**THE FEAR OF THE LORD-PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY MISSING IN THE CHURCH TODAY.**

Probably the most important quality a man must first acquire, before any other, is to fear the Lord. I cannot over-estimate the importance of the fear of the Lord in a believer’s life. It is absolutely foundational for living a fruitful Christian life. It is quite literally the start point for anything of any worth that God will do in our lives. Without it, we will never achieve anything that is eternal in nature. And we certainly won’t be able to consider ourselves a man or woman of God.

The scripture says,

**“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding,”** Prov.9:10.

The fear of the Lord is the start point for living a wise and productive life as a man of God. And until we receive the fear of the Lord into our hearts, we will not live as wise men. As simple as that. Because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The scripture also says,

**“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of Knowledge,”** Prov.1:7.

So, not only is the fear of the Lord the start point for wisdom in our lives. It is also the start point for knowledge as well. Some may think, ‘Well, what about all those people who have lots of knowledge, but don’t fear the Lord’?

Clearly many people possess lots of knowledge about many different things. And it is good to be knowledgeable and to increase our learning whilst on this earth so that we can be useful and able to do things. But such knowledge is temporal. It may benefit us for 70-80 years but then it is gone when we die.

**“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going,”** Ecc. 9:10.

No matter how much knowledge we accrue over the years, it all ends when we die. When the scripture says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, what it’s talking about is the true knowledge that will endure for all eternity. The knowledge that begins with God, and ends with Him. The knowledge of the Holy One. Not the temporal, human knowledge that is passing away.

If we don’t have the personal knowledge of God, we don’t really know anything properly. Because all true knowledge begins and ends with the knowledge of God and who He is. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The Bible puts it this way,

**“All mankind is stupid, devoid of knowledge,”** Jer.51:17.

So, if we don’t possess the true knowledge of God, we don’t really know anything. But the fear of the Lord enables us to know God as He is. And so it is the beginning of the true knowledge that will endure forever.

So, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it is the beginning of knowledge. And I would also say it is the beginning point for true humility in our lives also. I would go so far as to say no man can be truly humble, unless he possesses the fear of the Lord to some extent first.

Yet, despite its immense importance in a Christian’s life, I have met relatively few men who I could genuinely say fear God today. Which is a tragedy. If someone asked me what are the two most important things we need to receive from God today, I would say firstly, the gift of the fear of the Lord. And secondly, the gift of the revelation of God’s great love for us. I put the revelation of God’s love second, because until we receive the gift of the fear of the Lord, we may know the love of God to some extent. But we will struggle to enter the fullness of God’s great love for us.

The fear of the Lord is a most precious gift that God only gives to those who seek Him with a whole heart.

**“The fear of the Lord is His treasure,”** Is.33:6.

So many people today consider the fear of the Lord as an old, outdated concept no longer relevant in our modern churches. But they could not be further from the truth. If we could only grasp how important the fear of the Lord is for us, we would do everything we possibly could to obtain it. It is the Lord’s treasure. A gift of inestimable worth. Those who fear the Lord are rich indeed. The prophet Isaiah said the coming Messiah would delight in the fear of the Lord. Is that our testimony also? Do we delight in the fear of the Lord?

**“Then I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the citadel, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many,”** Neh.7:2.

Nehemiah could trust his brother Hanani to put him in charge of the city of Jerusalem. It was Hanani who had come to Nehemiah whilst he was serving as cup-bearer to the king in Susa. And Nehemiah had asked him about Jerusalem and the welfare of his fellow Jews there. Hanani had an interest in the welfare of Jerusalem. But every leader needs someone faithful and reliable at his side. So, Nehemiah appointed Hananiah to this important position. And the reason he gives for appointing Hananiah to this important position, was because he was a faithful man who feared God more than most.

If a church is not led by God-fearing men, it will probably not fulfil its calling to glorify God and to create disciples. It’s as simple as that. However charismatic or gifted the pastor or leadership team are. A charismatic leader might seem to succeed in building what appears to be a big church. But if they do not fear the Lord, what they call a church will probably be more like a gathering of goats who think they are sheep, with the occasional real sheep wandering around on its own or in small groups here and there. Or a field of tares with the occasional few stems of wheat dotted about.

Faithfulness and the fear of the Lord usually go hand-in-hand. Because if someone fears the Lord, they will want to live faithfully. The man who fears God humbles himself under God’s mighty hand. He considers what God has to say and acts upon it. And if he breaks God’s commands or walks in a way that is displeasing to Him, he will not be able to rest until he has got right with God. His relationship with God is all important to him. Because he fears God.

