consequence, every correction, every disappointment, or every uncomfortable truth. A physician who refuses necessary medicine because the patient dislikes the taste is not compassionate; he is useless. Proverbs repeatedly connects parental correction with love and wisdom. Modern parenting sometimes treats a child's temporary happiness as the highest good, but Scripture aims higher: character, truth, obedience, wisdom, and godliness. A mother who fears God loves her child too much to worship the child's mood. She knows that a spoiled child may smile today and curse the indulgence tomorrow.

4. CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEIR PARENTS REALLY FEAR

Children eventually discover what truly governs their parents. They hear what frightens them, what excites them, what controls family decisions, and what subjects may not be

questioned. If parents say, “God comes first,” but every spiritual commitment disappears whenever sports, vacations, entertainment, convenience, or social opportunity competes with it, the children notice the actual hierarchy. What parents consistently rearrange life around becomes the functional god of the house. The family calendar has a theology of its own. A child may forget a hundred lectures, but he will remember what Mom and Dad repeatedly treated as nonnegotiable.

If parents fear public opinion, children learn to fear public opinion. If parents panic over money, children learn that money is sovereign. If parents treat cultural approval as necessary for happiness, children learn to measure themselves by the crowd. But if parents fear the LORD, children repeatedly see another scale of values. They see truth told when lying would be easier. They see forgiveness offered when pride wants revenge. They see prayer before panic. They see Scripture consulted before culture. They see parents admit wrong instead of protecting an image. Few things impress a child more deeply than hearing a parent say, “I was wrong. God’s Word is right. Please forgive me.” That one sentence can preach humility better than fifty lectures on obedience.

Hypocrisy, by contrast, poisons the home because it teaches children that Christianity is a costume. A father who shouts about holiness in church and behaves wickedly at home is preaching two religions. A mother who praises kindness publicly and tears people apart privately is teaching two moral codes. Children may not articulate the contradiction immediately, but they feel it. Titus 1:16 describes people who “profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.” Nothing damages spiritual instruction faster than forcing children to live inside the contradiction between profession and practice. The fear of God brings consistency because it reminds parents that the most important audience in the house is not the children anyway. God is watching when they are not.

5. FEAR OF GOD GOVERNS MARRIAGE, SPEECH, DISCIPLINE, AND MONEY

A home governed by the fear of God will show it first in marriage. Husbands and wives cannot teach children reverence effectively while making war on each other every evening. Ephesians 5 gives commands to both husband and wife within God’s order, and verse 21 sets the atmosphere as believers are “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Marriage is not a competition to determine who can collect the most grievances. The husband is accountable to love sacrificially. The wife is accountable to honor God’s order. Both answer to Christ. When each spouse remembers that there is Someone above the argument, conflict looks different. Winning becomes less important than righteousness.

Speech likewise changes when God is feared. Ephesians 4:29 commands, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.” That includes the kitchen, the bedroom, the

car, and the family group message. Some Christians would never speak to a church member the way they speak to their spouse because church members can leave and tell people. Family receives the unfiltered version. That is backwards. The people closest to us should not receive the spiritual leftovers after politeness has been spent on strangers. The fear of God puts a governor on sarcasm, insults, contempt, shouting, gossip, cruel nicknames, and words intended to wound. A home cannot become a refuge while everybody inside needs body armor for conversation.

Money also exposes household theology. First Timothy 6:10 says, “the love of money is the root of all evil,” not money itself. A father or mother who fears God learns stewardship, generosity, honest labor, contentment, and wise provision. Children watching parents spend recklessly, covet constantly, envy neighbors, or measure success entirely by possessions will absorb the lesson regardless of what Sunday school says. Luke 12:15 warns, “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” The world says the house needs one more purchase to become happy. The catalog always has another page. Godly fear teaches a family that possessions are servants, terrible masters, and miserable substitutes for peace.

6. BLESSING DOES NOT MEAN A PAIN-FREE HOUSE

Psalms 128 beautifully describes the man who fears the LORD, the fruit of his labor, his wife, his children, and blessing connected with Zion and Jerusalem. The doctrinal setting matters. These are Old Testament blessings associated with Israel and cannot simply be converted into a guarantee that every Church Age believer who fears God will become wealthy, have perfect health, enjoy an unbroken marriage, raise children who never wander, and die surrounded by grandchildren at age ninety-five. Scripture does not permit that prosperity formula. Paul feared God and was beaten. Timothy served God and had bodily infirmities. Faithful believers have buried children, endured persecution, suffered poverty, and walked through grief.

The blessing of a God-fearing home is therefore not immunity from trouble. Rain falls on roofs owned by believers too. Cancer does not ask to see a church membership card. Children possess wills of their own. Spouses can make sinful choices. Jobs disappear. Cars break. Loved ones die. The difference is that trouble enters a house where there is already an altar of truth. The family knows where to take grief, where to seek wisdom, how to pray, how to forgive, how to endure, and where eternal hope rests. A storm may strike both houses, but foundations are revealed in weather. Christ’s teaching about the wise and foolish builders makes that plain: the storm tested what had been built before it arrived.

Nor does godly parenting guarantee that an adult child will always choose rightly. Parents are responsible to teach, discipline, model truth, pray, and point children toward Christ, but they cannot believe for them. Even God had rebellious sons in the sense that Israel repeatedly rebelled against Him despite perfect divine instruction. Ezekiel 18 emphasizes individual accountability. A godly parent should therefore reject both pride when children do well and crushing self-condemnation whenever an adult child chooses badly. Faithfulness belongs to the parent; the child's response belongs to the child. Family blessing is not a vending machine where enough quarters of obedience guarantee the product selected. God is Father, not a machine.

7. MAKE GOD THE LORD OF THE HOUSE, NOT AN OCCASIONAL GUEST

Many homes treat God as an emergency contact. He is welcomed when illness comes, money gets tight, a child gets in trouble, a marriage begins cracking, or fear enters the bedroom at night. Once the emergency passes, God is politely shown back to the guest room while ordinary life resumes without Him. That is not the fear of the LORD. Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." All thy ways includes the mundane ways. God belongs in decisions about entertainment, dating, spending, schooling, work, conflict, friendships, discipline, schedules, and priorities. A God consulted only during catastrophe is not being treated as Lord but as spiritual roadside assistance.

Deuteronomy 6, in Israel's covenant setting, instructed parents to speak of God's words while sitting in the house, walking by the way, lying down, and rising up. While the Church is not Israel and those covenant commands must remain in their proper setting, the pattern shows how thoroughly divine truth was meant to permeate household life. Spiritual instruction was not supposed to be quarantined to one formal religious hour. Church Age parents likewise have abundant instruction to bring children up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). A child should not have to visit church to discover what his parents believe. He should have been living inside the evidence all week.

The goal is not a home performing Christianity for outsiders. The goal is a home where God's reality has become ordinary. Prayer is normal. Scripture is normal. Saying no to sin is normal. Apologizing is normal. Forgiving is normal. Giving thanks is normal. Church is normal. Telling the truth when it costs something is normal. Respect is normal. Laughter is normal. Grace is normal. Godliness should not feel like a visiting evangelist who arrives twice a year and makes everybody nervous. When the fear of the LORD governs a household, reverence becomes part of the furniture—not because anybody is pretending perfection, but because everyone knows whose house it ultimately is.

CONCLUSION

“In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge” (Proverbs 14:26). A parent cannot manufacture faith inside a child, but he can build a home where faith is taken seriously. He can make Scripture more than decoration. He can make prayer more than emergency language. He can make holiness more than a church word. He can show through conduct that God’s authority reaches the wallet, the mouth, the marriage, the screen, the schedule, the temper, and the private decision. That kind of home becomes a refuge not because trouble cannot enter it, but because truth already lives there when trouble arrives.

The greatest inheritance parents leave their children may not appear on a probate document. Houses can be sold. Money can be spent. Furniture breaks. Cars rust. Photographs fade. But a child who watched a father fear God and a mother walk before God received something that may speak decades after those parents are gone. He remembers the prayers, the Bible opened at the table, the apology after a wrong word, the refusal to compromise, the generosity when money was tight, the calm trust when bad news arrived, and the conviction that God was not imaginary. Psalm 112:1-2 again connects the man who fears the LORD with influence reaching toward his seed. Godly fear leaves fingerprints on generations.

So let the house know who is God. Not Dad. Not Mom. Not the children. Not money. Not entertainment. Not culture. Not popularity. Not convenience. Let the LORD occupy the place no created thing can rightly hold. The family will not become perfect. There will still be mistakes, tears, disagreements, sickness, disappointments, and days when everybody needs grace before breakfast. But where God is feared, there is a fixed standard, a holy authority, a place for repentance, a reason to forgive, and a refuge bigger than the storm. The blessing that reaches a man’s house begins when somebody inside that house decides that God will no longer be treated as a guest. He will be treated as God.

7 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — Worship Without Fear Becomes Religious Entertainment

Key Passage: “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” (Psalm 2:11)

Psalm 2 does something modern religion has nearly forgotten how to do: it puts joy and trembling in the same sentence. “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11). Apparently God never received the memo informing churches that reverence

ruins worship. The verse belongs in a great prophetic Psalm concerning the LORD's Anointed, the rebellion of the nations, and the coming rule of the Son. Kings are warned to be wise, judges are instructed, and rebellious rulers are told to "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry" (Psalm 2:12). Yet the principle reaches far beyond that prophetic setting. God is not approached casually simply because men have learned to dim lights, amplify music, and call an emotional experience worship. He remains God.

The great mistake of modern worship is not that Christians rejoice. Scripture commands rejoicing. It is not that people sing with emotion. David certainly did. It is not that music can be powerful, preaching passionate, or fellowship warm. The problem begins when the emotional experience becomes the object instead of the result. Worship is no longer measured by whether God was honored, truth was proclaimed, sin was confronted, Christ was exalted, and believers were brought into obedient reverence. It is measured by whether people "felt something." The congregation leaves discussing the atmosphere, the band, the speaker, the lighting, and the experience while the One supposedly being worshipped receives a footnote. That is not revival. That is religious entertainment with a Bible verse printed on the ticket.

