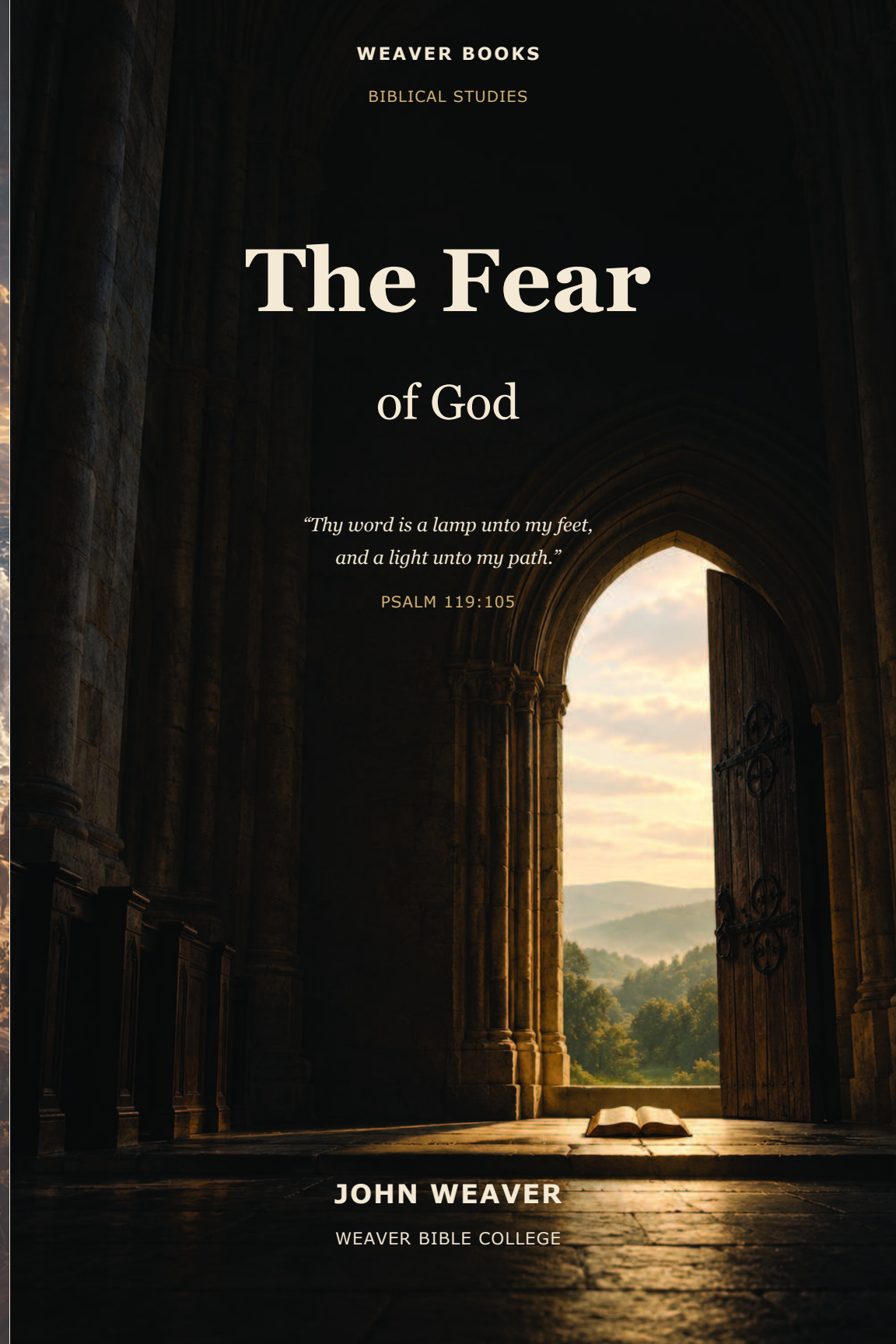
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The Fear of God

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

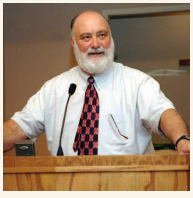
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

PROVERBS 9:10, EXCERPT

Reverence is made visible in the way a person lives. John Weaver considers the fear of God through obedience, speech, gratitude, and the daily reception of Scripture. These messages challenge the separation of religious profession from ordinary behavior, asking what our habits reveal about the regard we truly have for God.