These days it seems there’s one scandal after another in churches. Where people we thought were spiritual or good believers actually turn out to be hiding sins that they have been walking in for a long time. Such a person does not fear the Lord. They may have come to the faith somehow or other, but they have not been walking by faith for a long time. Because we cannot walk in faith whilst walking in known sin at the same time. It just doesn’t work like that. And clearly such a person does not fear God. Because the evidence somebody fears God is that they cannot walk in sin. They may stumble on occasion, but they will not walk in unrepentant sin. Because the thought of appearing before God in their sin will fill them with dread. Those who walk in known sin often fear being found out, or losing their jobs, their marriages, or their status more than fearing God.

Some people today don’t like the idea of fearing God, saying it’s not good to fear. We should do things out of love and not out of fear. There is some truth in that. But it is not the whole truth on the matter. Love should be our primary motivator. That is correct. But the fear of the Lord should also motivate us. And it also plays a crucial part in us discovering the love of God in its fullness. In a way that we become rooted and grounded in His love.

When we first come to the faith, we can receive a certain understanding of the love of God. When we realise that God loves us despite what we have done, we receive a revelation of the love of God. But such a revelation is often relatively shallow and fragile. We can easily find ourselves in situations where we drift away from God and we don’t sense that He loves us quite as much as we did before. But the apostle Paul was constantly exhorting the disciples and praying for them that they might grow in the love of God to such an extent that they would know the love of God deeply in their souls. That they might be able to comprehend the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the love of Christ. And this is where the fear of the Lord comes in.

When a man discovers the fear of the Lord, he will often become very aware of the holiness of God and the wickedness of sinning against Him. His conscience will become much more sensitive and aware of when he sins. So that when he does fall into sin, the feelings of disgust and condemnation may well be magnified in his heart. And that can cause him to struggle with despondency and possibly even depression. But this is actually the key to receiving a greater revelation of the love of God in our hearts. Because the darker our sin appears in our eyes, the greater the light of God’s mercy and grace towards us appears also. As long as we look for the light of His mercy and grace at that time of course. And it is this very apparent contrast between the darkness and the light within us, that causes us to be able to comprehend and appreciate the light of God’s love all the more.

The man who fears God will probably feel unworthy of God and that he should be punished when he stumbles in a sin. And in a way that’s right. The wages of sin are death. And if we have sinned, we should feel a sense of condemnation within us. If we don’t that is a very bad sign.

But at such a time it is crucial that we do kneel at His feet and repent of our sins. Because this is the way of faith. Wallowing in our sin will not help us. But acknowledging that we are a sinner worthy of death, but then looking up to a merciful Heavenly Father for His forgiveness is absolutely key in this type of situation. And as we look up to God in our helplessness and reach out to Him in faith, we will find the greatness of His love for us. A love that is not dependent upon our actions, but is wholly dependent upon God’s nature. A nature which is love, but is also holy. A holiness that sets God apart from man. And a holiness that bears with our sins time and time again for the display of His Own great patience and mercy.

No man would forgive again and again in the way God does. But God is Holy, and He is concerned for the honour of His great Name. And He has said He will be faithful, even when we are unfaithful. A Holy virtue He will reveal through His dealings with us. Something we will praise Him for throughout the generations of eternity.

Going through this process is one of the ways in which we will learn to trust in God and not in ourselves. By knowing fully that we are helpless sinners worthy of death in our flesh. But then finding the immense and glorious love and mercy of our Saviour Jesus Christ who freely forgives our sin, and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. That such a great and awesome and Holy God, would actually send His only Beloved Son to die for our sins upon the cross. That is amazing grace. But until we fear Him, such grace may only be ‘grace’. It will probably not be ‘amazing grace’. And the greatness of God’s love for us may well elude or escape us too, because we don’t value the enormity of what He has done for us in Christ Jesus. We tend to take such things for granted very easily indeed.

Most first or initial encounters people had with God in the Bible were not Him throwing His arms around them saying how wonderful they were, and how much He loves them. No, most first encounters with God in the Bible, was Him revealing something of His Holy Presence to someone, that would strike fear into their heart. Remember Ezekiel and the apostle John falling at His feet as though dead? Or Isaiah’s anguished cry when he saw the Lord high and lifted up?

**“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,”** Is.6:5.

This is so important to grasp. Because until we receive a revelation of God’s greatness and holiness, our pride remains unchecked. The one thing that will really crucify our pride is a revelation of the greatness and holiness of our God. As we mentioned already, when we truly see how great is our God, how Holy and set apart from us He is, and how small and insignificant we are before Him, and how wicked and evil is our sin against Him, only then will our pride be truly humbled. Until that happens, our pride will always remain hidden, lurking in the shadows, waiting to taint and spoil everything we do.

