

Fear God (1 Peter 2:17b)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Background

- a. Peter's first letter focuses a great deal on suffering. He says we should not be surprised that we suffer in various trials. Throughout his letter, he touches on several different types of trials that Christians face.
 - i. We will be refined through trials; they can produce a positive end result.
 - ii. The life of Jesus consisted of suffering in His life, followed by glory.
 - 1. If we are following Him, we should expect to see the same.
- b. In **1 Peter 2**, Peter begins a long discussion about the importance of submitting to various authorities. He begins with a focus on submitting to government authorities, starting with the king and the governors sent by him. As we discussed in the prior lesson, this is consistent with what Paul had said in **Romans 13**, as well as with the attitude that Jesus and the apostles demonstrated throughout their lives.

II. Fear God

- a. In the prior lesson, we concluded with Peter's sweeping statement:
 - i. "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."
(**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
 - ii. This is a great verse to commit to memory.
 - 1. It summarizes the overarching framework of all our relationships; plus
 - 2. It is *very easy* to remember!
 - iii. Here, in one simple statement, Peter sums up how we should treat all of our relationships. After saying that we should treat all people with honor, he gives more specific direction:
 - 1. Love *the brothers*, referring to our fellow Christians.
 - 2. Fear *God*.
 - 3. Honor *the king*.

- a. In the previous lesson we focused on the last admonition: that we must "*honor the king*".
- iv. In this lesson, let us consider the second-to-last statement: "fear God".
 1. **Question:** Why didn't Peter say, for example:
 - a. Love the brotherhood, *love God even more*, and honor the king?
 2. After all, Jesus had said the greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - a. "Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.'" (**Matthew 22:35-38**, NKJV; where Jesus is quoting from **Deuteronomy 6:5**)
- b. Years ago, I was in a large church Sunday gathering and heard a sermon where the main point the preacher made was taken from **1 John 4:18**. The speaker (and most in the congregation) were using the NIV translation.
 - i. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." (**1 John 4:18**, NIV)
 - ii. The points made by the preacher in that memorable sermon (and that I have heard from others since then who have dismissed the idea that Christians still need to fear God) included:
 1. This is part of the great news of the gospel: *we no longer need to fear God!*
 2. Fear was an inferior motive that God used in the Old Testament. It was based on fear of us being punished by God.
 3. However, through Christ we can now be motivated by a much higher, purer, better motivation: *the love of God*.
 4. Fear of God is, at best, a very poor motivation that can perhaps help the immature to get started in their spiritual walk, but can quickly be set aside as we come to appreciate the love of God.
 5. Although it said in the Proverbs that the fear of the Lord was "*the beginning of wisdom*" (**Proverbs 9:10**), that was just referring to the beginning of wisdom (like baby steps for a child, or training wheels on a starter bicycle).

- a. For those who have become mature through Christ, this fear that God used to motivate people in the past is no longer necessary.
- b. This would be similar to what the Bible says regarding the Law of Moses, circumcision, tabernacle/temple worship and Old Testament dietary laws.
 - i. These things were tutors that led us to Christ and now are no longer necessary (as explained in **Galatians, Colossians, Ephesians** and elsewhere).
 - ii. Now we have been saved by God's grace through faith, these 'Old Testament things', including fearing God, are no longer needed.
- iii. I was horrified; and spoke to the preacher who was teaching a large group of Christians that we do not need to fear God. Afterward, I approached him, armed with many passages of Scripture. Since I knew that anything I brought from the Old Testament would be dismissed, I had to be limited to passages from the New Testament.
 1. Let us start with Jesus. It was prophesied in the Old Testament that He would be *filled with the Spirit of the fear of God*.
 - a. Read **Isaiah 11:1-5**.
 - b. This prophecy was fulfilled at the baptism of Jesus when the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove (recounted in all four gospels).
 - c. He would be *filled with the Spirit*, referring to the Holy Spirit.
 - d. In the account I just read (from the Orthodox Study Bible translation, which is based on the LXX text), the Holy Spirit is described as having *seven* characteristics.
 - i. Note that if you are reading from a Bible based on the Masoretic Text, it will have *six* characteristics of the Spirit.
 - ii. Either way, the first characteristic is *wisdom*.
 - iii. The last characteristic is *fear of the Lord*.
 - iv. This prophecy informs us that the Christ would be *filled with the Spirit of the fear of the Lord*.

