

Proverbs 22-10-26a

Welcome to our Wednesday night fellowship and Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 25th of October 2022. We're continuing our study of the book of Proverbs.

We have stepped back from our verse-by-verse approach to examine this concept of the fear of the Lord. What does it mean? The book of Proverbs is introduced with this as the culminating thought in verse 7 of chapter 1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools hate wisdom and instruction. We've spent a couple of nights looking at this at the biblical emphasis on the fear of the Lord.

We're going to extend and conclude our study of that tonight. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and seek and cultivate the ministry of God's Holy Spirit about which I will have more to say shortly. Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege to be in the company of fellow believers who love you and are enthusiastic about learning and understanding more with regard to your plan and purpose.

All of us want to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We know that through him we come to know you. We become more closely related to you in fellowship and in perspective, in function, in service, in witness, and ultimately in love for you and love for one another.

We pray that our study tonight will further those goals, that each of us will come away encouraged and enlightened and ready to hit the ground running for the time that remains to us in this life, that we can be fully equipped for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I have reviewed the first part of our study of the fear of the Lord last time and rather than reviewing the review I will trust that you have that mentally in hand and can continue. We have seen that our primary passage, anytime you want a review of the fear of the Lord, a quick refresher, Deuteronomy 10, verses 12 and following is the key. This is where God describes the fear of the Lord to his people Israel.

The fear of the Lord has not changed in the same way that God himself has not changed. Our covenant is new and founded upon better promises, but God is the same. Our responsibility to him is the same.

What I would like to do is summarize the fear of the Lord and reminding ourselves that you can kind of break the use of this term and this phrase into five general categories. In case I didn't enumerate these before and if you want a very literal and easy listing, it's kind of like when you see the word if in scripture and it's great to understand the four classes of conditional clauses. If and it's true, if and it's not true, if maybe yes, maybe no, and if and it's not true but I wish it was.

If you were mature I wouldn't have to go back and talk about the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. I wish you were mature but you're not. That's the fourth class.

I think I heard myself say it was the third class in something I was listening to recently and I just wanted to smack my own self in the head. That's the fourth class. Third class is maybe yes, maybe no.

In any case, it's a helpful way to think when you come to an if clause. You just say, okay, which one of these is this? It helps me understand this statement and its context. In the same way, it is helpful when you come across fear as it relates to God in scripture.

It is helpful to remember that it falls into five general categories. Pairs of these are like a Venn diagram that have some things in common but then some uniqueness. You'll see what I'm talking about as I review them.

Number one, the emotion of fear when it comes to God, the things of God, the actions of God. This can fall on unbelievers as well as believers. I would call this emotional fear.

Emotional fear, this is just like seeing a snake, hearing that there's a tornado in the area, you're under a tornado warning. People have an emotional fear. There is some sort of impending danger.

I fear for my life, I fear for my safety, I fear for my loved ones, fear for my property. It's just this gut response that generally wants us to either fight or fly. That's number one, emotional fear.

Number two overlaps with this but has its own uniqueness and this is fear in more of an intellectual sense. As I watch inflation rise and other harbingers of doom in the economy, I don't have an emotional fear. I have an intellectual anticipation of bad times coming.

Intellectual fear is the anticipation of negative circumstances in the near, short or long term. You hear this in Hebrews, let us fear lest a promise of entering his rest be unfulfilled, any of you should seem to come short of it. There is a promise of entering into God's rest, let us fear.

This is just intellectually understanding that it would be a bad thing for us not to experience the fulfillment of the promises God makes when we enter into his rest. Let us remember that it's bad times in the future if this takes place. So that's number two.

You're anticipating a negative future, it doesn't rise to the level of emotional worry or emotional distress. Number three, and many of these are ones that you mentioned when I first gave my pop quiz question a couple of weeks ago, what would you understand the fear of the Lord to be? Number three is reverence or awe. The verbal form of this is to revere.

If someone is revered, he is a revered leader. George Washington is revered as the father of our country or he used to be. I am about ready to go postal on some people who are attacking George Washington.