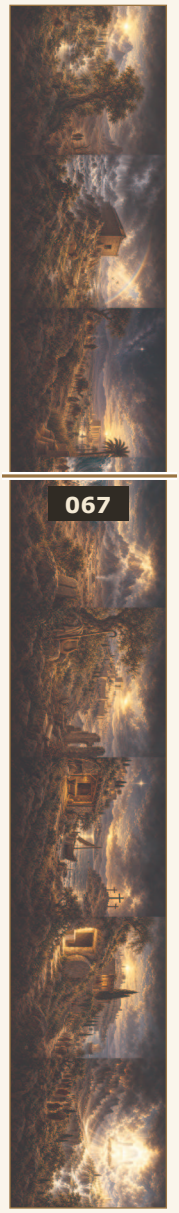
“It is God who gives us faith. But God does not exercise our faith for us. We must exercise it ourselves.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

Christians Who Despised God

Christians Who Despise God

Introduction and Text

It is a joy to be back in the pulpit. Those who were not here last week did indeed miss a blessing. I am thankful that the Lord ordained that conference, and I hope that, through the many CDs and DVDs and through its posting on the Internet, many people will indeed be blessed. This message is intended to tie together and cement everything heard during the past week by those who heard the series on Christian obedience. In Proverbs chapter 14 and verse 2, the Bible says, “He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.”

If you were to ask the average Christian, “Do you despise God?” you are going to get a resounding negative. In fact, you may get more than a negative. You may be looked at in a very hard and incredulous manner. You may be hollered at or even cussed at in a Christian manner, of course, because obviously someone who professes to love

Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father is not going to admit to despising Him.

Profession vs. Action

However, there is a vast difference between what you and I would call profession and action. Each of us has used, as well as heard, the old adage, “I cannot hear what you are saying for the way you are acting.” Our Lord made this truth abundantly clear in Matthew 7, verse 16, when He said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” He then repeated the same truth in Matthew 7, verse 20, when He said, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” So it is not the profession that counts; it is the actions that reveal the real man.

In the strictest sense of the word, it really does not matter what you say, and it really does not matter what you profess. What really, genuinely counts is how you act. Your actions and your conduct and your conversation reveal the innermost heart of man. That is why Solomon said in Proverbs 4 and verse 23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” And our Lord in Matthew 15 said, “For out of the heart the mouth speaketh.” So in reality, our actions demonstrate exactly what we are.

The Meaning of Walking and Despising

Our text demonstrates this truth by emphasizing the reality of walking: “He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord.” Your walk is your life. It is your conduct; it is how you live. Look at the latter part: “But he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.” In this passage, “he” refers to a man’s ways. What are a man’s ways? They are his life, his walk, how he lives, and how he acts. Therefore God puts it together: “He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.”

This truth is exceedingly simple. When one walks in uprightness—that which is right, righteous, just, moral, and ethical according to God’s law—it demonstrates the fact and reality that he fears God. On the other hand, the one who does not fear God, who does not hold God in awe and reverence, who does not regard Him and submit to Him, is perverse in his ways. The word “perverse”

means that which is crooked, devious, froward, and disobedient. He evidences in reality that he has no regard for God and, in actuality, despises Him.

When you look at the word “despise” in verse 2—“He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him”—the Hebrew word literally means to hold in contempt, to disdain, to scorn, to make contemptible, and to count as vile and worthless. Can you imagine counting God as vile and worthless? Yet believers disdain God, hold God in contempt, and despise Him. In fact, clear passages in Scripture show very evidently that men despise the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, whole Proverbs 14; but look in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 49 and verse 7. Isaiah 49, verse 7 states: “Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel,”

Biblical Evidence that Men Despise Christ

Notice what they say concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage: man despises Him, and Israel as a nation abhorred or hated Him. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

When it says, "we esteemed him not," it means that we do not even count Him worth thinking about. We do not want Him to enter into our minds or give the least bit of attention to Him. He is despised, and we esteemed Him not; we did not even count Him worthy of thinking about. We understand that unsaved men despise our Lord. That is very clear.

