

THE FEAR OF THE LORD: **THAT IS WISDOM**

Our society often thinks of an older person with grey hair as someone who is wise! As we grow older we do learn from our life experiences. But what is wisdom? The Bible speaks about wisdom a great deal, especially in the Old Testament. We are urged to get wisdom. "Above all, get wisdom". We are told that it is more valuable than rubies or any other precious stone. If wisdom was something we gain simply by growing older, then God would not urge us to get wisdom. No, this wisdom the Bible is speaking about is God's wisdom. Some weeks ago I spoke about this wisdom and how we can receive it. Today I would like to focus on something else the Word of God says about wisdom, and that is, 'the fear of the Lord.'

Often we find this phrase linked to wisdom. The book that is considered one of the oldest in the Bible is the book of Job, and in Job 28:28 it says:

Job 28:28 **And he (God) said to man, "The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding."**

This is repeated again and again.

Proverbs 1:7 **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**

Proverbs 9:10 **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**

Psalms 111:10 **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**

When something is repeated again and again we know it must be important to God. So if we want to have God's wisdom, then we need to know the fear of the Lord.

Many people live in fear of man! They want to be accepted by others around them, and so they follow the values of the majority simply because they want to be like everyone else – and they want others to like them. But you know, the book of Proverbs says that the fear of man, is a snare.

Proverbs 29:25 **Fear of man will prove to be a snare.**

In the time of Jesus we are told that many of the religious leaders did not believe in him, but there were some who did. However they feared not being accepted by the others, and being put out of the synagogue, so they would not openly show they believed. We are told in the gospel of John that they loved the praise of man more than the praise of God.

When we fear the Lord, our desire is to please him. We are more concerned with what God thinks, rather than being accepted by the crowd.

E.g. I have been reading the Gospel of John and recently read the story of how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus became sick and died. We are told that Jesus loved Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Yet Jesus did not go immediately to see him. He only arrived 4 days

after Lazarus had died. Both Mary and Martha said to Jesus: "If only you had been here our brother would not have died." There were mourners there who criticized Jesus, "Couldn't he have kept this man from dying?" If Jesus was seeking to please people, he certainly would have gone earlier, but he knew that his Father had a different plan, a greater plan, and he lived to please him.

It is not always easy to please our Heavenly Father. We may be misunderstood and criticized. However when we fear the Lord we would rather please him than man.

If I asked you what is the fear of the Lord, you may say, 'it is reverencing the Lord' or 'it is honoring him'. That is certainly true. Let's dig a little deeper.

1. ACKNOWLEDGES THERE IS A GOD AND WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO HIM

We can only fear the Lord if we believe that he exists! We need to believe there is a personal God who has created us.

Psalm 14:1 **The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."**

In our culture we hold those who are super intelligent in high esteem. But simply because a person is intelligent doesn't mean they are wise. A wise person acknowledges that there is someone greater who has created them.

E.g. There is a brilliant man, who is a historian and a philosopher, and he works as a professor in a university. Many of the wealthiest and most powerful men and women on the planet listen to what he says. He has great influence in the World Economic Forum that speaks about the Great Reset.

But this is what he says about God: "History began when humans invented gods, and will end when humans become gods." He predicts that through science and technology humans are on a path to upgrade themselves into gods.

Psalm 10:4 **In his pride the wicked does not seek him and in all his thoughts there is no room for God.**

It's not wrong to have questions about God, but at the root of saying there is no God there is pride. You see if we acknowledge there is a God who created us then it follows that we are also accountable to him. It takes humility to acknowledge there is someone infinitely greater than us who we are responsible to.

E.g. My grandfather on my dad's side was a believer. However during World War 1 he was sent to Gallipoli. He was injured there trying to help another soldier. Eventually he returned to New Zealand, but he never returned to church. On the day he died my father was with him, and grandpa said, "I am going to meet my Maker." How I long that his trust was still in Jesus, but he knew that he was accountable to God.

The Bible makes it clear that everyone, all men and women, will stand before God to give an account of their life. Jesus said:

Matthew 12:36 **But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.**

That is very sobering isn't it? We have probably all spoken careless words! The wonderful news is that if we have repented of our sin and asked God to forgive us, we have the promise of God that we will not face judgment. Jesus took upon himself the punishment we rightly deserve. Our sin has been wiped away. However we are responsible to Jesus for how we live after surrendering our lives to him. This is what Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 5:9-11 **We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things he has done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.**

2 Corinthians 5:14 **For Christ's love compels us.**

Paul, or Saul as he was then known, was a well-educated religious man. He thought he was doing God a favor by attacking the Christians. But one day as he travelled to Damascus Jesus appeared to him. His life was radically changed – he understood that Jesus had died to pay the penalty for his sin and he was forever grateful. And Paul writes that his goal was to please the Lord – he had received the love of Christ and in response loved him. However Paul also said that he had a fear of the Lord in his heart. We need both. You can't really separate them.

E.g. Little children usually want to please their parents. They love to see their dad and mum happy and giving their approval. But there are times when they want their own way, and they become stubborn and disobedient. When our three children were little we had a way of encouraging them to do what is right – it was a wooden spoon on top of the power box at the top of the staircase. Today that would be frowned on, but it worked. Often you only had to look in the direction of the power box and they would choose to do what they were told. They knew what it meant if they didn't! So they had a healthy fear of disobeying.

