

The Joy of Fearing God
Psalm 130:4; 2 Cor 7:1

The sermon title may strike you as odd.
How can fearing God be joyful?
I hope to convince you that it can be, or at least give you something to ponder.

I want people to come away from the sermon having a sense that it is a joyful thing to live in the fear of God. The guiding question is, “how is this good news?”
And the answer is it's good news because fearing God forms the structure or the foundation for a life well-lived. It becomes our point of reference. It holds things together when we understand how gracious God is how righteous and holy God is how loving he is.

Psalm 145:18-19

The LORD is near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.
19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;
He will also hear their cry and will save them.

A biblical concept of the fear of God enables us to hold what would appear to be contradictory things together as in the Narnia story of Aslan: “He's not safe but he's good.”

Psalm 130 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

A generation ago, Arthur Allen Leff wrote an article in the Duke Law Journal article entitled “Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law,”
Leff of Yale Law School, a brilliant unbeliever, put it bluntly with his agonized, confused, and conflicted conclusion: He is stuck in what J. Budziszewski refers to as the Leffian Quagmire that ends with the question, “Says who?”

http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3810&context=fss_papers

“It looks as if we are all we have. Given what we know about ourselves, and each other, this is an extraordinarily unappetizing prospect; looking around the world, it appears that, if all men are brothers, the ruling model is Cain and Abel. Neither reason, nor love, nor even terror, seems to have worked to make us ‘good,’ and worse than that, there is no reason why anything should...
...As things now stand, everything is up for grabs.

Nevertheless: Napalming babies is bad.
Starving the poor is wicked.
Buying and selling each other is depraved.
Those who stood up to and died resisting Hitler, Stalin, Amin, and Pol Pot – and General Custer too -
- have earned salvation.
Those who acquiesced deserve to be damned.
There is in the world such a thing as evil.
(All together now:)
Sez who?”
God help us.
(that’s the conclusion of the essay, which is worth the read – link in sermon notes)

Why would a smart guy go so far as to get wrapped up in this dilemma but not conclude that there are natural laws given by God?

<http://www.undergroundthomist.org/the-leffian-quagmire-and-others>

I think it relates to the issue that Solomon addresses in Proverbs – THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM.

Arthur Leff gathers a lot of information but he is unable to bring his own reasoning to a clear conclusion because his knowledge is incomplete. He does not leave room for God. He wrote a journal article that dances around the question of God, but he couldn't acknowledge the Creator because he showed no sense of FEAR of the Lord.

One day after I spoke at a law school about natural law, a member of the faculty approached me to state his objection: "If there really were a natural law, then there wouldn't be any fun anymore, would there?" j. Budziszewski Prof at Univ Texas

If we Fear God, then we can use all of our knowledge to glorify Him and enjoy Him.

During the course of the Ecclesiastes series we were asking the question, "What is the wise thing for me to do?"

Ecclesiastes has given the answer: Fear God and obey His commandments.

Now I want to circle back to the issue of the Fear of God, or the Fear of the Lord because it is the beginning of wisdom.

We must distinguish between two uses of the word translated "fear". One Hebrew word entails the idea of dread, wrath, etc. That's NOT what we're talking about. The other word evokes the idea of reverent affection and a desire to obey. That is the "fear" that is the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of God is a concept that is often ignored or misunderstood.

John Murray...

The fear of God in us is that frame of heart and mind which reflects our apprehension of who and what God is, and who and what God is will tolerate nothing less than totality of commitment to him.

It is orienting our lives around His Presence, Person, Promises, and revealed Purposes

- EX: coach roach on the ceiling

The FEAR OF THE LORD is seen by its Fruit...

Ps 89:7 God is greatly to be feared – i.e. a devout reverence for God.

Prov 11:7; 9:10 The fear or reverence of God is the beginning of Knowledge and Wisdom

Pro 1:7 Pro 2:5 Pro 9:10

Pro 8:13 The fear of the LORD^{H3068} is to hate^{H8130} evil:^{H7451} pride,^{H1344} and arrogancy,^{H1347} and the evil^{H7451} way...

Pro 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life and leads to humility. Pro 15:33

Pro 16:6 by the fear of the LORD *men* depart from evil and are kept from envying sinners.

Pro 23:17

Isaiah 33:6 the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure. (Isaiah 33:5-

2 Cor 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Psalms 31:19 How great is Your goodness, Which You have stored up for those who fear You, Which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, Before the sons of men!

This is one key reason why we can speak of the JOY OF FEARING God. He has stored up His goodness for those who fear Him. (Jerry Bridges)

Prov 11:7; 9:10 The fear or reverence of God is the beginning of Knowledge and Wisdom

Knowledge is more than gathering information. “it involves the ability to view that information with the right perspective and to use it for its proper end.... It is the fear of the Lord that gives us the right perspective and prompts us to use it for the right end. It is the Fear of the Lord that should determine our fundamental outlook on life.” Bridges p. 2–3

There are various elements to the fear of God. (Murray)

First there is the all-pervasive sense of the presence of God, Psalm 139 p.237

Second, there is the all-pervasive awareness of our dependence on Him and our responsibility to Him.

Thirdly, the fear of God implies our constant consciousness of relation to God as our primary relationship. All other relationships are determined by, and are to be interpreted in terms of, our relation to Him.

The first thought of The Godly Man in every circumstance is God's relation to him and his relationship to God. That is God Consciousness and that is what the fear of God entails.

Our Consciousness is not biblical unless it is conditioned by the fear of God.

The fear of God is a gracious work of the Holy Spirit. – Heb 12:28-29

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace (charis), by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe (fear); 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Jer 32:40 – It binds us to God after we receive a New Heart.

A popular definition of the fear of God is “reverential awe.” I’ve read it used by some who don’t cite where it came from – it’s like a hymn in public domain.

So what is AWE?

A dictionary definition says:

-an emotion in which dread, veneration and wonder are variously mingled.

-submissive and admiring fear inspired by authority

-A fearful reverence inspired by deity

So depending on the object of awe or the situation it could include emotions of fear, respect, admiration and amazement.

EX: a great ride at Six Flags – you get off the ride and say “That was(awesome)” – even if you’ve been screaming the whole time.

Ex: TV show “Amazing Race” - 300 ft bungie jump at Victoria Falls bridge

Obviously the word “awe” is over used to refer to an “awesome hot fudge sundae, or steak, or a song”.

Those things may be tasty or enjoyable, but do they inspire dread, wonder, submission and admiring fear? If so, then there is a real problem.

The bible tells us that there is a real problem – Rom 3:18 in describing the depth of man’s rebellion Paul writes, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

That is a theme that runs through the Bible

EX: after seeing the power of God in the plagues Pharaoh’s heart is still closed and Moses said, ‘But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the LORD God.’ – Ex 9:30

The fear of God brings the two together – He’s not safe, but He’s good.

EX: Aslan— Is he safe?

He's not safe because he has the power to crush us, but he's good, and to prove that He crushed His son.

This reverential fear is the empowering and motivating principle of a godly life. It's the missing ingredient in the Leffian Quagmire.

John Murray (great pastor, theologian) put it this way: "The fear of God is the soul of godliness" (Principles of Conduct)

He described the 'soul of godliness' as follows:

The fear of God in which godliness consists is the fear which constrains adoration and love. It is the fear which consists in awe, reverence, honor, and worship, and all of these on the highest level of exercise. It is the reflex in our consciousness of the transcendent majesty and holiness of God." Principles of Conduct

I WOULD dare to improve upon John Murray by adding that this reflex in our consciousness is not just focused on the majesty and holiness of God, but also on the amazing grace of God's mercy and forgiveness

[3] If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? [4] But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. (Psalm 130:3-4 ESV)

John Bunyan - "Godly fear flows from a sense of the love and kindness of God to the soul. Where there is no sense of hope of the kindness and mercy of God by Jesus Christ, there can be none of this fear, but rather wrath and despair, which produces a fear that is ...devilish...but godly fear flows from a sense of hope of mercy from God by Jesus Christ.