Their ignorance is just abysmal and their lack of appreciation, the only thing you can compare it to is the lack of appreciation for God himself and for the things of God and for the Lord Jesus and for biblical morality and Judeo-Christian ethics and the rest of it. People have just gotten so aggressively arrogant and aggressively self-righteous and they are perpetrating the five I wills publicly and impudently. They're impudent.

And it is so disgusting that we really, one has to go back to entering into that rest, let it go. I can't do anything about those people. I just need to be sure that I don't repeat their heinous mistakes of thinking.

But reverence, there are things about God that should spark our reverence. When you revere something or someone, anything that pertains to it is automatically a priority and something to be thought of carefully and your actions are executed in the light of that reverence. And this is the central idea, that's why I put it as number three, reverence or awe, A-W-E, in the proper sense of the term.

There's a praise song that says, Our God is an awesome God, but it's got this little bouncy tune to it. Our God is an awesome God. Genuine awe is down on our face in the presence of the Most Holy with the attitude Peter had when Jesus showed him the fish on the other side of the boat and he said, Lord, depart from me a sinner.

It is Ezekiel in the presence of God. I am unworthy. And a seraph has to take a coal from the burning pile around the altar of God and touch his lips and sanctify him before he even dares to remain in God's presence.

That's reverential awe. That's number three. Number four is, again, like an overlapping concept, it partakes of number three, but it extends into something new.

What is the result of that attitude? It is righteous behavior. Children who respect their parents, who honor their parents, I'm talking about younger children in the home, out of respect and out of understanding of potential consequences for disobedience and the rest of it, are behaved. They are well behaved for a complex of reasons.

Good children not only understand that there can be dire consequences for misbehavior, but they also love their parents and don't want to disappoint them. The most powerful motivation for good behavior in children is when they love their parents to the point that to disappoint their parents is worse than punishment. To realize that mom or dad are unhappy and disappointed and had expectations that you did not fulfill, this is awful.

This is something to be avoided at almost any cost. So righteous behavior, this is obedience and faithfulness. Loyalty to God.

We love because he first loved us and we want to be worthy of our calling. We fear, this also overlaps a little bit with the intellectual anticipation of bad consequences, we fear lest a promise remains of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. We are motivated not only by anticipation of unfortunate consequences, but one of the primary unfortunate consequences is God being disappointed in us.

We do not reflect the glory of our Savior who loved us and gave himself for us. There is a combination of respect, anticipation of bad consequences, and a desire to live faithfully and obediently as an expression of our fear of the Lord. So that's number four.

Number five is at the opposite end of the spectrum where it is superficial formal worship. This is interesting and one that people don't typically think of, but the Bible talks about it, where the ritual performance of religious functions reflects a quote-unquote fear of the Lord, but it is generally a holdover or it is a hollow expression. You can think of the pharisaical regulations that were put forward as their idea of what it is to fear the Lord and to keep the law and to be obedient, but it is hollow.

It is a superficial and outward conformity that calls itself fear of the Lord, but doesn't come from the heart, isn't motivated by awe. We're going to see tonight that fear of the Lord is a motivation. We have spoken as recently as last week about the triad of Christian virtues, specifically Christian virtues.

You remember those? Faith, hope and love. What those signify to us, I've got three words that start with M. Do you remember them? What is faith? Faith is the means. What is love? Love is the measure.

When we evaluate ourselves, do we love God and do we love one another? That's the measure of whether our faith and hope are doing their job. And what is hope? What do we always say about hope? It's the motivation. That is true.

Why? What is hope? If you were going to think of a synonym for hope that started with A and ended with patient, what would it be? When you look to the future, you're expecting things, you anticipate. It's an anticipation. What did we say about number two above in the fear of the Lord? The fear of the Lord is an anticipation as well.

And I would offer something of a new thought that when we think about faith, hope and love, the flip side of hope, hope of the glory of God, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Hope does not disappoint because of the fulfillment of God's promises. But there is sort of an anti-hope.