As God's children our desire is to please him. When we give our lives to Christ we receive a new heart – a heart that seeks to please the Lord. We have experienced his wonderful love and forgiveness, and in return we love him. However loving means obedience. Just like little children there are times when we want our way, when we choose what is selfish or prideful – but if we have a deep respect and fear of the Lord in our heart, it will help us to choose what is right.

So first of all, the fear of the Lord (which is the beginning of wisdom) is acknowledging that there is a God who created us, and we are ultimately accountable to him for the life he has given us. So we

live, always aware that our Father is watching over us. It is so good to know our Father watches and cares for us, but it is also sobering as we realize he also sees what our true motives and intentions are.

2. HATES AND AVOIDS EVIL – LISTENS AND OBEYS GOD

Secondly, the person who fears the Lord hates and avoids evil, and they choose to listen to God and obey him.

Proverbs 8:13 To fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

What is evil? It is everything that is not from God. God is the source of all that is good, true and pure – but that which is not from God is sin.

There are many lists of what is evil in the Bible. Today in our culture good and evil have been distorted. What God says is evil, the world says is acceptable. God's Word is no longer honored as the standard to live by in our society. In its' place man's thoughts and feelings become the standard. So whose standard is the right one? I believe God's are. And his standards don't change. Yes, our culture changes, we live in a very different world to our grandparents and great grandparents – but God's standards do not change.

We are told God hates evil and sin. Surely God doesn't hate – he is a God of love. He absolutely is, and that is why he hates sin. God knows how destructive it is, how it separates us from him – in fact this is what caused him to give his only Son. He loves people but hates what separates us from him.

A prayer we could pray is, "Lord help me to love what you love and hate what you hate."

And if we hate evil, we will certainly try and avoid it. This is what it says in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 14:16 A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil.

Proverbs 16:6 Through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.

But let's look at this truth in another way. The one who fears the Lord listens to him and does what he says.

And the very first step in listening and obeying the Lord, is to put our trust in Jesus Christ. Some people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus didn't give a long list of things we should and should not do. No, he gives this simple answer, "The work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent." So the first thing anyone needs to do to please God is believe in Jesus.

Now we have given our lives to him, we have a new heart, and we want to please him. Jesus told a story about a wise man and a foolish man. This story always brings back the words of the children's song I sang when I was young:

"The wise man built his house upon a rock and the rain came tumbling down. The rain came down and the floods came up, and the house on the rock stood firm. The foolish man built his house upon the sand and the rain came tumbling down. The rain came down and the floods came up and the house on the sand went crash!"

Jesus went on to explain the meaning of the story. Both men, the wise and the foolish, listened to God's voice, but only the wise man obeyed what he said to do.

E.g. I have been reading a book by Laurie Ditto called 'The Hell Conspiracy'. Laurie had a difficult background, but came to know Jesus Christ after having a vision of Jesus in 2000. Some years later she was in a worship service when she had an experience of hell that shook her life to the core. She shares that suddenly she was sucked through some very large gates, which were the gates of hell. It was so real she was convinced she would never get out. Laurie describes the horrors of hell, and as I read I would have to stop often as it was so heart wrenching. Yet I knew this was what the Bible said about hell. Although Laurie was a believer, she knew exactly why she was there and it was because she had refused to forgive people who had hurt her. Remember Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, that we are to forgive those who hurt us just as our Heavenly Father forgives us. Oh yes she knew what God's word said, but she didn't obey.

Laurie came out of that vision screaming and wailing. You may say, "How could a God of love do that?" Why? He knows the awfulness of sin, and has warned us. He doesn't want us to be separated from him, because that separation is more terrible than we can imagine. In his love and mercy he showed Laurie what would happen if she was foolish and did not fear the Lord and obey him. God loves us so deeply and wants us to be with him for all eternity – but we are the ones who make the choice.

Let's go back to the story of the wise man and the foolish man. This was part of what Jesus was teaching that day. He was warning the people and said, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven." Then Jesus went on to tell the parable of the wise and foolish men.

Matthew 7:24 **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on the rock."**

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. What is the fear of the Lord? It living each day with the awareness that our life doesn't belong to us. We have been given life by God and we are accountable to him for the way we live this life. The fear of the Lord means that we will hate evil and shun it, and live to please our Heavenly Father.

You see the fruit of God's wisdom in a person is all that is good and pure and true, and those qualities flourish when we love and reverence God.

E.g. If you were wanting to make concrete to build your house - you would need cement, a mixture of stones and sand called an aggregate, and water. Each ingredient is important. This is true in our lives too.

The cement is like the love of Christ. We love because he first loved us. The aggregate, the mixture of stones and sand is like the fear of the Lord. We reverence and honor God because he gave us our life and we are accountable to him. The water that is added to these two ingredients is like the Holy Spirit who lives within us and give us the grace, the strength to live in obedience to the Lord and please him. As we are motivated by our love for Jesus Christ and the fear of the Lord, the Holy Spirit works in our lives to produce good fruit. We grow from strength to strength on the Rock, which is Jesus Christ himself.

Let's close by looking at several verses from James 3 which speak about wisdom, a wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord:

James 3:13 **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.**

James 3:17 **The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.**