But the questions that must be asked are simple. Is it possible for a Christian, a real, genuine child of God, to hold his heavenly Father in contempt and treat Him with scorn, derision, and disdain? Is it possible that we might treat our Lord as vile and worthless? Is it possible that a real, genuine Christian could actually despise Him? The answer to all those questions, unhappily, is an unqualified yes.

Scripture shows us how many Christians not only actually despise God, but despise Him regularly and even daily.

Can a Christian Despise God?

The New Testament makes it exceedingly clear that we are either going to love Him or hate Him; we are going to serve Him or deny Him. For He said in Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

The title of the message is “Christians Who Despise God,” and you may be thinking, “I don't believe this is possible for a real, genuine believer to actually despise God.” Perhaps it would help if I gave you an illustration of a real, genuine believer who actually despised God, and God counted it as despisement.

For instance, everyone understands who David was. David is known as a lover of God; he is known as a man after God's own heart. In Acts 13:22, the Scripture says, “And when he had removed him,” that is, King Saul, “he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.” David was therefore classified as a man after God's own heart by God Himself.

If it was possible for David, who was known for his love for God and his obedience to God, and who was called a man after God's own heart, to despise God, then you must ask yourself how much easier and more readily it is for us, who do not love Him and do not obey Him as David did, to despise Him.

Look in your Bibles to 2 Samuel 11. Everyone knows the story of David and Bathsheba. In that chapter, David sinned. He took Bathsheba, and he killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the children of Ammon. The Bible says in 2 Samuel 11:26–27, “And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”

Interestingly, the Bible simply says in this passage that David displeased the Lord. Obviously, we know that David coveted, we know that David lusted, we know that David committed adultery, and we know that David committed murder; and it displeased the Lord. And the Lord sent Nathan unto David.

You remember how he told him the story about the rich man who had all of these sheep, and one poor man who had just this one little ewe lamb that he had nourished and raised in his own bosom. When a traveler came to the rich man, the rich man spared to take of his own flock, but he took this poor man's lamb and killed it. David was incensed, and he said, "The man that had done this thing shall restore fourfold, and he shall surely die." And Nathan said, "Thou art the man."

In 2 Samuel chapter 12, Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things."

All you had to do was ask. All you had to do was obey. "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." And the answer is yes, for David certainly despised him.

God and His Word Are One

So you have to ask yourself this question: How do we despise God? The answer is, in the same way that David despised Him. Look again at verse 9. God says to David, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed

Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

What had David done? He had violated God's law and transgressed His commandments. God says, "You have despised My commandments." First, David despised the Word of God, the law of God. In verse 9, he despised the commandment of God; in verse 10, God says, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me." So, in verse 9, he despised God's commandment, and in verse 10, he despised God.

When you have no regard for God's law, you do not have any regard for God Himself. You cannot separate God and His law. Let me tell you a simple truth you need to learn: A king rules by his law. Whether we are talking about an earthly king or the heavenly King, the law is the expression of the ruler's will for his people. God has given us His law; it is the expression of His will for His people. Therefore, you cannot separate God and His law. That is why David said in Psalm 138 and verse 2, God and His Word are one.

It is impossible to maintain one attitude toward God and a different attitude toward His Word. I want you to understand that it is likewise impossible to maintain one attitude toward Jesus Christ and a different attitude toward His Word, because He puts Himself and His Word together. In John chapter 12, verse 48, our Lord makes this statement very plainly: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." He that rejecteth me—that is Christ, the living Word—and receiveth not my words—that is the written Word—hath one that judgeth him. The word that He has spoken is the Word that will judge him in the last day. What did He say? We know who the Judge is.