Hebrews 12:28 brings the matter directly into New Testament Christian application: "let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Notice the word "acceptably." That word ruins the notion that anything offered sincerely must automatically please God. God determines acceptable service. The believer does not get to redefine worship according to taste, culture, personality, generation, or whatever produces attendance. Grace does not abolish reverence; grace enables acceptable service "with reverence and godly fear." The God who saved us by grace is still "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). Salvation gave us access to Him. It did not reduce Him to our level.

1. REJOICING AND TREMBLING BELONG TOGETHER

"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." The words are deliberately balanced. Fear without joy would misrepresent the goodness of God; joy without fear would misrepresent His holiness. Biblical worship holds both truths without embarrassment. Psalm 100 tells God's people to "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2). Yet Psalm 96:9 commands, "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." Singing and fearing are not enemies. Gladness and holiness are not competitors. The problem is not joy. The problem is joy detached from any awareness of the majesty of the One before whom the rejoicing occurs.

Modern Christianity frequently assumes that reverence means stiffness, silence, gloom, and an inability to enjoy God. That is a caricature. Heaven is not gloomy. The Psalms are full of shouting, singing, instruments, thanksgiving, praise, rejoicing, and celebration. But the same Bible contains falling on faces, trembling at God's Word, bowing, holiness, awe, confession, and fear. Scripture has room for a shout without turning worship into a circus. It has room for tears without turning worship into therapy. It has room for gladness without turning the congregation into customers waiting to be entertained. Biblical worship has emotional range because biblical worship begins with God rather than human mood.

When God becomes the center, the worshipper no longer asks first, "Did I enjoy that?" He asks, "Was God honored?" That simple change exposes much of the confusion. Worship was never designed primarily as a weekly emotional recharge station for religious consumers. God is not a product, the preacher is not a salesman, and the congregation is not a focus group. A man can leave a biblical service convicted, uncomfortable, corrected, and deeply blessed at the same time. Sometimes the best thing God can do for a man's feelings is offend the sin that has been managing them. Rejoicing with trembling means joy has learned to bow.

2. WHEN THE CONGREGATION BECOMES AN AUDIENCE

The New Testament describes the local church as a body, an assembly, a fellowship of believers, and the pillar and ground of the truth. It never presents the church as an audience gathered to review a performance. Yet modern ministry can easily drift into precisely that arrangement. The platform becomes a stage. The seating faces forward. The lighting isolates performers. The schedule is engineered for momentum. Every transition is rehearsed. The attendee enters, watches, evaluates, and leaves. If that sounds uncomfortably like a theater, changing the name from "show" to "worship experience" does not necessarily solve the problem.

An audience asks whether the presentation satisfied it. A congregation asks whether God was obeyed. Those are different postures. Second Timothy 4 warns of people who "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" and "turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The great temptation of audience-driven ministry is to discover what keeps people listening and then quietly remove anything that threatens retention. Judgment disappears. Sin becomes softened. Hell receives fewer mentions. Separation sounds negative. Chastening feels uncomfortable. Suddenly the church has become remarkably skilled at giving sinners and saints alike precisely what fallen flesh prefers to hear.

The fear of God rescues the congregation from consumer religion because it reminds everyone who the service is actually for. Colossians 3:16 instructs believers to teach and

admonish one another “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” To the Lord. That phrase changes everything. The question is not whether the music matched our preferred style, whether the message kept us entertained, or whether the room produced the desired mood. The question is whether truth was sung, Christ was honored, saints were edified, and God received what was offered. Worship ceases to be consumerism when God becomes more important than customer satisfaction.

3. WHEN THE PREACHER BECOMES A PERFORMER

The preacher faces the same temptation. Second Timothy 4:2 gives him a plain assignment: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” That is not a glamorous job description. Reproving people rarely improves popularity. Rebuking sin seldom increases applause. Doctrine requires attention in an age trained to consume thirty-second fragments. Yet the preacher does not stand behind the pulpit to display himself. He stands there to deliver a Book. The moment personality becomes larger than Scripture, the servant has stepped in front of the message he was supposed to carry.

A performer must keep the audience pleased because the audience controls success. A preacher who fears God knows the audience is secondary because heaven is listening. Paul wrote, “if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). That does not give a preacher permission to be obnoxious, lazy, deliberately boring, or proud of offending people unnecessarily. Paul also instructed Timothy to teach with patience. But faithfulness cannot be sacrificed for applause. A preacher who trims truth because he fears empty seats more than God has already announced whose servant he has become. The congregation may still call him pastor. Heaven knows who signs his paycheck spiritually.

The danger becomes especially severe when ministry creates celebrity. A gifted speaker may gather enormous attention, and gifts themselves are not sinful. Apollos was “an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures” (Acts 18:24). Paul could reason persuasively. But Paul rebuked Corinth for dividing over personalities: “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos” (1 Corinthians 3:4). His answer was blunt: “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?” (1 Corinthians 3:5). Ministers are servants, not stars. When people leave talking more about the preacher’s charisma than Christ’s glory, somebody on the platform has grown too large.

4. EMOTION IS A SERVANT, NOT THE LORD OF WORSHIP

Emotion belongs in worship because God made human beings with emotions. The Psalms overflow with sorrow, joy, fear, hope, gratitude, anguish, confidence, and praise. Paul tells believers to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19). A cold, mechanical service where truth is recited without affection is no spiritual ideal. But emotion must remain the servant of truth. Once emotion becomes the standard by which truth is judged, worship is upside down. A stirring melody can produce tears without producing holiness. A swelling musical arrangement can produce gooseflesh in a man who has not repented of anything.

Music possesses real power over human emotion, which means Christians should be more discerning about it, not less. Israel sang after crossing the Red Sea because God had delivered them. Their emotion answered truth. In the New Testament, spiritual songs are to let “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). The Word governs the song. The song does not manufacture a state in which doctrine becomes unnecessary. The church is not helped when twenty minutes of musical repetition produces a sensation people are then told is necessarily the presence of God. A nervous system can be stimulated without the Holy Ghost signing the program.

The same applies to emotional preaching. Volume is not authority. Tears are not automatically conviction. Excitement is not necessarily anointing. A man can pound a pulpit while saying almost nothing, and another can quietly open a verse that cuts the conscience like a knife. “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29). The power belongs to God’s Word. Delivery matters, but delivery cannot substitute for content. A golden trumpet blowing the wrong note is still wrong, no matter how polished the brass appears.

5. NEW TESTAMENT GRACE STILL REQUIRES REVERENCE

Some people speak as though reverence belonged to Sinai and disappeared at Calvary. Hebrews destroys that notion. Writing to people confronted with New Testament realities, the writer says, “let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28). Grace and godly fear appear in the same verse. The believer does not approach God under the terror of condemnation because Christ has borne that judgment. Romans 8:1 declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” But freedom from condemnation does not mean freedom from reverence.

Paul also tells the Corinthians, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). That chapter addresses confusion in an assembly where spiritual manifestations had become disordered. Whatever else may be said about the peculiar apostolic gifts

present at Corinth, the principle is unmistakable: God is not honored by confusion masquerading as spirituality. Earlier Paul writes, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Disorder does not become holy because religious vocabulary is attached to it. A church can be lively without becoming chaotic, joyful without becoming frivolous, and Spirit-led without pretending the Holy Spirit lost His interest in order.

Reverence also affects how Christians treat the Lord’s Supper. First Corinthians 11 records believers behaving so carelessly around the memorial of Christ’s death that Paul warns of divine chastening, including weakness, sickness, and death. That is strong medicine for anyone claiming God no longer cares how saved people conduct themselves in worship. Paul tells them, “let a man examine himself” (1 Corinthians 11:28). Communion was not entertainment, refreshments, or a sentimental moment tucked into a schedule. It called believers to remember the body and blood of Christ soberly. Grace opens the door to God’s presence, but grace never teaches believers to wipe their muddy boots on the threshold.

6. HEAVEN ITSELF IS NOT CASUAL ABOUT GOD

If anybody should feel comfortable in God’s presence, surely the inhabitants of heaven qualify. Yet Revelation does not show heaven lounging around the throne with casual familiarity. Revelation 4 describes living creatures crying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8). The four and twenty elders fall down before Him and cast their crowns before the throne. Whatever doctrinal identifications and prophetic details are considered in the passage, one fact is impossible to miss: heaven takes God seriously.

Revelation 5 continues the scene around the Lamb. Multitudes proclaim Him worthy, angels surround the throne, and creation erupts in blessing, honor, glory, and power. Again, joy is present. Praise is abundant. Majesty fills the scene. But casualness is nowhere to be found. Nobody appears bored with holiness. Nobody asks whether the music program could be made more relevant. Nobody complains that the throne-centered service failed to meet personal preferences. Heaven’s worship has an enormous advantage over much earthly worship: everyone there remembers who the center is.

Isaiah 6 gives the same pattern centuries earlier. Seraphim cry, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts,” while the posts of the door move and the house fills with smoke (Isaiah 6:3-4). Isaiah’s response is, “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isaiah 6:5). When God’s holiness becomes real, self-consciousness gives way to God-consciousness. That is one of the clearest differences between worship and entertainment. Entertainment asks how I am experiencing the moment. Worship forgets me for a while because Someone infinitely

greater has filled the vision. A church obsessed with creating an experience may accidentally make the worshipper the center. Heaven never makes that mistake.

7. ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP TREATS GOD AS GOD

Acceptable worship begins by taking Scripture more seriously than preference. Jesus told the woman of Samaria that “the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). Truth matters. Worship cannot be separated from doctrine because we cannot rightly worship a God we are busy misrepresenting. Sincerity does not repair falsehood. The prophets of Baal were sincere enough to cut themselves, but sincerity did not send fire from heaven. Religious intensity proves intensity, not truth. God has given a written revelation so worship does not have to guess whom it is addressing.

Acceptable worship also requires the life of the worshipper to agree with his mouth. Amos rebuked Israel’s hypocritical religious activity in its covenant setting because outward worship existed alongside rebellion. In the Church Age, Romans 12:1 tells believers to present their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Worship therefore extends beyond songs. A man cannot sing about surrender on Sunday while deliberately protecting rebellion on Monday and assume volume has covered the contradiction. God hears the hymn and sees the life. A singing mouth attached to an unyielded body is not the masterpiece religious performance makes it appear to be.

