

WALKING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Acts 9:31

I. INTRODUCTION

A. In writing about the early church, Luke recorded Acts 9:31:

Act 9:31 ESV So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Note that they were "walking in the fear of the Lord"!

B. In writing to the church at Philippi, Paul told them Ph 2:12:

Php 2:12 ESV Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

C. The concept of "fear and trembling" in connection with God is not a popular concept today

1. People prefer to hear about God's love, longsuffering and mercy
2. Sometimes, when we point out God's righteous indignation, holiness, and justice, people reply "My God is not like that!"

D. The emphasis on God's love and mercy today is probably an reaction to the "hell, fire, and brimstone" preaching of another generation

E. But could it be that we have gone to other extreme?

1. Where there is no concept of "fear and trembling" as it relates to the Christian?
2. Could this be why many Christians are apathetic in their service?
3. Could it be we have forgotten Whom we should fear if we are negligent in our service? - cf. Mt 10:28

Mat 10:28 ESV And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

F. In this lesson, I hope to accomplish three things:

1. Define the "fear of the Lord"
2. Point out why the "fear of the Lord" is important to the Christian
3. Suggest how we can develop a healthy "fear of the Lord" without going to one extreme or the other

[We begin by...]

II. DEFINING THE "FEAR OF THE LORD"

A. THE WORD "FEAR"...

1. In the Hebrew, the word is "YIR'AH" and is used in the Old Testament to describe:
 - a) fear, terror
 - b) awesome or terrifying thing (object causing fear)
 - c) fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety
2. The Greek word is "PHOBOS", and it is used to describe:
 - a) fear, dread, terror
 - b) that which strikes terror

B. IN CONNECTION WITH THE "FEAR OF THE LORD", IT IS OFTEN DEFINED AS "REVERENCE" OR "AWE"...

1. Which is fine as far as it goes...
2. But I wonder if this definition truly goes far enough...
3. For though the terms "reverence" and "awe" imply a place for "trembling", do most people make the connection?

C. THE "FEAR OF THE LORD" SHOULD INCLUDE A PLACE FOR "TREMBLING"!

1. Even as Paul indicated in Ph 2:12, by combining "fear and trembling"

Php 2:12 ESV Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

2. The Greek word for "trembling" is "TROMOS" and means "a trembling or quaking with fear"
3. Just as one would likely tremble in the presence of one who could take our life, so Jesus taught us to fear the Lord - Mt 10:28

Mat 10:28 ESV And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

D. A PROPER "FEAR OF THE LORD" WOULD THEN INCLUDE...

1. A reverence and awe
2. A fear of offending God
3. A trembling and quaking if one knows they have offended God and have not obtained forgiveness! - cf. He 10:26-27, 30-31; 12:28-29

Heb 10:26-31 ESV For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Heb 10:30-31 ESV For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Heb 12:28-29 ESV Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

[The results and value of such an attitude is seen as we continue]

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE "FEAR OF THE LORD"

A. FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, WE LEARN "FEAR OF THE LORD"...

1. The "fear of the Lord" is the beginning of knowledge - Pr 1:7

Pro 1:7 ESV The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

2. The "fear of the Lord" will cause one to hate evil - Pr 8:13

Pro 8:13 ESV The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

3. The "fear of the Lord" will prolong life - Pr 10:27

Pro 10:27 ESV The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.

4. The "fear of the Lord" provides strong confidence and is a fountain of life - Pr 14:26-27

Pro 14:26-27 ESV In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

5. The "fear of the Lord" prompts one to depart from evil – Pr 16:6

Pro 16:6 ESV By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.

6. The "fear of the Lord" leads to a satisfying life, and spares one from much evil - Pr 19:23

Pro 19:23 ESV The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

7. The "fear of the Lord" is the way to riches, honor, and life! - Pr 22:4

Pro 22:4 ESV The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

B. WITHOUT THE "FEAR OF THE LORD"...

1. We close ourselves to the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge!
2. We will flirt with evil and be corrupted by it
3. Our lives are likely to be shortened by our refusal to heed God's word (e.g., suffering sexually transmitted diseases because we did not heed His Word on sexual relationships)
4. We will not come to know the love of God that gives us assurance and confidence of our salvation
5. When fallen into sin, we will not be motivated to repent and turn to God!
6. We will not be motivated to truly "work out our own salvation"!

[Without the "fear of the Lord", we cannot please God (cf. Is 66:1-2). Only the person who "trembles at His Word" has God's promise to receive His tender mercy! (cf. Ps 103:17-18). But how does one develop the proper "fear of the Lord" without going to the extreme of earlier generations?]

Isa 66:1-2 ESV Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? 2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Psa 103:17-18 ESV But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, 18 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

IV. DEVELOPING THE "FEAR OF THE LORD"

A. THE "FEAR OF THE LORD" COMES THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD!

1. Just as "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Ro 10:17), the same can be said for the "fear of the Lord"!

Rom 10:17 ESV So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

2. Notice Deu 31:10-13, where the children of Israel were told to gather every seven years to read and hear the Word...

Deu 31:10-13 ESV And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. 12 Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, 13 and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."

3. The purpose? "...that they may learn to fear the Lord"!
4. As one reads the Word of God, they should gain a healthy degree of the "fear of the Lord"
 - a) Consider the words of Paul in Ro 2:4-11

Rom 2:4-11 ESV Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

b) Or how about the words of Peter in 2 Pe 3:7-14

2Pe 3:7-14 ESV But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

B. THE WORD OF GOD, PROPERLY USED, WILL MAINTAIN A PROPER BALANCE...

1. It is important to emphasize, however, that to avoid extremes, we must read ALL of God's Word
 - a) Some read only those portions will reveal God's love and mercy, and have no "fear of the Lord"
 - b) Others emphasize the "fire, hell and brimstone" passages, and know nothing of God's everlasting lovingkindness
 - c) The one develops an attitude of permissiveness that belittles God's holiness and justice
 - d) The other develops a psychosis of terror that forgets God's grace and compassion
2. Even in the passages noted above, the context of each speaks much of God's grace and forgiveness for those who will repent!
3. So we must be careful how we use the Word of God, but use it we must!

V. CONCLUSION

1. The Psalmist in Psa 89:7 said...

Psa 89:7 ESV a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?

2. Why do we need to "fear the Lord"? So we will be sure to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling"!

3. The warning is necessary, for as it is written in Hebrews 4:1-2:

Heb 4:1-2 ESV Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

And again...

Heb 4:11 ESV Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

4. With the proper "fear of the Lord", we will "work out our salvation", we will "labour...to enter into that [heavenly] rest"!

2Co 7:1 ESV Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

5. Are you "perfecting holiness in the fear of God"?