Who is the judge? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word is going to judge, because Christ and His Word are one. You cannot say, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ, but I do not like what He said in the New Testament. I do not like this command or that command, and I do not want to obey it." You cannot do that, because God and His Word are one; the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word are one. You cannot separate God and His Word.

When a Christian refuses to obey God, God's law, or God's commandment, he is guilty of despising the Word of God. When he despises the Word of God, he is guilty of despising God, for you cannot separate God and His law.

Esau as a Profane Despiser

May I remind you of something else? When we despise God's Word and commandment, we become like Esau. We become despisers of spiritual truths and blessings, and we actually become fornicators and profane persons. Look in your Bibles at Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 15. Scripture says, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

What did Esau do? Esau despised his birthright. As the firstborn, his birthright meant being the inheritor and administrator, or executor, of the estate—the number-one child, so to speak.

Esau also received a double portion of whatever the family had, because it was his responsibility in the old age of his parents to care for them. Moreover, included in that was the lineage of the Messiah. Yet the Bible says that Esau despised his birthright. He despised his duties, his obligations, and what God had given him.

The Bible calls him a fornicator. The term here is not used in reference to fleshliness as such, although he probably was a fornicator in that sense as well. Rather, it refers to the fact that he sold his birthright. A fornicator refers to the unlawful use of the body. The lawful use of his body would have been to obey God and fulfill his duties and obligations; he used his body unlawfully in that he despised his birthright.

He is also called a profane person, because profanity refers to treating that which is holy as something common or unclean. Esau treated the birthright, the spiritual truths, and the spiritual blessings

as if they were nothing, willing to trade them for a mess of pottage. Thus he was a profane person.

Old Testament Warnings for New Testament Believers

We become like Esau when we refuse to obey and fulfill our duties, obligations, and responsibilities to our Heavenly Father because we are acting in an unlawful manner. Moreover, we treat Him, His Word, and that which He has entailed upon us as something common and unclean. Therefore, we count Him as one to be disdained and despised.

One of the problems God consistently had with Israel was that they despised His Word and despised Him. In Leviticus 26:14, God says, "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments," and the word "abhor" is a very strong word for hatred, "so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it."

What did He say? "If ye despise my statutes." In Leviticus 26:43, He says, "The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes."

Look in Numbers 11:20. You know the story; the people were crying for flesh to eat. God says, "But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you." Then they wept before him, saying, "Why came we forth out of Egypt?" Here they are despising God by whining, complaining, bellyaching, and saying, "We were better off back in Egypt."

Look at Numbers 14:31. The children of Israel would not go up into the land when God commanded them. The Bible says, "But your

little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised." Have you ever thought about despising God's gifts?

Look at Numbers 15:29. God says, "Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment,"

That soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

Turn, if you would, to the book of Isaiah, chapter 5, and verse 24. God, in this passage, is dealing with Judah and Jerusalem. In fact, go back to verse 1: "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill." If you want to know who that vineyard is, look at verse 3: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard." He goes on to say that indeed they are His. Verse 7 says, "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." So God is talking to Israel, and particularly to Judah and Jerusalem.

Skip down to verse 24 and look what He says to them: "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

Now, you say, "But Brother Weaver, wait a minute. All of that was Israel in the Old Testament." I understand that. So in that case, turn to Romans 15, and then to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Let me lay out for you a simple truth. Romans 15, verse 4, says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime," that is, in the Old Testament, "were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Now God said everything that is written in the Old Testament was written for our learning.

Look in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, beginning with verse 1. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

Now watch: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

"Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

So what is He telling us? Everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament is there for a reason. It is for our admonition, our learning, and our instruction, that we should not do what they did. What did they do? They despised the commandments of God. They despised the Word of God. They despised God. God judged them. They sinned, violated the commandments of God, and transgressed.

Consequences of Despising God

There are a multitude of warnings simply scattered throughout Scripture. In Proverbs chapter 1, beginning with verse 20, we read: "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me,”

“But I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.”

