

Cultivating the Fear of the Lord

by Michael Durham

Michael Durham emphasizes the importance of cultivating a healthy fear of the Lord through understanding His holiness and pursuing a relationship with Him.

Scripture: Proverbs 9:10

Topics: "Fear Of God", "Christian Obedience"

Description

Michael Durham preaches on the importance of learning to fear the Lord as the beginning of wisdom and success. He emphasizes the need for individuals, like the kings of Israel, to cultivate a healthy fear of God to engender obedience and honor towards Him. Durham challenges the audience to consider their own fear of the Lord, highlighting the significance of instilling the fear of God in children and the necessity of actively pursuing a deeper understanding and reverence for God through His Word and contemplation of Christ.

Transcript

Deuteronomy 17:19

And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes.

The fear of God is as a conversational topic not very usual today. The modern vernacular just doesn't seem to go there. God should be loved, not feared, is the normal reply to his topic. But the Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; success begins in learning to fear the Lord. That's the reason for this commandment in our text. Anticipating that one day Israel would want to have her own king, God instructed Moses on how the king would conduct himself in his affairs. In our text he is instructed to do one thing: He is to learn how to the fear the Lord. If he would be a good and prosperous king, he needed to remember that he, too, had to honor his king, the Lord God. A healthy fear of the Lord would serve the king well, causing him to remember that he was under the command and authority of another. And this fear would engender obedience.

Could it be any different for us today? Are we not pledged to serve the same Sovereign as the kings of Israel? Are we not to follow the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords? The same holy fear of God will serve us. So I ask you, do you fear the Lord? Will you fear Him? Allow your mind and heart to be cultivated to fear the Lord so your heart will not be apt to forget him, that your heart will be guarded by a sentry of fear,

and vigilance will be the due result. Therefore I exhort us all today, let us learn to fear the Lord.

When I say fear, I don't mean a morbid dread or a timidity of God. I'm not scared of God in the sense I would fear someone who is vicious, but I do fear Him. Biblical fear is based upon the fact that I am not like Him, that He is so different from me. That is what Biblical fear is based on. This series of messages have been about the holiness of God, and we have tried to define holiness (although very poorly, perhaps). It boils down to the fact that God is not like any of us. He is so different, and the fact that He is so unlike me is what makes me fearful of Him.

This is how the fear of God works in me, and I hope it helps you. My fear is that I am never able to give Him what He deserves and is worthy, and I'm never going to be able to do it. That makes me a little fearful. I know the Lord Jesus has made up for my insufficiencies. I know that in Christ I'm complete, perfect and accepted to the Lord. I still recognize the fact that the Almighty is so infinitely above and beyond me, that all I can do is be in awe of Him. Even as we were singing this morning those beautiful choruses, I was thinking, "Lord, you are a God who loves me so and draws near to me, but at the same time You are the same God who told Moses he couldn't go to the promise Land because he didn't believe You. You're the same God that struck down Ananias and Sapphira in a worship service. Yet in Jesus Christ I'm so complete and perfect and accepted that You can't love me any more than You already do!" I don't understand how those things go together, and that is fear. That should engender fear - you can never figure God out.

There is this dualism, this paradox: He is so holy and righteous that He will not excuse sin, and yet He is so tender He pities His children. Friends, He is so beyond me, and that frightens me. That causes me - I hope more than it doesn't - to revere Him and hold Him in the deepest respect and awe, and create carefulness about me. Oh, that He were feared among His own people. Oh, that our children would fear the Lord!

It is said, and I believe it, that you can teach your children what to fear - we instill our natural fears and phobias into our children. For instance, if a mother is deathly frightened of storms and anxiously paces the floor in severe weather, it is likely her children will be afraid of storms. A father who doesn't like to swim and fears the water is likely to pass that phobia on to his children.