1. Therefore, we should expect to see that manifested in His life and teachings.
- v. One of the inherent, eternal characteristics of the Holy Spirit *is the fear of the Lord*.
 1. The Holy Spirit did not drop that characteristic nor “mature out of that phase”.
 2. Anyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit will be filled with the Spirit of the fear of God.
 3. Recall that Jesus, in teaching the disciples how to pray in **Luke 11**, concluded:
 - a. “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father *give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*” (**Luke 11:11–13**, NKJV)
 - b. Let us seek more of the Spirit in our lives, to be filled with all of the characteristics of the Spirit, *including the fear of the Lord*.
 4. For decades I was influenced by a church background (Churches of Christ) that tended to minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit (in reaction to more subjective, emotion-led religion). However, Jesus said that He had to depart *so that the Holy Spirit could come*. Clearly, He thought that the Spirit was very important!
 - a. “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the

Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:"
(John 16:7-8, NKJV)

- e. Early Christian writer Justin Martyr commented on the significance of the **Isaiah 11** passage as a prophecy about Jesus in a debate with Trypho, a Jew. Justin maintained that while prophets prior to Jesus had been given the Holy Spirit *with limits* (receiving perhaps only one or two of the seven characteristics), Jesus alone received the full measure of all seven. From Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 160 AD):
- i. [*Trypho, a Jew, challenges Justin*] "Tell me, then, how, when the Scripture asserts by Isaiah, "There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse; and a flower shall grow up from the root of Jesse; and the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety: and the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill Him." (**Isaiah 11:1-3**)
 - ii. "... 'now you admitted to me', continued Trypho, 'that this referred to Christ, and you maintain Him to be pre-existent God, and having become incarnate by God's will, to be born man by the Virgin. How can He be demonstrated to have been pre-existent, who is filled with the powers of the Holy Spirit, which the Scripture by Isaiah enumerates, as if He were in lack of them?'
 - iii. "[*Justin replies*] 'You have inquired most discreetly and most prudently, for truly there does seem to be a difficulty; but listen to what I say, that you may perceive the reason of this also. The Scripture says that these enumerated powers of the Spirit have come on Him, not because He stood in need of them, but because they would rest in Him, i.e., would find their accomplishment in Him, so that there would be no more prophets in your nation after the ancient custom: and this fact you plainly perceive.

- iv. “For after Him no prophet has arisen among you. Now, that [you may know that] your prophets, each receiving some one or two powers from God, did and spoke the things which we have learned from the Scriptures, attend to the following remarks of mine.
- v. “Solomon possessed the spirit of wisdom, Daniel that of understanding and counsel, Moses that of might and piety, Elijah that of fear, and Isaiah that of knowledge; and so with the others: each possessed one power, or one joined alternately with another; also Jeremiah, and the twelve [prophets], and David, and, in short, the rest who existed among you. Accordingly He rested, i.e., ceased, when He came, after whom, in the times of this dispensation wrought out by Him among men, it was necessary that such gifts should cease from you; and having received their rest in Him, should again, as had been predicted, become gifts which, from the grace of His Spirit’s power, He imparts to those who believe in Him, according as He deems each man worthy thereof.”
 - 1. (Source: *Dialogue with Trypho, A Jew, chapter 87*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1. p. 243)
- vi. Points made by Justin include:
 - 1. Jesus alone, unlike the prophets who came before Him, was given the full measure of the Holy Spirit *without limit*.
 - 2. Recall: “For He whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.” (**John 3:34**, ESV)
 - 3. Jesus, being the Son of God, had no need personally for these characteristics to be *added to* Him. The Spirit came down on Him to fulfill prophecy of **Isaiah 11:1-3** (that the Spirit would “rest upon” Him).
 - 4. Jesus came last and had the full measure of the Holy Spirit (*all* the characteristics).

