

WHERE WISDOM BEGINS

Derek Prince



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Publisher's Note:

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INTRODUCTION

So much of the Bible—and of the Christian faith—is directly contrary to the wisdom and the ways of this world. The world thinks a certain way; it has certain standards and operates on certain principles.

But what God reveals in His Word is usually directly contrary to the world’s ways. One of the priceless blessings of the Bible is that it enables us to approach and navigate this life from God’s point of view so we can avoid being ensnared by worldly lusts and sinful ways.

The prophet Isaiah tells us in vivid language how far superior God’s ways and God’s thoughts are from those of man. Speaking on behalf of God, he says:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

(Isaiah 55:8–9)

There is a tremendous gap that man cannot bridge between God’s ways and his. Man’s ways are on an earthly plane; God’s ways are on a heavenly plane.

There is good news, however: God has provided a means by which His ways and His thoughts can be brought down to our earthly level and actually be imparted to us. This happens through His Word. And it happens particularly through an important concept talked about in His Word—the “fear of the Lord,” which is the topic of this book. It is truly where wisdom begins for us.

In the next two verses of Isaiah 55, God continues to speak through the prophet:

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10–11)

God is saying that just as the rain and the snow come down from heaven to make the earth fruitful, so too His Word will pour down and accomplish His purposes.

This idea applies to the difference between the strength and wisdom of God and the strength and wisdom of man. God’s standards are totally different from ours. But through His Word, we can come to see these truths from His point of view. Understanding this difference will be an important step toward wisdom—and it all begins as we understand the concept of the “fear of the Lord.”

DO WE FEAR THE LORD?

The title of this beginning chapter poses an important question—one to which many Christians today probably give little thought. It is, however, an extremely important issue—one that we ignore to our own detriment. The Bible has a good deal to say about the fear of the Lord. But great numbers of Christians misunderstand this concept.

Of all the themes in Scripture, the fear of the Lord contains some of the most outstanding promises of God's favor and blessing. In fact, I know of no other theme of Scripture that has more blessings to offer than the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 33:6 ends with eight little words: "*The fear of the LORD is His treasure.*" The fear of the Lord is not something to be afraid of or to despise. Rather, it is God's treasure that He is sharing with His people.

I once asked myself, *Why was that jewel of truth tacked on at the end of a verse in Isaiah?* I came to the conclusion that it was tacked on so subtly because God wants us to *search* for

truth. Jesus said we should search the Scriptures, for in them we will find the truth about Him. (See John 5:39.) Are you one of those people who search the Scriptures? Do you really turn to the Bible in a diligent quest for truth? Do you look to God's Word for answers to your needs and solutions to your problems?

Many people are afraid of what God might say to them, but they do not need to be. Much of what God's Word tells us about the fear of the Lord is very encouraging.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever.

(Psalm 19:9)

The fear of the Lord is not merely clean, it is cleansing—it purifies us and keeps us clean. Psalm 19 says that it endures forever—not for this life only, but for eternity. The fear of the Lord will always be a mark of all the true people of God, whether human or angelic.

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day.

(Proverbs 23:17)

Psalm 19 says “forever” (verse 9); Proverbs 23 says “all the day” (verse 17). In other words, there should never be a time when we are not practicing the fear of the Lord.

What the Fear of the Lord Is Not

There are specific forms of fear that are not related to what the Bible means when it speaks of the fear of the Lord.

Natural Fear

I have been told that a newborn baby is naturally afraid of only two things: loud noises and the sensation of falling. As we grow and go forward in life, we make additions to the list of experiences we naturally fear—roller coasters, wars, getting lost in the dark. These types of fear are perfectly normal. All human beings have these natural fears; but these fears do not constitute what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord.

Demonic Fear

There is also demonic fear. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote:

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear [“timidity” NIV],
but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

(2 Timothy 1:7)

I would suggest that demonic fear has three marks that distinguish it from the fear of the Lord. First, demonic fear proceeds from Satan, not from God. Second, demonic fear tends to keep us from obeying God. Satan injects this kind of fear into us to keep us from doing all that God wants us to do. In this way, it is completely opposite of the fear of the Lord, which motivates and impels us to obey God and to do what God wants us to do. Third, demonic fear is tormenting.

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear,
because fear involves torment.*

(1 John 4:18)

There are many examples of demonic fear. One is claustrophobia, or the abnormal fear of being in tight spaces, such

as closets or elevators. For many years, my wife Lydia had a fear of getting on an elevator. She would rather walk up six flights of stairs than take the elevator. One day, God showed us that this phobia was demonic. We said a prayer against her fear, and she was immediately delivered from it, never again to experience problems when getting on an elevator.

Such a phobia is not the fear we are talking about when we discuss the fear of the Lord. Tormenting fear is from the devil, and it has no place in the life of a Christian. It is a kind of fear that is caused by an evil spirit. It is unnatural; it is an excessive reaction. It is a feeling that overpowers us—one we cannot master. It takes control in certain situations, and it is not the fear of the Lord. In fact, the greatest remedy for the tormenting type of fear is the true fear of the Lord.

Religious Fear

The prophet Isaiah wrote about religious fear:

Therefore the LORD said: "Inasmuch as these people [Israel] draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men...."
(Isaiah 29:13)

Jesus also quoted Isaiah in Matthew 15:7–9, applying the passage to the religious leaders of His day, whom He called "hypocrites." Religious fear is a kind of fear that generates hypocrisy. It is important to remember that the word *hypocrite* is directly derived from the Greek word for an actor, which is *hupokrites*. This kind of religious fear makes people act; their

religion consists in a dramatic façade or role-playing. When they enter a church building, they often change their whole demeanor. When they pray, they tend to use a special tone of voice. There is nothing genuine or natural; anything they say or do is a performance based on what somebody taught them to do. Jesus said that this artificiality is not what God seeks in His people.



Religious fear is taught by men, not by God. God does not accept responsibility for it. It is also superficial; it affects outer conduct but leaves the heart unchanged.

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The Lord says that the people who live in religious fear “*honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me.*” Religious fear does not produce the kind of obedience God desires. It produces a slavish attitude, not the free obedience of sons and daughters, which is what God desires.

Fear of Man

Another kind of fear is the fear of man:

The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe. (Proverbs 29:25)

The fear of man is the opposite of trust in the Lord. When we are afraid of what people will think or say, we are operating in the fear of man. We must acknowledge how often the fear of men succeeds in inhibiting us. Times arise when we ought to speak to people about the Lord, but the fear of man prevents us from opening our mouths.

The fear of man makes men more important than God. Those who live with the fear of man are more concerned about what others think about them than what God thinks about them. To these people, God's opinion is less important than the opinion of their fellow men. The fear of man also holds us back from obeying God; it ensnares us when we want to walk in the path of obedience and righteousness.

What the Fear of the Lord Is

The fear of the Lord is a special kind of fear. Yes, it *is* fear. Sometimes it is experienced physically as a powerful fear. For instance, when Moses was confronted with the glory of the Lord and the voice of the Lord at Mount Sinai, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "*I am exceedingly afraid and trembling*" (Hebrews 12:21).

Moses probably lived closer to the Lord than most people. But when he was confronted with a revelation of God's majesty and glory, he said, "*I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.*" If Moses could tremble, so can we. Trembling is not a harm-



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is not a
harmful
experience

ful experience. In fact, I think most people need a much greater, clearer vision of the awesome majesty and power of God.

Many modern translations of the Bible do not use the word *fear*. I believe that is due—at least in part—to a humanistic attitude that de-emphasizes our need to fear God. But we *do* need to fear God! God is to be feared, and there is nothing in

the Bible to suggest that the fear of the Lord is unnecessary or optional.

Think of a towering, craggy mountain, rising up steeply out of the sea. Picture yourself on the pinnacle of this mountain. Looking down one side, you see the waves far below. You can just make out the white foam, and you know that the waves are dashing against the base of the mountain. You are so high up, however, that you can hardly hear the sound of the crashing waves. Looking down the other side, landward, you see a beautiful array of fields and forests, stretching out to the horizon and illuminated by the shining sun.

You could use a number of adjectives to describe your situation. For instance, it is *beautiful*, *exhilarating*, *inspiring*, or *unique*. No sight could parallel it exactly. You enjoy this scene; it uplifts and exhilarates you. But at the same time, somewhere deep inside you, a continual realization reminds you that if you take just one step in the wrong direction, you will be dashed to pieces on the crags and plunged into the sea. You have no intention of taking that step, and yet the very thought of it produces in you a kind of gasp and an involuntary tightening of your diaphragm. This image gives you a beginning understanding of the fear of the Lord.

A word that is related to this hypothetical experience is the word *awe*—as in when we “stand in awe” of someone or something. In a sense, standing in awe means that we do not dare come too close. Another related word is *reverence*.



An attitude of submission is the fruit produced by the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is not just one of those words or sensations; rather, it encapsulates all of them. It contains elements of fear, awe, and reverence. An attitude of submission is the fruit produced by the fear of the Lord.

Pleasing the Lord

The fear of the Lord is something we can apprehend only by the Holy Spirit. The fear of the Lord will give us a distinctly unique attitude, regardless of the situation. When we encounter a situation, decision, problem, or need, the fear of the Lord causes us to ask, “What would God say about this?” That should be our first question—not “What do I think?” or “How can I get what I want out of this?” but “What does God say about this?” The fear of the Lord motivates us to seek to please the Lord always.

Having the fear of the Lord is really the same approach as obeying the first of the Ten Commandments: “*You shall have no other gods before Me*” (Exodus 20:3). This commandment could also be translated, “You shall have no other gods beside Me.”

Adhering to this commandment will bring forth the fear of the Lord in our lives. To obey this commandment, we must give God total preeminence. Nothing else in our lives—no influence, no person, no motivation—should occupy the same level as the Lord God. This expectation is extremely logical, if

we think about it. If God is willing to reveal Himself to us—to share Himself with us in some way, to come into our lives. If almighty God offers us, creatures of dust though we be, the privilege of His fellowship, then why would we even think of offering Him any place but first in our lives?

The Fear of Isaac

Genesis 31 includes a remarkable expression that some people may never have noticed. This is part of the scene in which Jacob is confronted by his uncle Laban and they have a strong disagreement. In the end, Laban says, in effect, “If God had not spoken to me, I would have taken vengeance on you.” Because God had appeared to Laban and had told him not to harm Jacob, however, he abandoned his violent agenda. Then Jacob said to Laban:

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. (Genesis 31:42)

Take note of the phrase “*the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac.*” A little later on in the same chapter, it says Jacob swore and made this oath:

“The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. (Genesis 31:53)

Twice, the God of Abraham is called “the Fear of Isaac.” There must have been something about Isaac’s attitude

toward God that the Bible does not reveal fully that caused people to talk about God as “the Fear of Isaac.”

The Picture of Jesus

The prophet Isaiah provided a prophetic picture of Jesus. Here is one of the beautiful preliminary descriptions of Jesus. He is called the “*Rod from the stem 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.

(Isaiah 11:1–2)

“*Branch*” is one of the Old Testament titles for Messiah. In addition, the Bible says of Him in Revelation:

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne.

(Revelation 1:4)

In this translation, the word “*Spirits*” is spelled with a capital S. Revelation 4:5 speaks about “*seven lamps of fire*” that are before the throne of God, “*which are the seven Spirits of God.*” Indeed, there is only one Holy Spirit, but He has seven distinctive aspects—manifestations, or forms in which He operates. I believe we can find the seven Spirits, or seven forms, of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2.

The first one is “*the Spirit of the LORD*”—the Spirit that speaks in the first person as God. In Acts 13:2, Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit said to the church in Antioch, “*Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*” The Holy Spirit spoke to the church in the first person as the Lord. Remember, God the Father is Lord, God the Son is Lord, and God the Spirit is Lord.

The next two aspects of the Holy Spirit given in Isaiah 11:2 are “*the Spirit of wisdom and understanding*”; the next two, “*the Spirit of counsel and might*”; and, finally, the last two, “*the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*”

I believe that these are the seven aspects of the Holy Spirit:

1. The Spirit speaking in the first person as God—just as much God as the Father and God the Son are God.
- 2, 3. “*The Spirit of wisdom (2) and understanding (3).*” I am always impressed by the attributes we need to put together. One may have wisdom, but if he lacks understanding, he will not be able to make the proper use of his wisdom. I was once a professional philosopher, and though I studied wisdom, I did not have much understanding.
- 4, 5. “*The Spirit of counsel (4) and might (5)*”—that is, knowing what to do or being able to give direction combined with power or strength. It is a terrible condition to have might without counsel. You could end up using your strength the wrong way.

6, 7. “*The Spirit of knowledge (6) and of the fear of the LORD (7).*” Knowledge is wonderful; most people desire it. But by itself, knowledge puffs up; it makes us inflated. (See 1 Corinthians 8:1.) The Bible nearly always pairs knowledge with the fear of the Lord. We must not seek knowledge unless we have the fear of the Lord; otherwise, knowledge will do us more harm than good.

Keeping all these thoughts in mind, we see Isaiah 11 as a picture of the Messiah, Jesus, whose “*delight is in the fear of the LORD*” (verse 3). Out of the seven aspects



If Jesus Himself needed the fear of the Lord, do we not need it as well?

the only one to receive further comment. This is the one aspect that the Holy Spirit focuses on: “*the fear of the LORD.*” If Jesus Himself needed the fear of the Lord, do we not need it as well?

The fear of the Lord comes only by the Holy Spirit. Without it, we are incomplete and extremely vulnerable to pride and the snares of Satan.

The Surrender of Jesus

Hebrews 5 provides a remarkable revelation of why God the Father always heard the prayers of Jesus.

In the days of His flesh, . . . He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because

of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

(Hebrews 5:7–8)

God listened to the prayers of Jesus because Jesus always prayed with a godly fear. The passage above refers to a time when He was in agony, waiting in the garden of Gethsemane for His betrayer, Judas, to bring the soldiers who would ultimately crucify Him. In anguish, Jesus prayed to His Father: “Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Such a statement of surrender epitomizes the fear of the Lord. “Lord, let me never put anything of my choice before Yours. Let nothing seem more important to me than Your will.” That attitude is the essence of the fear of the Lord.

As we finish this first chapter, let’s start out right by making the statements we just read our own prayer of commitment to give priority to the fear of the Lord in our lives. Let’s pray them together with emphasis:

Lord, let me never put anything of my choice before Yours. Let nothing seem more important to me than Your will. Amen.