

FEAR GOD. (1 PETER 2:17) PART I OF 2

(Sermon to the saints at Westboro Baptist Church, Topeka, Kansas, December 18, 2016)

The wise man said that the whole of religion, experimentally and practically, is “to fear God and keep his commandments.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The fear of God is of primary importance in divine worship. A true worshipper of God is frequently described in scripture by one that fears him. Psalm 66:16: “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.” The manner in which the worship of God is to be performed, with the fear of God, is directed to be in it and with it, for God is to be served “with reverence and godly fear.” Hebrews 12:28. See Psalm 2:11: “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” Also see Psalm 5:7: “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.” Further, see Psalm 89:7: “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.” “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31). And, Paul preaching and reasoning in the temple concerning Jesus Christ at Pisidia in Antioch, shortly before he declared, “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles” because the Jews judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46), said: “Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and **whosoever among you feareth God**, to you is the word of this salvation sent.” Acts 13:26. The fear of God is the sine qua non (or, without which, nothing) of true religion. There is as it were a banner flying above this Church: “Fear God.” Psalm 60:4 “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah.” Psalm 61:5: “For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name.” “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Revelation 14:6-7). From Genesis to Revelation, the theme “Fear God” dominates.

The object of fear is not the creature, but God the Creator. There is a fear due to men, as referenced in Romans 13:7: “Render therefore to all their dues: ...fear to whom fear.”

*There is a fear and reverence due to parents from their children, ("Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father" Leviticus 19:3), which is shown by the honor and respect paid unto them, and the obedience surrendered to them. Ephesians 6:1-2: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)." And the argument from that everlasting truth is strong to teach the fear and reverence of God the Father of spirits. Heb 12:9: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" 1 Peter 1:14, 17: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: ...And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

*There is a fear and reverence in the marriage state, due from wives to their husbands. Ephesians 5:33: "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." 1 Peter 3:5,6: "For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement." This relation affords a reason and argument why the church should fear and serve the Lord her God, because he is her husband. See Psalm 45:11: "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him."

*There is a fear and reverence which servants should show to their masters, Ephesians 6:5 ; and if such masters are to be obeyed with fear, much more our Master which is in heaven; and this is the argument the Lord himself uses, "If I be a Master, where is my fear?" Malachi 1:6.

*There is a fear and reverence which ministers of the word should be had in by those to whom they minister; 1 Samuel 12:18: "So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel." This is one part of that double honor they are worthy of, to be esteemed very highly for their work sake. (2 Timothy 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:13). Herod, though a wicked man, "feared John," that is, not dreaded him, but respected him, for he heard him gladly, Mark 6:20.

*There is a fear and reverence to be rendered to magistrates, 1 Peter 2:17, and especially to the chief magistrate, Proverbs 24:21: "My son, fear thou the LORD and the

king"; and if an earthly king is to be feared and reverenced, much more the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16). "Who would not fear thee, O king of nations?" (Jeremiah 10:7).

But men are not to be feared by the people of God, as to be deterred by them from the service of God; "the fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25) in this respect. God is to be listened to, served, and obeyed rather than men of the highest class and rank; they are not to be afraid of losing their favor and esteem, and of gaining their ill will thereby, as the Pharisees, who, though convinced that Jesus was the Christ, confessed him not, lest they should be put out of the synagogue (John 12:42), loving the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43). They should not be afraid of the revilings and reproaches of men (Isaiah 51:7; Hebrews 13:13), and be intimidated by them from serving the Lord their God, but with Moses should esteem reproach for the Lord's sake greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Hebrews 11:26); nor should they be frightened from a conspicuous confession of faith, and from an attention to it, by the threats and menaces of men (Jeremiah 1:8), and by all the persecution they may endure from them (2 Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."). They are not to be feared who can kill the body, but God is to be feared who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28). Those who fear men, so as to neglect the worship of God, are the "fearful" ones, who shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone. (Revelation 21:8). If God is on the side of his people, as he most certainly is, they have no reason to fear what man can do unto them. (Romans 8:31; Hebrews 13:6).

