

# **THE FORGOTTEN FEAR**



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WHERE HAVE ALL THE  
GOD-FEARERS GONE?

Albert N. Martin



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*The Forgotten Fear: Where Have All the God-Fearers Gone?*

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## CHAPTER ONE



# Predominance of the Fear of God in Biblical Thought

The fear of God is a massive and dominant theme in Scripture. It is also a theme that was very prominent both in the thinking and in the preaching of our spiritual forefathers. When our spiritual forefathers desired to describe someone who was characterized by genuine godliness, they would often call him a “God-fearing man.” This designation reflected the fact that men realized the fear of God was nothing less than the soul of godliness. Take away the soul from the body, and all you have left in a few days is a stinking carcass. Take away the fear of God from any profession of godliness, and all that is left is the stinking carcass of pharisaism, barren religiosity, or calculated hypocrisy.

To begin, let us consider the predominance of the fear of God in biblical thought. One does not need much learning to reach the conclusion that the fear of God is indeed a dominant theme in the Bible. In fact, equipped with a relatively good concordance (such as Strong’s or Young’s), you could discover the major concerns of the study that I am here presenting. If you looked up the word “fear” in your concordance, you would notice that there are no fewer than

150 to 175 explicit references to the fear of God. If you add to these explicit references the instances in Scripture where the fear of God is illustrated, though not explicitly stated, it is accurate to say that the references to the fear of God run well into the hundreds. It is amazing, then, that a theme so dominant in the Old and the New Testaments can either be greatly overlooked or carelessly treated, as it often is in our day. I trust after we grasp something of the predominance of this theme that you will not be content with a mere cursory knowledge or passing acquaintance with the fear of God. One simply cannot claim to love the God and truths of the Bible and still remain indifferent to a subject which is so prominent throughout the Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Fear of God in the Old Testament**

We start first with an overview of the fear of God in the Old Testament.

#### *The Books of the Law*

Genesis 31 is perhaps one of the most significant passages in all of Scripture as it relates to the predominance of the fear of God in biblical thought. Here, the patriarch Jacob said, “Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed” (v. 42). Throughout the

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1. For an excellent summary of the primary Hebrew and Greek words used to express the concept of “fear,” consult the footnotes on pages 231–32 in John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

Scriptures, God's name is a revelation of His character. Here, one of His names is "the Fear of Isaac." When God is rightly apprehended, true biblical fear of Him is so much a part of a right response to the revelation of His character that He calls Himself "the Fear of Isaac." If my perception of God and my comprehension of His revealed character do not lead me to fear Him as Isaac did, I have not rightly understood who God is.

Exodus 18 contains the record of Moses' problem of seeking to govern single-handedly the entire nation of Israel, including dealing with many concerns that called for the judgment of a mature mind. Jethro, his father-in-law, suggested that Moses was not up to the task by himself and that he ought to share this oversight with other competent men. When the requirements are given for those who would qualify to fill this role as judges, verse 21 says, "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." Of all the requirements that could be laid down for men to administer justice in the mighty nation which Israel had become, set at the very pinnacle of importance is that they must be men who fear God. Whatever other qualities they may or may not have, if they are not men whose primary characteristic is the fear of God, they would not be qualified for this significant role of administering justice and solving problems within the nation of Israel.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses explains to the nation of Israel why God had chosen to give them His laws and stat-

utes. Moses charges the nation not to forget the words God spoke to them, “that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children” (v. 12). In this passage, God Himself indicates that the great end for which He made known His words to the nation of Israel was that they might learn what it means to fear God.

When the apostle Paul is enumerating the peculiar privileges the nation had, he asserts, “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). If the chief blessing of being an Israelite was being a possessor of God’s words, and God Himself says that those words were given to teach them to fear Him, then the fear of God is a central motif in the entire corpus of the Mosaic revelation.

### *The Book of Job*

In the book of Job, we shift from God’s dealings to teach an entire nation His fear to His dealings with an individual Old Testament saint. This saint is not like the Pharisee who boasted of his own supposed attainments in grace, but one of whom God Himself boasts. The book begins with these words: “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). The words “blameless and upright” constitute a description of the observable patterns of Job’s life. However, God goes on to describe the inward disposition that produced those patterns. Job is “one who *feared God*.” This identification of the outward patterns

and the inward principle of Job's life is repeated in verse 8, "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'" The soul of Job's external piety was this inward fear of his God. Verse 9 reads, "So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?'" Satan responds that God believes that the fear of His name is the soul of Job's godliness, but Job has another dominant and self-serving motive for the service he renders to Him. The whole story then unfolds as God vindicates His claims on behalf of His servant Job. But we see that the essence of Job's piety—and God's estimation of all true piety—is that it is animated by and suffused with the fear of God.

### *The Psalms*

As we observe the central place the Old Testament gives to the fear of God, we look next at the Psalms. Here we will find many references to the fear of God. In Psalm 2, God reveals His purpose to exalt His Son to His messianic throne from which He will execute both grace and judgment. Having announced that purpose, God then gives the following command:

Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling. (Ps. 2:10–11)

God is saying, "In the light of what I have purposed to do with reference to My Son and the pivotal place which

I have assigned to Him, the only right response is service rendered to Him that is carried out in the context of godly fear.” “Serve the LORD with fear.” We must say, then, that if our view of Christ and His exaltation by the Father’s decree does not induce us to serve Him in the climate of godly fear, we have not rightly understood nor responded to the exaltation of the Son by the decree of the Father.

Psalm 67 is one of those great gospel psalms that focuses on the proclamation of God’s saving mercy to the ends of the earth. The psalmist pleads that God will be merciful to him and to His covenant people—to this end: “That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations” (Ps. 67:2). And what will be the result of God’s saving message going out to the nations? The answer is in verse 7: “God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” In other words, the whole end for which the gospel goes out through God’s covenant people is to teach the nations the fear of God. Does this not make the fear of God a most crucial issue in our understanding and experience of God’s salvation? God expresses His determination to bless His people in order that they in turn may bring blessing to others. He states His purpose in these words: “God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him” (v. 7).

Psalm 103 contains several references to the fear of God, and they have a common thread. They teach us that the fear of God is an indispensable characteristic of the true people of God. So much is this the case, that in describing the true people of God, the psalmist uses this phrase—those who *fear God*. Notice verse 11: “For as the heavens

are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.” Does it say that His mercy is toward all men? No. The idea that God’s redemptive love is just some kind of a general, gushy benevolence that is focused on all men without distinction is not the teaching of Holy Scripture. Here the psalmist says, “His mercy [is] toward *those who fear Him*.” His peculiar love is on His people. And who are His people, but those who fear Him? If there is no fear of Him, there is no steadfast mercy resting upon us or exercised toward us. Verse 13 makes a similar assertion: “As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.” God’s “children” are parallel to “those who fear Him.” This means that if I have no fear of God, I have no right to claim that I am under the canopy of redemptive love (v. 11), and no right to claim that I am one of His children (v. 13; cf. v. 17). The psalmist conceives of the people of God as those who are in every instance marked by this characteristic of the fear of God.

### *The Writings of Solomon*

Proverbs 1 is another important text regarding the fear of God, especially verse 7. In the first six verses, Solomon introduces Proverbs as a textbook full of wise counsels with a manifold purpose. Then, as he begins to lay out the path to the attainment of knowledge and wisdom, he makes this statement at the very beginning of his discourse: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (v. 7). In other words, learning the fear of God is not only the ABCs from which we move on to the rest of the alphabet. Learning the fear of God is not

like learning to spell the word “cat”—one of the first words we learn to spell—and then moving on while acquiring the ability to spell the word “disestablishmentarianism.” Rather, the fear of God is the *chief part*, just as the use of the alphabet is something that is not left behind but becomes the chief part of all our learning. Thus, when a man is studying the most complicated book on physics, he is dependent on the same numbers and letters he learned in kindergarten and first grade. Now the physics book may contain complex arrangements of those letters and numbers, but the physicist works with the same letters and numbers he learned as a four- or five-year-old. In the same way, the fear of the Lord is the chief part of knowledge. It is not only the beginning but that which permeates all accumulation of heavenly knowledge at every point along the way. Without the presence of that fear, God says there is no true wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

Then we turn to the book of Ecclesiastes, and we hear the insights of a man (Solomon) who surveyed all the possible avenues down which a man may go to find meaning and satisfaction in life. You may have contemplated going down some of those paths that seem so inviting and promise so much, as they did to this man in the beginning. But as he went down to the end of every one of those paths, he saw that they were nothing but vanity and vexation, until he came to the conclusion couched in the last verses of the last chapter: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into

judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).

While this concluding statement does not address God’s gracious provision for sinners who universally do not fear God by nature (Rom. 3:18), it does clearly identify the fear of God as central to our duty as creatures made in the image of God.

### *The Prophets*

In Isaiah 11:1–2, we have a beautiful prophecy of the Messiah who would come out of the stock of Jesse:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Here is an explicit statement that the Spirit would come on Messiah, as the Spirit did in fact come on Him in conjunction with His baptism in the waters of Jordan. Isaiah says the Spirit would come on Him not only as the Spirit of might and of power by which He raised the dead, unstopped deafened ears, and loosened dumb tongues, but that He would rest on Him as the “Spirit of the fear of the Lord.” That fact is the one aspect of the Spirit’s ministry which is enlarged upon in verse 3: “His delight is in the fear of the LORD.” The prophet foretells that the dominant aspect of Messiah’s own character is that He would live and move and delight in the fear of the Lord.

This fact should immediately purge from our minds any notion that the fear of God is incompatible with an assured sense of God's favor. It was in the very context of empowering our Lord with the Spirit ("the Spirit of the fear of the LORD") that the Father audibly expressed His delight in Jesus as His beloved Son.

In Jeremiah 32, Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant, a covenant that we know from other Scriptures would be brought into effect by the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the covenant sealed and ratified by the blood of Christ as expounded in Hebrews 8 and 10. Notice what God says will happen when the blessings of the new covenant are brought to men: "They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me" (Jer. 32:38–40).

God says, in effect, "The whole end for which I will work in such power in this new covenant is to put My fear within the hearts of My people so that they will not turn away from Me." According to this passage, it is the fear of God placed in the hearts of the beneficiaries of the new covenant that becomes the principal reason for their perseverance in faith, and in a loving and obedient attachment to the God of their salvation.

Do you believe that you are a recipient of the blessings of the new covenant? Do you frequent the Lord's Table, where you take the outward symbols of the blood of that

covenant? God says that if you have inwardly partaken of the benefits of that covenant, one of the dominant characteristics of your life will be that you now live in the fear of God. If you are a stranger to that fear, then you are a stranger to the blessings of the new covenant. You are yet in your sins. You are still under the wrath of Almighty God. Every time the benefits of the new covenant are applied with power by the Spirit, God says they are applied in such a way that He puts His fear in the heart. The fear of God is a central theme of the new covenant itself.

It is true that under God's previous covenants, every elect sinner was regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, received a justifying righteousness, and experienced the blessing of having the fear of God implanted in his heart. It is this fact alone that explains the godly patterns of life attributed to Old Testament believers. Furthermore, we know from the overall teachings of Scripture that any and all saving benefits in every stage of redemptive history have been given to guilty and depraved sinners on the basis of the work of Christ as the only Mediator of sinners. Yet it is only within the terms of the new covenant that this blessing is explicitly guaranteed to all those who are brought to repentance and faith in the context of the accomplished salvation proclaimed in the new covenant (Jer. 32:40).

In the light of this handful of references taken from scores of others in the Old Testament, we must conclude that the fear of God, whatever it is, is a predominant theme in the Old Testament. It is not an optional virtue but absolutely essential and central in God's saving work.

## **The Fear of God in the New Testament**

But we can imagine someone objecting, “Yes, but the texts you have cited are part of the dark and shadowy religion of the Old Testament. We now have the full revelation of God’s love and mercy in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Just as the types and shadows of the blood of bulls and goats have been fulfilled in Christ, so has that dark, foreboding concept of the fear of God given way to the bright and breezy quality of the joy of the Lord.” Is that true? Let us see whether the New Testament itself will support such thinking.

### *The Gospels*

What do we find as we turn to the New Testament? Shortly after the Lord Jesus was conceived in His mother’s womb, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth. Upon her arrival at the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary was filled with the Spirit, and she spoke those words of prophetic praise commonly called the Magnificat. In this Spirit-inspired poem of praise, Mary testified that she saw in God’s dealings with her an illustration of a principle that had characterized God’s dealings with His people throughout the centuries—one that would characterize His dealings with His people through the very One she now carried in her womb. Mary saw that what God was doing simply illustrated what He had always done with His people—and what He will continue to do through the coming of the Son of God. Here is her testimony: “For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation” (Luke 1:49–50). God’s way is to show mercy to those who fear Him.

Mary saw God's mercy to her as illustrating this principle, a principle that will continue to operate as Messiah comes and carries out His mission. Here then, in one of the opening chapters of the gospel records, God makes it unmistakably clear that His true people have been and remain characterized as those who "fear Him."

What did our Lord Himself teach? Certainly, if He wanted men not to fear God but simply to have joy in and love for God, we would expect to find Him discouraging anything like fear, especially anything that had the fear of dread in it. As we will see in our more formal definition, there are two basic aspects of the fear of God, as in all human fear. There is dread, and there is awe. The first aspect of fear drives us *from* the object of dread; the other aspect draws us *to* the object of awe. Our Lord's teaching makes very clear that both aspects are included in a healthy fear of God—including this element of dread. While commissioning the twelve disciples, He first warns them not to fear what men can do to them. He says, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Jesus was not on a mission to do away with the fear of God. Instead He enforced it by *commanding* His disciples to possess in their breasts the fear that even includes the element of dread—fear of what God would do if they were to fall into His hands with their sins laid to their charge. As the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, it is indeed "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). Jesus did not come to negate the fear of God; He came to enforce it. We shall see in our further

studies that, as there were grounds in the shadowy revelation of God in the old covenant to fear Him, so the fuller revelation in the new covenant has only intensified the obligation of godly fear.

### *The Book of Acts*

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke describes the maturity of the early church and God's blessing on her. Notice how two things are fused together beautifully. Though we would separate them, God brings them together. Following the conversion of Saul, who had made havoc of the church, we read in Acts 9:31, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." We tend to think that wherever there is the Spirit's comfort, there is no fear of God; and if there is the fear of God, then there will be no Spirit's comfort. But that is not the case at all. The Spirit that rested on Christ, the Spirit whom He received in plentitude and now Himself pours out on His church, is "the Spirit of the fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:2). And just as the fear of the Lord characterized Jesus Himself, so the more His church is filled with the Spirit of Jesus, the more that church will also live, worship, and witness in the fear of the Lord. John Murray writes:

If he who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners was endued with the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord, how can thought or feeling that is not conditioned by God's fear have any kinship with him who is the captain of our salvation and who has given

us an example that we should follow in his steps? The church walks in the fear of the Lord because the Spirit of Christ indwells, fills, directs, and rests upon the church and the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Epistles*

Now we turn to the epistles of the New Testament. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:1, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Is there remaining sin to be dealt with in the life of a believer? Is he expected, on the one hand, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and, on the other, to cultivate every grace that will bring him into greater conformity to Jesus Christ? Every properly instructed Christian says, “Yes, but how are we to do this?” Are we to think primarily that the more holy we are, the more gracious rewards we will receive when we stand before the Lord? Or, the more we are filled with the Spirit, the more joy and happiness and peace and vibrancy we’ll have? There is certainly an element of truth in both these things, but I suggest that neither is to be our primary focus. According to Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 7:1, the highest reaches of attainment in practical holiness and godliness are to be achieved and sought after in the climate of the fear of God.

If the fear of God is the climate in which we are to pursue practical godliness, what constitutes a major area of

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2. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 230.

concern in the attainment of practical godliness? It is how we conduct ourselves in our interpersonal relationships. Much of the specific and detailed ethical instruction found in the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistles is focused on various interpersonal relationships. The “godliness” that leaves you nasty with your boss, churlish with your wife, bossy with your husband, or snippy with your mom and dad is no godliness at all. The godliness and holiness of the Bible are intensely practical things that show up most clearly in the interactions with your deepest and most intimate human relationships, whether in the family, work, church, or school. Our holiness, our progress in sanctification, must be seen in those relationships. As we pursue greater degrees of holiness in those relationships, what is to constitute a dominant motive in that pursuit?

In Ephesians 5:21 and following, Paul addresses the various relationships in a household—the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship, and the master-slave relationship. Notice what he says to introduce these domestic concerns in verse 21: “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” All of these commands that speak about the nitty-gritty of practical godliness in matters of interpersonal relationships are couched in the framework of the fear of God. Therefore, any attempt to progress in holiness in these relationships that ignores this idea of the fear of God is something less (if not something totally other) than that which is set before us in the Word of God.

In Philippians 2:12–13, Paul commands believers to work out their salvation: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now

much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” What is the context of that working out of our salvation? It is to be one characterized by “fear and trembling.” In light of these words, what biblical truths have given birth to the current notion that a laid-back, cavalier, and sprightly attitude constitute the essence of advanced spirituality? What biblical truths have persuaded many professing Christians that serious, self-denying discipleship is the essence of legalism? Paul’s prescription is that our salvation is to be worked out in a climate of godly “fear and trembling.” Anyone who is working out his salvation without this disposition is working it out in a context unauthorized by the Word of God. What “fear and trembling” is will be explained further on in the book. But at this juncture, suffice it to say that this “fear and trembling” is to be a dominant characteristic in the life of every true Christian who is committed to “working out his salvation.”

But does this have to continue all throughout the Christian’s life? Can’t we come to a place where we no longer need the various constraints of the fear of God? Let the apostle Peter answer that question. We have looked at Jesus’ words and the apostle Paul’s. Peter gives the same word. And he speaks of it in a most interesting context. He says in 1 Peter 1:17–19, “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct

received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The question could be raised, but if one possesses a well-grounded biblical assurance that one has been saved by the blood of Christ, shouldn’t this negate any fear of God? No, it should not, because Peter says in the next verse: “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold.” He says the knowledge that you have been redeemed at such an awful price will intensify the reality of the fear of God, not negate it. He uses the fact that *we know we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ* as his very argument to enforce the necessity of walking in godly fear, and that we must pass the whole time of our exile in fear. At every point in my Christian life, from the moment I breathe my first breath as a new creature in Christ to the moment when I take my last breath, the entire time of my sojourning—all of this is to be marked by the fear of God.

### *The Book of Revelation*

The fear of God is so fundamental to godliness that even into eternity, even after the last remains of sin are purged from believers, we will still fear God. Our last two references are taken from Revelation. The first is found in Revelation 15. Here, in graphic language, we have set before us a picture of the redeemed of God in verses 2–4:

And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having

harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

“Great and marvelous are Your works,  
Lord God Almighty!  
Just and true are Your ways,  
O King of the saints!  
Who shall not fear You, O Lord,  
and glorify Your name?  
For You alone are holy.  
For all nations shall come and worship before You,  
For Your judgments have been manifested.”

In the light of the marvel of His works and the righteousness of His ways, what should be the response of the redeemed there in His presence? Verse 4 gives the answer: “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?” The fear of God will mark the worship of the redeemed, even when they are glorified and are worshiping in God’s immediate presence.

Similar words of praise are recorded in Revelation 19:4–5: “And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, ‘Amen! Alleluia!’ Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’”

How does the Spirit describe the redeemed in the context of a fully realized redemption? They are characterized as “those who fear Him.” Their fear of God is singled out as the prominent identifying characteristic of the servants of God.

## Conclusions from the Biblical Evidence

What can we conclude in light of these pivotal texts found in both the Old and the New Testaments? First, I believe we are warranted to conclude that *to be devoid of the fear of God is to be devoid of biblical and saving religion*. It matters not how many texts of Scripture we can quote, or how many promises we may claim to believe. In the light of the texts of Scripture we have briefly considered (and they are but a sampling of many more), it is neither unkind nor unjust to assert that if you do not know what the fear of God is in your heart and life, you do not know experientially the first thing about true biblical and saving religion. That is a serious conclusion, but no less a conclusion can be drawn from these passages. Since Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of biblical religion, and since the Spirit given to Him and sent from Him is the Spirit of the fear of God, to be without the fear of God is to be without the Spirit of Christ. Romans 8:9 says that those without the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Christ. If such teaching is utterly foreign to you and leaves you completely baffled, you need to engage in some serious reflection. You need to examine the Scriptures and cry out to God, asking Him to teach you what it is to fear Him, for you see that if you are devoid of His fear, you have no true saving religion.

The second conclusion we are warranted in making is this: *one of the accurate measurements of true spiritual growth is the measure to which one increases in walking in the fear of God*. The Bible speaks of Hananiah in Nehemiah 7:2 as a man who “feared God more than many.” His spiritual stature as a man who possessed spiritual maturity, wisdom,

and godliness to an exceptional degree was in great measure due to the fact that he “feared God more than many.”

Third, *to be ignorant of the meaning of the fear of God is to be ignorant of a basic and essential doctrine of revealed religion.* There are no doubt many in our day who are genuine Christians yet who are sadly deficient in their understanding of the concept of the fear of God. They are not strangers to the fear of God in their experience, but they are very unclear about the fear of God in their understanding. Are you such a Christian? Has your reading of this book thus far been like walking on ground unfamiliar to you? Since growth in grace is always joined to growth in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), it is vital to give yourself to earnest prayer and study so that you might have a clearer understanding of the fear of God. This, in turn, will lead to your further Christian growth and development.<sup>3</sup>

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3. For any readers who desire a clearer understanding of the fear of God, see chapter 10 in John Murray’s *Principles of Conduct*, John Bunyan’s *The Fear of God*, and Arnold L. Frank’s *The Fear of God*—the latter being a most helpful collection of teaching on the fear of God drawn primarily from Puritan authors.

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What numerical facts demonstrate the predominance of this subject of the fear of God in the Scriptures?
2. In what ways is the fear of God taught and illustrated in the Pentateuch?
3. What significance did the fear of God have in the life of Job?
4. How is the fear of God presented to us in the Psalms and the other parts of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament?
5. Where and how does Isaiah describe the place of the fear of God in the experience of the coming Messiah? In what way should this influence your life?
6. What passages in Jeremiah highlight the place of the fear of God in the new covenant?
7. Identify at least five key texts from the Gospels to Revelation which conclusively prove that the fear of God is not an exclusively Old Testament emphasis.