<http://www.puritandownloads.com/the-fear-of-god-by-pastor-al-martin-john-bunyan-wilhelmus-abrakel-john-murray-et-al-free-mp3s-articles-books-etc/>

Paul Tripp offers this AWE CHECK:

Awe stimulates the greatest joys and deepest sorrows in us all. Here's a simple way to do a personal awe check.

Where do you experience your biggest moments of happiness and your darkest moments of sadness?

What angers you or crushes you with disappointment?

What motivates you to continue or makes you feel like quitting?

What do you tend to envy in the lives of others, or where does jealousy make you bitter?

What makes you think your life is worth living or causes you to feel like your life is a waste?

When you say, "If only I had _____," how do you fill in the blank?

What are you willing to make sacrifices for, and what in your life just doesn't seem worth the effort?

Look at your highest joys and deepest sorrows, and you will find where you reach for awe.

The reality is that AWE or REVERENTIAL FEAR in anything other than in God leaves us empty. *Awesome stuff never satisfies.*

WISDOM BEGINS WITH THE FEAR or AWE OF THE LORD. What you make the center of your life is the source of your wisdom. Your lord is the beginning of your wisdom. If Christ is your Lord then he is the beginning of your wisdom, if not then it is something else.

Right Wisdom comes from knowing God in Jesus Christ. He is our wisdom before God. If you make Jesus your king instead of anything else, you can have peace and calm because he is the only king that can't be taken from you. All other kings you serve make you nervous in their service because they can be taken away. He is also the only king that can forgive.

HOW DO WE GET IT?

We don't drift into a heart that Fears God. We need to put our hearts, minds, and souls into the environment where a holy reverence for God is cultivated: DON'T TAKE THE SUMMER OFF Spiritually.

1. PRAY – .
2. Read God's word - Memorize scripture,
3. Give attention to the preaching and teaching of God's Word – do you come ready for worship and for hearing the Word?? Your heart preparation is as, or more important, than my sermon preparation. "THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS"
4. Study the Bible – in a group or alone. Take time to go deeper
5. Read good Christian books – Packer, Sproul, Piper, Tozer, etc
6. Learn what God is like, have right thoughts about God.

TOZER – "What a person thinks about God is the most important thing about her/ him. "

A reverential fear comes over time as we practice thinking biblically about God. The Fear of the Lord is not just a concept for the head, it needs to become an empowering and transforming reality of the heart that impacts every area of our lives and shapes how we live.

In February 1977, Bishop Festo Kivengere was part of a group of church leaders who delivered a letter of protest to the dictator, Idi Amin, speaking out against the beatings, arbitrary killings and unexplained disappearances taking place across Uganda at that time. The next day, Festo Kivengere's friend and leader, Archbishop Janani Luwum was murdered by Idi Amin and Bishop Festo was driven into hiding and then exile.

Soon afterwards, Festo Kivengere published a book entitled I Love Idi Amin. In the book he explained the extraordinary title: 'The Holy Spirit showed me that I was getting hard in my spirit... so I had to ask for forgiveness from the Lord, and for grace to love President Amin more... this was fresh air for my tired soul. I knew I had seen the Lord and been released: love filled my heart.'

Who is your Idi Amin?

Who do you need to love by faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ, which is the Spirit of the Fear of God.

How is the Fear of God Good News?

It is good news when viewed through the lens of faith in Jesus. Knowing that He has fulfilled the commands of God gives us the spiritual capital we need to reverence God, not man. Ps 130:4
If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

Keep your eyes focused on Christ, not on yourself or on others
– HE IS THE VISIBLE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE God.

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