People can learn to be humble by figuring out what humble people do, and copying them. And they can be very believable. For a time. We know someone like this. Who figured out how to come across as humble in church, and learnt all the good phrases to use. And he tricked many into thinking he was a humble guy. But every now and then, his pride would get triggered and his mask would slip. And his true self would be on display for a time. A ‘professional tare’ within the house of God.

But even if we try to become genuinely humble, we will only succeed so far or to some extent, if we do not possess the fear of the Lord. For unless our hidden pride is put to death, it will inevitably pop up and defile what we are trying so hard to achieve. The only way our pride will be dealt with properly is if we have a revelation of the greatness and holiness of our God. And the fear of the Lord then becomes a living reality within our hearts. And this is important, because,

**“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble,”** Jam.4:6.

So many people never truly experience the greatness of God’s grace because their pride has never been properly dealt with. And worse, they probably don’t even realise that they have a problem with pride anyway.

**“But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My Word,”** Is.66:2.

God doesn’t have to look at or to listen to anyone. We are all sinners in rebellion against Him. He had just been posing the question through the prophet Isaiah, where is the house we could build for Him, considering that heaven was His throne and the earth was His footstool? And all things had been made by Him, not by us. The question is designed to show us how insufficient and incapable we are in ourselves to do anything for Him. How dependent we are upon Him for anything and everything. And yet after asking this question, God goes on to say that He actually will look with favour towards a certain type of person. Not to everyone. But only to those who are humble and contrite of spirit, meaning they mourn for their sins. And to those who tremble at His Word.

When was the last time you or I trembled at God’s Word? When we actually read something that caused fear to arise in our hearts? Have we ever felt such a thing? Or was it a very long time ago perhaps? When we read something that sent shivers down our spine? Either for ourselves or for someone else? The only people who will tremble at God’s Word are those who genuinely fear Him. And that is a good test for us, to see whether we possess the fear of the Lord or we don’t. When was the last time we read something in the Word that caused us to tremble?

As I mentioned previously, we can never truly walk in the fullness of the love of God, until we first learn to fear the Lord. And we need both of these qualities. If we only had the fear of the Lord, we might veer into self-condemnation. But if we understand the fear of the Lord and then look to the Lord with the eye of faith, His love will come flooding into our hearts. So, the fear of God combined with the love of God are the perfect bedfellows in our hearts. They balance each other in perfect harmony.

**“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase,”** Acts 9:31.

The early churches were healthy and grew in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort or love of the Spirit. When these two qualities are found together, there will always be spiritual growth. But the fear of the Lord comes first. Then the comfort or love of the Spirit comes next, bringing complete harmony when known and practiced together. The problem with us is that we usually want to know the love or comfort of the Spirit, but not the fear of the Lord. But it doesn’t work this way.

God is to be feared, because He is Sovereign and can do as He pleases. He doesn’t have to save us. He doesn’t have to do anything for us in fact. He owes us nothing, yet we owe Him everything. And anything He gives us, however small, is an act of great grace and mercy from Him. We are completely dependent upon Him to enable us to overcome sin and our flesh. Yet often we just take such things for granted, and assume He will always forgive us, even when we walk in our pride and in the lusts of our flesh. So, if we know how merciful He has been to us, and if we know how great an offence our sin is against Him, we will fear Him. Because He holds the power over our souls to either save us, or to throw us into hell-fire. And God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

People today often say the fear of the Lord is to reverence Him but not really to fear Him. That is a modern version of the fear of the Lord which has no bearing in scripture. The Greek word translated ‘fear’ in our Bibles is the word ‘phobos’ which is where we get the word ‘phobia’ from, meaning an all-consuming fear. When God came down upon Mount Sinai in His holiness, in blazing fire, darkness and with the whirlwind, the scripture says Moses was exceedingly fearful (‘ek-phobos’). Not just in fear or having some vague feeling of awe and respect.

**“And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, ‘I am full of fear and trembling,’”** Heb.12:21.

The closer we get to the Lord, the more we will genuinely fear Him. The reason we don’t tend to fear the Lord today is that we often don’t really know Him as we should. We have yet to draw near to Him.