If it is true that we can instill our fears into our children, why can't we instill the fear of God into our children? Shouldn't they observe in us a fear of transgressing His commandments? Shouldn't they sense our apprehension of approaching the Lord in an irreverent way? Shouldn't they see our seriousness in observing all of His commandments? That would help to engender a fear in their hearts. We will teach them concerning the fear of the Lord - you will either teach them to fear Him, or you will teach them they do not have to fear the Lord; either way, you will instill something in them. Our example indoctrinates; our behaviors instruct. The question is what are we teaching them? Let us set our hearts to fear the Lord, that our children and others might fear Him.

The question that I wish to focus the message on is this: How do you learn to fear God? How do you make yourself fear God? You can't just say, "I'm going to fear God" and expect it to happen. You can't just set your mind to fear God and expect your heart to begin to tremble. So how is the fear of the Lord cultivated in my life?

God Must Reveal Himself to You

The answer is twofold. The first half of the answer is that God must reveal Himself to you. If you are to fear the Lord, you need God to show up. We've established in this series that the fear of God comes by experiencing the true and living God. You fear Him by experiencing Him. He just needs to show up! It is good that we have Alpha Ministries and Sunday school to teach our children the Word of God, and that you teach them on a daily basis. But that doesn't teach them to fear God, not altogether. It helps. But the fear of God will happen when those children experience God for themselves.

So, if I am to fear the Lord, He must reveal Himself to me. So now the question is, how does He do that? How does the eternal, omnipotent, invisible God make Himself real, knowable, to you and me? Does He do it by putting Scriptures into your mind, or by putting words into your mind that give you this wonderful, sensational feeling? No, not quite; He doesn't do it that way, because the devil can do that as well. Do you remember when Jesus was being tempted? The devil actually quoted Scripture to Him! Yet, there are many today who believe they have had an encounter with God because a Scripture came to their mind or some impression of words that gave them a wonderful sensation. Friends, be careful with these kinds of things! The beloved John exhorts us in his first epistle (4:1) to test the spirits, for there are many antichrists. In other words, even the Lord God wants you to test Him when He is speaking to you, because there are many dangers. There are many things out there that can distract us and imitate the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

I have seen it time and again - men and women who have come to me and say, "I believe God told me such and such." But my spirit did not resonate; I knew it wasn't right because it did not seem to jibe with Scripture. I'm not talking about heretical things or new doctrines; I'm simply talking about direction, and the will of God in their lives. Then even with a warning against it, they go headstrong believing they have a word from God, and they run headlong in to danger and difficulty that was avoidable. Be very careful!

He Reveals Himself in Christ Jesus

No, God doesn't reveal Himself quite that way. He reveals Himself in Christ Jesus. I know you already knew that. At this moment, there is a danger because of the simplicity of that statement: that you would pass by it and daydream for a few moments. Don't do that. Those words, God revealing Himself in Christ, are crucial - it's the very core of everything Christianity is all about. So let's unpack this for a few moments: God makes Himself known to you by and through Jesus. God is too holy and too glorious to handle. If God were to show up right here, right now in all of His glory, they would find 60 or 70 little greasy spots on the floor. The glory would be too much for our physical frames, and we would break and melt under the pressure of such glory.

What would happen if a nuclear bomb went off in our vicinity? Do you think His glory is any less powerful? I don't think so. Consequently, the only way God can make Himself known to us without killing us is by putting on a veil called humanity - human flesh. He became one of us so we could see and know God. That is what the apostle John said in his prologue (1:14), "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." They saw God, and it didn't kill them, because it was veiled power, veiled glory, so that John would go on to say in verse 18, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." You couldn't handle if God showed up and showed you all of who He is, but He has in Jesus, and Jesus declares the Father. That is why the same apostle John says in his first epistle (5:20), and this is rich, "And we know that the Son of God is come" - and we all say, yes, we know; Jesus was born of a virgin, died on a cross, rose again in three days, we know, but friends, he came for a

purpose - "and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

Listen! The reason Jesus Christ is come is that we might know God! Not know about God, but know him, as I know any of you. In fact, I know God better than I know any of you, yet I barely know Him. Through Christ there is a revelation, there is an experiencing of God, and that experience is eternal life. That is why I keep proclaiming that just praying prayers and making decisions and joining churches is not Christianity! Eternal life is to know Him emotionally, intimately, and have fellowship with the same. That is what it is. John is saying here that Jesus gives us an understanding of God that we might know Him. So let us refine our question - not how do we know God, but how do we know God in Christ Jesus?