- a. The Holy Spirit “rested on” Jesus, at His baptism. After that, the Spirit did not come to any more Jewish prophets as He had done up to that time.
2. Consider what John the Baptist said regarding the Christ, the mightier One for whom he came to prepare the way.
 - a. “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” (**Luke 3:17**, NKJV)
3. Consider *what Jesus taught* regarding the fear of God.
 - a. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
 - b. “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: *Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!*” (**Luke 12:4–5**, NKJV)
 - c. Clearly, Jesus taught His disciples that they must fear God (but not fear men).
4. Consider, also, the *motivation Jesus used* when He called His disciples to follow various teachings about the kingdom of God.

Question: Was it only (or even primarily) the love of God, or was it the fear of God that He relied on to motivate His disciples to change and to walk the narrow road?

 - a. In the Sermon on the Mount, teaching on anger, lust, etc.
 - i. “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ *shall be in danger of hell fire.*” (**Matthew 5:22**, NKJV)
 - ii. “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your

members perish, *than for your whole body to be cast into hell*. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, *than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*" (**Matthew 5:28–30**, NKJV)

- iii. Jesus is *very graphic* in explaining the dangers of continuing to sin, bringing the fires of hell to bear in warning his followers. He powerfully uses the fear of God (specifically fear of the eternal punishment of God) to motivate us to live righteous lives.
- b. In teaching *the importance of our forgiving others* who sin against us, Jesus tells Peter the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Jesus concludes:
- i. "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." (**Matthew 18:32–35**, NKJV)
 - ii. Jesus explains that the motivation to forgive others is both:
 1. gratitude for what we have been forgiven, AND
 2. *fear of the just punishment we will receive from God* if we do not forgive others.
- c. In **Matthew 24 and 25**, Jesus tells several parables to explain the importance of us being found faithful when He returns (on the Day of Judgment).
- i. From the beginning of that discussion:
 1. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (**Matthew 24:45-51**, NKJV)

2. In this case, the unfaithful servant (a believer who was not found doing what Jesus told him to do, upon the return of Jesus) was guilty of two types of sin. He did not meet the needs of his fellow servants (feeding and taking care of them), and he was living a morally dissolute life (eating and drinking with drunkards).
3. Jesus warns that those of His servants who are not found faithful upon His return will face severe punishment and regret.

ii. From Parable of the Talents:

1. "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (**Matthew 25:26-30**, NKJV)

iii. From the Story of the Sheep and Goats, Day of Judgment:

1. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (**Matthew 25:41–46**, NKJV)

d. Consider the *general teachings of Jesus on the need for us to repent* and uproot sin from our lives.

i. Read **Luke 13:1-9**.

1. Jesus taught, "Repent or perish." (It's *your choice!*)
2. Jesus warns that the unfruitful tree will be given another chance, yet will be *cut down* if it does not bear fruit. That reminds me of what John the Baptist had said about the coming of Jesus:
 - a. "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now *the ax is laid to the root of the trees*. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is *cut down and thrown into the fire*." (**Luke 3:8–9**, NKJV)

- ii. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”
(**Matthew 18:6-9**, NKJV)
 - iii. “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”
(**Mark 9:43-46**, NKJV; where Jesus is quoting from **Isaiah 66:24**)
 - iv. Consider also the story Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16**, where the greedy rich man is tormented in the flames, in Hades, after death and regretting the way he lived his life.
5. Jesus was the great promised king, priest, shepherd *and prophet*. He was (in addition to being the Son of God) also the greatest prophet of all time (as Peter said in **Acts 3:23**, pointing to the prophecy of Moses in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**).
- a. **In my considered opinion:** No Old Testament prophet ever preached the fear of God *as powerfully and graphically as Jesus did*.
 - b. Recall that Jesus described Himself by comparing Himself to two men in the Old Testament, in **Matthew 12:41-42**.