Finally, acceptable worship remembers whom we are approaching. The believer may come boldly unto the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), but boldness is not brazenness. We come boldly because of Christ, not because God has become common. We approach as redeemed children, not condemned enemies, but our Father is still “the Lord God omnipotent” (Revelation 19:6). Intimacy with God is one of the wonders of salvation, yet true intimacy increases reverence rather than erasing it. The closer a man gets to holy fire, the less likely he is to treat it like a candle on a birthday cake.

CONCLUSION

“Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11). There is the balance modern Christianity desperately needs. Rejoice, but remember before whom you rejoice. Sing, but sing truth. Preach, but preach the Word. Gather, but gather as a congregation rather than consumers waiting for a show. Express emotion, but let truth govern emotion rather than emotion judge truth. Use gifts, instruments, voices, technology, and organization if they serve biblical worship, but never confuse the tools with the object. The moment the machinery becomes more impressive than the God supposedly being honored, worship has begun drifting toward theater.

The local church does not need to become joyless in order to recover reverence. It needs to become God-centered. Joy should deepen when God becomes larger. Gratitude should increase when grace is understood. Singing should become more meaningful when the words matter. Preaching should become weightier when the preacher remembers heaven is listening. Fellowship should become sweeter when believers gather as members of one body rather than customers occupying seats. Reverence does not suffocate worship. It keeps worship from becoming trivial. The fear of God is not the wet blanket thrown over spiritual joy. It is the fireproof wall that keeps holy joy from degenerating into religious foolishness.

Hebrews 12:28 gives the final standard: “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” Acceptably to whom? God. That is the question that straightens the whole matter. Not acceptable to the marketing department, the worship team, the preacher’s ego, the congregation’s preferences, or the culture outside the doors. God decides what honors God. Heaven itself bows before Him. Angels call Him holy. Elders cast crowns before His throne. Prophets fall on their faces. Apostles tremble before His majesty. The church on earth has no reason to become more casual about God than heaven is. Worship can rejoice. Worship can shout. Worship can sing. But if it cannot tremble, something has gone missing.

8 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — What Happens to a Church That Stops Fearing God

Key Passage: “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)

Acts 9:31 gives a picture of healthy churches that modern Christianity desperately needs to recover. They were “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Fear and comfort stand in the same verse without fighting each other. The early churches did not believe reverence would frighten people away from grace, nor did they imagine the comfort of the Holy Ghost required turning God into a harmless grandfather who never raises His voice. They feared the Lord, they were comforted by the Spirit, they were edified, and they multiplied. Apparently spiritual health does not require choosing between holiness and encouragement. God can comfort a trembling saint without teaching him to become casual about the One doing the comforting.

A church begins getting sick when it fears everybody except God. It fears losing attendance, losing donors, losing cultural respectability, losing online approval, losing influential

families, losing musicians, losing staff, or losing its reputation for being welcoming. Slowly, the fear of the Lord becomes negotiable because every other fear is screaming louder. Doctrine gets softened because somebody might leave. Sin gets renamed because somebody might become offended. Discipline disappears because somebody might post about it. Preaching gets trimmed until every sharp edge is rounded off and the sword of the Spirit resembles a butter knife. The congregation may still grow numerically, the building may still be crowded, and the budget may still look healthy. A tumor can grow too. Growth alone has never proved health.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ. He said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Paul calls it “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). That fact should settle the question of whose opinion matters most. The church is not owned by the pastor, the deacons, the board, the biggest giver, the loudest family, the denomination, or the neighborhood. Christ purchased it. Christ is the Head. Christ determines doctrine. Christ judges ministry. Once a church forgets that, it begins behaving like a business protecting a brand instead of a body serving its Lord. The fear of God reminds everybody—from the pulpit to the back pew—that the Owner is present.

1. FEAR AND COMFORT WERE NEVER ENEMIES

Acts 9:31 destroys the modern assumption that churches must choose between reverence and warmth. The believers were “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Walking describes a continuing manner of life, not a five-minute emotional response at the end of a sermon. These churches lived consciously before the Lord. They understood His holiness, authority, and presence, yet that awareness did not crush them into despair. The Holy Ghost comforted them. Biblical fear does not drive redeemed people away from God. It drives them away from treating God lightly. The Spirit does not comfort believers by convincing them holiness no longer matters; He comforts them while leading them in truth.

Modern Christianity has often mistaken comfort for indulgence. If a sermon confronts sin, somebody says it was not encouraging. If discipline occurs, somebody says it lacked grace. If a preacher names false doctrine, somebody says the tone was not loving. Apparently comfort now means nobody must ever feel uncomfortable. The Bible knows nothing of that definition. The Holy Ghost is called “the Comforter” (John 14:26), yet He inspired passages on judgment, chastening, separation, rebuke, and church discipline. The Spirit who comforts the saint is the same Spirit who convicts. A physician who comforts a patient by hiding the diagnosis is not compassionate; he is dangerous. Sometimes the most comforting thing God can do is tell the truth before the disease becomes terminal.

Acts 9:31 also says those churches “were edified.” Edification means building up, and God builds His church with truth, not flattery. Paul told the Ephesian elders, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). All the counsel includes promises and warnings, grace and judgment, heaven and hell, comfort and chastening, liberty and accountability. A church that serves only spiritual dessert eventually develops doctrinal diabetes. Sweetness has its place, but a body cannot live on frosting. Fear of God keeps the menu honest. It forces the pulpit to feed people what God said instead of what market research says they prefer.

2. ACTS 5 SHOWS THAT GOD TAKES HIS CHURCH SERIOUSLY

Acts 5 records one of the most sobering scenes in the early church. Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession, kept back part of the price, and presented the remainder in a way designed to create a false impression. Peter told Ananias, “thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). The issue was not that they were required to give every penny. Peter explicitly said the property and money were theirs to control. Their sin was hypocrisy and deliberate deception in a spiritual setting. They wanted the reputation of sacrifice without the reality of sacrifice. That religious costume proved deadly.

Ananias fell dead, and later Sapphira did the same. Acts 5:11 says, “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” The apostolic setting matters. Scripture does not teach that every dishonest church member today will immediately fall dead at Peter’s feet, nor should anybody pretend this sign-judgment is the normal administrative pattern for a local church in the present age. But the event reveals something permanent about God’s character: He does not consider hypocrisy in His church harmless. Heaven was not impressed by the couple’s public image. God saw the hidden calculation behind the gift.

Modern churches can read Acts 5 and spend more time explaining why such judgment does not happen every Sunday than considering why it happened at all. We are more comfortable discussing the dispensational distinction than allowing the holiness to reach our conscience. Keep the distinction, certainly—but keep the fear too. First Corinthians 11 shows believers suffering divine chastening over abuse of the Lord’s Supper, with Paul saying, “for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:30). Grace never turned God into a spectator. He still knows what happens in His assemblies.

3. WHEN LEADERS FEAR CROWDS, DOCTRINE GETS SOFTENED

A pastor who fears people more than God is already compromised before the controversial sermon begins. Paul wrote, “if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ”

(Galatians 1:10). That does not mean a preacher should enjoy offending people, cultivate a rude personality, or confuse bad manners with boldness. It means human approval cannot become the governing standard of ministry. Once the preacher starts measuring truth by the reaction it produces, Scripture is no longer the final authority. The audience is. He may still carry a Bible into the pulpit, but the crowd is quietly holding the red pencil.

Second Timothy 4 warns that the time will come when people “will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). Notice that the demand begins in the pew. People want teachers who tell them what their lusts prefer to hear. Then teachers arise to meet the demand. That creates a religious marketplace where doctrine is adjusted according to consumer preference. Judgment gets toned down. Separation disappears. Biblical sexuality becomes vague. Hell becomes awkward. Holiness becomes optional. The message grows smoother as the crowd grows larger, and everybody congratulates himself because nothing sharp enough remains to draw blood.

The preacher’s defense against that pressure is the fear of God. Paul charged Timothy “before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ” to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2). Heaven was placed in the room before the congregation ever sat down. A man who knows he must answer to Christ can survive a few unhappy faces. A man who believes his ministry depends on pleasing everybody will eventually become everybody’s servant except Christ’s. Churches do not lose doctrine all at once. Usually one sentence gets softened, one subject gets avoided, one complaint is accommodated, and one boundary gets moved. Compromise often enters wearing slippers.

4. WHEN ATTENDANCE MATTERS MORE THAN HOLINESS

Numbers are not evil. Acts records conversions, baptisms, multiplication, and thousands being added to the church. There is nothing spiritual about empty seats merely because they are empty. But numerical success becomes dangerous when it replaces faithfulness as the measure of health. A church can draw a crowd for many reasons. Bread drew crowds to Jesus until He preached something they disliked in John 6, and “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). Christ did not chase them down with a revised sermon entitled “Ten Ways to Feel Better About Hard Sayings.”

The fear of losing attendance can make a church incapable of correction. A wealthy family threatens to leave, so leadership suddenly discovers flexibility. A popular musician is living wrongly, so nobody wants to disturb the worship program. An influential member spreads division, but confrontation might create a scene. A young couple rejects biblical morality, and the church worries that clear teaching will appear unwelcoming. Bit by bit,

membership becomes leverage. The people who threaten departure gain more authority than the Scriptures they are violating. That is not shepherding. That is hostage negotiation with hymnbooks.

First Corinthians 5 shows Paul taking church purity seriously enough to command action concerning open, scandalous sexual sin. He rebuked the Corinthian church because they were “puffed up” when they should have mourned, and he commanded them to address the matter. Church discipline must be biblical, careful, truthful, and aimed at restoration rather than humiliation. But refusing all discipline is not grace. A shepherd who never removes danger from the flock is not merciful to the sheep. Sometimes love closes the gate. Sometimes holiness requires saying, “This cannot continue here.”

5. WHEN SIN GETS RENAMED, THE CHURCH LOSES ITS CONSCIENCE

One of the surest signs that the fear of God is disappearing is that biblical words start making people nervous. Sin becomes brokenness. Rebellion becomes struggle. Adultery becomes a complicated relationship. Covetousness becomes ambition. Pride becomes self-confidence. Gossip becomes concern. Worldliness becomes relevance. Bitterness becomes boundaries. The dictionary gets softer while the heart gets harder. Isaiah 5:20 warns, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.” Changing the label on poison does not improve the contents of the bottle.