Christ makes God the Father real to me by the Holy Spirit. The whole Trinity of God is involved. John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." There is the answer. The Holy Spirit takes the words of Jesus, the revelation of Jesus, and He gives you understanding and causes you to know Him.

So if someone this morning is thinking, "OK, I heard that, so the only way I can really know God is that He must make Himself known to me, and the Holy Spirit must do this thing to me, so I will just wait for a revelation or a vision from God or whatever this stuff is you're talking about. I'll just wait for that." Friend, that is not what this means. It doesn't mean that you continue in your coldness (or your immaturity, believer) waiting for God to do something to you. You don't wait in your sin for God to do something spectacular to you. If you sit around waiting for God to carry you to heaven, you will find yourself disappointed in hell. We must set ourselves to know God. This is the message of the prophets. Hosea 6:3 says, "Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth." There it is; I hope you see it. If you are to know God, you must pursue Him. We are to pursue the knowing, the experiencing of Him, and will come to us.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

No, you don't sit waiting for God to come to you; He has already come in the Person of Jesus Christ. Now pursue Christ! And if you do, you will find Him. He will come to you. And when He comes to you, you will know He has come to you because you will know God. You will have an understanding of God that is beyond the intellect, that moves into the very core of who you are. It is as if you are related to Him now, because you are. Something inside calls out, "Abba, Father," and it feels natural. You will find Him worthy of your love, faith and obedience.

He Reveals Christ Jesus by Truth

Now, God must reveal Himself and He reveals Himself by the Person of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, but how does the Holy Spirit do that? He does it by the truth. Notice again what Jesus said in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." That is what the Holy Spirit does, and that is

how He makes Jesus Christ real to you. He does that as you pursue the knowing of Christ - not just facts about Him, but when you set your mind to know Christ, the Holy Spirit takes the words of Jesus and He makes them to reveal Christ. There is something self-revealing in those words when the Holy Spirit is involved.

Let's look at our text again, beginning in verse 18:

"Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes."

During this time, the king was to hand-copy the Law of Moses, all five books of the Torah, in order to learn the fear of the Lord. While it wouldn't be a bad idea for us to hand-copy the whole Bible, that's not the point. Of course they did not have any other way to copy the Bible at that time other than to hand-copy, but the king must do it himself because it was God's way of making him think about God's law as he did it. Copying Scripture forces us to think about each word, and it is amazing how the Holy Spirit will help us when we simply slow down and think. By daily meditating and reading the words of God, the king would learn to fear the Lord.

The word "learn" is interesting in this context, not because of its etymology or some hidden meaning. "Learn" here means - "learn." But it is interesting for this fact: it implies that the fear of the Lord can be learned. We learn to fear God.

In this series of messages, we have seen some events where people learn to fear God immediately. Isaiah became fearful immediately when he saw Him in the temple. But none of us, no one I've ever met, has had an experience like Isaiah. Therefore we have to learn to see him with the eyes of our heart. This morning we sang, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; I want to see you." The only way we can do that is to learn to see Jesus in His Word. It is the Word of God that enlightens the eyes of our hearts to see Him as He is. Thus, when you see Him in His Word you will fear Him. That is the first part of my answer: we cultivate a fear of God when He reveals Himself.

We Must Think

But that does not absolve us of our responsibility, which brings me to the second half of my answer. We must think. To be fearful of God you must think; there is no room in Christianity for non-thinkers. It isn't possible because God made us thinkers - we are rational and not as the beasts of the field because God wanted to give us the greatest ability, the greatest joy: the contemplation of Him. Therefore, we need to think deeply about Christ. At this point I must address some of you, those who are not readers and don't think much. Our world doesn't require us to think much, so what about you? Am I communicating that you can never fear the Lord? Am I saying to you that you can never really know God unless you read? Well, if God has chosen to reveal Himself in His words, not by mystical experiences where He just shows up and you have Scripture running through your brain and a tingly "holy" feeling. If He has chosen to reveal Himself primarily through the Word, then it must require you to read it (or listen to it being read) and think about what you are reading or hearing. That is why He gave you a brain that reasons, so you can contemplate Him, not so you can figure your taxes, which is secondary.