- i. Jesus said He was *even wiser* than Solomon.
- ii. Jesus also said He was *an even greater preacher* than Jonah.
 1. “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” (**Matthew 12:41**, NKJV)
- iii. **Question:** What was *so great* about Jonah? Why did Jesus pick this seemingly obscure and often-disparaged Minor Prophet from among all the great preachers of the Old Testament?
 1. No one preached the fear of God like Jonah. His message was simple but blistering. He preached the fear of God.
 - a. Jonah’s preaching: “And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’” (**Jonah 3:4**, NKJV)
 2. The response of the men of Nineveh, who Jesus says will rise up on Judgment Day to condemn the rest of mankind that does not repent:
 - a. “Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, ‘Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is

in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." (**Jonah 3:6-10**, NKJV)

3. Jonah preached the impending judgment and the wrath of God. The people (and there were over 100,000 in that city) were wicked, but were convicted and repented.
4. I believe Jesus compared Himself to Jonah because Jesus was an even greater preacher of the wrath of God than Jonah was.
 - a. No one preached the fear of God as powerfully as Jonah, nor brought as many (even Gentiles) to complete repentance.
 - b. Jesus would preach the fear of God even more powerfully, and have an even greater impact, than Jonah.
- iv. Recall that Jesus had the Spirit *without measure*, meaning *without limit*. (**John 3:34**)
 1. He had the *first characteristic* (wisdom) even *more than Solomon*, the wisest man before Him.
 2. He also had the *last characteristic* (fear of God) even *more than Jonah*, the greatest and most effective preacher of the fear of God before Him.
6. Jesus continued to preach the fear of God after He was resurrected, as we see in His messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, in **Revelation 2 & 3**.
 - a. While He has many encouraging words for the Christians who have remained faithful through trials, He

also warns those who have fallen short, revealing His own wrath and the wrath of His Father.

- b. To the church in Thyatira, He says:
 - i. “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.” (**Revelation 2:20–23**, NKJV)
 - c. To the church in Laodicea, He says:
 - i. ““I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.” (**Revelation 3:15–16**, NKJV)
 - ii. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” (**Revelation 3:19**, NKJV)
7. The apostles taught the same thing Jesus did regarding the fact that we still need to fear God.
- a. “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For

our God is a consuming fire.” (**Hebrews 12:25–29**, NKJV)

- b. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;” (**Philippians 2:12**, NKJV)
- c. “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” (**Ephesians 5:19–21**, NKJV)
- d. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (**2 Corinthians 7:1**, NKJV)
- e. “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” (**2 Corinthians 5:11**, NKJV)
- f. “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 Peter 1:17**, NKJV)
- g. Also, the passage we began with, also from Peter: “...Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
 - i. Certainly, it should come as no surprise that Peter, arguably the greatest student of Jesus, called us to *fear God!*
 - ii. As Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but *everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.*” (**Luke 6:40**, NKJV)
- iv. Jesus and the apostles did not consider fear to be a bad motivation. They used it all the time to warn us of real dangers.
 - 1. Fear is not always a bad thing. It can save our lives!
 - a. For example, a healthy fear of death or severe physical harm causes me to be very cautious regarding heights

(on ladders and scaffolding), fire and high temperatures, electricity, toxic chemicals and other potentially lethal hazards I encounter when building or repairing things.

