

Fear Knot
Essential Truth
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For those of you that know me or know my family, you can imagine that this is quite a time of mixed emotions in being here for the final time at Grace Church. I have in my Bible the bulletin from the first time I was at Grace Church, October 26, 1986. That was with a radio Bible conference before I had even met my wife and it goes back to the very earliest days of my Christian experience. The earliest days of my Christian experience are bound up with the ministry of this pulpit with the life of Grace Community Church and I can tell you that it would only take a magnificent opportunity to be able to go with people who are urgent about the word of God to be able to have the heart to leave. This is just a time of mixed emotions for me. But the real urgency on my heart is not my own situation. It's not thoughts about leaving here this evening and that's not the opportunity that is given to me here today is to talk nostalgically about my own personal past even though those feelings are in my heart and my love for all of you is very rich and deep and will be abiding long after the moving van pulls out. No, the urgency tonight is the subject matter from the word of God that we're going to consider and it's found in the book of Proverbs 1:7.

Many in the church throughout America and perhaps throughout the world have been conditioned in a terribly wrong way. They have been conditioned to think that the first law of spiritual life is for you to believe that God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life. Millions of people have been told that is the first spiritual law that you need to know. I want to tell you that that is not at all what the Bible says about what the first thing that you need to know is, what is the beginning of knowledge. The Bible states it clearly and the Bible states it over and over again. To start with the love of God is to start at the wrong place because it sets the sinner into thinking that God loves him and there is no other aspect to God's attitude toward him.

In Proverbs 1:7, the beginning of the book of wisdom in the Old Testament, you see what the real first spiritual law is and Solomon states it very plainly and clearly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 1:7, which is our text for this evening says, "The fear of the LORD,

7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. That is the first spiritual law that everyone must understand. Both sinner and Christian alike must understand that the foundation of knowledge, the foundation of life is built upon a right understanding of the fear of the Lord.

Now, the fear of the Lord is not the beginning in the sense that you start there and move on to other things and move on to more important things. No, the fear of the Lord is like the foundation of a house; that is the foundation upon which everything else is built. The fear of the Lord is the foundation upon which everything else rests and the fear of the Lord was a prominent theme not only in the book of Proverbs but also at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes. You can see that Solomon had this thought on his mind throughout his writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The last 2 verses of the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, verses 13 and 14, after he had gone through all of his statements throughout the book of Ecclesiastes he said, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." So as you look at the writings of Solomon, it's interesting, he says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning," and at the end he says the conclusion is, "The fear of the Lord is what matters. The fear of the Lord is what applies to every person."

What we're going to look at tonight applies to every one of you regardless of where you're at in your spiritual life. If you are here and you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, if you do not know what it means to repent from sin and to yield your life to Christ, trusting his shed blood and righteousness alone to make you fit to appear before a holy God, this message applies to you. For those of you and the majority of you on an evening like this who already know Christ and love him, the fear of God applies to you as well. Solomon says it applies to every person and therefore it applies to every one of us in here tonight. It applies to me.

Now, what I want to do tonight is really just kind of help you understand what the fear of God means. I've been frustrated, I'll be honest with you, over the years of hearing preachers in different parts of the country and when you hear the fear of the Lord come up, you so often hear it summarized very briefly and defined as: the fear of the Lord means reverential awe. That's not a bad definition. I won't criticize the definition, but the truth of the matter is, I never really understood what that meant. What does that mean? I'm in awe, is my awe reverential enough? We don't even talk that way, really. What does this mean? I've never found that very helpful and it's the definition that I have so often heard come from various teaches that I've heard teach on this over the years.

Now, that was one problem that prompted me to want to study this theme in times gone by. There was another reason why I wanted to study this theme and why I want to share it with you tonight. If you read the Bible superficially, your problem and your confusion will only get worse because the Bible says different things about this and points us in different directions. So for example, in the book of Hebrews 10:31, it says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God," speaking in the context of eternal

judgment. Okay, I get that. Be afraid of God because he can send you to hell. That is a legitimate reason to fear God. I get that. I understand that, but as you continue to read in the Bible, you realize that there are other aspects of the fear of God that the Scriptures point us to.

For example, I want you to turn to Psalm 112 and we have to treat all of these things rather quickly this evening, although it occurs to me that since I'm leaving tonight, if I go 3 hours tonight, what are they going to do to me? So if I go a little long today, please bear with me because this is such an urgent topic. It applies to every person. So look at Psalm 112:1. If you only think about the fear of God in the context of the terrors of hell that God can inflict on the unrepentant, if that's your only approach to it, then this verse makes absolutely no sense. Psalm 112:1, "Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments." Wait a second, he said it was a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but now the Bible speaks about praise and blessing and delight? How are we to put those things together? Where is the terror in that?

And if you continue reading in the New Testament, turn over to the book of 1 John 4:15. I'll let you catch up with me as you get there. 1 John 4:15, listen to this, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

Try to put all of those things together. On the one hand, the Bible commands the fear of the Lord. Commands it and describes the terror of falling into his hands. On the other hand, the fear of the Lord produces praise and delight and blessing. Then on your third hand, it's okay, you can catch up with me there. On your third hand, Christians have no cause for fear after all. How are we to put these things together? How are we to understand and synthesize the totality of biblical revelation on this most important theme? It must be urgent for us to do so because it applies to every person and it must be urgent to do so because it is the beginning, it is the foundation of knowledge.

Yet, here we are with these seemingly conflicting streams of thought. This biblical fear of God, this biblical theme of the fear of God, is a difficult knot to untangle and thus the title of tonight's message, "Fear Knot." It's more than a riddle. This has vast spiritual implications. If you are a Christian and you believe that you are supposed to fear God with the same kind of terror that troubles the mind of someone who fears impending hell, your spiritual life must certainly be one of great frustration and no doubt falls into a sense of a performance-based approach to your spiritual life. If you have your quiet time, God is not angry with you. If you miss your quiet time, there is reason for terror. There is reason for fear. Well, if you believe that you must fear God with the same terror as one who is going to hell, your spiritual life is certainly impoverished and frustrating and my desire here for those of you tonight who know Christ is to give you a sense of

understanding and help that will certainly increase your confidence in what it means to be a Christian and I say without fear of contradiction that untangling this knot will establish the framework for your entire Christian life. This is a comprehensive approach to the way that you approach your entire philosophy of living from day one until the day you die. This is absolutely urgent. This is absolutely something that you must understand and embrace in the fullness of what it means.

We're going to look at it from 2 perspectives, 2 contrasting perspectives tonight. We do need to talk about it from the perspective of the sinner's fear of God and then look at it from the saint's fear of God or the Christian's fear of God. I want to start with just considering what the Bible says in answer to this question, we'll frame it as 2 different questions: what is the sinner's fear of God? That's where we'll start, talking to the non-Christian that might be in the room or helping you to understand what the fear of God means to your unsaved loved ones all around.

You see, the fear of God and here is one of the keys to understanding this theme: as you study the fullness of what the Bible says about it, the fear of God works itself out in 2 different senses depending upon who you are addressing. Let this one thought, before we get into it, sink deep into your mind. Based on the fact that the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, you must understand that the first thing you need to understand about God at all and the first thing that you need to understand about the fear of God, is that God is a God who must be feared. God is a God to fear. The greatness of his majesty, the greatness of his holiness, the greatness of his uncreated essence, means that you should tremble in his presence; that you should be humbled before him; and that you should have such a sense of respect for him and humility in his presence that you fear him and look to him to understand what he would say to you in a spirit of absolute submission and willingness to respond.