God says, “Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.” What is fearing the commandment? It is obeying, according to Proverbs 14:2, our text. “But whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed.” Proverbs 19:16 says, “He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.”

The general principle is set forth in 1 Samuel 2:30. God is condemning Eli and his house, and He says, “Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” Those that honour God will He honour; those that despise Him shall be lightly esteemed. In other words, you despise God, and God will despise you back. Is it any wonder, then, that our prayers are unanswered and our lives are lived in an unblessed manner because we are disobedient to our God? We are despising His Word and despising Him.

We are holding Him in contempt, and He in turn is holding us in contempt. So here is my question. Think about this as an earthly father: What earthly father wishes to bless a rebellious, disobedient, hateful son? What grandfather wishes to bless a hateful, disobedient, rebellious grandchild?

I remember years ago, when our two oldest grandchildren were two and eight. When they were about two, they wanted some cowboy

boots. They could not even say “cowboy boots”; they called them “cow boots.” So Alice and I took them to the store. Here is the absolute truth: I had twenty dollars to my name. That was all I had, and I needed it to buy some groceries. Our plan was to take them to the store, find the boots, try them on, and make sure they fit. Then we were going to come back a week or so later and get the boots.

We took the boots off, tried them on, noticed the size and the amounts, and saw that they were not that expensive. They would have consumed most of the twenty dollars I had. The grandchildren walked around in those cowboy boots, and then we took them off, wrote down the sizes and everything, put them back in the box, and returned them to the shelf.

I picked up the oldest grandson, and Alice picked up the little girl. As we were walking away, my little grandson said, “Bye-bye, cow boots.” I looked at Alice and said, “Get them. We are just still hungry. Get them. Get them.”

Now, if he had pitched a fit and started kicking and screaming, he would never have gotten any cowboy boots. You see what I am saying? No father wishes to honor a dishonorable son.

Look in your Bibles, if you would, to Malachi chapter 1 and verse 6. Look at the question that God asked. Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, and God is asking this question of His priests: “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?” Then He answers that question. Notice that His priests were despising His name. Do you realize that we despise God by holding Him and His Word in contempt? We despise God by disobedience.

We despise God by refusing to honor and obey Him. We despise God by counting His service and worship as something that is vile and worthless. We despise God by saying, “I'm not interested in going to church. I'm not interested in hearing that man preach. No, no, no, no. I'd rather be doing something else.” That's despising God.

Is it possible for a real Christian to despise God? The answer is yes. I read this passage this past week, but I did not emphasize the

one verse. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, beginning with verse 3, the apostle is talking about sanctification, and he's talking about obedience to the law of God. Notice verse 1: “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”

Anyone here who commits fornication is not only violating the seventh commandment, but the eighth commandment, and the tenth commandment, and also violating the first commandment, because you're dethroning God and enthroning yourself. Now, he's talking about God's commandments, very obviously. At verse 8, here's what he said: “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.” So Paul said, if you don't like what I'm telling you, you're despising God. Is it possible for a Christian to despise God? Of course. Because we despise His commandments. We despise His Word. We do what we want to do instead of obeying God.

Before I make some applications, I want to give you one more thought that's connected with this. In 2 Chronicles chapter 36, beginning with verse 15: “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers,”

That is, the prophets, the preachers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place. So when God wants to have compassion upon a people, He sends them His Word. He sends them His preachers. But what happened? "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

"Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand."

Consider verse 15: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers,"—He sent more than one—"rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers, they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

Whose words were they despising? God's. How were they despising God's Word? They were refusing to listen to the word being expounded, explained, and applied by the preachers God sent.

Do you realize you can despise God in a church service? You can despise Him when you have come to worship Him and give Him honor and glory. When you refuse to hear His words and apply them to your heart, when you refuse to listen to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, you are despising God.