There is the other side of the coin of hope, which is if we fail the grace of God, if we do not heed the author of Hebrews and a promise being left of entering into his rest, we don't enter in, what's your anticipation then? You have a hope of negative consequences. Our hope embodies the fear of the Lord in both senses. You can

anticipate blessing and reward and opportunity, future service, fellowship, closeness with the risen Christ in the kingdoms that are to come through faithfulness and obedience.

You can also hope, anticipate that failure in those areas is going to have the opposite result, distance from Christ, few if any opportunities for service, not reflecting his glory, not prospering and being blessed in this life or the next. And that's why it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if you're not doing what you're supposed to. So when we think about motivation as the significance of our hope, just remember there is both positive motivation and negative motivation.

People have characterized this as both the carrot and the stick and we should be motivated by both. This is why scripture gives us both. So these are the five, emotional fear, intellectual anticipation of bad things to come, anticipation of evil circumstances if you will.

Number three, reverence and awe that are due to God because He is worthy to be praised. Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor and glory and power and all the other things. Four, righteous living which is the expression of number three.

If we are not living righteously, if we are not pruning out bad behavior, if we are not extinguishing patterned sins in our lives, number three is not really true. You are not actually reverencing God if you do not care enough about His opinion to purge out the leaven, to have our lives be a feast of unleavened bread, resisting the devil so that he will flee, of fleeing youthful lusts, of eschewing bad behavior, evil company. Blessed is the man that does not continue to keep company with sinners and the scornful.

I have more about the scornful here in a moment as well. So those are the five kinds, righteous behavior and then there is a superficial fear of the Lord that calls itself that, passes for that, but it is hollow. And in some cases it even overlaps with number one.

There are people who have a mystical fear of God. They do not really understand Him, love Him or reverence Him. They are just afraid God is going to drop the hammer so they will go through legalistic or superficial ritual behavior, obediences in their mind because they are spooked out that the big mean judge in the sky is going to hammer them otherwise.

And this typically does not last long. So let us talk about the first one. We will just give an example or two of each of these in Scripture.

We have already seen in Deuteronomy, in Exodus and in Deuteronomy when Israel gathered at Mount Sinai and there is smoke and thunder and fire on the mountain and loud noise of every description. Moses reviews this and reminds Israel of it in Deuteronomy chapter 5 verse 5. Moses said, I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord, for you were afraid because of the fire and

you did not go up to the mountain. The fire scared you.

The thunder scared you. The presence of God in its overt and outward physical manifestations produced such emotional fear in you that you could not really even think. It is an emotional fear.

In 1 Samuel chapter 5 verse 6, Moses said, I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord, for you were afraid because of the fire and you did not go up to the mountain. The thunder scared you. The presence of God in its overt and outward physical manifestations produced such emotional fear in you that you could not even think.

It is an emotional fear. So, this is the kind of fear, whether it is emotional fear or the intellectual anticipation of bad consequences that are in view when you see exhortations to fear thou not. Fear not is an exhortation against being emotionally afraid or being overcome by the intellectual expectation of bad times.

You look around at the news today, almost any area of life, and even if it is not emotional, there is certainly an intellectual recognition that things are not getting better, they are getting worse, especially for believers. The hatred, the vituperation, the overt, active attacks on the foundations of what made our country great, of what made Christianity great, of what has sustained us as Americans in particular throughout the last couple hundred years, are all not just under attack but are being actively destroyed and pulled off of their pedestals and hauled to the scrap heap like statues. And it can be very depressing, but the universal, constant, constant, constant exhortation from Scripture is, fear thou not.

Fear not. Remember when Gabriel appears to Mary? Fear not. He appears to Joseph? Fear not.

Zechariah? Fear not. The interposition of a divine presence or even a divine messenger for almost anyone, the first thing they have to say is, fear not. Why? What is our memory verse? Fear thou not, for fear thou not, for I am with thee.

Be not dismayed. You can categorize these first two kinds of fear as dismay, either emotional or intellectual, but we are commanded to not fear. Don't be emotionally disturbed.