The church must certainly distinguish between temptation and action, weakness and defiance, ignorance and deliberate rebellion. Scripture does. Believers need patience, restoration, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. Galatians 6:1 commands spiritual believers to restore the fallen “in the spirit of meekness.” But meekness does not require pretending sin is not sin. Christ could tell the woman taken in adultery, “Neither do I condemn thee,” and also, “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). Grace forgives sin without issuing it a certificate of innocence. Mercy never needs a lie in order to remain merciful.

When a church loses its moral vocabulary, it soon loses its moral backbone. People cannot repent of what they have been trained to call harmless. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” Confession requires agreement with God about what the thing is. The fear of the Lord restores that honesty. It allows believers to say, “That was sin. I was wrong. God is right.” A church where nobody can say those words because everyone is protecting self-esteem may have excellent lighting, but spiritually somebody turned the lights off.

6. LEADERSHIP WITHOUT THE FEAR OF GOD BECOMES DANGEROUS

Church leadership carries authority, and authority without fear of God is dangerous. Peter warned elders not to be “lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1

Peter 5:3). Pastors are shepherds under the Chief Shepherd. They do not own the sheep. They cannot use spiritual authority to control people for personal advantage, protect their ego, build private kingdoms, or demand loyalty that belongs to Christ. The fear of God reminds every leader that there is always a higher chair in the room.

Paul's qualifications for bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 emphasize character as much as capability. A man may speak brilliantly and still be morally unqualified. He may draw crowds and still be ruled by pride. He may understand administration and still mishandle his home. He may know doctrine while loving money, applause, or power. Churches sometimes tolerate character defects in gifted men because the ministry appears successful. God's qualifications are inconvenient to celebrity culture because God seems more interested in what a leader is than in how many people recognize his name.

The fear of God also protects leaders from covering sin to preserve reputation. When preserving the institution becomes more important than righteousness, secrecy gets baptized as wisdom. Problems are buried, victims are ignored, facts are managed, and everybody is told not to damage the ministry. That is backwards. The ministry is already damaged when truth is sacrificed to protect it. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." A church that fears God brings sin into the light, follows biblical process, tells the truth, protects the vulnerable, and accepts whatever embarrassment righteousness requires. Better a humbled church with truth than a polished church built on concealment.

7. A CHURCH THAT FEARS GOD CAN SURVIVE BEING UNPOPULAR

The early church was not protected from hostility by its fear of God. Often that fear made hostility inevitable. Peter and John were commanded to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Their answer was, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). Later the apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). They were not hunting persecution. They were simply unwilling to purchase peace with disobedience. That is what the fear of God looks like when culture becomes hostile.

A church that fears God does not need to become politically powerful, socially fashionable, culturally admired, or universally understood in order to remain faithful. The New Testament church survived prisons, beatings, slander, economic pressure, martyrdom, and governmental hostility without a marketing department explaining how to make Christianity less controversial. The gospel itself was "unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul did not solve that problem by redesigning

the cross. Some truths cannot be made acceptable to rebellion without being altered beyond recognition.

Unpopularity is not automatically proof of faithfulness, of course. A church can be disliked because it is foolish, abusive, dishonest, arrogant, or needlessly combative. There is no crown for being obnoxious. First Peter 4 distinguishes suffering as a Christian from suffering as an evildoer or busybody. But when unpopularity comes because Scripture is preached plainly, Christ is honored exclusively, sin is named honestly, and holiness is maintained humbly, the church should not panic. Public opinion is weather. Truth is the foundation. You do not tear up the foundation because the forecast turned unpleasant.

CONCLUSION

Acts 9:31 describes churches “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” That is the balance. Fear without comfort can produce despair. Comfort without fear produces carelessness. God gives both. The Holy Ghost consoles believers while the holiness of God keeps them sober. The result is edification, stability, and genuine spiritual life. A healthy church does not need to choose between truth and love, holiness and grace, courage and compassion, reverence and joy. Those are false choices manufactured by people who have separated what Scripture keeps together.

What happens when a church stops fearing God? Eventually it starts fearing everything else. It fears empty seats, angry members, bad publicity, financial loss, cultural ridicule, political pressure, social media storms, denominational consequences, and declining influence. Every lesser fear grows because the greatest fear has disappeared. Then compromise begins to look prudent. Silence begins to look pastoral. Cowardice begins to look compassionate. The church may still call its decisions strategic, but heaven knows when fear of man is writing policy. “The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25), whether the man stands alone or sits on a church board.

The answer is not to make churches harsh, paranoid, joyless, or suspicious. The answer is to put God back where He belongs. Fear Him enough to preach His Word when the crowd prefers something else. Fear Him enough to confront sin without hating sinners. Fear Him enough to discipline biblically, lead humbly, handle money honestly, protect the flock courageously, and admit wrong when leaders fail. Fear Him enough to survive being unpopular. Christ purchased the church with His own blood. He is not asking permission from the congregation to remain its Head. A church can survive losing applause. It can survive losing influence. It can survive losing members. But once it loses the fear of God, it has lost the very thing that might have kept everything else from rotting.

9 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — Saved by Grace, Yet Still Accountable to the Father

Key Passage: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)

Romans 8:15 settles one side of the matter with magnificent clarity: “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” The man who has trusted Jesus Christ is not standing outside heaven every morning wondering whether yesterday’s failure caused God to tear up his adoption papers during the night. Romans 8 begins with “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), and it ends with nothing able to “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). Salvation is not a revolving door through which a believer enters by faith, exits by failure, reenters by confession, and spends fifty years dizzy from the trip. Christ saves completely. The believer is justified, sealed, accepted, adopted, and placed into a relationship with God that rests upon the work of Christ rather than the daily perfection of the Christian.

Yet the same Bible that removes condemned fear refuses to remove godly fear. Philippians 2:12 tells saved people to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” First Peter 1:17 tells believers, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Second Corinthians 7:1 speaks of “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Hebrews 12:28 commands Christians to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” Evidently the Holy Ghost did not believe Romans 8:15 cancelled every use of the word fear after conversion. The contradiction exists only when different kinds of fear are thrown into the same doctrinal sack. The child of God does not fear eternal condemnation as an uncertain criminal awaiting sentence. He fears his Father as a redeemed son who understands that love never made holiness disappear.

Modern Christianity often ruins this distinction in one of two directions. One crowd turns the Christian life into probation, leaving believers constantly wondering whether a bad week has erased eternal life. Another crowd reacts so strongly against that error that accountability is almost abolished. The first group has security without assurance; the second wants assurance without seriousness. Scripture gives neither. Eternal security is real, and so is chastening. Justification is complete, and practical holiness still matters. Heaven is certain for the saved man, and the Judgment Seat of Christ is still ahead of him. Grace removed the believer from condemnation; it did not remove him from his Father’s government. A good father does not disown his son every time he disobeys, but neither does he hang a sign over the house reading, “Since you are family, nothing matters anymore.”

1. THE BELIEVER HAS NOT RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE AGAIN

Romans 8 is not written to men trying to earn adoption. It is written to those who are already “in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Paul distinguishes flesh from Spirit, death from life, bondage from adoption, and condemnation from the liberty belonging to the children of God. Verse 15 says believers have not received “the spirit of bondage again to fear.” The word “again” matters. Salvation does not place a redeemed man back under the terrified uncertainty from which grace delivered him. The Holy Spirit does not indwell a believer in order to spend the Christian life whispering that one wrong move will return him to hell. He is “the Spirit of adoption,” and through Him believers cry, “Abba, Father.”

Adoption changes the relationship. The saved man no longer approaches God merely as Judge dealing with a condemned sinner; he approaches Him as Father because Christ has settled the condemnation. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace with God is not a temporary ceasefire renewed every twenty-four hours if conduct remains acceptable. Justification is God’s judicial declaration based upon Christ’s righteousness, not a prize awarded for consistent behavior. If eternal life depends upon the believer preserving it, then eternal life has been given an expiration date and somebody needs to explain why Scripture called it eternal.

But adoption never means equality with the Father. A son receives access, affection, inheritance, care, and family standing, yet the father remains the father. Some modern ideas of intimacy with God become so casual that reverence is treated as though it belonged to an inferior stage of Christianity. The believer is encouraged to think of God almost as a spiritual companion who exists to affirm every emotional need. Scripture gives something far richer. “Abba, Father” means closeness without contempt, assurance without arrogance, intimacy without irreverence. A man may enter the family room, but he has not become head of the house.

2. ETERNAL SECURITY DOES NOT MEAN ETERNAL PERMISSION

Romans 6 anticipated the argument long before modern Christianity perfected it: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Paul’s answer was not a theological seminar. “God forbid” (Romans 6:1-2). Grace is never presented as God’s permission for the Christian to cultivate the very sins from which Christ redeemed him. The believer has died with Christ positionally and is commanded to reckon himself “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). Salvation establishes a new relationship to sin. Sin may remain present, but it has lost the right to be treated as master.

The error is easy to expose. If a father told his son, “You will always be my son,” no sane person would interpret that as, “Therefore burn the house, steal from your mother, curse

everybody at dinner, and live however you please.” Security in relationship is not permission for rebellion. In fact, security makes rebellion more shameful because the one being dishonored is the one who loves you. The believer does not obey in order to become a son; he obeys because he is one. Grace did not weaken the obligations of gratitude. It strengthened them. Paul writes, “ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

A Christian who uses eternal security as an excuse for sin understands neither security nor grace. He has taken one of the sweetest assurances in Scripture and turned it into a pillow for the flesh. Titus 2:11-12 says the grace that brings salvation teaches believers “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly.” Grace has a classroom, and its curriculum includes denial. The modern idea that grace means God has stopped caring how Christians live would astonish Paul. Grace does not teach the believer how much mud he may roll in without losing heaven. It teaches him that heaven purchased him too dearly to make mud his home.

3. “WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING”

Philippians 2:12 is frequently mishandled because people read “work out your own salvation” and imagine Paul has suddenly contradicted everything he taught about justification by faith. He did not say work for your salvation. He said work it out. The Philippians were already “saints in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:1). Paul was addressing saved people and urging them to bring the reality of God’s work in them into practical expression. Verse 13 explains the source: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God works in; the believer works out. Salvation is received by faith, then manifested through obedient living.