Our Lord sends His disciples out to preach, and He says in Luke 10:16, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." Therefore, when you despise the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, you are despising the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are despising God the Father who sent the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is it possible for Christians to despise God? It is. It is possible for true, genuine believers to despise their Heavenly Father, who has revealed Himself in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible for you to despise the God whom you profess to love and serve.

The Awfulness of Despising Christ

Therefore, we must pay close attention to our attitudes, our actions, and our conduct, because our life demonstrates the reality of what we genuinely believe. Hebrews 10:28 says, “He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.” If you violated the law in the Old Testament, and there were two witnesses

against you, and it was a law that merited the death penalty, you were put to death. There was no appeal; you were just executed.

But verse 29 says, “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” When we disobey, when we despise His Word and His commandment, we are despising Him. We are treading the Son of God under our feet as if He were vile, contemptible, worthless, and not worthy to be honored, served, or obeyed. We are doing despite to the Spirit of grace.

Application and Illustration

This truth should teach us to live soberly as well as righteously. We must genuinely consider our actions and attitudes. We must contemplate what we do before we do it in reference to our God and His Word. Our thoughts, actions, and conduct should be measured by the standard of the Word of God, because we realize it is possible to despise the Word of God and the God of the Word.

Years ago, there was a man who had two children in our Christian school. He was also a member of our church and a deacon. His children were so rebellious they would not listen or be taught. I confronted the father on several occasions. Finally, it became so bad that we were going to kick them out of the Christian school, so I called the father.

I explained to him what was happening. He stood in front of my desk and never sat. For over an hour, I went through Scripture after Scripture, showing him how this was to be handled, what church discipline was all about, and that these two children were going to be brought before the church. Unless there was repentance, they would be cut out, and they would certainly be cut out of the Christian school. After I had explained everything, he said, “Preacher, I know you're right. And I know the Bible is right. But I have to handle this in my own way.”

So he took his family and left the church. The young girl turned out to be a prostitute. The boy became a drunkard and a dopehead.

His parents had to sleep with a loaded pistol by their bed because their own son had threatened to kill them so many times. They had to call the law and have him arrested repeatedly because he was out of his mind on drugs, trying to kill them and destroy everything they had. Finally, that young man got drunk and went to sleep in his car on a railroad track. They identified him only by his teeth after the train ran over him.

It does not pay to despise God and His Word. You handle things God's way, not your way. Do not trod the Son of God under your feet. The Father does not look lightly upon such. Do not despise God. “He that walketh uprightly feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.”

Closing Prayer

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. Make us serious, sober Christians who understand the absolute necessity of obedience in every area of our lives. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Forgive us, Lord, for we have despised Thee and Thy Word, doing what we wanted, felt like, and desired instead of what You commanded. Forgive us for our sins, help us, and deliver us, we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Christians That Despise God

Christians Who Despise God

Father, thank you for your love, your grace, your mercy, your goodness, and kindness. We pray tonight, Lord, that you would teach us. Help us to see thy word and thy truth, and grant us understanding hearts. We pray for liberty and freedom in preaching, and that the word of God would have free course. In thy name we pray, amen.

Introduction and Text

Open your Bibles to the book of Proverbs, chapter 14, and verse 2. It is a very simple verse, but it will take a little while to explain, because the title of the message is, Christians Who Despise God.

In Proverbs 14:2, the Bible says, "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord. But he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him."

If you were to ask the average professing Christian, "Do you despise God?" you would receive a resounding negative. In fact, you might receive more than a negative. You might be looked at in a very

hard and incredulous manner. You might even be hollered at, or cussed out in a Christian manner, of course. Most will profess to love Him, and they would certainly never confess to despising Him.

Profession vs. Action

However, there is a vast difference between profession and action. Each of us has heard and used the old adage, "I can't hear what you're saying for the way that you're acting." The truth of the matter is that our actions reveal more than our profession. Our Lord made this exceedingly clear in Matthew 7:16 when He said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Then He asked, "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" The answer is obviously no. It does not matter what one professes; it is how one actually lives and walks. Again, in Matthew 7:20, He said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." In the strictest sense, it does not matter what an individual professes or says. It is how he lives that counts.

