

FEARING GOD



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Fearing God

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Fearing God

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Welcome to *Fearing God*

We may not like the idea of fearing God, but God requires it.

We like to think of God in terms of love. We love God. He's our Father, Christ is our Savior, the Spirit is our Comforter. What's to fear?

Plenty, as it turns out. And fearing God leads to loving Him, knowing His truth, living in His wisdom – indeed, fullness of life as God intends.

In this brief study we will look at why fearing God is so important in the life of faith. And when we say *fear*, we don't mean merely *reverence*. God is to be *feared*, and the studies that follow can help you understand why and how.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 What God Requires

*You, Yourself, are to be feared;
And who may stand in Your presence
When once You are angry? Psalm 76.7*

Fear? Really?

Believers are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt. 22.37). This is the first and great commandment. Every Christian knows this, and no small part of effective discipleship involves cultivating that frame of mind and disposition of heart which lead to loving obedience to God through Jesus Christ.

We love God because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4.19). We must learn to love God, since loving Him does not come naturally to us; but all believers will insist they love God, and they would love to love Him more.

But the same God Who commands our love also commands us to fear Him: ““And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...” (Deut. 10.12). This is not simply an Old Testament mandate that we can easily dismiss. The Lord Jesus echoed this command in Matthew 10.28: ““nd 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.”” Paul echoes the same instruction, insisting that the fear of God is that which defines and sustains our quest for holiness (2 Cor. 7.1).

Now we don’t hear much about fearing the Lord these days. In fact, about the last thing many pastors seem to want to tell their people is that they should in any way relate to God with fear. God is our Father, Jesus is our Friend and Brother, and the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. What’s to fear there?

In large segments of the believing community today we have concluded that fear is not a proper affection for conducting a relationship with God.

Obviously, that conviction needs reconsidering.

Why fear?

As a result of the neglect of teaching and instruction on the fear of God, most believers do *not* fear the Lord, and, frankly, their lifestyles demonstrate as much. If we feared the Lord we would be mindful of offending or disappointing Him, or in any way provoking Him to exercise discipline against us. If we feared the Lord, we might tremble for our country, as Jefferson did, since we are an increasingly sinful people, and God is a just and all-powerful God.

When the only affection we nurture toward God is love, we aren’t likely to obey Him as we should. And when we fail in obeying God, we miss out on the full and abundant life He wants us to enjoy.

But why should believers fear God? Apart from the fact, as we have seen, that we are commanded to fear God, we should consider the very nature of the Deity. As Asaph points out in Psalm 76, God is powerful to overcome all adversaries (v. 3). He is majestic beyond all description (v. 4); wrathful toward those who oppose Him (vv. 5, 6; cf. Rom. 1.18-20); and able to subdue and punish those who arouse His anger (vv. 7-9). The writer of Hebrews reminds us that, as our loving heavenly Father, it pleases God to discipline His children from time to time, and, since no discipline is ever pleasant, we should regard the very prospect of discipline with a certain amount of fear (Heb. 12.7-11). If we do not fear the discipline of the Lord, then we

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will be more inclined to indulge those behaviors that provoke God's discipline against us.

More than awe

Sometimes people want to reduce the fear of God to a kind of reverential awe. That's a component, to be sure. But the fear God commands is more than simple awe, although it includes that. The fear of God is a healthy dread of what so powerful, majestic, and holy a God might do to demonstrate His indignation and impatience with recalcitrant sinners such as we.

But besides the fact of God's *commandment* to fear Him, as well as His *worthiness* to be feared, there are the many *benefits* that accrue to those who nurture and sustain a healthy fear of God. Nurturing the fear of the Lord opens wide doors of opportunity to enjoy full and abundant life in ways that, apart from the fear of the Lord, we can never fully know.

To be sure, in fearing God we do not leave off loving Him. These are two sides of the same coin. Our love for God can only grow as we nurture fear of Him, because the enormity of His everyday grace becomes even more starkly evident against the backdrop of our own unworthiness, and of what we deserve at the hands of our holy and just God.

If you love God, truly love Him, you will want to fear Him as well; for as we shall see, these two seemingly opposite affections create a healthy tension in the soul, where righteousness and abundant life can flourish.