Now, what is the sinner's fear of God? This God who must be feared, how do we understand what the sinner should fear God, what that should look like? Well, let me say it to you this way: for the unsaved sinner, for the person who is not a Christian, the fear of God describes the abject terror that arises when you understand that the God of the Bible is a threat to your well-being. I'll say that again: for the unsaved sinner, the fear of God describes the abject terror that should arise when you understand that he is a threat to your well-being. These are no superficial matters that we are discussing here. This is not, when we talk about the fear of God, this is not the startle reflex that you feel when you bump into somebody unexpectedly in a dark hallway, "Oh!" A little sense of fear there but it quickly passes. This is not what the Bible describes at all.

Listen to the words of Hebrews 10:26-27, and we can't go into the fullness of everything that this topic deserves even in answer to this one question, but Hebrews 10:26-27 says, "If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES." If you reject Christ, understand that what awaits you is a terrifying judgment, a fury of the wrath of God, a fury of a fire which will consume all of his adversaries. If you have not bent your knee to

the Lord Jesus Christ, this verse is addressing you directly. This is the expectation that you should have as the outcome of your existence, terrifying judgment. In verse 31 of Hebrews 10, it says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." This is terror. This is abject, uncontrollable, consuming terror.

The Bible gives us a look at what that terror is like. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Revelation 6. The book of Revelation, chapter 6. In case there are any tough guys in the audience here tonight that think that this won't frighten you, understand that the Bible has a different look at it. The judgment that is coming at the end of this age on earth, when God pours his judgment before the final glorious return of Christ, there will be judgments poured out and in Revelation 6:12, you see a description of that. The Apostle John writing says, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." Now look at this in verse 15. This is what I really want you to see. In response to those birth pangs of God's judgment, let alone the full unveiling of it, look at this in verse 15 and if you are not a Christian, put yourself in this verse because this is what awaits you. It is so very urgent for you to see this! "Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains." The greatest, strongest, bravest men in the world at that time are going to hide and try to run from this because of the great terror of the judgment of God that is starting to be unfolded upon them. And you are not greater, my friend, my arrogant, sinful friend, rejecting Christ as you sit here hearing this message, you are not greater than these men. You are lesser than them and so it will be even worse and more terrifying for you.

Verse 16, "and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" The greatest men in the world, the five-star generals, the Navy Seals, this is their reaction to the unfolding of the wrath of God in time. It's utter terror and they know that they can't stand before it. The greatest men will crumble, shattered as God's wrath is unveiled before them and, my friend, the Lord brought you here tonight to warn you about this. This is an act of grace and mercy if you're not a Christian here tonight. This is an act of grace that the Lord would call this to your attention and to give you one more opportunity to pay attention to the urgent claim of Christ on your life because sinners who do not know Christ should have intense alarm when they think about the God of the Bible. An omnipotent, sovereign God is angry with you. Psalm 7 says that he is a righteous God who suffers indignation every day. Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the knowledge of the truth."

This is not to be trifled with. This God, this God is not to be trifled with and this is why you need the Gospel. It's not so that you can have a better life. It's not so that Jesus can help you with your problems; so that Jesus can unfold a wonderful life for you here on

earth. That's not the point at all. That's quite secondary to the urgent centrality of the Gospel is that you need to be saved from the wrath of God on yourself, on your sinful soul and until you come to Christ to be reconciled to God, nothing but the absolute terror of God should control your thinking and thoughts about life. You cannot escape this. As Solomon said, this applies to every person and lest you think that this is foreign to the lips of the Lord Jesus, listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28. He said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Scriptures are so clear about this absolute sense of terror that should control the mind of a sinner. The wrath of God is coming and it's not because you are outside the scope of that wrath that you haven't felt it yet, it's an expression of the patience of God; expression of his kindness to you to give you one more opportunity to repent; one more opportunity to turn from sin and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, that's why the Gospel is important to you. That's where this fear of God fleshes out for you and if you are gripped by that terror right now, understand that God in putting that terror in your heart is showing grace and mercy to you. That terror should be the motivating force that causes you to turn to Jesus Christ in repentant faith.