John 14, Jesus says, fear not. How does He say it? Let not your heart be troubled. Why? Fear not, for I am with thee.

How does Jesus put it in John 14? Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God and you believe in me. If you believe in God and you believe in the Lord Jesus, you recognize that they are available.

We are related to God through Christ. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture, just as Israel was. If God be for us, who can be against us? All of these petty, shallow, self-indulged, self-gratifying, weird people wandering around attacking everything in sight, trying to build their own little towers of babel everywhere.

I feel like we're just right in the middle of the plain of Shinar, don't you? We're just surrounded by people who want to make a man-made tower of deliverance of their own design, their own architecture, their own building, and it isn't going to end well for them. Fear thou not, for I am with thee. So, whether it is in the human realm or God assuring us, we should not be subject to these circumstantial types of fear, because we are connected to the Divine and the Eternal.

Jesus says, don't fear those who can kill the body. Who should we fear? Fear Him who can cast both body and soul into Gehenna. Do not fear.

Don't be emotionally or intellectually disturbed. Don't get depressed and overly aggravated. Any time that starts welling up, what is the antidote? Turn away from fear of people and circumstances and turn toward the fear of the Lord.

That's where wisdom is. That's where life is. That's where blessing and opportunity are.

That's where we make our spiritual money. That's where we invest in our treasure in heaven. Any time we start fearing and dreading the earth and its calumnies and its failures and its evil and its despicable agendas, we replace it.

We shove it aside and fill the living room of our soul with the fear of the Lord. So, the reverence for God is similar to that reverence for God in the sense that that is due to parents. You go to Leviticus chapter 19 verse 3, every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.

The New King James actually translates the verb for fear which is Yare, Yare, Yare, Y-A-R-E would be the verb. Yare is the infix that makes it fearing. There is another related word that is Morah that comes from, remember how we can take a verb in Hebrew and put an M in front of it and turn it into a noun because it is from the action of fear.

From the action of fear, Ma-Ya-Ra, you get Morah or Moray which is fear. What is the name of the mountain? Mount Moriah? What would that mean? The M-O-R there is fear. The Lord is my fear.

The Lord is my reverence. The mount of my reverencing the Lord, Moriah. It is hard to know exactly what is happening in the middle of that word.

Is there a my in there? It all depends on which rabbi you believe. But we know the first part is fear and Yah is Yahweh, the Lord, the covenant name of God. He is my reverence.

He is my fear. He is the Lord that is to be feared, Mount Moriah. So parents in 19.3 Every one of you shall revere his mother and father and keep my sabbaths.

I am the Lord your God. How do you reverence your father and mother? Honor them when you are young and under their authority. You obey them.

How do you reverence God? The first commandment after, have no other gods before me, make no graven images, don't take my name in vain, remember the sabbath day. It is a practical expression of respect for God to set aside on a regular basis time that is devoted to reflection and cultivation of the fear of the Lord. The Old Testament Israelites were on a one day out of seven schedule in the same way that their tithe of their increase was of a material nature.

Hours are spiritual. It's a good rule of thumb. Can we take one part in seven? If you've got an eight hour work day, can you take even a half hour in a day for prayer, for review, for reflection, to endeavor to redeem the time, review and examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith.

If we're doing five minutes a day of spiritual reflection and ten to twelve hours a day of work and labor in a thoughtless and earthly manner, we are not functioning as the body of Christ. We're not operating in faith or hope or love. We're anybody in the world can do that.

Any godless, atheistic, unbeliever can do that. What we do in everything we should be giving thanks. In everything give thanks.

This is the will of God concerning you. Why? The dog just made a mess I've got to clean up. Something just broke.

Something just failed. Something requires an odious effort on my part that I'm not looking forward to. In everything give thanks.

This is the will of God concerning you. What does that do? Instead of being negative and carping and creating a complex of attitude sins that usually lead to sins of the tongue and making ourselves a non-blessing to those around us, if we start by saying, really? I'm supposed to give thanks for this? How does that work? And then take a beat and say, well, let's see. Here is an opportunity for me to serve.