For reflection

1. Why do you think the fear of God is neglected in churches today?
2. Is there something about us, about the kind of beings we are, that *needs* to fear God? Explain.
3. How can fearing God help us grow in love for Him?

Next steps – Conversation: How do your Christian friends understand the fear of God? Ask a few of them. How do they experience the fear of God? What effects does fearing God have in their lives?

2 In the Lord's Pleasure

...but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. Psalm 147.11

Nothing to fear?

One of the great, turning-point exhortations of the last century, was Pope John Paul II's word to the Polish people: "Do not be afraid."

Christians have nothing to fear in this life. On several occasions the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples not to fear. He told them not to be afraid of men who, after all, can only kill you (Matt. 10.28) He instructed them to sell all they possessed and follow Him, and not to be afraid, when they do, that they might miss a good and happy life, since they are gaining the Kingdom of God (Lk. 12.32, 33). He warned that in this world we could expect to have many trials and tribulations, but added that, since He had overcome the world, we should not be afraid (Jn. 16.33).

There is no reason, Jesus insisted, for any of His followers to fear anything here on earth. John Paul II understood that well.

At the same time, as we have seen, Jesus clearly and unequivocally *commanded* His disciples to fear God. Jesus understood what the psalmist also knew, that it is the pleasure of God for His people to fear Him as they should. Only if we fear God as He commands, can we know His pleasure so palpably as to not be afraid of anything else.

Fear and love in tension

The psalmist clearly declares this; however, it leaves me wondering: How can this be so? Why should it be in the pleasure of God for me to fear Him? Wouldn't God much prefer that I be motivated toward Him out of love, rather than fear?

To think this way would be to make a typical, foolish human mistake. In our minds, we struggle to hold fear and love in tension as opposing but harmonizing affections. We think it's got to be one or the other, and, since none of us likes to live in fear, we opt to relate to God by love, and leave fear out of the equation.

But that just shows our finitude and folly. God knows that, for us to relate to Him *properly*, that is, so that we may know the full and abundant life He holds out to us, may enter His *pleasure* and find there the ability to overcome every other fear, we must both fear and love Him. Never mind if we can't figure that out; God knows what He's doing, and He does what lines up with His pleasure.

Fear defined

But note also how the fear of God is defined in our psalm.

They *fear the Lord* who *hope in His steadfast love*. We fear God as we ought when all our hope in life is focused on the love of God that we long to know as fully in the future as ever we have known it in the past. Apart from God's love for us, we cannot so much as even exist! It is by His steadfast and faithful love that God gives us all good things, including, life, salvation, and the many and diverse blessings which constitute and sustain our daily lives.

If we hope in anything other than the Lord's steadfast love – such as political stability, material wellbeing, financial and personal security, and the like – then we *fear* not having these things more than we fear *Him* Who ultimately provides *all things*.

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Many people live in fear of having such things taken away from them. The reason they fear this is because they do not fear God – do not hope in His steadfast love and faithfulness – and they have allowed the things they love to become idols in place of God. If they truly understood that every good and perfect gift – every single one – comes to us from a loving God, they would *hope* that His steadfast love would continue and *fear* Him Who, should He choose to act only in justice toward us, rather than with mercy and grace, would not only withhold all future blessings but all life and existence as well.

In this we can see the close connection between fear and love. To fear God is to hope in His love; to know His love is to be prompted to fear Him, lest because of who *we* are, He should turn His favor away from us. To fear and love God is to be find ourselves in the sweet spot of His pleasure and, hence, to walk in all His holy and righteous and good ways.

If we do not fear the Lord, we may take His future blessings for granted. How does it make you feel when someone takes your goodness and kindness for granted? If we do not fear the Lord it is certain that we will not be able to engender sufficient love for Him to obey Him in all His holy and righteous and good ways.

But if we both fear and love God, then we will rejoice in the anticipation of His future blessings, we will walk with spiritual power and blessings in the path of righteousness – and we will know the pleasure of our Father Who is in heaven.

So with respect to anything in this world – or the *loss* of anything in this life – let us not be afraid. Let us, rather, fear God.

For reflection

1. Give some examples of thing people fear in this life. Why do they fear such things?
2. Why is it wrong for believers to fear such things, but not to fear God? Why is fearing the right thing such an important affection?
3. Those who fear the Lord, hope in His steadfast love. Explain.

