



THE FEAR OF THE LORD

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Psalm 111

It seems like you can get away with anything these days.

Dictators bomb their own people;
blathering politicians deceive their constituents;
sleazy pharmaceutical execs keep pushing opioids;
Child-molesting priests are still serving Mass.

And life goes on without a peep out of heaven.

No one is held to account.

Fear God? How primitive! Don't you know that God is love?

Don't you realize that "**perfect love casts out fear**"?

The gospel of salvation is a gospel of grace.

The Lamb of God took away the sin of the world.

Mercy triumphs over judgment, so what's to fear?

Good News

Did not Jesus come with good news?

***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent, and believe in the good news."***

Mark 1

The good news is the arrival of the Kingdom of God,
which is at work among us now.

But if we pay attention to Jesus's description of the Kingdom,
his message has a dark side.

Jesus makes clear that God's Kingdom separates the wheat from the tares,
the good fish from the bad fish,
the faithful servant from the slouch.

Fearless Fear

Jesus instructs us to fear nothing----except God.

*"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body,
and after that have no more that they can do.
But I will warn you whom to fear:
fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell;
yes, I tell you, fear him!"*

Luke 12

Fear of God sets us free from the fear of man. Where God is not feared, we live in fear of everything else: fear of our enemy, fear of the future, fear of failure, fear of rejection.

Fearful Fear

The callous dictator has no fear of God.

But fear lies behind every decision he makes. Who can he trust?

The crooked politician does not fear God.

But he trembles before the people who control the money flow.

The sleazy pharmaceutical execs do not fear God.

But they cannot shake the fear that one day their treachery
will be exposed to the light.

The child-molesting priest does not fear God.

But he dreads the day when his victims rise up to accuse him.

The average church goer does not fear God.

But all the fears that plague the human soul haunt his dreams.

The Day of Accounting

The hour is drawing near when the most arrogant people on earth
will experience the fear of God.

*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake;
and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,
and the stars of the sky fell to the earth
as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale;
the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up,
and every mountain and island was removed from its place.
Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich
and the strong, and every one, slave and free,
hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,
calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us
and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne,
and from the wrath of the Lamb;
for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"*
Revelation 6

Wrath? The wrath of God? How primitive!

Once you get a glimpse of that wrath it does not seem so primitive.

God's wrath is simply his response to evil.

God's final response to evil is a consuming fire.

All gentleness is gone.

When evil encounters the HOLY it sees nothing but flames.

Casual faith?

Our present tendency to think casually about God is a dangerous mistake.

Our God is a consuming fire.

And that fire is already beginning to burn through the professing church.

The dead branches on the Vine are falling off in staggering numbers.

Many of those who claim to be “spiritually alive” are beginning to feel the flames.

Spirit-filled, but glib

There are those who take great pride in being “Spirit filled.”

They make lofty claims to “spiritual power,” “spiritual gifts,” “spiritual wisdom.”

But there is an ease and glibness in their testimony---

facile words devoid of fear and trembling.

They seem to be unaware that they are in the presence of the HOLY,

blind to the fact that they are already under the judgment of God.

Wake us up, Lord, before it's too late!

Wise but foolish

*“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other,
or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*

You cannot serve God and mammon.”

*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money,
heard all this, and they scoffed at him.*

*But he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men,
but God knows your hearts;*

for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Luke 16

In their own eyes and in the eyes of the world the Pharisees were men of wisdom. But in the eyes of God they were fools.

They were in bondage to their wealth, to their status, to their egos.

They were blind to the glory that stood before them

in the person of this quiet teacher from Nazareth.

The leaven of the Pharisees is contagious.

We need to make sure that we are not infected,

for the professing church abounds in wise fools.

Scripture smart, but truth blind

*Nicodemus, who had gone to him before,
and who was one of them, said to them,
"Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing
and learning what he does?"
They replied, "Are you from Galilee too?
Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee."
John 7*

These men of authority in Israel knew their scriptures.

But they had no fear of God,
no dread of the HOLY.

Their "scriptural knowledge" blinded them
to the glory of God in this man from Nazareth.
They were "scripture smart and truth blind."

The very same blindness comes over us when we approach the scriptures
without the fear of God.

We become experts in the trivia of scripture
and miss the voice of the Lord, calling us to repent.

Call it primitive, if you like.
But the fear of the Lord is still the beginning of wisdom.

May God in his unspeakable mercy do whatever it takes
to teach us how to walk this earth with holy fear of his glory and grace.....
.....and to fear nothing else.

Let's Pray Together

Lord Jesus, who can stand before you? We tremble before your Holiness. You are a consuming fire who incinerates all that is impure. We bow before you asking to be purified. Oh God, we cannot hide from you. Lord you know our hearts, you know we fear the exposure of man, you know we are in bondage to our status and our egos. In our awe and fear of you, free us from our fear of man, our fear of enemies, our fear of failure, our fear of exposure, and our fear of rejection. Heal us of the leaven of the Pharisees. Heal us of our pride in our spirituality. Open our eyes to your glory, open our ears to your voice, may we walk in holy fear of your glory and grace... and fear nothing but you.

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WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN