

## Chapter Nine: Walk in the Fear of the Lord

The world says a real man is not afraid of anything. The Bible, however, teaches fear should reign in the hearts of all. In fact, not only is fear readily discussed in the Scriptures, it is done so in a positive light. The word fear is found about 400 times in the King James translation and its variations appear an additional 124 times. Over half of all these occasions are in direct relation to fearing to God. In the Old Testament “no fewer than fifteen Hebrew nouns and ten verbs are translated by ‘fear’” (Elwell 409). In the New Testament “there is one main noun for ‘fear,’ *phobos* [G: 5401], and one main verb, *phobeō* [G: 5399]. The element of fright or terror seems to be inherent in these terms, but as in the case in the OT, the idea of reverential trust predominates” (Elwell 409). As the Scriptures discuss fear they teach us: 1) To walk in the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31); 2) To fear God is to obey God (Ecclesiastes 12:13); 3) Fearing God is learned (Deuteronomy 4:10; 6:1-15); and 4) Fearing God will be rewarded (Hebrews 4:1).

“Walking in the fear of the Lord” was the habit of the New Testament church (Acts 9:31). Walking is translated from *poreuomai* (G: 4198). “The word is often used to denote Christian conduct, or manner of life...The idea is that of *travelers* who are going to any place, and who walk in the right path. Christians are thus travelers to another country, an heavenly” (Barnes 442). Fear is part of that path. Fear, *phobos* (G: 5401), means first “dread, terror” and then “reverence, respect” (Thayer 656). This is not just a frightful fear or dread, but a reverential fear toward God. Walking in the fear of the Lord indicates a lifestyle of reverence for God and trust in him. In addition to walking in the fear of the Lord the New Testament church walked “in the comfort of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:31). Comfort, *paraklēsis* (G: 3874), means “consolation, comfort, solace” (Thayer 483). Within this word is the idea of “a calling to one’s side” and here indicates calling the Holy Spirit to our side to receive consolation and comfort (Vine 110). To walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost is to be “not only faithful, but cheerful” (Henry *New* 6:187). The New Testament church did not only fear God; they feared God cheerfully. It was not a burden for them to be Christians, but a joy, a pleasure and a comfort. “‘The fear of the Lord’ expresses their holy walk; ‘the comfort of the Holy Ghost,’ their ‘peace and joy in believing’” (Jamieson 1095).

Walking in the fear of the Lord led the New Testament church to edification and growth (Acts 9:31). Edified, *oikodomeō* (G: 3618), refers to “the spiritual growth and development of character of believers” (Vine 194). Literally, it means “to build (up from the foundation)...to build upon a foundation laid by others” (Thayer 439-440). Paul writes about this concept in 1 Corinthians 3:10: “I have

laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.” The New Testament church originally received the Gospel through the apostles’ teaching, thus the foundation was laid. Others, in addition to the apostles, continued the work through further teaching. Thereby, the faith of the New Testament church was built upon the foundation already laid. As the church continued to learn and grow spiritually, they also taught others. Their walk proclaimed their fear of the Lord and the joy they had in serving him. “They so lived that all who conversed with them might say, Surely the fear of the Lord reigns in those people” (Henry *New* 6: 187). What better way to spread the Gospel than to live the Gospel? Those with whom the New Testament church came into contact could not help but notice the manner in which they lived. Peter wrote about such an example where the friends of new converts wondered at the sure and visible change to the way they lived their lives (1 Peter 4:1-5). As we walk in the fear of the Lord, we, too, can and should spiritually strengthen the church and cause growth.

According to Ecclesiastes 12:13, to fear God is to obey God. This verse comes at the end of Solomon’s discourse of life “under the sun,” or on earth (1:2). Life on this earth is empty if this is all there is. But, Solomon continues, there is more to life than what we see. Chapter twelve begins with these words of exhortation: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth” (12:1). We are here for a purpose and that purpose is to glorify God. Consider Solomon’s conclusion: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13). Conclusion, *sōp* (H: 5490), means “end, conclusion” (Strong 1541). Matter, *dābār* (H: 1697), means “what is said” (Strong 1489) and refers to “words, speech, discourse” (Tregelles 187). The conclusion of the whole matter is the “conclusion of the discourse” just made (Cook 5: 113). That conclusion, our purpose in life, is to fear God and keep his commandments. Fear, *yārē*’ (H: 3372), means “to revere, respect” (Strong 1512). Keep, *šāmar* (H: 8104), means “to keep, tend, watch over, retain” (Vine 127). The sense is of guarding and comes from the idea “of shutting up, making fast with nails” (Tregelles 838). If we guard God’s commandments within our hearts, then we will do them; we will obey them. This, Solomon says, is the whole duty of man. “Rather, the whole man. To fear God and to obey him is the whole man, constitutes man’s whole being” (Cook 5:113). The purpose of our lives on earth is to do as God bids, and that can only be done if we truly give God the reverence and respect he is entitled to receive.