Next steps – Demonstration: Spend some time meditating on all the ways God shows His steadfast love and faithfulness to you throughout the day. What would your life be like without all these benefits? We do not deserve any of the good things that come our way. They are ours by the grace and mercy of God alone. We fear God when we hope in the continuation of His steadfast and faithful love. Express your fear and love for God in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

3 Delight in God's Law

Praise the LORD!

*Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
Who greatly delights in His commandments.* Psalm 112.1

Who fears the Lord?

God requires that His people fear Him. Jesus warned us to fear God and to follow in His ways. Paul commands us to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Clearly, we need to pay careful attention to what fearing God entails.

They are relating properly to God who, having come through faith in Jesus Christ to know the Father, now live daily in love and fear of Him. What characterizes such people? That is, how can we know those who love and fear the Lord?

More to the point, how can we be sure that *we* love and fear the Lord?

The psalmist tells us plainly: they fear the Lord who *delight* in His commandments. The reference here is clearly to the Law of God – the Ten Commandments and the statutes, precepts, and rules which guide us in the blameless life of love for God and our neighbors (Lk. 1.6; Matt. 22.34-30). Paul insists that the Law of God is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12), and it is appropriate for those who delight in the God Who gave such laws, to delight in His Law as well.

We are fearing God when we delight in His Law. *Not* delighting in God's Law may be an indication that we do not fear Him as He requires.

Delighting in God's Law

But what does it mean to delight in the Law of God?

First, we cannot *delight* in what we do not *know*. From time to time, Susie and I have enjoyed a wonderful dinner of rice, black-eyed peas, and chicken livers, swathed in bacon. Prior to marrying Susie, I would never have thought that such food could delight my palate so richly. I remember, as a child, seeing my mother and grandmother enjoy a lunch of liver, onions, and bacon from time to time. And I recall vowing that I could never eat such horrid smelling food. It took marrying Susie for me to learn otherwise, and to take delight in this and many other foods – except, of course, eggplant – which I would otherwise never have known.

If we would delight in the Law, therefore, we must *first come to know it*.

For many believers, this will be a new experience – like sitting down to chicken livers for the first time. In the contemporary Church, we have become persuaded that the Law of God is not for us. We're "under grace" rather than "under the Law." We fear that keeping the Law might turn us into legalists or detract from the gracious salvation we know through Jesus Christ.

But once you begin to read, study, and meditate on the Law of God, you will discover such clear guidance for loving God and neighbors, such profound wisdom and beauty, such right and true counsel for everyday living, and such a wealth of common sense instruction on maintaining a just and orderly society, that you will not be able to help yourself. You'll delight in what you're learning.

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As you develop a *taste* for God's holy and righteous and good Law, your delight in it will grow.

The righteous person delights to meditate in God's Law day and night (Ps. 1), and he finds no contradiction whatsoever in the salvation which we *receive* by grace through faith and the salvation which we *unpack* through obedience to the gracious Law of God.

Doing the Law

But it doesn't stop here. As we begin to delight in *studying* the Law of God, we will delight even more in *obeying* it. We will learn to say with the psalmist, "Oh how I love Your law!" (Ps. 119.97), and the Law will become such a source of joy to us that we will hasten to add, "I delight to do your will, O my God" (Ps. 40.8). In *doing* the Law of God we walk in the paths of love for God and neighbor that mark out the course of divine grace as it flows through us and before us.

Rivers of living water will issue from our words and deeds as the Spirit of God fills, teaches, and empowers us to obey the Law of God (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Jn. 7.37-39). We will discover depths of saving grace and power that we have never known before as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling by submitting to the work of God's Spirit as He teaches us His Law (Phil. 2.12, 13).

The Law of God is not a burden to be reluctantly learned and grudgingly obeyed. It is, rather, the very source of full and abundant life to all who delight in it (Lev. 8.1-5). They who fear the Lord nurture and manifest that fear by delighting in His Law. Loving God and fearing Him thus go hand in hand, through the joyful, consistent, increasing study and practice of the holy and righteous and good Law of God.