What should you do, take a reading course? Go back to school? No. If God created Himself to be revealed to us through the Word, then it seems to me those of you with a natural dislike of reading have an opportunity to see God work in your life in a wonderful way. Instead of trying to read or have me motivate you to read, which I could never do with a hundred sermons, why not go to the Lord and say, "Father, you know I am not a reader, and my education level is not as good as others. But You have bound the knowing of You in Your book. And I believe You, that You have given me the Holy Spirit that He will call to my remembrance and give me understanding of what You have said. So therefore, Father, open up this book to me. Give me a desire to read and find You."

I'm not advocating reading your Bible for the sake of reading your Bible. I am advocating getting into your Bible to find Jesus! It will change the outlook of how you approach the Word of God. Go to Him in prayer; I know He will answer that if it is prayed in simple faith and trust. He will make you to know because He has bound up the knowing of Him in the book. You ought to be thankful He did that, because if there are many seducing spirits out there that will imitate Jesus' voice (and there are, as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:14, "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light"). If Satan can even quote Scripture, then what mechanism is there to keep you from being deceived? Only one: the Word of God, and not some mystical experience. It is for your protection. If the Spirit of God speaks to you, He will always speak the words of Christ, the words of this book. Having said that, I wish to give you a task. By the help of God in His grace, you need to study the Scriptures in order to see Jesus.

I got a phone call this week from a pastor friend of mine who had a question: "Is it all right to see Jesus Christ in illustration in all of the Old Testament?" He had been reading 2 Kings 25, in which the Babylonian king Evil-Merodach, who freed the Judean king Jehoiachin from prison, set him on a throne beside himself and allowed him to eat at his own table. My friend said he saw this as a type of Christ and His redemption of sinners, and asked, "Is this a permissible hermeneutic?" (In other words, is this a right way to interpret the Bible?) I said, not only is it permissible, it is your duty to see Jesus in all of the Word of God. I know this because this is what Jesus did. Remember the day of His resurrection? He taught two of His disciples how from Genesis to Malachi, it all pointed to Him. So the Old Testament is not so boring if you read it through that lens: how does this figure illustrate Jesus? And of course we know the New Testament is the New Covenant in Christ.

If you would know Jesus, then you cannot be idle. We must direct our minds to the pursuit of meditating and contemplating Christ. As I said earlier, to know God is to fear God. So, contemplate God. "Be still and know that I am God." Set aside some time to think about the Lord Jesus, how He came to this earth both as God and man. If you want an exercise that will send you into orbit, just think about that: fully God as if not man; fully man as if not God - wrap your mind around this infinite concept and you will fear God! Think for a moment seriously about His teachings, think about His life that He came healing the sick, raising the dead; think seriously about His agony and suffering, and as you ponder His death, ask yourself this question: why do I see Him writhing under the judgment of God? And supply yourself the answer: He is there suffering on your behalf! Think on it!

The reason many of you are not as holy as you desire to be, and every Christian desires to be holy, is because you don't think about Christ this way. You don't take the time, focus yourself and rid yourself of distractions so you can meditate.

Dear sinner, especially those who have listened to me for a while, please know I am not angry with you. But my desire to see you come to Christ eats me up sometimes, and it can come across as harsh. But one

of the reasons you aren't saved today isn't God's fault. It is because you haven't thought deeply about Him.

I want all of you, converted and unconverted, to do this exercise today. Find a quiet place and think about this Jesus that I am preaching to you today. Think about the real and important issues affecting you - not your bills or lack of utilities or such, but the real problems that face you. For instance, where are you going to spend eternity? This afternoon, take exactly 30 minutes and think about where you are going to spend your eternity. The life you are living is so very brief - and life will be lived somewhere after we leave this earth. I believe your soul will begin to tremble. Think about your death; you aren't too young to do that. Think about what it will be like in those moments before you expire and breathe your last, knowing you are about to go to the judge and ruler of all men. What will it feel like in that hour?