Why “fear and trembling”? Because Christian living matters. A believer should not handle divine truth as though he were rearranging furniture in a room nobody owns. God is at work in him. The Christian life involves the reputation of Christ, the influence of the gospel, the health of the local church, the testimony before the lost, the shaping of a family, and an eventual appearance before Christ. Casualness is therefore inappropriate. A surgeon may possess complete confidence that he is employed by the hospital and still handle the operation with trembling seriousness. Security in his position does not make the patient unimportant. The believer’s position in Christ should increase carefulness, not eliminate it.

Paul immediately applies the command to ordinary conduct: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings” (Philippians 2:14). That is wonderfully inconvenient. We might prefer fear and trembling to mean something mystical, but Paul takes it into complaining and arguments. Practical salvation shows itself at the level of the mouth and attitude. He

wants believers to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke” while shining “as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). The man who claims to fear God while poisoning every room with complaining has somehow misplaced the trembling before reaching verse 14. Godly fear eventually reaches ordinary Tuesday behavior.

4. THE FATHER WHO LOVES HIS CHILDREN ALSO CHASTENS THEM

Hebrews 12 gives one of the clearest explanations of divine chastening: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). Notice that chastening is connected with love, not rejection. God disciplines believers because they are sons. The passage even argues that absence of chastening would call sonship into question. Modern Christianity sometimes speaks as though divine correction is incompatible with grace, but Hebrews says it is evidence of fatherhood. Apparently a loving Father can do something more substantial than nod sympathetically while His children destroy themselves.

Chastening is not eternal condemnation. That distinction must remain sharp. The believer does not suffer fatherly discipline in order to pay for sin judicially; Christ paid the price of redemption at Calvary. Chastening concerns fellowship, conduct, correction, training, and the believer’s earthly walk. Hebrews says God chastens “for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10). God is not settling Calvary’s unfinished account because there is no unfinished account. He is correcting His child because holiness matters inside the family. A spanking from a father and a sentence from a judge are not the same thing, even if both make the recipient reconsider his decisions.

This gives godly fear practical teeth. A Christian should not imagine that he can deliberately sow rebellion indefinitely without consequences simply because hell is no longer his destination. Galatians 6:7 warns believers, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The seed bag is free to the believer, but the harvest still knows what was planted. Sin can damage health, marriage, reputation, usefulness, finances, conscience, testimony, and fellowship. The Father may intervene with chastening precisely because He refuses to abandon the child to foolishness. Love sometimes hugs. Love sometimes uses a rod. Both can come from the same Father.

5. “PASS THE TIME OF YOUR SOJOURNING HERE IN FEAR”

First Peter 1:17 says, “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Again, Fatherhood and fear occupy the same verse. Peter does not think calling God Father gives believers permission to become spiritually careless. Quite the opposite. Because the Father judges impartially, the Christian is to live his earthly pilgrimage with reverence.

Salvation gives the believer a home in heaven, but while sojourning here he remains accountable for how he represents the One who purchased him.

The context makes the reason even stronger. Peter reminds believers that they were not redeemed “with corruptible things, as silver and gold,” but “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The price of redemption becomes an argument for holy living. A man who understands what his salvation cost should not treat the life Christ purchased like a disposable napkin. Calvary does not make sin lighter; Calvary shows how heavy sin really is. If rebellion were a harmless personality quirk, the Son of God would not have needed to shed His blood. The cross tells the saved man two things at once: you are deeply loved, and sin is deadly serious.

“Sojourning” also reminds the believer that this present world is temporary. Christians get into trouble when they start furnishing the motel room as though they own the building. First Peter repeatedly directs their attention toward an inheritance “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 1:4). The fear of God loosens the grip of earthly approval because the believer knows he will answer somewhere else. Reputation here is temporary. Popularity here is temporary. Money here is temporary. The applause of men dies at the grave. A wise Christian lives with the next world in view before this one convinces him to trade eternity for a weekend.

6. THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST MAKES CHRISTIAN LIVING SERIOUS

Second Corinthians 5:10 states plainly, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Paul includes himself: “we.” This is not the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20, where the unsaved dead are judged and cast into the lake of fire. The believer’s eternal salvation is not being retried. The Judgment Seat of Christ concerns the believer’s service and conduct. Paul says each one will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” A saved man does not face hell there, but he does face evaluation.

First Corinthians 3 explains that the believer’s work will be tried “of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13). Gold, silver, and precious stones withstand the fire; wood, hay, and stubble do not. Some believers receive reward. Others “shall suffer loss,” though Paul immediately adds, “but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15). That verse is eternal security with smoke coming off the Christian’s coat. The man is saved. His wasted work is not. Scripture could hardly make the distinction clearer. Salvation is secure, reward is conditional, and service will be examined.

Second Corinthians 5:11 follows the Judgment Seat statement with, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” Paul’s ministry possessed urgency because

divine evaluation was real. A Christian who remembers the Judgment Seat stops treating time as though it were endlessly renewable. Opportunities expire. Influence passes. Strength diminishes. Doors close. Someday the last sermon will be preached, the last prayer offered, the last gift given, the last witness spoken, and the account will be complete. A believer should not live terrified of losing salvation, but he ought to live seriously enough to care what Christ will say about the life salvation produced.

7. GODLY FEAR PRESERVES BOTH ASSURANCE AND OBEDIENCE

The great doctrinal balance is not difficult once Scripture is permitted to speak plainly. Romans 8 gives assurance. Hebrews 12 gives chastening. First Corinthians 3 gives reward and loss. Philippians 2 gives fear and trembling. First Peter 1 gives sojourning in fear. None of these passages needs to be erased to save the others. The believer is eternally secure and presently accountable. He is accepted in Christ and commanded to pursue holiness. He possesses peace with God and is still warned against grieving the Holy Spirit. Biblical doctrine is strong enough to hold two truths at once without dropping either one on the floor.

Ephesians 4:30 tells believers, “grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” That single verse beautifully contains security and accountability. The Spirit can be grieved, yet the believer is sealed “unto the day of redemption.” Some systems want the first half without the second: grieve Him and you are lost. Others behave as though the second half cancels the first: sealed, therefore grieving Him does not matter. God says both. You are sealed. Do not grieve Him. Security is not an excuse to mistreat the One guaranteeing it.

The mature believer therefore obeys neither from slavish panic nor careless presumption. Love and fear work together. Second Corinthians 5:14 says, “the love of Christ constraineth us.” Hebrews 12:28 says serve “with reverence and godly fear.” Love draws; fear steadies. Love makes obedience desirable; fear makes rebellion serious. One keeps the Christian from viewing God as a tyrant waiting to condemn him; the other keeps him from treating God as an indulgent uncle who hands out grace while ignoring the furniture being smashed. The Father’s arms are open, but His throne has not disappeared.

CONCLUSION

The believer has “not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Romans 8:15). That truth should be preached until every saved man understands that Christ does not half-save anybody. The blood is sufficient. The Spirit seals. The Father adopts. Eternal life is eternal. There is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, and nothing can separate them from the love of God in Him. Christian assurance is not arrogance when it rests upon the promises

of God. A believer may sleep at night without wondering whether heaven recalculated his salvation after yesterday's failures. His confidence rests in Christ, not in the flawless performance of the flesh.

But that same believer should wake in the morning remembering that his Father is holy. He should "pass the time" of his sojourning here "in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). He should work out salvation "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). He should remember chastening, the Judgment Seat of Christ, reward, loss, testimony, stewardship, and the cost of Calvary. Eternal security settles where he is going. It does not make irrelevant what he does on the way there. A train ticket guarantees the destination; it does not give the passenger permission to set fire to the car.

Grace and accountability are therefore not enemies. They belong to the same household. The Father who says, "You are Mine," also says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). The Saviour who promises eternal life will also examine the believer's work. The Holy Spirit who seals the saint can be grieved by the saint. That is the mature fear of the Lord: not the condemned fear of a criminal expecting hell, but the reverent fear of a son who knows his Father is holy, his life has been purchased, his conduct matters, and a day of accounting is coming. Eternal security is not eternal permission to rebel. It is eternal reason to be grateful enough to obey.

10 of 10 — The Fear of the Lord — When Men Stop Fearing God, They Begin Fearing Everything Else

Key Passage: "Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." (Isaiah 8:12-13)

Isaiah 8 exposes one of the strangest exchanges fallen man ever makes: he refuses to fear the Almighty and then spends the rest of his life frightened by creatures. Judah faced political pressure, military danger, conspiracy, invasion, and the threatening movements of nations around her. In that historical and prophetic setting, God told Isaiah not to adopt the fear governing the people: "neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid." Then He supplied the alternative: "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." God did not tell Isaiah that nothing dangerous existed. Armies were real. Judgment was real. Trouble was coming. He told him where fear belonged. Once the LORD of hosts occupied His rightful place, everything beneath Him could be measured correctly.

That principle runs through Scripture. Men imagine that removing the fear of God will make them free, relaxed, independent, and enlightened. It does the opposite. When the great fear disappears, a thousand little fears rush in to fill the vacancy. Men fear other men. They fear rejection. They fear losing money, health, status, influence, security, youth, possessions, relationships, employment, popularity, and control. They fear tomorrow before tomorrow arrives and death before death knocks. They fear what strangers may write about them on a screen. They fear missing something, losing something, being excluded from something, or discovering that somebody somewhere disapproves of them. The man who announces that he fears no God often spends his days trembling before things God made.

The cure is not pretending danger does not exist. Biblical courage is not closing your eyes, clenching your fists, and repeating that everything will work out exactly as you prefer. Faith does not deny the lion; it remembers who made lions. It does not deny the furnace; it remembers who can walk through fire. It does not deny death; it remembers who rose from it. The fear of the LORD restores spiritual proportion. God becomes God again, men become men again, circumstances become circumstances again, and tomorrow returns to being one more day under divine authority. A shadow can terrify a child until the light comes on. The fear of God turns on the light.

1. ISAIAH REFUSED TO FEAR WHAT EVERYBODY ELSE FEARED

Isaiah's generation was full of political fear. Judah looked at surrounding powers, alliances, armies, and threats and began calculating survival according to human strength. Isaiah 8 warns against joining the people's fear. "Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy." The immediate setting belongs to Judah, Syria, Israel, Assyria, and the historical judgments surrounding that period; it should not be torn from its setting and converted into a slogan about every modern political alliance. But the spiritual principle is unmistakable: God's servant was not to let the panic of the crowd determine the size of his God.