For reflection

1. What has been the role of the Law of God in your Christian life? By Law of God, we mean the Ten Commandments and the various civil and ceremonial laws that detail how to practice those commandments.
2. We're not saved *by* good works, but we're not saved *without them*. In the same way, we're not saved *by the Law*, but this does not mean we *reject* the Law as irrelevant to Christian life (cf. Rom. 3.31). How should the Law of God function in a believer's walk with the Lord?
3. Meditate on Psalm 1. How might you begin to give the Law a more prominent and fruitful place in your Christian life?

Next step – Transformations: Look up all the passages cited in today's column. Taking them all together, write a brief description of what you think your attitude should be toward the Law of God. Share that description with some of your Christian friends. Do they agree?

4 The Right Kind of Hate

An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked:

There is no fear of God before his eyes. Psalm 36.1

The wicked and the righteous

The Scriptures explain that wicked people do not fear God. As David continues to say in Psalm 36, the wicked delight in the very things God warns against, and for which He threatens judgment and wrath.

The wicked “flatters himself in his own eyes” concerning his sins, because he thinks he’s getting away with something deliciously evil and self-serving (v. 2).

His words and acts are devoid of peace, truth, wisdom, and goodness because he does not fear the Lord (v. 3).

He plots his life along a course of wickedness, setting himself in a way that is not good and that embraces all kinds of evil (v. 4). The wicked do not fear God (v. 1).

These are the wicked, so marked and identified by their repudiation of God and His ways.

The truly righteous person is just the opposite of this. Those who love the Lord also fear Him. By a divine and spiritual mystery and power, the who love and fear the Lord hold those two apparently opposing affections in harmonious tension as the very breeding ground of righteousness and good works. And all who thus love and fear the Lord hate evil in all its forms (Ps. 97.10).

Hate?

We don’t much like that word, “hate.” But hate is a perfectly legitimate affection, and should be cultivated by every sincere follower of Jesus Christ. We must make certain, however, that this powerful affection is properly focused. We are called to hate *evil* – anything which is contrary to God’s holiness, righteousness and goodness. And we must sincerely *hate* it – not just be averse to it – so that we cannot bear the very thought of transgressing against the God Who so graciously has saved us in Jesus Christ.

When we hate evil, we will not even so much as dabble in it. If we dabble in sin in any way – in any of our thoughts, words, or deeds – soon enough we will begin to think that, since no one else knows about it, and it’s not really hurting anyone, a little sin can’t be a bad thing. Thus we show that we don’t hate evil and are more like the wicked who think they can indulge themselves and get away with it.

But sin is like a wildfire, and can quickly burn out of control. One sin leads to another, as Aspah explained (Ps. 73.18) and sin, like truth, will make itself present. We are not clever enough to be always on guard against the sin we have chosen to harbor in our souls breaking to the surface in some word or deed. Indeed, we cannot even predict how our cherished peccadillo might spread to some other area of our lives, bringing its destructive power to otherwise clean and wholesome activities.

Moreover, they who harbor sin in any way will find that their prayers are impeded (Ps. 66.18; Is. 59.1, 2). Not only will God turn a deaf ear to our prayers, but we will delight to seek the Lord in prayer less and less, knowing, as we do, that we’re harboring an attitude or practice displeasing to Him, and concerning which He knows full well.

We must nurture a genuine loathing for all things sinful. Sin is what put Jesus on the cross. Sin caused Him

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infinite sorrow, suffering, and shame. Sin turned the Father's eyes from His Son and left Him to suffer in utter and complete isolation. Should we not truly hate that which brought such incomparable misery to our beloved Savior, and which provokes the wrath of God against unrepentant sinners?

Hate is what God does

If we love and fear the Lord, we will hate that which He Himself hates. And God hates sin. Period (Ps. 5.4, 5). As we take up the study of God's Law, specific sins will be revealed to us. We will understand and recognize them, in ourselves and others, and then we can begin to nurture such a disgust for sin that we will in no way take them into or abide them within our souls or lives (Rom. 7.7).

At the same time, as we begin to hate sin, we will find that we are gaining and practicing more of the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). To fear the Lord is to love what our heavenly Father loves, hate what He hates, and do what lines up with His pleasure. And that includes hating sin.

You who love and fear the Lord, hate evil.