You see, Christ came to save sinners. Christ came to save sinners from this terrible wrath of God and if you are sensing that sense of terror, understand that maybe probably for the first time, the urgency of the Gospel is now before you and I invite you to come to our Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved from the certain coming wrath of God. Come to Christ, he receives sinners. Come to Christ, he bore the curse on the cross for sinners. He bore the wrath of God. He interceded for sinners at the cross and now with that terror in your heart, he says, "Come to me and I will give you eternal life." That's where the fear of God should lead sinners who don't know Christ. It should drive them straight to the cross and cause them to flee to him in urgent repentance in order to be saved from this awful future that awaits those who reject him.

The fear of God starts exclusively, not primarily, exclusively, the fear of God starts exclusively with understanding this element of judgment and to those who would truly want to fear him, it should cause them to repent from sin and put their faith in Christ because only Christ can deliver you from that terror. And do you see why in the fullness of biblical revelation, do you see why the fear of the Lord would be the beginning of knowledge? If the fear of the Lord would drive someone to Christ, then that becomes the very beginning of spiritual life. It drives you to him. Galatians 3 says that the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ and so to fear God with this kind of terror is wise. It's the beginning of knowledge because it is what leads you to salvation from eternal wrath and damnation and if you would fear God in that way, it would be the start of wisdom. It would be the first wise moment in your entire life because to ignore it and to reject it up until now has been utter folly.

That's for the sinner, but as I hinted at the beginning of this message, that is not the only aspect of the fear of God that the Bible teaches us. It's not the only thing that it shows to us and so let's look at it from a contrasting perspective here. What is the Christian's fear

of God? How do we fear God? That's the focus for the remainder of the message. I suppose that it would be good to pause and just remember as believers in Christ, remember as the family of God, to look back on that sinner's terror and with gratitude and to realize with such thankfulness in our heart what it is that Christ has saved us from, right? You look back and you smell the flames, as it were, and say, "Lord, thank you for delivering me from that."

But what is the Christian's fear of God? Well, understand this as we move into this second point: salvation, your salvation does not change the fact that you fear God but it changes the way in which he is to be feared. Understand this most basic point about the fear of God as it relates to salvation: when Christ saved you, he relieved you from that terror that should mark the sinner because that judgment is not in your future. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." All of that terror that we were looking at, that's for sinners. Christ saved us from that. Thessalonians, 1 or 2 Thessalonians, I don't remember which and I don't have time to look it up, one of those 2 books in the first chapter says Jesus Christ saves us from the wrath that is to come. He saved us from that. We don't have to fear that anymore and that's what 1 John 4 is talking about, there is no fear of judgment for the Christian. We have been saved from that. We have been delivered from that. Christ took our place and endured the wrath of God against our sins.

So what does it mean for the Christian to fear God? I'll show you in the time that we have left, that the Bible teaches us that the Christian still has a fear of God but it's a different kind of fear. That's really pivotal and so let me give you a definition here. For you as a believer, what does the fear of God mean to you? What should animate your heart as the beginning, the foundation of knowledge? For the believer, the fear of God – listen to this – the fear of God is the wholehearted life of loving, humble worship that you give to God in response to the saving mercy of Christ in your life. Let me say it again: for the believer, the fear of God is the wholehearted life of loving, humble worship that you give to God in response to the saving mercy of Christ in your life. It's a total consuming heart attitude but it's from a completely different perspective, that's the point.

Now, Proverbs 1:7 was written in the context of the progress of biblical revelation. When Solomon wrote Proverbs, he had built on what Moses had recorded in the first 5 books of the Bible and what God says to his people about fearing him is distinct from what he says to sinners about fearing him. I'm going to give you 5 fairly quick elements of the fear of God that should mark your attitude as a Christian here. We're going to answer the question what is the Christian's fear of God with 5, really kind of stating them as imperatives.