God only is the object of fear: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him"; that is, him only. (Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20). This is the principal thing God requires of his people, and they are bound in duty to render to him fear; "Now, O Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God?" (Deuteronomy 10:12); this is the first thing, others follow, to wit: "to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul". That language may sound familiar if you've read the Gospels. (Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). Therefore because he is so much the object of the fear of good men, he is called "fear" itself; so the "fear of Isaac" is used for the God of Isaac in Genesis 31:42, and by whom Jacob swore, at Genesis 31:53, who could be no other than the God of his father Isaac.

God, not only essentially but personally considered, is to be feared; God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Hosea 3:5: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the

LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days." So in Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name," whose name is Jehovah, "the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 4:3), "shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;" even the Son of God, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person (Hebrews 1:3).

Jehovah the Son is also the object of divine fear and reverence, "Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread"; that is, the object of your fear and reverence; and what follows shows which of the divine persons is meant; and "he shall be for a sanctuary" to worship in, and a place of refuge for his people in times of distress; "but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence," Isaiah 8:13,14 which phrases are applied to Christ, and can only be said of him. (Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:7-8). Jehovah the Father, the lord of the vineyard, after sending many of his servants who had been ill used, says, "I will send my beloved Son," meaning Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1:14), it "may be, they will reverence him when they see him." (Luke 20:13). They ought to have done it: reverence should be given to him, the heir of the vineyard, his church, the son in his own house, whose house believers are, and therefore should reverence him. (Hebrews 3:6). Reverence in the Bible is essentially fear.

Jehovah the Spirit also is and should be the object of fear; the Israelites in the wilderness rebelled against him, and vexed him, and they smarted for it, for "he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them." (Isaiah 63:10). Lying to the Holy Ghost, which was a most irreverent treatment of him, was punished with death in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5); and saints should be careful that they "grieve" not the Holy Spirit by their unbecoming conduct toward him, from whom they receive many blessings and favors.

Here are some of the reasons God is to be feared according to the Bible:

*He is to be feared because of his name and nature; "Holy and reverend is his name," (Psalm 111:9) particularly his name Jehovah, expressive of his essence and nature; "that thou mayest fear this fearful and glorious name, The Lord thy God," Deuteronomy 28:58, a name peculiar to him. The name of God is to be revered. And, you can spend a lot of quality time finding those names in searching the scripture; samples are outside the back door of Brent's house.

*God in his perfections and because of them, is the object of fear; as his majesty and greatness in general. God is clothed with majesty, and majesty and honor are before him (Psalm 45:3-4; 1 Chronicles 16:27), and "with him is terrible majesty," such as is sufficient to command an awe of him; particularly his omnipotence, for "he is excellent in power." (Job 37:22-23). Also his omniscience, for nothing can be hid from his sight (Hebrews 4:13; Daniel 2:22); the most enormous actions committed in the dark are seen by him, with whom the darkness and the light are alike. (Psalm 139:12). He is to be feared for his perfect omnipresence, from whence there is no fleeing, for he fills heaven and earth with it; Jeremiah 23:24: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD." To which may be added to these perfections, the justice and holiness of God, which make his majesty the more terrible and to be revered, since he is not only excellent in power, but also "in judgment, and in plenty of justice," "men do therefore fear him." (Job 37:23-24). 2 Chronicles 19:7: "Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." 1 Peter 1:16: "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." What a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of a just and sin-avenging God, the living God (Hebrews 10:31), the everlasting King, at whose wrath the nations tremble, and are not able to bear his indignation. (Jeremiah 10:10).