2. Jesus said that *those He loves*, He rebukes and disciplines (**Revelation 3:19**). Let us see His warnings as another indication of His love for us.
- v. There are *many benefits* of fearing God.
1. Fear of God is *one of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit*, Who dwells in us and leads us toward heaven, the ultimate Promised Land.
 2. Fear of God *keeps us from sin*.
 - a. Jesus used this motivation, with very graphic examples, as we discussed.
 - b. God said the same thing at Mount Sinai, that He wished the people would *always fear Him*, that it would go well with them and they would *stay away from sin*.
 - i. Read **Deuteronomy 5:23-29**.
 - ii. Unfortunately, the Israelites quickly lost the fear of God and made the golden calf only a few weeks later.
 - c. *When we do sin*, the fear of God will motivate us to *confess our sins and repent quickly*.
 - i. If we are more afraid of God than of people (what others will think about us), we will more readily confess our sins to one another. (**James 5:16**)
 3. Fear of God will motivate us to *spread the gospel to others*.
 - a. "Knowing, therefore, *the terror of the Lord*, we persuade men..." (**2 Corinthians 5:11**, NKJV)
 4. Those who fear God will not be afraid of men.
 - a. Everyone is afraid of something (or someone). People either fear God, or they fear other people.
 - i. Just as everyone must *serve somebody* (whether the Lord or Satan), I believe we all must *be afraid of somebody* (whether God or people).

- b. Recently I heard a commentator who made an insightful point that a very famous political leader (who has an *outward persona of being fearless*) has two character flaws that have led to his downfall:
 - i. being too easily flattered by other people, and
 - ii. making mistakes caused by fear of people.
- c. Jesus told us to fear God *instead of fearing men*.
 - i. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”
(**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
- d. Heroic examples, men of faith who feared God rather than men:
 - i. Daniel refused to follow the king’s edit to stop praying to the Lord, because Daniel feared God more than the king (**Daniel 6, Hebrews 11:33**).
 - ii. Daniel’s three friends refused to bow to the golden image, for the same reason. They feared God more than the king (**Daniel 3, Hebrews 11:34**).
 - iii. One of the distinctive characteristics of the heroes of faith in **Hebrews 11** is that they feared God rather than fearing people.
 - 1. “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, *moved with godly fear, prepared an ark* for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”
(**Hebrews 11:7**, NKJV)
 - 2. “By faith he [*Moses*] forsook Egypt, *not fearing the wrath of the king*; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”
(**Hebrews 11:27**, NKJV)
 - a. *Moses had his eyes on God* rather than on the pharaoh, the king of Egypt.
- e. This principle that those who fear the Lord will not fear people is expressed clearly in the **Wisdom of Sirach**.

That book, which is among Deutero-canonical books (also called the Apocrypha), was originally included in the King James Version and is still included in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles.

- i. “The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live, for their hope is in Him who saves them. *He who fears the Lord will fear nothing*, and he will not be cowardly, for the Lord is his hope.” (**Wisdom of Sirach 34:13-14**, Orthodox Study Bible)

III. How Then Should We Understand 1 John 4:18?

- a. John wrote, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” (**1 John 4:18**, NKJV)
- b. **Question:** *What does John mean* when he says “perfect love casts out fear”?
 - i. **One possible explanation:** Perhaps John here is speaking about someone who is very spiritually advanced, who has matured in their Christian walk to a point where they are so enlightened that they are no longer struggling with sins of the flesh, and now are motivated only by the love of God. (At which point perhaps they *no longer* need to fear God).
 - ii. Certainly, I have not “arrived” at such a high spiritual plateau, nor has anyone I know personally!
 - iii. Is this a spiritual height I might be able to attain if/when my love of God becomes perfect (= complete)?
 - 1. However, consider that *not even the apostle Paul* believed that he had attained such a lofty spiritual level. He wrote:
 - a. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (**Philippians 3:12-14**, NKJV)
 - b. “Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, *lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*” (**1 Corinthians 9:26-27**, NKJV)

