

LEARNING TO FEAR THE LORD

Psalm 34:11-22 - Part 2

Intro: There is probably no subject that is more basic to the Christian life than that of fearing God. And yet, at least in our generation, there probably is no subject that we hear less about.

Fear is a title that is given to God Himself. Jacob spoke of God as the Fear of Isaac, his father, when Laban caught up with him after he had left secretly and was returning home after working for Laban for twenty years. See Genesis 31:42. Fear is one of the names given to the Scriptures in Psalm 19:9, “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.” The people of God are addressed in Psalm 33:8 and in Psalm 115:11. Solomon used the term, “the fear of the Lord,” fourteen times in his book of Proverbs. In Psalm 33, the Psalm just before Psalm 34 where our text for this morning is found, although it is not attributed to David, it appears in a group of David’s Psalms, and was probably written by David, we read,

8 Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

9 For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast (Psa. 33:8-9).

This passage helps us to understand what it means to fear the Lord. The Lord simply spoke the Word for six days, and the world with all that it contains, came into being, and it continued on not only to the days of David, but down to the present hour in 2010. Surely God is an awesome God to be able to do such a thing. We marvel at His power. We marvel at His wisdom. We marvel at the ways of God Who did what no man or any group of men has ever been able to duplicate since those earliest days in the history of the world and of the human race. We must not forget that man himself is evidence that should cause us to marvel at the mighty and infinitely good character of God.

Books have been written on the subject of the fear of God. Two that I have mentioned and profited greatly from are *The Joy of Fearing God*, by Jerry Bridges, and John Bunyan’s book which is entitled simply *The Fear of God*. I am sure that there are others also, as well as countless numbers of sermons which have preached on this subject, or referred to the fear of the Lord in the course of other messages.

It was obviously very important to King David because he not only was a

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man who feared God, but he wanted to teach others the fear of God as we see in our text in Psalm 34:11. And when he addressed himself to children, he definitely was addressing young people, but possibly also those who were young in the faith regardless of the years they may have lived.

It is very apparent that if we are to fear God, we must begin by knowing God and by learning all that we can about Him. We have learned from our study of the book of Romans that we can learn much about God from creation which is His handiwork, but we know that our Bibles give us a written revelation of God. So to know God, we need to know His Word. And it is in the Word that we learn about Christ Who came into our world as a Man as the final and most complete revelation of God that we find anywhere. So when David or anyone else speaks of the fear of God, they are including God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The glorious attributes that you find in One are to be found also in the Others. The Members of the Godhead are incomparable. What they are and what they can do has no equal among men or angels. They are the greatest of all.

The word fear usually carries with it in regular every day language that which we are afraid of. It could be any number of things. It can be anything that can harm us, and especially things over which we have no control. That kind of fear causes worry and anxiety, and so it is anything but pleasant. We are exhorted in Scripture not to worry about anything. Philippians 4:6 and 7 give us such a commandment. (Quote.)

People who are living any way they want to live, have every reason to fear the Lord in this sense. While the Lord Jesus was here on earth, one of the many things that He had to say, was this, found in Matthew 10:28:

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

If any of us is careless about our lives to the extent that we get involved in things that are sinful and wicked in God's sight, we have every reason to fear what the consequences might be.

But this is not what King David had in mind when he said, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psa. 34:11). He was talking about learning about the Lord to such an extent that we are overwhelmed with His glory, His goodness and His grace, His power, love, and wisdom, that we live in awe of Him. We want to please

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Him. We worship Him, and bow in humility before Him. We depend upon Him, and want to do everything that we can to please and glorify Him in our lives. Fearing God is not just a one-time experience, but it is the way we live. Last Sunday I mentioned to you the prayer that a dear servant of the Lord prayed at our breakfast table, which is set to music and which we have as an insert in our Trinity Hymnal. I think you would look a long time to find a better definition of the fear of the Lord. Let me repeat it for you:

In the sweet fear of Jesus let me begin each day,
Fearful lest I should grieve Him, fearful lest I should stray,
Fearful lest earthly longings ever my heart should share,
Taking the throne of Jesus, placing an idol there.

And then the second verse goes like this:

In the sweet fear of Jesus let me begin each day,
Serving, or resting, always under His gentle sway;
All that I say directed, all that I plan conceived,
With the remembrance present, Jesus must not be grieved.

If you haven't heard this often enough to know it, you ought to memorize it and pray it frequently. And there is no better time than at the beginning of the day.

You see, to fear Jesus, is to love Him. It is to please Him. It is to worship Him. It is to depend upon Him. It is to keep learning of Him. It is to trust Him.

Now I believe that in the verses which follow, King David was telling us how you can identify a person who truly, from the heart, fears God, not just now and then, but day after day.

If you were to tell the man on the street that to live life to the full, and to live a long happy life, a good life, a truly good life, then you need to know the Lord and live to please him, he would probably laugh at you. Or he might say how can anybody really live that way. But that is exactly what King David meant. He had tried the world's way, and he had been living the Lord's way. And he wanted to tell us that there is no way that you can compare the two because God's way is so much better, that His way surpasses anything that the world has to offer us.