First of all, you as a believer, how do the people of God fear God? Well, first of all, you fear him with love. You fear him with love. I love this aspect of the biblical teaching on the fear of God. Turn back to the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, Moses was preaching to the people and they were about to enter into the Promised Land. Moses was giving him his final instruction to them and he repeatedly talks to them about the fear of the Lord and I want you to see this. We'll have to go through this rather quickly, but in

Deuteronomy 5:28, I want you to see a number of different passages and we'll try to synthesize them together. Deuteronomy 5:28 says this, "The LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken.'" Now look at this, verse 29, he says, "'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!'" Notice that he says, "Fear Me and keep My commandments," alright?

Now, chapter 6, verse 1, "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that," verse 2, "you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life." Okay, the fear of the Lord tied up with obedience. Yes, we understand that, but now look what happens. This is so cool! This totally transforms the way they you understand the fear of God because he goes on in verse 4 and he's talking about the commandments and the word of the Lord but watch how he starts to discuss it. He says in verse 4, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." All of a sudden he's talking about the same thing, the centrality of the commandments of God but he's talking about it in the context of love now and as you go on, he starts to use the terms almost interchangeably.

Look at chapter 10, verse 12. He says, "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Fear and love side-by-side, mingled together, inseparably joined together. Look at verse 20, he says, "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him." Chapter 11, "You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments."

One last one, chapter 13, verses 3 and 4. Notice how they are wrapped around each other. Chapter 13, verse 3, "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments ."

What I want you to see is that in this preliminary foundational teaching on the fear of God, Moses wraps it tightly around loving God in response to his word and that context, my friends, informs what Solomon meant in Proverbs 1:7. He was building on this prior revelation when he wrote several hundred years after Moses and you see the fear of God is taught side-by-side with loving him. And Jesus Christ, when he was talking about what it meant to be a disciple of his, he taught us, "You fear God." Let me put it this way: you fear God as a believer by setting your highest affections on him. Jesus said in Matthew 10, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." He called for

your highest affections to be set upon him. To love the Lord your God. What is the greatest commandment? To love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind.

So to fear him as a believer, not afraid of judgment, but you fear him by setting your highest affections. I wish I was 10 feet tall right now so that I could really get up on my toes and emphasize this. You set your highest affections on him. Your highest life priority is to love him and to serve him with an undivided, pure and unmixed heart. That's what it means to fear him as a believer. It's the wholehearted life response that you give to him in response to the saving mercy of Christ in your life.

It becomes a matter of your priorities. It's no longer this craven fear some theologians call the sinner's fear, a servile fear of God. We're not talking about that as a believer, we're talking about what some theologians will call the filial fear of God. This fear of love. This fear of honor. This fear of your highest affections belonging to him. That's what it means to fear the Lord with love and that is the responsibility of every believer in Christ is to have no affection that competes with your love for Christ. No affection that competes with your love for the God of the Bible. You fear him with love in the sense that you place your highest affections, your highest loyalty, your highest allegiance to him. That's fear that honors him.

Now, secondly, you fear him with humility. You fear him with humility. Your love for Christ does not make you casual in your approach to him. The fear of God makes us low in his presence. It makes us want to honor him, to reflect glory to him. Isaiah 66:2 says, "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." You see, becoming a Christian means you revere his majesty. Oh, beloved, hear me on this most essential point: if you are a Christian, you take salvation seriously. It is a matter of earnest study, earnest attention to you, to work out your salvation with fear and trembling as Philippians 2 says. We take salvation seriously because we understand that God disciplines us when we sin, Hebrews 12, we won't take the time to look there. But understand something else really important: you also fear God with humility because you understand something really eternally important and that is that you as a believer are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of your life before him. Not to have your sins brought up and displayed again because Christ has already paid for those on the cross, but Christ is going to evaluate your life as a believer at the judgment seat of Christ and Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 when he's talking about the judgment seat of Christ, he says, "Knowing about this, we fear the Lord." Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.

So in this life, you give him your highest allegiance. You fear him and you're earnest about your salvation. You love him with all of your heart and you have this sense of fear, this sense of respect that you give to God because you know that he providentially disciplines us when we sin and you fear that. You don't want that element of discipline in your life if simple obedience will spare you the painful consequences of it.

