

I. Why is it important to fear God?

A. It is fundamental to our relationship with God

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Pro 1:7 ESV)
The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecc 12:13 ESV)

B. Fearing God is the first characteristic of those who wish to please God – before loving God, following God, serving God, etc. It is always used to describe Gentiles who, along with the Jews, belong to God.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. (Act 10:1-2 ESV)

So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. (Act 13:16 ESV)

C. It is the proper attitude of the Christian toward God.

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. (1 Pet. 2:17 NIV)

II. The two types of fear

A. Guilty fear

i. Guilty fear is consciousness of our sins and overwhelming terror that can drive us away from God instead of toward Him

Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' (Luk 23:30 ESV)
Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. (Joh 3:36 ESV)
It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:31 ESV)

ii. Can convict of sin and lead to desire for salvation

B. Wholesome fear

i. Those who are saved can rest in their secure position in Christ, with no fear of eternal judgment For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.... Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God..., and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:18-24 ESV)

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (1Jn 4:18 ESV)

ii. View God with awe and respect, such that all our thoughts of God and we say to Him recognize:

- His sovereignty (as the absolute ruler of the world He created)
- His power
- His majesty
- His holiness
- His hatred of sin

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. (Pro 8:13 ESV)

- His “inexpressible gift” of his son Jesus as atonement for our sins
- His jealousy for:
 - His glory

- His Son
- The Holy Spirit
- His Word
- Our time and devotion

iii. Fear displeasing God, as a child fears to displease his parents

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15 ESV)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, (Eph 6:5 ESV)

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, (1Pe 1:17-19 ESV)

iv. Fear incurring His discipline. When He does correct us, we should welcome it as His way of drawing us back into full fellowship with Him.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:11 ESV)

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, (Rom 13:3 ESV)

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. (1Ti 5:20 ESV)

III. What are the benefits of fearing God?

A. If we fear God we will not fear men or earthly circumstances.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Mat 10:28 ESV)

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. (2Ti 1:7 ESV)

B. We will learn to love, worship and obey more as we develop a proper sense of fear.

And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. (Act 19:17 ESV)

C. A right relationship with God increases holiness and leads to a clean conscience and a sense of peace.

... let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2Co 7:1 ESV)

... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Php 2:12-13 ESV)

And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. (Jud 1:22-23 ESV)

D. Fearing God is an antidote to pride.

...you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. (Rom 11:20 ESV)

IV. Examples from Scripture

A. Adam and Eve feared God after they had sinned, but in a way that drove them away from God instead of toward him.

B. In Luke 23:40, the second thief on the cross rebuked the first for insulting Jesus, saying "Do you not fear God?"

C. Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 were put to death by God for lying to the Holy Spirit and doing harm to the church, God's gift to his Son.

D. Cornelius in Acts 10 feared God and was the first Gentile to be given the gospel via special emissary.

E. The Corinthians were judged for not approaching the Lord's table properly.

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged

by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1Co 11:28-32 ESV)

V. We have comfort through the Holy Spirit and confidence through the Savior

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. (Act 9:31 ESV)

A. We are not told to fear Jesus. He is the mediator between God and man.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh (*Heb 10:19-20 ESV*)

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (*Heb 4:14-16 ESV*)

VI. Am I a God-fearing Christian?

A. Do I take the Lord's name in vain? That does not just mean “swearing” (or euphemisms). “In vain” means “in an empty way” -- one that fails to recognize His full power and glory. Praying in an automatic way without real consciousness of speaking to the Almighty might be one example.

B. Do I take his Word seriously, and as personally directed at me?

C. Which do I fear more: Displeasing God or displeasing other people?

D. Do I conduct my life in a way that gives glory to God before men?

E. Do I ask God, through the Spirit, to reveal my sins to me and help me to see them as He does?

F. Do I speak of his Son with proper reverence and gratitude, acknowledging His lordship?

G. Do I have a deep care and concern for correctly handling His Word, putting accuracy and truth before my own opinions, and faithfully representing the gospel?

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1Co 2:3-5 ESV)

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (Jas 3:1 ESV)