Now, from what David, the King of Israel, wrote here, how can you identify a man who fears God? The rest of the Psalm gives us the answer to that question.

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First and foremost, you can tell a man who fears God by the way he talks. See verse 13.

I reviewed with you briefly what the Apostle James in the NT said about the tongue in James 3. Have any of you read that chapter this week? Our tongues are like unruly evils, full of deadly poison, a world of iniquity. The first effect of sin that we see in Genesis 3 was in the way that they talked to the Lord. Oh, it wasn't profanity, but it was an attempt to blame someone else.

In our country we have gotten far away from the Lord, and you can often see the effect of it in the way even children speak. I have a very dear friend who has told me more than once that after he was saved he had to learn to speak all over again because his language was so foul. So when a person comes to know the Lord, you are going to notice a difference in the way they speak, and that means that they are thinking differently too.

What is a second evidence that a person fears God? Verse 14 tells us that you can tell it in the way he walks. And by that I mean, as most of you know, by the way he lives. He separates himself from what is evil in God's sight, and turns to doing what is good, that is, what is pleasing to the Lord.

And why does he do this? Because he has learned some very important things about God. He has learned about the Lord's eyes, and the Lord's ears, and about the Lord's face. See verses 15 and 16. Before we are saved we don't know anything about God. We don't know that His eyes see what we are doing, and that His ears hear what we are saying, and that He sets His face against us (and nothing can be worse than this) unless we turn to Him to save us from our sins so that we want to do what He wants us to do instead of insisting on having our own way. How do these verses set with you? King David was a believer when he sinned as he did, but it was because he forgot that the Lord sees what we do and He hears what we say when we think it is just between us and the people we may be involved with in sin. What a safeguard it is to learn that there isn't a moment of the day but what the Lord sees us, and there is nothing that we say but what He hears us. He even knows what you and I are thinking about right now. I have no doubt but that none of us would want others to know some of the thoughts that we entertain in our minds during a given day, but we forget that the Lord knows it all. And what a safeguard this can be defending us against sin.

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Now King David does not tell us all of the ways that you can identify a man, or a woman, or a young person, or even a child who fears God, but the King was touching upon some of the main points.

Let us look at another evidence that a person is God-fearing. You see it in verses 17 and 18. What is it? If you and I really fear the Lord, it means that we pray.

I have reminded you before, probably more than once that when Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, was led blind into Damascus, the Lord told Ananias where Saul was, and how he could identify him. He didn't describe how tall he was, or what color hair he had, but the Lord told Ananias this, "Behold, he prayeth." Now Saul was a Pharisee, and he had said many prayers that didn't get much farther than out of his mouth, but since the Lord had changed Saul's heart, he had really been talking to the Lord. When the Lord said, "Behold, he prayeth," you can be sure that that was exactly what Saul of Tarsus was doing, doing it for the first time in his life. And the Lord knew that he was praying because he was praying to the Lord.

Now Saul was not yet born when King David lived, so let us think about how the Lord had heard the King's cry. This probably had reference to David's terrible sin with Bathsheba, and then his planned murder of her husband. Read verses 17 and 18 thinking about David's sin. And while we may not have sinned in the same way that David did, yet we have sinned and we know the agony of heart when we have done something that we know has displeased the Lord. In Psalm 51 you may remember that as David confessed his sins to the Lord, he used much the same language that he did here. He told the Lord in Psalm 51:16 that there was no sacrifice to offer for the sins he had committed, but then he went on to say this,

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psa. 51:17).

Can a person who fears God sin? Unfortunately, yes. Does that end a believer's relationship with God? No! That is when a believer sees how good God is even when we sin. Does that make us want to sin more, as Paul asked in Romans. No, absolutely not! It makes a believer who really fears God, draw nearer to God because he knows that God is the only One who can keep us from sin.

You can't find any verses that are more wonderful in all of the Bible than

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verses 17, 18, 19, and 20.

In the last two verses of the Psalm King David contrasted the person who does not fear God with the one who does. The person who doesn't fear God is called "wicked." The person who does fear God is called "righteous." And he used the word "desolate" with reference to both of them. Those that hate the righteous (and who hate God) shall be "desolate"; but "none of them tht trust in Him," the Lord, "shall be "desolate."

What does "desolate" mean? It means *guilty and, in this case, subject to punishment by death*, meaning eternal death. How can you explain this? Aren't both sinners, the man who fears God and the man who does not fear God. Yes, both are sinners, but the one who fears God has forgiveness, and the one who does not fear God does not have forgiveness. How does the man who fears God have forgiveness even though he can sin after he is brought to the Lord. It is because he shall not be desolate because another has taken the full penalty of his sin, and that One is Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of God, who died to secure the salvation of all who would even trust in Christ.

And so here in Psalm 34 we have some of the main characteristics of the person who fears the Lord. Let each of us ask ourselves the question, Does this describe me? Even though we may not fit the picture perfectly, yet if the characteristics are there, we owe all of the glory and praise to God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. If not, if this does not describe you, let me urge you as you sit where you are to open you heart to the Lord and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. That is how to become a person who fears the Lord.(Psa. 51:17)