Do you think it was fun washing the disciple's smelly feet in the upper room? Jesus did it. And he said, as I have done for you, you should do for each other. So I am in a unique position to do what Jesus did to accomplish a not fun task in a way that initially might be puzzling in terms of how can this glorify the Lord? I'm cleaning up this bathroom floor because the toilet plugged up and overflowed.

How am I going to glorify God in this? It's not about the task. It's about the attitude.

Whatever you do, it's the verse my dad put in the front of my Bible that they gave me when I graduated high school.

Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord. If the Lord brought you into the divine throne room and said, you know, in wing 17 of the palace here, a commode has overflowed. Could I rely on you to clean that up? What would you say? The divine Lord of glory, the creator of the universe is actually calling me and giving me an assignment and I can come back and report to him and be in his presence and tell him that I did the job and I did it to the very best of my ability.

It doesn't really matter what the job is at that point, does it? You have been called by name by the Lord of glory and given an opportunity to do something. And if you do it heartily as unto the Lord and come back and say, well, that wasn't fun, but I gave it my very best. Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful in a few things. You have been faithful in small and sometimes odious things. I am going to put you in charge of great and wonderful things.

Because it's not the quality of the things, it's the quality of the person accomplishing them and the spirit and the power in which they are done. This is what the fear of the Lord is all about. If we don't remember anything else about the fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of wisdom, this is what converts time into eternity capital, eternal treasure, eternal life, eternal service, eternal joy, capacity, position, fellowship with God himself, the Lord Jesus Christ in the kingdoms that are to come.

The motivation is positive, hope, hope of the glory of God, hope of those opportunities, those overcomer blessings. But it is also fear, lest we fall short. Given an opportunity, we fumble it.

We miss it. It's in our hands. You watch slow motion replays of football, perfect pass, catches the receiver on the back shoulder.

He's just in stride. The defender is two steps behind him. It's six points and he takes his eye off the ball for just a split second.

And it goes right through his hands. You have to punt, ultimately lose the game. All because of a split second failure to concentrate on what is important.

Catch the ball. You don't have to be particularly gymnastic. You don't have to jump three and a half feet in the air to get it.

It's right there in your hands. Remember what scripture says? You don't have to ascend to heaven to get this. You don't have to descend into hell to get this.

The word is near. It's in our hearts and on our lips. We can say it.

We've memorized it. If it's in our hearts and on our lips, how is it not coming out in our attitudes and our actions? We can say it. We believe it.

We just have to make it happen. This is the fear of the Lord in a nutshell. It is number three, the reverence for God that results in number four, obedience, faithfulness, righteous living that isn't satisfied to tolerate offense and failure and patterned sin.

Track it down. Put a javelin through its heart. The man of Israel and the woman he brings into the camp, go into the tent, run that javelin straight through both of them and eliminate the evil from God's camp.

All of the things we've seen about defiling of the temple, weeping for Tammuz and Ezekiel, hair of the head and look at all these heinous things and the glory of God leaves the temple. What do you think happens when we are His temple and we don't purge out the idols that have been set up in the courtyard? We don't sanctify the altar. We don't purge out and drive out with a whip of cords the money changers and those who are in it for themselves and don't give two hoots and a rain barrel about reverence for God and the fear of the Lord.

There is no fear of God in this place. If that's us and we are the temple, what's going to happen to that temple? Well, what happened in 586? What happened in 70 AD? That temple will be knocked down and be no more. There is hope of glory and there is also the fearful expectation of judgment that comes on those who receive the rain many times like a field but produce thorns and briars instead of a crop on behalf of the owner.

The owner of the field is not us. The owner of the field is God. He purchased us with a great price and we should be motivated by positive hope and also by the anticipation, both emotional and intellectual, of negative consequences if the promises being put before us, we fall short of them.

That's what the whole first portion of Hebrews is about. Well, we have more to say about this when we come back from our break.