Then you're conscious. Oh Christian, hear me. Hear me: you have an appointment with Christ at his judgment seat. You are going to give an account of your life and on the basis of that account, he is going to fill out your eternal reward. This is so critical and I want that day to go well for you. I want to see your reward maximized and the only way that reward is going to be maximized is if you walk in the fear of the Lord that the New Testament describes.

We fear God like an earthly child fears his father. We are secure in his love. We trust his goodness. He's not going to pull the rug out from us but the authority of our heavenly Father produces a reverent sobriety in us that tells us and motivates our heart that we do not trifle with Christ or with his salvation. That's what it means to fear him. "I'm not going to trifle with this salvation. This was bought at the lifeblood of the holy Son of God. How can I trifle with that?" No, these things are far too holy not to fear them with a reverent sobriety that is worthy of the shed blood of Christ.

Well, we have to hurry here. Thirdly, we said that you fear him with love; you fear him with humility. Listen, think about it this way: this unqualified allegiance to Christ and this humility that we are talking about are the very spiritual fibers that make up the heart of a believer. Your heart beats and with every beating of its spiritual muscle, it is beating forth this love for God and this humility that comes from understanding what Christ delivered you from and you are the unworthy recipient of that kind of great grace.

Now, when that heart beats, what does it produce? What is it pumping through your spiritual veins, you might say? Well, here's the third aspect of the Christian's fear of the Lord is that you fear him in his word. You fear him in his word. Go back to Proverbs 1. If I announced it as the text, I might as well look at it from time to time, huh? Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." It makes the contrast between the God fearer and the fool and what marks the fool is the despising of wisdom and instruction.

Psalm 119:38 says, "Establish Your word to Your servant, As that which produces reverence for You." It is the word of God that produces that kind of fear in your heart. You as a believer must have your nose in this book. You must have your mind meditating on the principles and doctrines that this Bible teaches us because that is where the fear of God is fed and I can tell you without fear of contradiction, when you let your life drift away from the Scriptures, these elements of love and humility are replaced by a sense of distance and an ever increasing sense of arrogance and spiritual confusion and a lack of clarity that is not fitting for a true fearer of the Lord. We are gladly bound in tethers and bonds to this Bible in order to maintain this fear of the Lord.

The emphasis that a church gives to Bible teaching tells you instantly whether its leadership fears God or not. That is an easy point of discernment and if you want to look at your own heart, the emphasis that you give to the word of God in your own life is a barometer of whether you fear God in this manner or not. I'll commend that to the Holy Spirit to work out in your thinking but there is no true fear of the Lord apart from the Bible. You fear him in his word and thank God. I mean, I thank God that so many of you

are here Sunday night. The reason you're here is because you fear the Lord and you want his word impacting you. That's why you're here on Sunday night and I thank God for that. I recognize that.

Fourthly, you fear him with your obedience. You fear him with your obedience. We saw that in Deuteronomy. Let's just look at Proverbs 8:13. This is a really important point too. It's all important. It's all God's word, how could it not be important, right? Proverbs 8:13, look at this. Look at this with your own eyes. You see, the fear of the Lord is so much more than a subjective flash of reverential awe, whatever that means. It is very practical and it goes to the way that you orient your entire life. He says in verse 13, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate." The fear of the Lord is wrapped up in the way that you think about sin and the way that you respond to temptation when it comes.

We can reinforce this with another verse. Turn over to Proverbs 16:6 as we're about to make a very crucial point here. This is going to bring such clarity to your mind about so many important things. Proverbs 16:6, "By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil." The fear of God motivates you to rise above your love for sin.

I've often heard the question, "How did So-and-so Pastor fall into sin? I thought he was a man of God. How did he fall into sin?" I'll tell you how he fell into sin: whatever his external activities were in so-called ministry, he did not fear the Lord. If he's living a double life that ultimately gets exposed, you can look back and retroactively understand everything that you need to know because the fear of the Lord keeps you away from evil. It's by the fear of the Lord that we turn away from sin and if someone can continue in a pattern of sin, claiming to be a Christian, or even worse, standing up in ministry, knowing that they are living a double life, all you need to know is that there is no fear of God controlling that man's heart. It doesn't matter how often he's teaching the Bible. That's utterly irrelevant because the fear of the Lord is what causes you to turn away from sin.

I'll say it to you individually, to you personally: if your involvement with Scripture is such that it doesn't turn you into a repenting man or woman of God, your Scripture involvement really doesn't mean too much because the fear of the Lord is what causes you to turn away from evil.

Now, let me say it on the positive side here. It's important to say this on the positive side. Those of you with tender consciences and you're conscious that you fall short of the glory of God, you know what it's like to struggle with sin and you grieve over it and you battle it and sometimes you win and sometimes you fail but you always want to keep moving in that direction and you never quite give up on the struggle of fighting against sin, understand that what is at work in your heart is a true fear of God because that is what is motivating you. That is what is pulsating through your spiritual veins that would cause you to resist sin in the first place. It's the fear of the Lord that makes us turn away from evil. It's the fear of the Lord that causes us to desire to be separate from sin. So if you see that going on in your heart, be encouraged. But without the fear of the Lord, you may

withhold from sin for a while but when the right temptation comes along, a heart that doesn't fear God will go for it. When there is a perfect blending of private opportunity and lack of accountability and desire, without the fear of the Lord, you strike at it. That's why this is so important. When the fear of the Lord is controlling your heart, you want to turn away from that kind of sin and hypocrisy.

Well, let's close on the most positive note that we could. There is so much more that should be said about this, really there is. But I want to end on this positive note, this note that will bring you joy. Fifthly, you fear him with trust. You fear him with trust. We've said that you fear him with love, humility; you fear him in his word; you fear him with your obedience; and finally, you fear him with trust.

Last verse here tonight, Proverbs 22:4. Those of you who love Christ, those of you who acknowledge the imperfection of your allegiance but desire to be going in that direction, you want to love him more, you want to be faithful, you love his word, you want to obey, understand that that fear of the Lord is not in vain. You fear him with trust because God looks on your contrite spirit with favor. Let your mind anchor in this great word, Proverbs 22:4, "The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life." You see, God rewards those who fear him. He rewards them with joy. He rewards them with providential favor in this life. He rewards them with heaven in the next life. It's reward. It's blessing upon blessing upon blessing. Even being in the fellowship of this body of believers is a great blessing from God that he has honored your fear of the Lord.

Having saved you in Christ and seeing the fear of God and as the fear of God is being fleshed out in your life, understand that God himself will personally guard you now and he will save you to the uttermost in the end and when you know that, you trust him. When you know that, you honor him. When you know that, you love him. You are humble before him and all of these things are wrapped together like strands of spiritual DNA and form the believer's fear of God and I know that many of you see yourself in that. "Yeah, I love him. Oh, I love his word. I want to walk in obedience before him. I want to turn away from sin." Understand that the Lord sees right through all of the externals and sees straight to your innermost heart and he honors that fear. He promises to bless that fear and so persevere, that's the point. You persevere in pursuing that, knowing with trust and confidence that God will most certainly reward you in the end.

This is not the craven fear of the sinner looking into the bowels of hell, this is the joyful, loving, faithful response of a child of God looking full into the face of his heavenly Father and saying, "I honor your position. I trust you with my life. I give you the fullness of my allegiance and I will humbly walk with you until you take me home to be with you forever." May God bless you. May God bless the elders of this church. May God for generations still to come, bless and keep Grace Community Church in that kind of the fear of the Lord.

Let's pray together.

Only one question matters at this point and it's whether you in the audience, do you fear the Lord? Because God is a God who must be feared.

Father, we thank you. We honor you. You are worthy of our reverence. You are worthy of this kind of fear that comes from knowing the truth. Help those of us who know you to walk in that lifelong reverential obedience and, Father, for those who don't know Christ, teach them the fear of the Lord that they might come to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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