Don't think you can repent and get right with God then - I have stood near many bedsides of men and women who were not Christians, knowing they were about to die, and they refused to repent. If we harden our hearts, God may allow them to remain hard. Friend, do yourself a favor and think of your own death. Think of what is required to be saved from sin - think about why Jesus came and died for you. I'm so confident that if you do this 30 minutes a day for one week, you would want to be saved more than anything else. I believe that. Make it a full hour and start thinking about your sins! Remember your lust, your angry outbursts, your evil desires - how are you going to escape a God who is holy and just with all your sin? Don't let a second go by without thinking of them. Can't you feel your heart tremble even now? What good you could do yourself if you would meditate longer on these things. I do believe you would begin to see the holiness of God and you would be afraid! "Be still and know that I am God."

How do you believe you will ever be truly sorry for your sins if you don't ever think about your sin? What makes you think you will one day repent if you never think about the terribleness of your sin? You think God's grace will cleanse you of your sin even if you never realize how great a sinner you are? I don't think so - I've never known anyone to get saved who didn't realize they were terrible sinners, far more terrible than they had first thought.

We ask Him to do what He commands us to do. We want Him to do our repenting for us. We want Him to do our grieving over sin for us. We really want an easy birth - but if salvation is being born again we must understand it is not easy, for no birth is easy! It is always preceded by great travail and pain. Do you want God to bring you into His kingdom without any pain? Do you want Him to bring you into the light with no tears, no sorrow, no travail? My friends, what you're asking for is a stillbirth! A birth that bears no life! Think - no matter how painful or hard. Is your salvation so unimportant that you will not let your mind think like this? Are you so little concerned about your eternity that you refuse to do this and will say, "If I am to be saved, God must save me!"

Answer me this: why should God save you if you care so little and think so little about your salvation? If you are to be saved, you must stop and think about these things. The world must grow dim in comparison to eternity for you. The real issues of life must be sin and salvation, not what you spent most of your time thinking about.

Dear Christian, if you are to know God better, you must think about what He has said and give weight to His self-revealing words. That's the way He has chosen it.

Dear sinner, if you are to know God, you must give consideration and weight to His self-revealing words with a heart that cries out, "God, show me who You are!" He certainly will answer that prayer if it is spoken

in trust and humility.

To see God as He really is will produce the right thoughts, which will produce a biblical, holy fear of God. That is how you cultivate the fear of God: you learn the truth about God and you believe it. Believe the truth about God regardless of your emotions, regardless of what your feelings may be suggesting to you. You take God at His word and you stake your heaven and hell on it. Believe it with all your heart and order your life by it because that is how much you trust it.

Would you do that now? Some would say, "But I have tried to believe 100 times before. I have heard you preach so many times, and each time I have tried to muster up the faith and go away disappointed. I'm tired of being disappointed."

Sir, I have never asked you to believe in God by your own strength! Why would I ask that of you when I could have never done that? I tried to, and I failed each time. I'm asking you to lift your voice to God and cry, "God, I can't believe You; that's how wicked I am! I can't trust You; that's how hard my heart is! But the preacher today said You would hear my cry if I humbly said, 'Lord, help my unbelief!' And so I cry, make me to trust in You, God. Forgive me of my unbelief and hardness of heart. I believe what that man said today. I believe it so that from this moment on, I will order my life by it regardless of what I feel."

Ask Him to remove the clutter of your brain and the junk in your heart so you can think on these holy things, and the fear of God will rise. It will rise and be a light to your feet and a pathway to you from this moment on. What a terrible waste to spend your life on the petty and trivial, seeking luxury but never giving yourself to the most consequential. You will waste yourself into a luxury of time in hell lamenting this waste. Friend, fear God and be saved! Seek Him with all your heart, and He shall be found to you. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/michael-durham/cultivating-the-fear-of-the-lord/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net