- c. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (**2 Corinthians 7:1**, NKJV)
- c. **Another possible explanation:** I recently stumbled on another explanation, provided by early Christian writers, on this unusual statement in **1 John 4:18**. They held that the “fear” John was referring to that we no longer need to have, was referring to *the fear of men* (not the fear of God)!
- i. From Tertullian, a fiery Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa, in a work on persecution entitled *Scorpiace* (= *Antidote to the Scorpion’s Sting*), written c. 213 AD:
1. “Who, now, should know better the marrow of the Scriptures than the school of Christ itself?—the persons whom the Lord both chose for Himself as scholars, certainly to be fully instructed in all points, and appointed to us for masters to instruct us in all points. To whom would He have rather made known the veiled import of His own language, than to him to whom He disclosed the likeness of His own glory—to Peter, John, and James, and afterwards to Paul, to whom He granted participation in (the joys of) paradise too, prior to his martyrdom? Or do they also write differently from what they think—teachers using deceit, not truth?
 2. “Addressing the Christians of Pontus, Peter, at all events, says, ‘How great indeed is the glory, if you suffer patiently, without being punished as evildoers! For this is a lovely feature, and even hereunto were you called, since Christ also suffered for us, leaving you Himself as an example, that ye should follow His own steps.’ (**1 Peter 2:20-21**)
 3. “And again: ‘Beloved, be not alarmed by the fiery trial which is taking place among you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. For, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, do you rejoice; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; because glory and the Spirit of God rest upon you: if only none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters; yet (if any man suffer) as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.’ (**1 Peter 4:12-16**)
 4. “John, in fact, exhorts us to lay down our lives even for our brethren, affirming that *there is no fear in love*: ‘For perfect love casteth out fear, since fear has punishment; and he who fears is

not perfect in love.’ (**1 John 4:18**) What fear would it be better to understand (as here meant), than that which gives rise to denial? What love does he assert to be perfect, but that which puts fear to flight, and gives courage to confess? What penalty will he appoint as the punishment of fear, but that which he who denies is about to pay, who has to be slain, body and soul, in hell?

5. “And if he teaches that we must die for the brethren, how much more for the Lord,—he being sufficiently prepared, by his own Revelation too, forgiving such advice! For indeed the Spirit had sent the injunction to the angel of the church in Smyrna: ‘Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.’ (**Revelation 2:10**)”
 6. (Source: Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, chapter 12; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 645–646)
- ii. From Phileas, a martyr and bishop of the church in Lower Egypt, writing c. 307 AD:
1. “...For which reason also these Christ-bearing martyrs sought zealously the greater gifts, and endured, some of them, every kind of pain and all the varied contrivances of torture not merely once, but once and again; and though the guards showed their fury against them not only by threatenings in word, but also by deeds of violence, they did not swerve from their resolution, because ‘perfect love casts out fear’ (**1 John 4:18**).”
 - a. (Source: Phileas, *Fragments of the Epistle of Phileas to the People of Thmuis*, chapter 1; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, p. 162)
 - b. Clearly, Phileas believed that the *fear* of being “cast out” as referred to in **1 John 4:18** was *the fear of men* (which Christian martyrs otherwise might experience in the face of persecution from the governing authorities). This agrees with Tertullian’s understanding, demonstrated in the prior quote.

IV. Conclusion and Suggested Take-Aways from this Lesson

- a. I encourage you to memorize **1 Peter 2:17** (very easy!):
 - i. “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)

- b. Embrace a healthy love and appreciation for the fear of God.
 - i. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (**Proverbs 1:7** and **9:10**).
 - ii. The fear of God will keep us from sin and eternal punishment.
 - iii. Fear of the Lord is one of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit (and therefore also of those who are full of or led by the Spirit).
 - iv. Jesus was the all-time greatest preacher of the fear of God.
 - v. The apostolic writers (Peter, Paul and the writer of Hebrews), following the example of Jesus, emphasized the importance of fearing God.
- c. Strive for a complete and balanced view of God: that we both *love and fear* Him.
 - i. As Paul admonished the Gentile believers in Rome: “Therefore *consider the goodness and severity of God*: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. *Otherwise you also will be cut off.*” (**Romans 11:22**, NKJV)