*The works of God make him appear to be a proper object of fear and reverence. For example, his works of creation, to which the Psalmist says, at Psalm 33:5-8: "He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him." They display his greatness and goodness in them, as to show him worthy of fear and reverence. The prophet gives an instance in what may seem small, yet is a most wonderful thing, and commands an awe of God: "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord? will ye not tremble at my presence? which hath placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree that it cannot pass it;" and at the same time the stupidity of the people is observed, who, notwithstanding the goodness of God in his works of providence towards them, yet completely lacking in their fear and reverence of him: "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God that giveth rain, the former and latter rain in its season; he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest." (Jeremiah 5:22,24). And he is worthy of fear not only for his common providential blessings but

especially his works of grace should have such an effect upon the hearts of his people, as they indeed do have when they come with divine power (Psalm 110:3); particularly the pardoning grace and mercy of God: "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." (Psalm 130:4). "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days." (Hosea 3:5).

*The judgments of God which he threatens, and sometimes inflicts, and the promises of grace he makes and always fulfills, render him an object of fear and reverence. The judgments of God on sinners are awful to the saints themselves, and strike their minds with fear of God; says David, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments," Ps 119:120; not as coming upon himself, but as terrible to behold on others; and these are dreadful and formidable to sinners, when they see them near approaching, who go into the holes and clefts of rocks, and into the caves "for fear of the Lord, and the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth." (Isaiah 2:19,21). Nothing has a greater influence on a filial and godly fear in the saints, and to stir them up to the exercise of it, than the free, absolute, and unconditional promises of grace in the covenant; therefore after the apostle had observed such promises, strongly urges to "perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2 Corinthians 6:16,18 7:1. "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." "Filial" means noting or having a relation of a child to a parent.

What is the nature and kind of fear that constitutes the true fear of God?

There is a fear which is not good nor commendable, and it is of different sorts; there is an idolatrous fear, which Paul called "superstitious," meaning "a fear of demons," which the city of Athens was greatly addicted to and for which Paul calls out as being to their disgrace; "I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious," (Acts 17:22), or given to the fear and worship of false deities. Such is all will worship, worship not founded in the word of God, which brings on a spirit of bondage unto fear. The verse is Romans 8:15: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." All such false and vain imaginations

which inject dread and terrors into the minds of men, and cause them to "fear where no fear is," (Psalm 53:5) or where there is no reason for it; such as the pains of purgatory after death, invented by the Catholics to extort money from men; and "after death purification," a figment of the Jews. There is an external fear of God, an outward show and profession of it, which is taught by the precept of men (Isaiah 29:13), as in the men of Samaria, who pretended to fear the Lord, as the priest instructed them, and yet served their own gods (2 Kings 17:32-33). There is an hypocritical fear, when men draw nigh to God with their mouths and honor him with their lips, and their hearts are removed far from him (Isaiah 29:13); and when they fear and serve him for some sinister end and selfish view, which Satan insinuated was Job's case, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" (Job 1:9). And there is a servile fear, such as that of some servants, who serve their masters, not from love but from fear of punishment; and such a "spirit of bondage to fear," the Jews were much subject to under the legal dispensation; but now saints being "delivered out of the hands" of sin, Satan, and the law, they "serve" the Lord "without fear," without slavish fear and with a filial one, "in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives." (Luke 1:74-75). And this slavish fear arises from the following:

*From a sense of sin, and the guilt of it on the conscience, without a view of pardon; thus no sooner were Adam and Eve sensible of their sin and their nakedness by it, but they fled through fear from the presence of God, and hid themselves among the trees of the garden, as yet having no discovery of pardoning grace made to them. When God summonsed Adam, he said, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Genesis 3:10). Thus a wicked man, conscious of his guilt, flees when no man pursues (Proverbs 28:1), and is like Pashur, a Magormissabib, "fear round about," a terror to himself and others. (Jeremiah 20:1-4).

*From the law entering the conscience of a sinner, having broken it and working wrath in it (Romans 4:15) for the law, when it comes with powerful convictions of sin, and with menaces of punishment for it, "it worketh" a sense of wrath in the conscience, and leaves a "fearful looking for of judgment" to come, and of "fiery indignation" which shall consume "the adversaries" of God (Hebrews 10:27); when persons in such a condition and circumstances would be glad of rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of God, which appears to them intolerable. (Revelation 6:14-17).

