

The Fear of the Lord

Proverbs 9:10a says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The call to fear the Lord is found in many different places throughout the Bible. Deuteronomy 10:20 says, “You must fear the Lord your God. You must serve Him and cling to Him, and swear by His name.”

But if the fear of God is the beginning of a wise life, what exactly does that mean?

It’s clear that the first impressions are hardly positive. At first, this sounds like the Middle Ages—fear-filled religion, oppression and bondage. Fear is generally considered a bad guide. Who wants to be guided by fear? And isn’t this the idea of a punitive heavenly ruler, an all-righteous, petty-minded God watching my every move? It’s this image of God that causes many to reject faith and flee. And it’s one—combined with a correspondingly questionable morality of the church—that has let a whole generation of theologians and clerics stand up for something else. Is that what the Bible means?

The Bible also tells us that God crowns humanity, calls us to greatness and dignity, rejoices in us and bestows glory on us. So why use the term “fear” instead of a level partnership?

According to biblical understanding, the coexistence of God and humanity only works if the realities remain clear. Ecclesiastes 5:2b says, “God is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore may your words be few.” I believe that here, it becomes clear what the Bible means by “the fear of the Lord.”

The original Hebrew word means more than “fear.” It means the fear that does not spring from a frightful being but from clear knowledge of that being. If you stand on a high tower, you would be well advised to hold on. Anyone preparing to buy a house has every reason to have respect for the large sum of

money involved. This kind of fear means I have an idea that I am dealing with something much more powerful than I. This is not self-deprecation, but a completely clear appraisal of one's own situation.

This feeling is the basis of all religion. And it's not deceiving. In fact, we are not the author and center of the universe. We are limited by lifetime, knowledge and power in every corner. It's not difficult for us to realize that the distance between God and humanity is infinite, insurmountable in the light of God's greatness and our own limitations.

Anyone who underestimates the depth of the canyon whose edge they are standing on is not brave when they jump. They are foolish. Only those who know nothing about canyons and gravity do not realize that.

To know what it means as a human to face God who is omnipotent, uncreated, eternal and holy is rightly inspiring fear. This is not the spawn of a frightened soul, but the clearly outlined reality. It's the beginning of wisdom, the fear of God. Fear of God does not mean that He is less beautiful, that being near Him is less wonderful or that He thinks less of us. Fear of God is acknowledging that He is far greater than we are.

So why is a fear of the Lord so uncomfortable for Christians? Because it presents a direct attack on the philosophy so prevalent in our culture: the self-glorification of the human ego. The problem for us as humans is that God is so much greater than ourselves.

We live in a society that is focused on the self to the point of obsession. It's no coincidence that "selfie" has become so much a part of our language. It's what we see all the time on social media—the picture is really of the self in front of the canyon, rather than the canyon itself. Our society has lost sight of the canyon because we are too interested in

ourselves.

We are taught to better ourselves, care for ourselves, embrace ourselves—and to be told otherwise makes us uncomfortable. None of these are bad things in and of themselves. But if we put so much emphasis on loving our self and elevating our self, God's importance diminishes. We lose sight of Him, we lose sight of those around us, and we lose sight of the person God has made us to be.

This self-glorification of the human ego has permeated the church also. A church in which there is no longer a sense of the sacred resembles, in disturbingly precise detail, the culture of its time. Things are lost, dramatically, when the creature forgets that it is a creature and not a creator, when we lose the sense of the final and highest majesty. We don't fear God because we don't appreciate how incredible he is.

Fear is a logical reaction to God—and that is uncomfortable in a society that is so self-glorifying of the human ego. It's uncomfortable for Christians to stand up for something or someone greater. It's offensive to our world.

As Christians, when society all around us is focusing on the self, ignoring those around them and ignoring God, we are wise to turn the camera lens away from themselves and point to God—His majesty, His glory, His beauty—and what an honor it is to be loved by him.

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