For reflection

1. How would you be able to tell when you hate sin?
2. They who do not fear the Lord, do not hate sin. What shall we say about those who dabble in sin, or harbor known sin in their lives, or do not treat sin as seriously as the Lord does? What should we do if we find some of that tendency in ourselves?
3. How can daily meditation in the Law of God help to makes us sensitive to the presence of sin and temptation?

Next steps – Conversation: Would you describe yourself as “hating sin”? Would your life be different in any ways if you truly hated all sin? In what ways? Talk with some Christian friends about this aspect of the fear of God. How can you help one another to hate sin?

5 Courageous Faith

But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Genesis 22.11, 12

How does God know?

How does God know that we fear Him?

God commands us to fear Him. He knows that when we fear Him, we will delight in His Law and hate all manner of evil. They who live thus before the Lord are positioning themselves for acts of courageous obedience which only true faith can engender.

When we live by courageous faith, obeying God even when what He requires of us seems unlikely, fearful, unreasonable, or beyond anything we've ever experienced, then we prove to Him that we love and fear Him as we ought.

This is what God saw in Abraham, and this is what He is looking for in us. God knows we fear Him when we are *courageous* in obeying Him, regardless of how *outrageous* what He requires may seem.

Abraham's task

Abraham's was neither a pleasant nor, from a human perspective, reasonable task. He loved his only son, Isaac. The thought of sacrificing him on an altar on the top of the mountain must have sent horror and disgust into his very bones.

Moreover, this was the child of promise, the one through whom God declared He would make of Abraham a great nation. How could it be reasonable to sacrifice this child? Yet this is what God commanded Abraham to do.

In our lives, we are often confronted with prompts, suggestions, instruction, and coaxing from the Lord to do things that appear to us as neither pleasant nor reasonable. Tell the Good News of Jesus to that angry colleague at work. Forgive this one who has so egregiously sinned against you. Bite your tongue and smile instead when someone has slighted you. Confront a sinning believer with the wickedness of His ways. Heed the call to serve the poor and needy, or to take up some other unfamiliar work of ministry. Stop robbing the Lord by withholding the tithe from Him. Confess that sinful attitude you have been harboring against your spouse. And so on.

Obeying such prompts can seem difficult. It might lead to unhappy consequences, or upset our comfort.

None of these even begins to approach what Abraham was called to do, but they may all seem as unpleasant and unreasonable to us as that task which he took up in courageous faith.

Simple obedience

But when we love the Lord we will want to know His pleasure by doing whatever He requires of us. And when we *fear* the Lord – more than we fear the consequences of our obedience – we will do what He bids, even when what He bids is not what we would choose. We might fear the consequences of acting in courageous faith, but we fear more than that incurring the displeasure of the Lord.

How can we muster the kind of courageous faith that shows the Lord that we love and fear Him as He

requires?

First, we must be certain about what the Lord is calling us to do. Don't act impulsively. Listen in prayer and wait upon the Lord to restate and reinforce His directive, as the Spirit prompts and leads you, day by day. Make sure that you've heard the Lord correctly, and that the path on which He would send you is clearly illuminated by His Word.

Second, envision yourself performing the thing you dread, and make preparation to carry out your obedience in faith. Abraham knew what a sacrifice required – fire, wood, a sharp knife – and he made sure to bring these with him to the mountain. Whatever God is calling us to do, we must see ourselves acting in obedience, what we will be doing as we carry out His directive; and we must make whatever preparations of prayer, setting up a meeting, writing down what we want to say, or whatever else may be involved, so that when the moment for obedience presents itself, we will be ready.

But, finally we must trust in the Lord to do what His good and perfect will in this situation. God is good; He does all things well; He works all things together for good to those who love Him and are following His purposes; and He never fails nor forsakes us. If we have waited on Him faithfully, envisioned ourselves acting, and made the necessary preparations, then, at the earliest moment or opportunity, we must take by faith the steps our obedience requires.

This will require courage, it's true, perhaps even beyond what you've ever had to show before. But take the necessary steps, and God will meet your courage with His presence, promises, and power. For when He sees that we fear Him, then He acts according to our faith and His promises.

They who act in such courageous faith show the Lord that they fear Him. And He will surely grant them to know His pleasure.

