Fear of God in Our Practical Lives

Alex Schneider · 1 Peter 1:17 · November 6, 2024



1 Peter 1:17

> 17 And if you invoke as Father him who, without regard of persons, judges according to the work of each, pass your time of sojourn in fear,

Proverbs 8:13

> 13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate.

2 Corinthians 7:1

> 1 Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God’s fear.

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Sometimes you hear questions like: "Am I allowed to do that as a Christian?", "Is that allowed in the Bible?" or someone complains: "The Christian life is so restrictive!" You will realize that the Bible does not say anything about many specific topics in our everyday lives. In such cases - but not only there - one thing helps us in particular: the fear of God. This term, which appears very often in the Bible and seems somewhat outdated and old-fashioned in our time, is the key to a life that is pleasing to God.

What is the Fear of God?

What exactly is the fear of God? This expression sounds strange at first, as we associate "fear" with anxiety. As Christians, we know that God has become our Father. We have a wonderful living relationship with Him. Fear somehow doesn't fit in with this at all. However, as this term is very often presented in the Bible as the mark of a believer, we should think about it in more detail.

Let's first realize what the fear of God is not for believers today: being afraid of God. For someone who is still in his sins, this kind of fear is appropriate in a certain sense because he has no peace with God. But those who know God as their Father need have no fear. Personally, I would hate it if my son was afraid of me. And we very often read in the Bible that God calls out: "*Do not be afraid*."

The following examples show that the fear of God cannot mean fear:

- In Ephesians 5:33, we read that the wife should fear her husband. However, this is obviously not about fear but about respecting and honoring.

- Romans 13:7 is about our relationship with the government. There, we read that we should fear it. Here, too, it is not about fear but about recognizing it as an authority to which we must submit. We can understand this well if we imagine a

personal encounter with a president or prime minister.

Fearing God means showing Him recognition and respect. Although God is our loving Father, as God, He is far above us. He is not just a friend that I talk to like anyone else on the street. We need to be aware of this: Being a child of God and having the fear of God must not be played off against each other. Just because God is our Father does not mean that He should be treated any less reverently. Peter makes it clear that His being a Father takes nothing away from His awesome greatness and omnipotence - he writes: "*And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear*" (1 Pet 1:17).

This shows that we should never forget that God is our Father. At the same time, we should also never forget that our Father is God.

This is the first meaning of the fear of God: to recognize God as someone who is far above us. It is about awareness of God's greatness!

But there is also a second aspect. I quote Psalm 36:1-4, which is about unbelieving people: "*An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes, for he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil*." This describes a person who has no fear of God. What characterizes his life? He is doing, speaking, and thinking evil all the time.

Relation to evil

This is why Solomon writes in Proverbs 8:13: "*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil*." So, the fear of God also has to do with the fact that reverence for His greatness leads me to a holy life. If I am aware of how holy and exalted my Father in heaven is and I conduct my life under His eyes, this will have an impact on my everyday life.

A God-fearing believer, therefore, hates evil. It is important to him not to dishonor God by sinning. It is important to him to separate himself from everything that dishonors God in any way. And this is only possible with the fear of God, as 2 Corinthians 7:1 confirms: "*Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*." This is not about refraining from sin because I am afraid of God's punishment. It is about reverent diligence in my everyday life and not wanting to dishonor God.

Here is a story that illustrates this: a landowner wanted to hire a coachman. He asked the three applicants: "How close could you drive the carriage along a deep ravine?" The first replied: "Three feet next to the slope." The second swelled with pride and said: "I even two feet." The third applicant replied, "Not at all. I would drive as far away from the ravine as possible to avoid the danger." The third was hired.

Fearing God means avoiding evil. It means not trying to drive as close to the "ravine" as possible, which means not going as close to sin as possible. Fear of God keeps me away from evil and draws me to the Lord!

"The fear of the Lord is a reverence for the greatness and authority of God and a deep awareness of His holiness combined with a desire to live a life that meets with God's complete approval and to place His will and honor above all else."

Fear of God in our practical life

How can the fear of God manifest itself in our lives? Here are some examples:

How do we speak and communicate? The Bible admonishes us: "*Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit*" (Ps 34:13). When we say something, it should be true. It should be good, and it should be useful. It should be clear to us that strong language and swearing do not fit in with a God-fearing life. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth" (Eph 4:29) and "*But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks*" (Eph 5:3, 4).

How do we deal with impurity? The fear of God will lead us to live a pure and holy life. We encounter every form of impurity in the world - but that is exactly what we should stay away from. In practical terms, this means that I stay away from certain places - including digital ones. Simply because I know that I am very likely to sin. The same applies to our media consumption – or what magazines or books do I read? What movies or series do I watch?

We often ask the wrong questions about many topics. Am I allowed to do this? Is this allowed? How far can I go? The fear of God will lead us not to exhaust our Christian freedom but to avoid anything that could somehow dishonor God. A God-fearing believer actively tries to please his Lord through his whole life. Not out of compulsion but voluntarily and out of love.

Let us ask ourselves at this point: Do we really fear God? If Jesus Christ is my Lord and I consciously call God my Father, the fear of God will be evident in my life. Let us examine ourselves to what extent we show respect, esteem, and appreciation to our God.

What does the Fear of God imply practically?

Finally, let's look at the Bible and consider some other characteristics of the fear of God:

1. Fear of God has to do with reverence for the Bible (Isa 66:2). Do you like to be obedient to the Word of God?

2. Fear of God is the secret of true wisdom (Prov 1:7). Could God give you His wisdom?

3. The fear of God comes when you are in the presence of God. This can be in prayer, for example (Ps 86:11), but also in Bible devotions (Prov 21:2-5). Are you living in communion with your Father?

4. The fear of God is a condition for being able to serve God properly (Heb 12:28). Is your everyday life pleasing to God so that you can serve Him?

5. The fear of the Lord helps you to withstand sexual temptation (Gen 39:9) - even if no one notices. Does the fear of the Lord keep you from such sins?

6. The fear of God is also evident in day-to-day business such as school, training, or work (Col 3:22). Do your superiors sense this?

7. The fear of the Lord can be learned (Dt 14:23). Are you interested in this respect?

8. The fear of God influences the behavior and appearance of women (1 Timothy 2:10). What signals do you send out through your clothing?

9. The fear of God is always and, in every case, rewarded by God (Ps 33:18). Is God's reward worth anything to you?

10. The fear of God is carefully noted by God (Mal 3:16). Is the recognition of God worth anything to you?

11. The fear of God is a logical consequence of being thankful for the redemption brought about by the blood of the Lamb (1 Pet 1:17-19). Is Calvary something you only think about on Sundays when the assembly (church) meets?

12. The fear of God influences every single situation in my everyday life (1 Pet 3:2). Do other people notice my fear of God?

13. The fear of the Lord ensures that I separate myself from evil (Prov 16:6). Can you see this in yourself?

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