Fear is contagious. Put ten frightened people in a room and soon the eleventh man begins wondering what he forgot to fear. One rumor multiplies, one headline expands, one whispered possibility becomes certainty, and before long everyone is staring in the same direction while forgetting to look up. Isaiah was told to break that cycle by sanctifying "the LORD of hosts himself." To sanctify Him in this sense is to set Him apart in the mind as the One who deserves the highest place. When God is reduced to one concern among many, every crisis competes successfully for attention. When He is enthroned, crises lose their ability to impersonate deity.

This is where many Christians surrender before any actual enemy arrives. They absorb the world's fears without filtering them through Scripture. The world panics, so they panic. The market drops, so peace drops with it. Culture threatens, so they behave as though Christ misplaced His throne. A powerful man speaks, and believers act as though God just received unexpected news. Isaiah's command remains instructive: do not borrow somebody else's terror. The crowd can be sincerely frightened and sincerely wrong about what deserves ultimate fear. Panic is not prophecy merely because many people share it.

2. THE FEAR OF MAN BECOMES A SNARE

Proverbs 29:25 states the matter plainly: "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." A snare traps by concealment. Fear of man usually does not introduce itself as idolatry. It sounds respectable. "I do not want to offend anybody." "I need them to approve." "What if they misunderstand me?" "What if I lose the relationship?" "What if they criticize me?" Each question may concern something real, but once human reaction becomes the governing standard, the trap has closed. A man who must always be liked cannot always tell the truth.

Saul gives a painful example. After disobeying God concerning Amalek, he confessed to Samuel, "I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24). A king feared his own subjects. He wore the crown, but public opinion held the leash. That is what fear of man does. It can make pastors afraid of members, parents afraid of children, employers afraid of employees, Christians afraid of unbelievers, and leaders afraid of followers. The position may look authoritative while the soul underneath is begging for approval. A man can sit in the largest chair in the room and still be everybody's servant.

The fear of God breaks the snare because it settles whose judgment finally matters. Paul wrote, "if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). That does not authorize rudeness or make needless offense a virtue. Christians should be gracious, honest, charitable, and wise. But pleasing men cannot outrank serving Christ. Once those two commands collide, one must yield. A believer who has already decided that God gets the final vote becomes difficult to manipulate. You cannot easily control a man with applause once he has learned that applause is not the Judgment Seat of Christ.

3. FEAR OF REJECTION SHRINKS WHEN GOD'S ACCEPTANCE BECOMES REAL

Many people live under the fear of rejection. They shape personality, speech, appearance, convictions, friendships, and even doctrine around the need to be accepted. Rejection hurts because human beings were made for relationship, and Scripture never mocks that pain. Paul himself knew abandonment, writing that at his first answer "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me" (2 Timothy 4:16). Yet the next verse changes the atmosphere

entirely: “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:17). Everybody left. Somebody remained. The Somebody who remained mattered more.

The fear of rejection becomes tyrannical when human acceptance is treated as proof of worth. Then every disagreement feels like catastrophe. Every criticism becomes an identity crisis. Every lost friendship feels like judgment. But the saved believer is already “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). His standing before God rests in Christ, not in a public vote. That does not make human relationships meaningless; it puts them in their proper place. A believer can grieve rejection without being destroyed by it because rejection from man cannot cancel acceptance in Christ.

This is one reason the fear of God produces backbone. If men can threaten a Christian with exclusion and make him surrender truth, they have discovered his price. Some prices are paid in money; others are paid in approval. Christ warned that faithfulness could bring division even within households, and New Testament believers repeatedly experienced social and religious rejection. The Christian should never manufacture unnecessary conflict, but neither should he purchase belonging by selling conviction. Better to stand alone with truth than sit comfortably in a crowd that required a lie as the admission price.

4. FEAR OF CIRCUMSTANCES GROWS WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES BECOME GOD-SIZED

Circumstances become terrifying when they fill the entire field of vision. Israel saw Goliath and measured him against themselves. David saw Goliath and measured him against “the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26). Same giant, different ruler. Israel saw nine feet of military experience. David saw an uncircumcised Philistine defying God. Fear magnifies whatever it studies. Spend all day staring at the problem and by evening it will have acquired several new floors, a parking garage, and a gift shop. The fear of God corrects the scale.

Paul learned this principle through circumstances that were anything but easy. He endured beatings, imprisonments, shipwreck, hunger, danger, false brethren, opposition, and physical weakness. Yet he wrote, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair” (2 Corinthians 4:8). Trouble existed. Perplexity existed. Despair did not get the final word. Why? Because Paul looked beyond “the things which are seen” to “the things which are not seen” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Visible circumstances had an expiration date. Eternal realities did not.

The Christian who fears God can therefore say, “This situation is serious, but it is not sovereign.” That sentence alone puts half the demons of panic out of work. The diagnosis is not sovereign. The lawsuit is not sovereign. The employer is not sovereign. The economy is not sovereign. The family crisis is not sovereign. Nothing visible has secretly ascended to God’s throne while He was occupied elsewhere. Romans 8:28 does not promise that every

circumstance feels good; it says God works through all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Providence may be mysterious. It is never absent.

5. FEAR OF TOMORROW IS THE TAX MAN PAYS FOR TRYING TO BE OMNISCIENT

Tomorrow frightens people because they cannot see it, control it, or guarantee its outcome. So the mind tries to manufacture omniscience by imagining every possibility. What if this happens? What if that fails? What if the money runs out? What if the phone rings? What if the test comes back badly? What if somebody leaves? The imagination holds committee meetings about disasters that have not occurred and then bills the body for the stress. Jesus said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (Matthew 6:34). Tomorrow already has enough trouble without importing it into today.

Church Age instruction gives the same practical direction. Philippians 4:6 says, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” The answer to anxious care is not denial but prayer. The believer takes the unknown future and places it before the known God. Verse 7 then promises “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” Notice that peace does not require complete understanding. If peace depended upon understanding everything, nobody would sleep until the Millennium.

The fear of God helps because the believer understands that tomorrow will not arrive before God gets there. We experience time sequentially; God is never surprised by the next hour. Psalm 139 declares His knowledge of our thoughts, words, path, and days. The Christian therefore does not need the gift of prophecy to make it through Tuesday. He needs daily bread, sufficient grace, and enough light for the next step. Fear of tomorrow is often the price man pays for demanding a ten-mile floodlight when God handed him a lamp for his feet.

6. FEAR OF LOSS LOSES POWER WHEN WE REMEMBER WHAT CANNOT BE KEPT ANYWAY

Much fear comes from the possibility of losing something: money, health, beauty, property, influence, employment, reputation, relationships, independence, or life itself. The world tells us to secure everything, preserve everything, insure everything, control everything, and then quietly admits that death eventually takes the entire collection. Job stated the obvious truth men spend fortunes avoiding: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither” (Job 1:21). Nobody has ever seen a hearse pulling a moving van into eternity.

The Christian is not commanded to become careless with earthly responsibilities. Scripture teaches work, provision, stewardship, family responsibility, and wise planning. But stewardship is different from worship. First Timothy 6:17 warns believers not to “trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.” Riches are uncertain by definition. Health is uncertain. Careers are uncertain. Investments are uncertain. Reputation can disappear because one person lied convincingly. If peace is chained to things that can vanish overnight, peace has been chained to a getaway car.

Jesus Christ gives the believer something loss cannot reach. Colossians 3:3 says, “your life is hid with Christ in God.” Romans 8 says tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword cannot separate the believer from the love of God in Christ. The world can take possessions. It cannot repossess eternal life. It can take comfort. It cannot erase adoption. It can take a job. It cannot fire the Holy Ghost. It can take the body through death. It cannot keep the body in the grave forever. Once eternal things become weightier, temporary losses stop behaving like eternal catastrophes.

7. FEAR OF DEATH IS BROKEN BY THE ONE WHO WALKED OUT OF THE GRAVE

Death is the great fear beneath many smaller fears. Men fear disease because it may lead to death. They fear aging because it moves them toward death. They fear losing control because death is the final earthly loss of control. Hebrews 2:14-15 says Christ took part of flesh and blood so that through death He might destroy “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” and “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Fear of death is described as bondage. Christ came to break it.

For the lost man, death should not be treated casually because judgment follows. Hebrews 9:27 says, “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Salvation is therefore not psychological reassurance about mortality; it is rescue through the finished work of Jesus Christ. But for the saved believer, death has lost its condemning sting. Paul could say, “to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21), not because death itself became pleasant, but because “to depart, and to be with Christ” was “far better” (Philippians 1:23). Death could remove Paul from earth. It could not remove him from Christ.

First Corinthians 15 therefore taunts death with resurrection truth: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). The grave is temporary housing for the believer’s body, not the final landlord. At the Rapture, the dead in Christ shall rise and living believers shall be changed (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The Christian may still feel natural apprehension about dying, pain, separation, or the unknown details of the process. Courage does not require pretending the grave looks cheerful. It requires knowing the grave cannot hold title to what Christ purchased.

CONCLUSION

Isaiah's command brings the entire series back to the central issue: "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13). The world will always manufacture another reason to panic. One crisis fades and another appears. One threatening ruler leaves and another arrives. One financial concern passes and another bill comes. One disease is treated and another bodily weakness appears. If peace requires the disappearance of every frightening circumstance, peace will remain permanently postponed. The answer is not a fear-free world. The answer is a God-filled vision.

When men stop fearing God, they do not become fearless. They become available for smaller fears. Public opinion takes a piece. Tomorrow takes another. Money takes another. Health, rejection, politics, death, criticism, and uncertainty divide the remainder until the man who boasted of independence is serving twenty masters. Proverbs 29:25 was right all along: "The fear of man bringeth a snare." But Proverbs 14:26 was equally right: "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence." The Bible's great irony is that the fear which looks restrictive becomes liberating, while the fearlessness man advertises becomes bondage.