The root of religion is the fear of God reigning in the heart, a reverence of his majesty, a deference to his authority, and a dread of his wrath. Fear God, that is, worship God, give him the honour due to his name, in all the instances of true devotion, inward and outward...Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be a respect to all his commandments and a care to keep them...It is the concern of every man, and ought to

be his chief and continual care; it is the common concern of all men, of their whole time. It is nothing to a man whether he be rich or poor, high or low, but it is the main matter, it is all in all to a man, to fear God and do as he bids him. (Henry *Whole* 3: 1052)

Fearing God must be learned (Deuteronomy 4:10). In the context of the verse Moses rehearses Israel's history from Sinai to the wilderness wandering. Since Moses is addressing a new generation, forty years removed from Sinai, he reminds the nation of God's commandments and promises. God especially wants Israel to remember when they stood before him at Mount Sinai. There God commanded Moses, "Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:10). The purpose of gathering the people together was so they could hear God. Hear, *šāma'* (H: 8085), means "to hear, listen, obey...from the base meaning of hearing come the extensions of understanding and obedience" (Strong 1576). The result of hearing and obeying God is fear, *yārē'* (H: 33372). This is the same Hebrew word used in Ecclesiastes 12:13 where we learned to fear God is to obey God. Once again "this is not simple fear, but reverence" (Vine 79). This reverential fear must be learned. Learn *lāmad* (H: 3925), means "to teach, learn, cause to learn...In its simple, active form, this verb has the meaning 'to learn,' but it is also found in a form giving the causative sense 'to teach'" (Vine 256). Thus, the same word is translated teach later in the verse. Both learning and teaching the fear of God comes through his Word.

Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

Commandments, *mišwā* (H: 4687), means "a command, a precept...especially used of the precepts of God" (Tregelles 501). Judgments, *mišpāt* (H: 4941), is a "law, regulation" (Strong 1533) and is "used of the body of laws...the law of Moses" (Tregelles 520). Statutes, *ḥōq* (H: 2706), properly means "that which is established or definite...an appointed law, a statute, an ordinance" (Tregelles 300). "The words' synonyms are *mišwāh*, 'commandment'; *mišpāt*, 'judgment'; *b<sup>e</sup>rīt*, 'covenant'; *tōrāh*, 'law'; and *ēdūt*, 'testimony.' It is not easy to distinguish between these synonymns, as they are often found in conjunction with each other" (Vine 245). No matter how you say it, the law of God teaches us to fear him.

God coupled fearing him with loving him. Just a few verses after God calls for the Israelites to fear him (Deuteronomy 6:1-2) and to obey him (verses 2-4), he also calls on them to love him. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (verse 5). Heart, *lēbāb* (H:

3824), means “the inner man” (Vine 108) and stands as the “seat of the senses, affections, and emotions of the mind” (Tregelles 427). The soul, *nepeš* (H: 5315), is the “self; life; person” (Vine 237). Might, *m<sup>e</sup>’ōd* (H: 3966), “is a marker of great degree or quantity” (Strong 1520). To do something with all of our might is to do it “in the highest degree” (Tregelles 444). Together heart, soul and might indicate a “total self-surrender of man’s being to his maker” (Cook 2:283). We are to love God with every ounce of our being and such a love will come easily to those who truly fear him.

To fear God and to love God are so important God commanded the Israelites to teach those traits to their children. It is mentioned in Deuteronomy 4:10 as well as 6:2 and 6:7-9. God wanted their love and reverence ever present in their lives and always with them. Thus, the command to love God with every ounce of their being was to be written not only in their hearts but also on their hands, their faces and on the door posts of their houses (6:8-9). They were to talk about it and teach it to their children at every opportunity (6:7). Today, we also have the responsibility of teaching our love and fear of God. Whether taught through our words or our actions, all who know us should know that we love and fear God. Our walk should be as such that all who know us can not help but know we love, reverence and obey Almighty God. That walk can and will open doors, allowing us to proclaim further the love and fear God deserves, thereby bringing others into our walk.

In Deuteronomy 6:12-15 God warns the Israelites not to forget such fear and love.

Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

Beware, *šāmar* (H: 8104), is the same word used in Ecclesiastes 12:13 and Deuteronomy 6:2 where it is translated keep. Rather than guarding God’s commandments within our hearts so as to keep or obey them, the idea here is that of using vigilance to guard ourselves against forgetting God. Forget, *šākaḥ* (H: 7911), does not refer to forgetting who God is, but to allowing our attention to wander away from God to other things. Jesus said, “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). God is a jealous God and demands we put him first in our lives. Though this passage (Deuteronomy 6) deals directly with false gods and idols, it applies to us today just the same. Thought we do not physically bow down and worship false gods, anything that comes before God in our lives is an idol or false god to us. Therefore, we must fear God and serve only him. The phrase “swear by his name” indicates giving allegiance to God (Vine

253). When we serve God there is no room for allegiance to any other for “No man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). If we do not fear God and serve only him, then God’s anger will be kindled against us and we will be destroyed. Kindled, *hārâ* (H: 2734), means “to be angry...to burn with anger” (Strong 1503). Anger, *’ap* (H: 639), is “very often used of the anger of God” (Tregelles 69). As a jealous God, he demands our loyalty, else we face his anger and destruction. Destroy, *šamad* (H: 8045), “frequently is part of an open threat or warning given to the people of Israel...if they forsook God for idols” (Vine 59). The law is clear—fear God. God gives us the opportunity to learn that fear and the responsibility to teach that fear. If we fail to do so, then we will incur the wrath of God and suffer spiritual destruction.

Just as God promised to destroy those who do not fear him, he likewise promises to reward those who do fear him. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Hebrews 4:1). Chapter three verse eight begins a recall to the Israelites of old who could not enter Canaan “because of unbelief” (3:19). Unbelief, *apistia* (G: 570), is the negative form of *pistis* (G: 4102), faith. It is a lack of conviction toward God and his Word (Vine 61). It was not that Israel did not believe God existed. They had ample evidence of that fact—just look at the Ten Plagues and other miracles God performed through Moses. “And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses” (Exodus 14:31). Further, the people declared as one, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). They knew God existed. Their unbelief was their lack of trust and confidence in God which led to a lack of active obedience. That lack of trust and obedience prohibited the generation from entering into Canaan, God’s rest. Rest, *katapausis* (G: 2663), literally means “putting to rest...repose” (Vine 529) and refers to “God’s heavenly rest, of which Canaan is the type” (Jamieson 14505). Rest is still promised to Christians today who fear and obey God. “The apostle declares that our privileges by Christ under the gospel are not only as great, but greater than those enjoyed under the Mosaic law. He specifies this, that we have a promise left us of entering into his rest; that is, of entering into a covenant relation to Christ, and a state of communion with God through Christ, and of growing up therein, till we are made perfect in glory” (Henry *New* 9:250). Though the promise of rest is available to us today, we must take heed lest we also “come short of it” (Hebrews 4:1). Short, *hystereō* (G: 5302), means “to come late or too tardily...to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the end...fail to become a partaker” (Thayer 646). Just as the Israelites failed to enter into their rest of Canaan we, too, can fall short and not finish the race. Just because we have walked in newness of life (Romans 6:4) do

not guarantee we will partake of God's eternal rest. Therefore, we are to fear, *phobeō* (G: 5399). As we recall, the literal translation is that of fright while the figurative deals with reverence and respect (Strong 1652). In this passage both aspects of fear are clearly seen. This verse is a warning to "take anxious care" (Thayer 656) and "to show reverential fear" (Vine 235). The overall meaning is this:

Let us be apprehensive that we may possibly fail of that rest. The kind of *fear* which is recommended here is that which leads to caution and care. A man who is in danger of losing his life or health should be watchful; a sea man that is in danger of running on a lee-shore should be on his guard. So we who have the offer of heaven, and who yet are in danger of losing it, should take all possible precautions lest we fail of it. (Barnes 1250)

Fear God. Give him the reverence and respect he is entitled and show anxious care so as not to lose the rest we have been promised. Spiritual rest is available to Christians today and we can and should look forward to receiving it.

The concept of fear is found throughout the Scriptures, mostly in reference to fearing God. We must learn to fear God through his commandments, statutes and precepts. Once we learn to fear God, we will understand that to fear God is to love God and to love God is to obey God. Only then can we walk in the fear of the Lord, bringing others to God through our example and profession of faith. Only then, when we truly fear God, can we look forward to the eternal rest promised to the faithful. Fear God. Honor, cherish, respect, love and obey him for that is why we are here; that is the purpose of our very existence. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

**Questions:**

1. In what two ways is fear used in the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. How did the New Testament church walk [two ways] (Acts 9:31)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - a. What is meant by each? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - b. To what did such a walk lead? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What is our purpose in this life? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. How do we learn to fear God? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - a. What is coupled with fearing God? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - b. What responsibility do we have in regard to fearing and loving God?  
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5. How can we forget God? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - a. What will happen if we do forget God? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - b. What reward comes to those who do not forget God? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. In your own words, describe what it means to walk in the fear of the Lord.

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