People do good things for many and varied reasons. Perhaps to gain respect? Perhaps out of a sense of duty? Perhaps to get something they want? But these can all be for self-centred reasons. And when there’s no longer a need to gain respect, or we don’t feel such a sense of duty anymore, or we’ve obtained the thing we wanted, the motivation to do the right thing goes with it also. But God wants us to do the right things because of our love and fear of Him. Because that way we will always want to do the right thing. Because we are doing it with the right motivation.

People who fear God do not need to be policed. Or watched, to make sure they don’t step out of line. They can be entrusted with things because they are not doing them for themselves. They are doing things for God and in His Name. And if they stumble or transgress, their conscience will condemn them. And they will listen to their conscience because they fear God and know that we cannot take the grace of God for granted. We cannot treat the blood shed by Christ as an unholy thing that can be trampled upon by walking in wilful sin. People who fear God will fear to do such a thing. Any person who walks in known, wilful and unrepentant sin, does not fear God. And this is how we can know whether a person fears God or not. What is their attitude towards sin and how do they react when they stumble and fall into sin? The evidence that someone fears God is that they fight against sin and mourn in spirit when they stumble in it.

**“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,”** Matt.5:4.

If we have not got to the place where we feel grieved in our hearts about our sin, and mourn the fact we have committed it, we do not yet fear the Lord. This is a clear sign we need the fear of the Lord in our hearts because we have not yet obtained it.

**“Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension,”** I Tim.2:8.

God is holy. And without holiness no-one will see God. And it is His delight when holy hands are raised up to Him.

The man who fears God will be careful to live a holy life. To live as someone who has been set apart from this world, set apart unto God as His peculiar and special people. His lights in a world that is full of darkness. So that he may be able to lift up holy hands in prayer to His God. Not just on a Sunday morning, but every day of the week. The man of God may not be sinless. He will stumble. But it’s what he does at that time that will show whether he is a man of God or not. Whether he fears God or he doesn’t.

Men of God mourn over their sin. It affects them. They feel unclean inside and they lose their peace. And so, they repent from their sin, with a resolve to turn away from it. And repentance does not mean just saying sorry. It means turning from that sin by throwing away the drugs, or deleting the pornography, or returning the stolen items. And putting measures in place that will prevent us from committing that sin again. Staying away from bad influences. Not putting ourselves in positions where we will be tempted. Having filters on our internet usage that guard what we see. Not having secret passwords to hide our online activity behind. Tanya and I know each other’s passwords, so that at any time either of us can view the others computer or phone and what is on them. This is true repentance.

We are in a war against sin and against our flesh. And in a war, if we’re under attack it is wise to build fortifications to protect our position. Not to sit out in the open waving to the enemy and being vulnerable to attack. When the Russian soldiers crossed over into Ukrainian territory last year, the Ukrainian soldiers didn’t just sit there waving their hands saying, ‘Stop, don’t come here!’ No, they had dug trenches. They had taken the time to fortify their positions. Because they knew they were in a war. And it should be the same for us.

Other men however, treat sin lightly. They may be sorry. But they do not repent so as to turn away from their sin. The man who fears God walks in the Light and leaves the darkness behind him.

Most of us do not really fear the Lord when we first come to the faith. It is not something we are naturally born with. It is something we must acquire. In the early church it speaks of the early disciples discovering the fear of the Lord as they lived their lives as disciples. As they devoted themselves to the apostle’s doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, the fear of the Lord began coming upon every one of them.

**“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Fear** (‘phobos’ in Greek) **was occurring to** (or ‘coming upon’) **every soul** (literal rendering from the Greek); **and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles,”** Acts 2:42-43.

The fear of the Lord is something we need to acquire as believers. Especially those of us who wish to walk as men of God. And it seemed to ‘occur’ or ‘come upon’ the souls of the early believers. It wasn’t something they intellectually grasped with their minds. The fear of the Lord cannot be learnt by mental study and intellectual knowledge. No, it comes through receiving a revelation of the greatness and the holiness of God. Something only the Spirit of God can give to us. Something the Spirit of God will begin communicating to our spirits when we continue in the apostle’s doctrine, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. So that the fear of God ‘occurs’ to our souls. Or comes upon us.

**“My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry out for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God,”** Prov.2:1-5.

If we want to discern or understand the fear of the Lord, we need to receive God’s Words and treasure them in our hearts. Like they are important to us. Something of high value that we guard and treasure within ourselves. Not something we take lightly. And we need to seek for God’s wisdom and understanding as if we were searching for hidden treasures. With the same energy and motivation. If we will do that, then God says we will discern or understand the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. The fear of the Lord is His treasure. And He gives it to those who seek Him for it diligently. And it’s at that point that we will start actually living a life of wisdom and fruitfulness.