So end the matter where Scripture begins it: fear God. Fear Him enough that men become smaller. Fear Him enough that tomorrow can wait until tomorrow. Fear Him enough that loss cannot purchase your obedience. Fear Him enough that public opinion loses its throne. Fear Him enough that death itself must stand beneath resurrection. The believer who truly fears the LORD does not become a nervous man hiding from life. He becomes a man whose fears have finally been put in order. The creatures around him stop looking quite so large because the Creator has returned to His proper magnitude. And once God is seen as God, everything else finds its proper size.

Conclusion — The Fear of the Lord — The Missing Ingredient in Modern Christianity

The fear of the Lord is not a minor doctrine tucked away in the dark corner of the Old Testament for preachers who enjoy making people uncomfortable. It runs through the Bible like steel through concrete. It begins knowledge, produces wisdom, cleanses conduct, drives men away from evil, strengthens homes, steadies churches, corrects worship, gives courage, and puts every lesser fear in its proper place. Take the fear of God out of Christianity and you do not make Christianity warmer. You make it weaker. You do not make grace brighter. You make sin cheaper. You do not make believers freer. You simply trade one

holy fear for twenty miserable ones. The Bible knew that long before modern religion discovered mood lighting.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). That is where this entire series began, and it is where the matter must end. If a man starts wrong there, everything downstream gets crooked. He can possess intelligence without wisdom, information without discernment, theology without reverence, and religion without God. The problem with fallen man has never been merely that he does not know enough. Romans 3:18 says, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” The great problem is not lack of data. It is lack of proper relation to the One who gave truth meaning in the first place.

Once the fear of God disappears, man does what man always does when there is an empty throne—he sits down on it. Then his feelings become law, his preferences become doctrine, his experiences become evidence, his opinions become judgments, and his conscience becomes the supreme court of the universe. It is an impressive arrangement until death walks into the room. A man can declare himself autonomous for seventy years, but the grave has a remarkable way of reminding him he never owned the property.

The fear of the Lord begins by restoring proportion. God is God. Man is not. That is deep theology simple enough for a child and offensive enough for a philosopher. The creature does not correct the Creator. The clay does not lecture the Potter. The grass does not convene a committee to revise the rain. Isaiah 40 asks, “To whom then will ye liken God?” (Isaiah 40:18). The answer is nobody. He is not the largest member of our category. He is in a category by Himself. Until that truth settles into the soul, reverence will always remain weak.

That reverence immediately affects sin because “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13). A Christianity that can tolerate everything eventually stands for nothing. Biblical love is not a moral fog where every distinction disappears. God loves righteousness and hates iniquity. The believer who claims to love God while becoming increasingly comfortable with what God condemns has a contradiction to explain. The fear of God will not allow him to keep calling darkness a decorating preference.

Sin looks different when God looks large. Lust is no longer entertainment. Pride is no longer personality. Bitterness is no longer self-care. Greed is no longer ambition. Rebellion is no longer authenticity. Gossip is no longer concern. Worldliness is no longer relevance. Once fear returns, the old Bible words start working again because the conscience has stopped negotiating with the dictionary.

That is why “by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). There is something wonderfully practical about that verse. Men depart. They leave. They back up.

They shut the door. They end the conversation. They turn off the screen. They walk away from the temptation. They stop pretending they are spiritually mature enough to stand ankle-deep in gasoline while playing with matches.

Joseph did not defeat temptation by holding a symposium on emotional needs. He said, “how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). That is the fear of God in one sentence. Potiphar could not see. God could. Joseph feared the right Person, and that made the decision easier. The man who fears God does not need a police officer behind every curtain because conscience has learned that heaven does not have blind spots.

The fear of God also cleans. Psalm 19:9 says, “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever.” It reaches where reputation cannot reach. A church can clean a man’s vocabulary in public. Social pressure can clean his behavior around respectable people. Fear of embarrassment can clean up his visible habits. But only the fear of God gets into the locked room, the hidden thought, the private resentment, the secret appetite, the unseen browser, and the motive behind the ministry.

Second Corinthians 7:1 tells believers to cleanse themselves “from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Flesh and spirit. Outside and inside. God is not satisfied with a man who looks clean from the sidewalk while the basement smells like a sewer. The fear of God turns on lights where men prefer curtains.

Grace never made filth harmless. Grace made forgiveness possible. There is a difference. Titus 2:11-12 says grace teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Grace is not God lowering the standard. Grace is God saving sinners who could not meet it and then teaching them to live like people who have been bought with blood. “Ye are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Something that expensive ought not be treated like yard-sale merchandise.

The fear of God also produces one of Scripture’s strangest blessings: confidence. “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26). The world thinks fearing God makes men timid. Scripture shows men fearing God and then walking into lions’ dens, courts, prisons, battlefields, and hostile assemblies. The difference is simple. Once the highest Authority has been settled, lower authorities lose some of their power to intimidate.

Daniel feared God, so Babylon could not own his conscience. Peter and John feared God, so the council could threaten but could not command their silence. Paul feared God, so prison walls became a place to sing. David feared God, so Goliath remained large but not ultimate. The fear of God does not shrink the giant physically. It shrinks him proportionally.

The man who does not fear God does not become fearless. He merely gets frightened by smaller things. “The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25). Men fear criticism, rejection, exclusion, poverty, aging, disease, public opinion, tomorrow, the economy, the government, the neighbor, the boss, the child, the audience, and the possibility that somebody on the internet may disapprove. They reject one King and spend their lives paying tribute to a hundred petty rulers.

Isaiah 8 gives the answer: “neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear” (Isaiah 8:12-13). God does not tell His people there is nothing dangerous. He tells them not to give danger divine status. A problem can be serious without being sovereign. A man can be powerful without being Almighty. A disease can be frightening without becoming Lord. Tomorrow can be uncertain to us without being uncertain to God.

The fear of God also reaches the home. Proverbs 14:26 says, “his children shall have a place of refuge.” A home where God is feared has something stronger than tradition holding it together. Parents know they answer to Someone higher. Children learn that truth does not change because moods change. Discipline becomes more than anger. Authority becomes more than control. Marriage becomes more than convenience. Money becomes stewardship. Speech becomes accountable. The television loses the right to disciple the family without inspection.

Children know what their parents really worship. They watch what the family rearranges its schedule for. They watch what Dad gets angry about. They watch what Mom fears. They listen to what is said at home after church. They know whether the Bible is authority or decoration. They know whether God is Lord or merely an honored guest who is expected to leave before the weekend gets inconvenient.

A father who fears God learns that leadership is not strutting around the house announcing that he is the head. Christ is the Head over him. A mother who fears God understands that nurturing is not worshipping a child’s moods. Both understand that parenting means preparing souls, not merely producing happy memories. A family can laugh, travel, celebrate, play, and enjoy life while God remains first. Reverence is not gloom. Order is not misery.

The fear of God also corrects worship. “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11). Rejoicing and trembling belong in the same verse because true worship knows both joy and majesty. The Bible never teaches that reverence requires dead services, but neither does it teach that excitement proves spirituality. Volume is not

anointing. Emotion is not automatically worship. A crowd can be moved without God being honored.

Hebrews 12:28 commands believers to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” That word “acceptably” should bother every ministry that thinks sincerity settles everything. Acceptable to whom? God. The congregation does not get the final vote. The preacher does not get the final vote. The worship team does not get the final vote. The culture outside certainly does not get the final vote. God determines what honors God.

When fear leaves worship, performance moves in. The preacher becomes a personality. The platform becomes a stage. The congregation becomes an audience. Music becomes atmosphere. Truth becomes content. God becomes subject matter. Everybody discusses how powerful the service felt without asking whether anything in the life actually changed.

Heaven has no such confusion. The creatures around the throne cry, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 4:8). Elders fall down. Crowns come off. The Lamb is declared worthy. Heaven is filled with joy, music, praise, and glory, but nobody there is casual about God. Earth has somehow become sophisticated enough to do what heaven never does: become familiar with holiness.

The fear of God must therefore return to the church. Acts 9:31 says the churches were “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Fear and comfort together. Holiness and encouragement together. Reverence and grace together. Modern Christianity loves false choices because false choices make compromise easier. Scripture refuses them.

Acts 5 is a permanent warning that God takes His church seriously. Ananias and Sapphira lied, and great fear came upon the church. That exact apostolic judgment is not the weekly operating procedure of the present local church, but the holiness behind it has not expired. God still sees hypocrisy. God still sees hidden sin. God still sees leaders protecting reputations, congregations excusing rebellion, ministries burying truth, and Christians confusing grace with immunity.

A church that fears attendance more than God will eventually soften doctrine. A church that fears donors more than God will eventually compromise discipline. A church that fears culture more than God will eventually rename sin. A church that fears bad publicity more than God will eventually hide what should have been brought into the light. Once the fear of man enters the boardroom, compromise starts asking for a key.

The preacher especially needs godly fear. Paul told Timothy to preach the Word because the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine. That time was not scheduled to end with the first century. A preacher who requires applause will eventually

edit the Book. The crowd is a terrible master because it keeps changing its mind. Better to answer to One Judge with an unchanging Word.

The fear of God does not make a preacher mean. It should make him faithful. There is a difference. Meanness enjoys hurting people. Faithfulness tells the truth because truth helps people. A surgeon is not cruel because the knife is sharp. He is cruel if he knows cancer is present and refuses to cut because the patient may object to the incision.

The fear of God also puts salvation and accountability in their proper places. The believer is saved by grace through faith, sealed by the Spirit, justified by Christ, and secure in Him. Romans 8:15 says we have not received “the spirit of bondage again to fear.” That condemned fear is gone. The saved man is not hanging over hell by a thread tied to yesterday’s performance.

But the New Testament still says, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). It still says, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17). It still says, “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6). It still says, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Security and accountability are not enemies. A son may be secure in the family and still answer to his father.

The Judgment Seat of Christ ought to put seriousness back into Christian living. First Corinthians 3 says a believer’s work can be burned while the man himself is saved, “yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15). Salvation is secure. Reward is not automatic. That ought to end the childish argument that eternal security means conduct does not matter. Heaven may be certain, but what happens when we get there is not irrelevant.

Some believers seem determined to arrive at the Judgment Seat carrying enough wood, hay, and stubble to start a bonfire visible from three dispensations away. Scripture gives a better ambition. Paul wanted to finish his course. He wanted to keep the faith. He wanted a crown. The Christian life is not about sneaking into heaven with the minimum amount of obedience necessary. Christ did not purchase us so we could spend eternity explaining how efficiently we wasted what He bought.

And then comes the final irony of the whole series: when men stop fearing God, they begin fearing everything else. Isaiah warned his generation not to fear what everyone around them feared. That message still exposes the human heart. Fear follows worship. Whatever you believe can destroy your life begins to exercise power over you. Whatever you believe must approve you begins to govern you. Whatever you believe you cannot live without begins to own you.

Fear of rejection owns people. Fear of poverty owns people. Fear of sickness owns people. Fear of death owns people. Fear of losing influence owns people. Fear of being misunderstood owns people. Fear of government owns people. Fear of social disapproval owns people. Fear of children's reactions owns parents. Fear of congregations owns preachers. Fear of customers owns businesses. Fear of tomorrow owns people who have not even finished today.

The man who fears God gets these fears back into order. He may still feel concern. He may still experience natural fear. David said, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56:3). Biblical courage is not emotional numbness. It is obedience while fear is present. It is trusting while the knees shake. It is remembering God when the circumstances still look large.

Death itself finally stands beneath the fear of God. Hebrews 2 says men live in bondage through fear of death, but Christ entered death and defeated it. For the believer, the grave is not the end. "To die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). The dead in Christ shall rise (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The body may go into the ground, but Christ has already served notice on the cemetery.

Once resurrection becomes real, a tremendous amount of this world's intimidation loses leverage. What can the world threaten a saved man with permanently? Poverty? Temporary. Rejection? Temporary. Sickness? Temporary. Death? Temporary. The Christian owns an inheritance "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 1:4). Men can take things. They cannot take Christ.

That is why the fear of the Lord is not bondage. It is liberation from inferior masters. The man who fears God can tell the truth because people are not his judge. He can refuse sin because pleasure is not his god. He can endure loss because possessions are not his life. He can face death because the grave is not final. He can stand alone because Christ has not left him.

Modern Christianity needs the fear of God again, not as a slogan but as a governing reality. It needs it in pulpits. It needs it in homes. It needs it in worship. It needs it in private conduct. It needs it in leadership. It needs it in doctrine. It needs it in finances, entertainment, marriages, parenting, speech, sexuality, friendships, ministry, and every place where Christians have learned to ask what they can get away with instead of what pleases God.

We do not need a manufactured revival that produces two weeks of excitement and leaves the secret sins untouched. We need men who tremble at the Word again. We need women who fear God more than culture. We need churches that fear losing holiness more than

losing attendance. We need parents who fear failing God more than disappointing children. We need preachers who would rather empty a pew with truth than fill it with lies.

Revival does not begin when the music gets louder. It begins when excuses get quieter. It begins when the Bible wins an argument inside a man. It begins when somebody stops calling sin a struggle and starts calling it sin. It begins when confession becomes specific, repentance becomes visible, and obedience costs something.

“The fear of the LORD is clean” (Psalm 19:9). “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13). “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26). “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). Those are not contradictory statements. They are different sides of the same diamond. Fear cleans because God is holy. Fear hates evil because God hates evil. Fear gives confidence because God is greater than man. Fear drives men from sin because God’s judgment is real.

The fear of God does not contradict His love. It proves we understand His love correctly. A God who loves without holiness is not the God of Scripture. A God who forgives without justice is not the God of Calvary. The cross shows both at once. Sin was so serious that blood had to be shed, and love was so great that God gave His Son. Calvary is where cheap grace goes to die.

The fear of God does not contradict intimacy. The believer can cry, “Abba, Father,” without climbing onto the throne. We are children, not equals. We are loved, not sovereign. We are accepted, not autonomous. We are secure, not untouchable by chastening. The Father’s house is safe precisely because the Father still rules it.

The fear of God does not contradict joy. “Rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11). Christian joy becomes deeper when God becomes greater. Shallow gods produce shallow worship. A God small enough never to frighten you is probably small enough never to save you either. The God of Scripture is holy enough to make seraphim cover their faces and gracious enough to invite redeemed sinners near.

The fear of God does not contradict courage. It creates courage. The man who fears God properly no longer needs everybody else’s permission to obey. He can lose applause and keep peace. He can lose popularity and keep truth. He can lose possessions and keep Christ. He can lose the world and still inherit eternity.

So let the fear of the Lord return to its proper place. Put it back at the beginning of knowledge. Put it back in the conscience. Put it back in the home. Put it back behind the pulpit. Put it back in worship. Put it back in the private room. Put it back in the Christian’s understanding of grace. Put it back before the Judgment Seat. Put it back where public opinion has been sitting.

Fear God more than you fear men. Fear God more than you fear rejection. Fear God more than you fear the future. Fear God more than you fear loss. Fear God more than you fear sickness. Fear God more than you fear death. Once He becomes the greatest reality, everything beneath Him becomes smaller without becoming unreal.

And that is the final lesson of this series. The fear of the Lord is not the missing ingredient because Christianity forgot an obscure theological detail. It is missing because modern religion has spent years making God manageable. We have tried to domesticate the Almighty, soften His warnings, sentimentalize His grace, market His Son, package His worship, and protect people from trembling. We succeeded only in making ourselves smaller.

God never needed to be made safe. He needed to be believed.

He never needed to be revised. He needed to be obeyed.

He never needed to be marketed. He needed to be feared.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Start there. Stay there. Build there. Let knowledge begin there, wisdom grow there, holiness develop there, courage stand there, worship bow there, homes rest there, churches recover there, and every lesser fear learn its place there. When God is feared rightly, grace becomes sweeter, sin becomes uglier, truth becomes clearer, courage becomes stronger, and the world becomes smaller.

Fear the Lord.

Not as a condemned criminal fearing hell, but as a redeemed child standing before a holy Father.

Not because Christ failed to save, but because Christ saved at infinite cost.

Not because God is cruel, but because God is God.

And once that settles into the soul, everything else finally falls into place.

"Who will not fear thee,
O Lord, and glorify thy name?
for thou only art holy: for
all nations shall come and
worship before thee; for thy
judgments are made manifest.
Revelation 15:4 (KJV)

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM, THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
Proverbs 9:10

"The fear of the LORD
endureth for ever:
his judgment are true
and righteous altogether.
Psalm 111:10 (KJV)

1. A reverent awe of His greatness, holiness, and authority
2. A deep respect that produces obedience.
3. Not terror, but a godly dread of displeasing Him.
4. It is the proper response to who God is.
5. The fear of God sees Him as He really is.



Ecclesiastes 12:13
 "Let us hear the conclusion
 of the whole matter: Fear God,
 and keep his commandments:
 for this is the whole duty of man."

1. Not a servile fear like a slave dreading a cruel master.
2. Not a hesitant, uncertain relationship with God.
3. Not mere intellectual knowledge about God.
4. Not emotionalism or momentary fright.
5. Not legalistic religion, but a heart reality.
6. Not the fear of man, which is a snare.
7. Not compatible with casual, habitual sin.



Proverbs 29:25
 "The fear of man bringeth
 a snare: but whoso putteth
 his trust in the LORD
 shall be safe." (KJV)

1. It is the beginning of true wisdom.
2. It leads to knowledge and understanding.
3. It keeps us from sin and foolishness.
4. It brings long life, peace, and prosperity.
5. It distinguishes the godly from the wicked.
6. It is the foundation of a right relationship with God.
7. It prepares us for eternity.



Proverbs 1:7
"The fear of the LORD
is the beginning of knowledge;
but fools despise wisdom
and instruction." (KJV)

1. Wisdom and understanding (Prov. 9:10).
2. Long life (Prov. 10:27).
3. Wealth, riches, and honor (Prov. 22:4).
4. Confidence in the day of death (Prov. 14:27).
5. A well-ordered family and home (Ps. 128:1-4).
6. Favor with God and man (Prov. 3:4).
7. A life that pleases God (2 Cor. 5:9).



Proverbs 22:4
"By humility and the fear
of the LORD are riches,
and honour, and life." **AMV**

THE FEAR OF GOD	THE FEAR OF MAN
• Leads to obedience • Produces wisdom • Brings life and peace • Seeks God's approval • Endures forever	• Leads to compromise • Produces a snare • Brings anxiety and bondage • Seeks man's approval • Fades and disappoints



Proverbs 14:27
 "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
 to depart from the snares of death." (KJV)

1. Abraham - feared God and obeyed (Gen. 22:12).
2. Joseph - feared God and refused sin (Gen. 39:9).
3. Moses - endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27).
4. Job - feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1).
5. Daniel - feared God above men (Dan. 6:10).
6. The early church - walked in reverence (Acts 9:31).



Acts 9:31
 "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified: and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (KJV)

1. Know God through His Word (Rom. 10:17).
2. Meditate on His holiness, power, and grace.
3. Obey His commandments (John 14:21).
4. Keep a short account with sin (Ps. 66:18).
5. Surround yourself with godly influences.
6. Pray for a deeper, reverent heart (Ps. 86:11).
7. Remember the reality of eternity (Eccl. 12:13).



Psalm 86:11
 "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth:
 unite my heart to fear thy name."

A DANGEROUS DECLINE

1. Rejection of wisdom and instruction.
2. Boldness in sin and moral decay.
3. Disrespect for God's Word and authority.
4. A hard and rebellious heart.
5. Judgment in this life and the next.
6. A society in chaos and godlessness.
7. Spiritual blindness and eternal loss.



Romans 1:28
 "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,
 God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things
 which are not convenient." (KJV)

1. It keeps us ready for the judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10).
2. It helps us live with an eternal perspective.
3. It delivers from the fear of hell.
4. It leads to a life that pleases Christ.
5. It will be rewarded forever (Rev. 2:10).



2 Corinthians 5:10
 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ:
 that every one may receive the things done in his body,
 according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

1. Do not delay – today is the day (2 Cor. 6:2).
2. Turn from sin and trust Christ.
3. Make the fear of God the foundation of your life.
4. Live to please Him, not men.
5. Finish your course with joy.



2 Corinthians 6:2
 "(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted,
 and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee:
 behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day
 of salvation.") (KJV)

"The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."
Psalm 25:14 (KJV)

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
Proverbs 9:10 (KJV)*

"The fear of the LORD endureth
for ever: his judgments are true
and righteous altogether."
Psalm 111:10 (KJV)

Psalm 111:10 (KJV)

VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES