

The Fear of God
(Special Topical Lesson, by Chuck Pike)
October 5, 2025

I. Background

- a. Today's lesson is on a topic touched on in practically every book of the Bible.
 - i. This subject is mentioned throughout the Scriptures. We find it from the first verse of the oldest book of the Bible to the end of **Revelation**.
 - ii. The subject we are going to study today is closely associated with the tests of faith given to Abraham (**Genesis 22**) and Noah (**Hebrews 11**).
 - iii. It is one of the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit given in **Isaiah 11:1-3** (seven in the LXX, or six in the Masoretic Text).
 - iv. Jesus, Peter, Paul and the writer of Hebrews all speak about the importance of Christians understanding this.
- b. Yet in most churches today, this topic is largely *ignored or even disparaged*. Or it is (falsely) treated as something that was important only under the old covenant (therefore no longer applying to us Christians).
- c. However, this topic is so important that, for those who are already Christians, it may be the single greatest factor in influencing our eternal destiny on the Day of Judgment. *That is not an exaggeration.*
- d. The topic I speak of, which we are going to explore today: *the fear of God!*
- e. The visceral reaction of many Christians is to avoid fear as an unwanted emotion. Most of us much prefer to focus on the love of God, which we consider to be much more positive and encouraging.
 - i. Many view fear as something that is paralyzing.
 - ii. However, in the Scriptures, it is held up as a powerful motivation to do good, and to avoid sin and the snares of the devil.
- f. **Question:** Is fear always a bad thing?
 - i. **Answer:** No, certainly not always. Sometimes fear can prevent us from doing foolishly dangerous things, and thereby save our lives.
 1. Fear isn't limited to the "deer in the headlights" type that can paralyze and overwhelm us.
 2. We should be eager to study the fear of God!

- ii. Some of the things I am afraid of (for good reason) include:
 - 1. Heights (such as when I am high up on a ladder or scaffolding when working on the exterior of the third floor of my 2-family home, or climbing a 60-foot tree).
 - 2. High voltage electricity.
 - 3. Toxic chemicals.
 - 4. The ocean (dangers from drowning, rip currents and sharks).
- g. The Old Testament does have a great deal to say about the fear of God.
 - i. In **Hebrews 11**, it says of Noah:
 - 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)
 - ii. In **Genesis 22**, after Abraham was tested in being called to sacrifice Isaac, he is told by the Angel of the Lord:
 - 1. “Now I know that *you fear God...*” (**Genesis 22:12**)
 - iii. Job is described as a man who was “blameless, righteous and *God-fearing*.” (**Job 1:1**)
 - 1. The book of Job is considered by many to be the oldest book in the Bible.
 - iv. Read **Deuteronomy 5:22-29**.
 - 1. After the people hear the voice of the Lord speaking the Ten Commandments, they fear God and tell Moses they will do *whatever* God tells him.
 - 2. The Lord responded that He only hoped *that would always be the case*, since fear of Him would keep them from sin and the resulting destruction.
 - v. Other heroes of faith are seen as God-fearing, as well.
- h. **Question:** Sure, fear of God is held up in the Old Testament. But *what about in the New Testament?*
 - i. Let us dig into that question.

II. Start with Jesus

- a. All four gospels speak about the baptism of Jesus, at which time the Spirit descends on Him. He has the full measure of the Holy Spirit. That is in fulfillment of the prophecy of **Isaiah 11**.
 - i. Read **Isaiah 11:1-5**.
 1. The Spirit of the fear of God shall fill Him. This is a prophecy referring to what would happen at the baptism of Jesus.
 - a. Therefore, this means that *Jesus Himself* was filled with the *fear of God*.
 2. In describing the characteristics of the Holy Spirit here, we learn that the fear of God was *one of the Spirit's attributes*.
 - a. **Question:** In light of this, do you think that a person could be 'filled with' or 'led by' the Holy Spirit if they do not have the fear of God?
 - b. Read **Matthew 12:41-42**.
 - i. Jesus explains who He is by comparing Himself to two famous men from the Old Testament. This is His 'self-portrait.'
 - ii. He has more wisdom than Solomon, and also is *greater than Jonah* (noted for being a preacher of repentance, the judgment to come, and *fear of God*).
 1. Recall that wisdom and fear of God were the first and last characteristics of the Spirit listed in **Isaiah 11:1-3**.
 - c. **Questions:** In the gospels, did Jesus use the love of God as the only motivation, or *did He also use the fear of God to motivate His hearers?* What about when He addressed the seven churches in **Revelation 2-3**?
 - d. Consider *how John the Baptist described Jesus*.
 - i. "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)
 - e. Consider *what Jesus taught* regarding the fear of God during his ministry.
 - 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)
 - ii. "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)

1. Clearly, Jesus taught that His disciples must fear God (rather than men).
- iii. In the Sermon on the Mount, from Jesus' teaching on anger, lust, etc.
1. "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)
 2. "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)
 3. Here, 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.
- iv. In teaching *the importance of our forgiving others* who sin against us, Jesus tells Peter the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Jesus concludes:
1. "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)
 2. In that parable, Jesus explains that the motivation to forgive others is BOTH:
 - a. gratitude for what we have been forgiven, AND

- b. *fear of the just punishment we will receive from God if we do not forgive others.*
- v. 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).
 1. From the beginning of that discussion:
 - a. “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)
 - b. 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).
 - c. Jesus warns that those of His servants who are not found faithful upon His return will face severe punishment and regret.
 2. From Parable of the Talents:
 - a. “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)

3. From the Story of the Sheep and Goats, Day of Judgment:
 - a. “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)
- vi. Consider the *general teachings of Jesus on the need for us to repent* and uproot sin from our lives.
 1. Read **Luke 13:1-9**.
 - a. Jesus taught, “Repent or perish.” (It’s *our choice!*)
 - b. 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:
 - i. “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)
 2. Read **Matthew 18:6-9**.
 - a. “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)

3. Read **Mark 9:43-46**.

- a. "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**)

- i. 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.