For reflection

1. Give some examples of what would be for you courageous acts of faith. When confronted with any of these, whether in your thoughts or on your daily path, how do you typically respond?
2. What God calls us to do may sometimes *seem* unpleasant or unreasonable. But such things may actually be the path to the pleasure of the Lord, and make perfect sense in retrospect. Explain.
3. Review the examples you gave in question 1. How should you prepare for each one of these, so that, when you have to confront them, you will be ready with courageous faith, and thus demonstrate that you both fear and love the Lord?

Next steps – Conversation: How do your Christian friends prepare for courageous acts of faith? Ask a few of them.

6 Fullness of Life

*The fear of the LORD leads to life,
And he who has it will abide in satisfaction;
He will not be visited with evil.* Proverbs 19.23

God's desire for us

God wants us to know full and abundant life in Jesus Christ (Jn. 10.10; 14.6). This is the good life, life as God intended it, the kind of life in which human beings realize their greatest joy and flourish in righteousness and love.

This is why we become Christians; but if we want this life, truly want to know and enjoy the fullness of life in Christ, we can only achieve it on God's terms. And His terms are clear: they who fear God know the life God intends for them, and enter into the rest He has accomplished for them in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, in the redemption God provides through Him, we find fullness of life and joy (Ps. 16.11), as we fear and love the Lord.

Two promises

Two subsidiary promises help us to understand what this entails, and why it is so.

First, the fear of the Lord leads to knowledge of truth (Prov. 1.7). Who wants to think of himself as living a lie? Deceiving and being deceived? Everyone has a sense that we should be dealt with truthfully, even if we don't always deal truthfully with others. The knowledge of truth sets us free from the misery and constraints of all sin (Jn. 8.32). When we know the truth and delight in it, we find the guidance and power we need to hate sin and embrace the life of love for God and neighbors that God intends for us. As we nurture fear of God, together with love for Him, we grow in the knowledge of truth.

Only by hiding the Word of God in our hearts and letting it dwell within us richly can we discover the newness, wholeness, and righteousness that allow us to enjoy full and abundant life (Ps. 119.9-11).

But unless we learn to fear God we will not even be able to *begin* knowing truth. This only makes sense. God is the Author of truth, Jesus is the embodiment of it, and the Spirit is the One Who guides us into all truth. Why would God entrust His precious, life-transforming truth to someone who refused to receive and use it by the means He has appointed? Fear God, and He will reveal Himself and His truth to you. Try to make sense out of His truth without fearing Him, and He will frustrate your attempt.

Your love for Scripture and ability to know the life of freedom it provides will increase in direct proportion to the extent the fear of the Lord grows alongside your love for Him.

Second, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111.10), which, as we practice it, gives us good understanding into every aspect of human life and leads us to richer, fuller worship of our God. Wisdom is everyday skill in living that allows us to realize and express the life of Jesus Christ – Who is the fullness of God's wisdom (Prov. 8; Col. 2.2, 3).

We can ask, "What would Jesus do?" all we want, but we will not live like Him with any degree of consistency until the fear of the Lord is firmly in place in our souls, and the knowledge and wisdom of God are thereby unleashed within us.

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Wisdom is based on knowledge, which begins with salvation and builds as we study and meditate on God's Law and all His Word. Knowledge thus gained – through the fear of the Lord – equips us in everyday situations to live like Jesus, in the wisdom of God.

The truly happy person

As Solomon argued in Ecclesiastes, only the wise person is truly happy. But to be wise, as he pointed out, we must orient the totality of our existence to God, living “under the heavens” rather than “under the sun.”

The whole of life, as Solomon summed it up in his exhortations to his son, is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12.13). What he literally says is, “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of [what it means to be] a human being.”

If you are trying to live your Christian life apart from the fear of God, you will never realize all the joy, purpose, power, vision, beauty, goodness, righteousness, hope, and peace that God intends for you. You will not make progress in knowing God's truth; the wisdom of God will escape you at just the moment you need it; and you will lack that constant presence of joy that lets you know you're living within the pleasure of the Lord. And your Christian life, absent the fear of God, will be as routine, dull, and unchallenging of that of many contemporary Christians.