*From the curse of the law, and the weight of it on the conscience. The voice of the law is terrible; it is "a voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the

word should not be spoken to them any more." (Hebrews 12:19). It accuses of sin, pronounces "guilty" for it; its language is, "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Galatians 3:10). What slavish fear must he be filled with when the conscience of a sinner is awakened and he feels all the curses of the law upon him, as he does when "the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy smoke against" him, "and all the curses written in this book lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven," as pronounced in Deuteronomy 29:20?

*From a view of death as the punishment of sin; "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), the just desert of it; sin is the sting of death (1 Corinthians 15:56), gives it its venom and fatal influence, and makes it that terrible thing it is; and some "through fear of death are all their life time subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:15), and are under a continual servile fear of it.

*From a dread of hell and everlasting damnation. This fear is of the same kind with that of devils, who believe there is one God and tremble; tremble at present wrath and future torment. (James 2:19; Jude 1:6). So wicked men, who have a fearful apprehension of everlasting punishment, it appears to them greater than they can bear, as it did to Cain. (Genesis 4:13).

But there is a fear of God different from this and opposite to it, and may be called a filial fear, such as that of a son to a father; called "godly fear," at Hebrews 12:28: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." The same word is used of the fear and reverence of Christ to his divine Father, who was "heard in that he feared," or "because of fear." (Hebrews 5:7). Christ's filial fear of his Father which lay in honoring him (John 8:49), in obedience to him (Hebrews 10:7, 9), and in submission to his will, even when with supplications he protested death (Hebrews 5:7).

This filial fear of God in the saints arises, as follows:

*From the Spirit of adoption, to wit: Romans 8:14-17: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." They that fear the Lord are in the relation

of children to him; wherefore their fear of him, which he takes notice of and regards, must be a childlike one, arising from their being put among the children, and their sense of it; and which seems to be implied in Psalm 103:13. "Like as a father pitieith his children, so the Lord pitieith them that fear him."

*From the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Spirit, which produces love to God again. Romans 5:5. "There is no fear"—slavish fear—"in love," but "perfect love," a sense of the perfect, everlasting, and unchangeable love of God "casts out" such slavish fear (1 John 4:18); for the true fear of God is no other than a reverential affection for God flowing from a sense of his love ("We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19)); such do not dread his wrath, but desire his presence and communion with him, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee," Psalm 73:25.

*This filial fear is attended with faith and trust in God; it is a trusting fear; hence they that fear the Lord also trust in him; and they that fear the Lord are exhorted and encouraged to trust in him. Psalm 31:19: "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee in before the sons of men." Psalm 115:11: "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield." Job was a man that feared God (Job 1:1), and yet such was his faith and confidence in him, that he could say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." And his profession of faith is remarkable in strength: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." (Job 19:25-27).

*It is a fear that is consistent with great joy in the Lord; "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." (Psalm 2:11). It is a fearless fear; a man that fears the Lord has no reason to fear anything, or what any man or devil can do unto him; he may say as David did, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear..." (Psalms 27:1-3).

*Such a fear is opposed to pride and self-confidence; it is a humble fear, a distrust of a man's self, placing his trust and hope alone in God; "Be not high minded, but fear." (Romans 11:20). This is that "fear" and "trembling," or that modesty and humility with

which the saints are exhorted to work about or employ themselves in things that accompany "salvation"; as knowing that "both to will and to do," the disposition and ability to perform any duty properly, are owing to the efficacious operation of the Spirit of God (Philippians 2:12-13). It is by the grace of God they are what they are, and do what they do (1 Corinthians 15:10); they that fear the Lord are such who "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," (Philippians 3:3), declaring that when they have done all they can they are but unprofitable servants. (Luke 17:10).

Next week, the Lord willing, we will see what the Bible tells us about how this fear of God is manifest or shown openly amongst his children, what is the cause or the source of the fear of God, and finally describe the temporal and spiritual happiness of those who enjoy the benefits of the fear of God.

I love you. Amen.