- vii. 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**).

1. In my opinion, *no Old Testament prophet* ever preached the fear of God *more powerfully and graphically than Jesus did*.

- f. 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**.

- i. 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.

- ii. To the church in Thyatira, He said:

1. "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)

iii. To the church in Laodicea, He said:

1. "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)
2. "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.* Therefore be zealous and repent." (**Revelation 3:19**, NKJV)

g. Even to the end of the **Book of Revelation**, which is addressed to Christians, it speaks of the importance of maintaining a healthy fear of God to the end.

i. Read **Revelation 19:1-5**.

1. It says that the people who are praising God, in the end, are *those who fear Him*, both great and small.

III. What the Apostles Taught Regarding the Importance of Fearing God

a. Some might be tempted to object: "Yes, perhaps Jesus did teach about the importance of fearing God. But after He died and was resurrected, didn't the apostles reveal to us that we are now under grace and no longer have to fear God?"

i. Let us consider now what the apostles taught as they spread the gospel, after Jesus was resurrected.

b. Consider Peter's sweeping statement regarding the mindset that Christians should have toward all others.

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!

c. In the same letter, Peter explains how Christians should conduct their lives, in anticipation of the coming judgment: *in obedience, holiness and fear (of God)*! (**1 Peter 1:13-17**)

i. "...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here *in fear*;" (**1 Peter 1:17**, NKJV)

- d. Later in that letter, Peter explains one of the reasons why it is so important for husbands to treat their wives in an understanding way: so that nothing will hinder their prayers. (**1 Peter 3:7**)
 - i. Peter supports his statement that the Lord will not heed the prayers of those who treat others unrighteously (in **1 Peter 3:8-12**), by pointing back to the words of **Psalm 33/34**.
 - ii. **Psalm 33/34**, which Peter is referring to, is noteworthy in celebrating the importance of fearing the Lord.
 1. “The angel of the Lord shall encamp around those who fear Him, and He shall deliver them.” (**Psalm 33/34:8**, OSB)
 - a. This speaks of the spiritual protection and deliverance promised to those who fear the Lord.
 2. “Fear the Lord, you His saints, for there is no want for those who fear Him.” (**Psalm 33/34:10**)
 - a. The Lord will provide for the needs of those who fear Him.
 3. “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, who loves to see good days? (**Psalm 33/34:12-13**, OSB)
 - a. This passage is followed by the text quoted by Peter in **1 Peter 3:10-12** that establishes what it means to live righteously in a way that the Lord will hear one’s prayers.
 - b. This teaches us that the fear of the Lord is more than a feeling. It is something that impacts how we live and how we treat others.
 - c. God will heed the prayers of those who, in accordance with the fear of the Lord (in contrast, His face will oppose those who do not fear Him, but do evil).
 - i. While Peter applies this specifically to husbands in his letter, the principle is universal and applies to all of us.
- e. The apostle Paul also wrote about the importance of Christians to live in the fear of God.
 - i. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has

done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men....” (2 Corinthians 5:10–11, NKJV)

1. Fear of God can help keep us prepared for the Day of Judgment.
 - a. When tempted by sins of the flesh, the fear of God can help us to stay away from the kinds of sins that led to Esau’s destruction. (**Hebrews 12:16**)
2. Also, the fear of God (and an awareness that the Day of Judgment is coming) is a powerful motivation for evangelism.
 - a. Let us pray for boldness and, in the fear of God, warn and persuade others to follow Jesus!
 - b. We need to *fear God rather than men*, as Jesus taught in **Matthew 10:26-33**. Fear of the (negative) reaction of men is one of the greatest impediments to spreading the gospel.
- ii. “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)
 1. Fear of God can help us to become perfected (complete) in holiness. We know that without it, no one will see the Lord. (**Hebrews 12:14**)
- iii. “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)

IV. Conclusions

- a. The fear of God is not just an ‘Old Testament concept.’ Throughout the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles repeatedly held it up as being absolutely critical for us, if we are to be prepared for the Day of Judgment.
- b. The fear of God offers many wonderful benefits to us, including:
 - i. It will keep us from all kinds of destructive sins.
 - ii. It is the way to spiritual protection from the Lord.
 - iii. It is the way that will lead us to a way of life where God will hear our prayers.
 - iv. It is a powerful motivation for us to overcome fear of man (and laziness) and to spread the gospel to the lost around us.

- c. While we live in an age where fear of God is unpopular, let us embrace this teaching and share it with other Christians who need to hear it.