But nurture the fear of the Lord, and watch your walk with Jesus, and your joy in following Him, begin to blossom, bloom, and bear fruit.

For reflection

1. What are some differences between knowledge and wisdom? Why do we need both?
2. Scripture says we cannot get to the knowledge and wisdom we need for full and abundant life apart from the fear of God. Do you agree with that? Explain.
3. In what sense or senses can we say with Solomon that to fear God “is the whole of [what it means to be] a human being?”

Next steps – Transformation: Would you describe yourself as one who earnestly desires to know truth and live in wisdom? What would be the identifying marks of such a person? Are these marks present in your life? Lay out a plan to begin growing in love for God's truth and desire for His wisdom. Share that plan with a Christian friend and ask him or her to pray for you.

7 This Way to Fearing God

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.
Revelation 21.23

Here, but not yet

The Kingdom of light, which Jesus, the Light of the world has brought near, and given to us, and in which we are lights shining in the darkness, is a present reality. It is unfolding and expanding against the darkness of unbelief as the followers of Jesus Christ walk in the light as He is in the light, and as they expose the darkness and proclaim the onset of the new day.

Christians seek the light of Christ and His truth, that they may be illuminated by Him, made radiant with His transforming presence and power, and luminescent to shine His light into their Personal Mission Fields. Not to love the light, nor to seek it diligently day by day, is to love the darkness.

But while the Kingdom of light is here and advancing, it is still yet to come in all its fullness. For the final realization of the Kingdom will not be until the Lord returns and banishes all the minions of darkness to the eternal and outer darkness for which they have been prepared. Then He will create the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells, where the light of Christ will shine fully and fruitfully on, in, and through every creature.

It is toward this day that we strive, for this day we long, and as harbingers and heralds of this day that we conduct our lives in the world.

Living for the eternal Day

Now this longing for the eternal day is neither a hypothetical nor a merely intellectual experience. We know this day is coming, because the same Word which has delivered us into the Kingdom of light tells us that the new day assuredly is near. We embrace the coming new day by faith, and strain toward it every day, not simply as an idea to be indulged, but as a way of life to embrace. We walk in the light of that new day so that, when we finally arrive there, it will be clear to all that this is, indeed, our native land.

Peter writes of this in 2 Peter 3.10-13: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

The *coming* new day must make a difference in *each new day* of our lives. “Therefore,” Peter continues (v. 14), “looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...” We do not live our citizenship before the watching world alone. The Lord of light scrutinizes His people, and He urges us day by day, through His Word and Spirit, to be clothed with the light and to proclaim the light so that the world might know that the light is coming and the darkness is about to pass away.

Then and there, here and now

We are called, in short, to live in the “then and there” in every “here and now” moment of our lives. We are a people oriented toward the future, and who prepare for it every day of our lives. The future we expect is one of no more sorrows, no more tears, no more sin, and no more darkness. So when that day at last dawns upon

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us, we want to be seen as qualified to take our place within it, true children of the light and followers of the Light of the world. It should not be hard to see that living this way will make us stick out – “shine,” as Paul put it – as true citizens of Light in an age of darkness and unbelief.

Does this describe your life? Do you live with an eye always toward the far horizon of eternal glory? And does that longed-for destination and hope inform, shape, and direct every aspect of your life in the present?

This is how we as Christians are called to live, and if we do not live this way, then by what means will it be known, when the Lord comes to call for an accounting, that we have any real claim on that eternal Kingdom of light?

If we hope to know the eternal light of that glorious then and there, let us strive to increase in that light every moment and day of our here and now.

For reflection

1. What is your understanding of what the new heavens and new earth will be like?
2. What does it mean to live *toward* this coming day of light?
3. How can believers encourage one another to walk in the light as He is in the light?

Next steps – Transformation: “The coming new day must make a difference with each new day of our lives.” How are you planning for this to be more true in your life during the year to come?

Fearing God

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to fear God? Why is it essential that Christians fear Him?
2. How do fearing God and loving Him work together in a believer's soul?
3. What are the marks of a person who is growing in the fear of God? How can we improve in this ourselves?
4. What are the greatest obstacles to overcome in fearing God as He requires? How can we address these? How can we help one another?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this brief study on fearing God? How are you putting that lesson to work in your daily life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.