We need to understand this in the political arena. All the politicians claim to be Christians just to get the Christian vote, and then, when they get in office, everything they do is absolutely contrary to God and His Word. So many times we say, “Well, he said he was a Christian,” but the truth is that we never examine his actions. Action, conduct, and conversation reveal the innermost heart of man. That is why Solomon said in Proverbs 4, verse 23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

The Meaning of Walking in Uprightness vs. Perverseness

The Bible says, “…he that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord.” Stop and think about this. Your walk is your life. It is your conduct; it is how you live. The latter part of that verse says, “…but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.” One’s ways describe how one lives, walks, and acts. Thus, the Word of God accurately says, “He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord, but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.”

When one is walking in uprightness according to the Bible, he is walking in righteousness—in that which is ethical, moral, and right according to God's law. When one is walking like that, it demonstrates in reality that he genuinely fears God. His life demonstrates that he holds the one true living God in reverence and awe, regards Him, and therefore submits to Him and obeys Him.

On the other hand, when one is perverse in his ways—when he is crooked, devious, froward, and disobedient—he evidences the fact that he has absolutely no regard or respect for God. Rather, he despises Him. The Hebrew word translated "despises" literally means to hold in contempt, to disdain, to scorn, to make contemptible, as well as to treat vile and worthless. Therefore, he that is perverse in his ways treats God as vile, worthless, and contemptible.

The World's Despising of Christ

We should know and understand that the world of unbelievers automatically despises Christ. Isaiah 49:7 says concerning Christ, the Messiah, "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and His Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee."

Notice the first part: "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, and to him whom the nation abhorreth." They hated Jesus Christ; they despised Him. This passage speaks of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, whom men despised and the nation abhorred.

Isaiah 53:3, speaking of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, says, "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from Him. He was despised and we esteemed Him not." This is a passage that practically everyone can quote, or at least certainly knows about.

"He is despised and rejected of men." He is classified as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." "And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him." We did not really want to acknowledge Him or look

at Him. We hid our faces from Him because we did not want to acknowledge Him. He was despised. "And we esteemed Him not." When the Bible says that we esteemed Him not, it means literally that we did not even think that He was worth thinking about. He was not worthy of our time or consideration. Such was our despisement for the Son of God.

Obviously, the unsaved, according to Isaiah 49 and Isaiah 53, despised Him. That is very clear. We also despised Him when we were unsaved, just like the others. But the questions that remain, and that must be asked, are these.

Is it possible for a real, genuine child of God, a true Christian, to hold his heavenly Father in such contempt and treat Him with scorn, derision, and disdain—so much so that we actually consider Him vile and worthless? Is it possible for a real, genuine child of God to despise Him? Unhappily, the answer is indeed an unqualified yes.

In fact, Scripture shows us how most Christians really despise God. They do not only despise Him; they despise Him on a regular basis. They would despise Him daily. They profess to love Him, but in reality, they despise Him. Our Lord made it clear that we will either love Him or hate Him, or we will either serve Him or deny Him.

He said in Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other." Then He said, "You cannot serve God and mammon." Our Lord said that we either love one and hate the other, or serve one and despise the other.

David: A Believer Who Despised God

I have been talking about Christians who despise God. Before going further, it would be helpful to see from the Bible an illustration of a real, genuine believer who despised God.

You say, "I don't think that's possible." Well, it is possible, and I am going to show you. Look at what God says concerning David in Acts 13:22: "And when he had removed him," that is Saul, "he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after

mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will." Saul was the first king of Israel. This is the testimony God gave concerning David: David was a man after His own heart, and David was going to fulfill all of His will. Now turn to 2 Samuel.

In 2 Samuel chapter 11, David looked out and saw a beautiful woman washing herself. Her name was Bathsheba. He sent and took her, although she was a married woman. The Bible says, beginning with verse 26: "And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

David had taken Bathsheba. He had not only committed adultery; he had also had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, slain with the sword of the children of Ammon. David tried to get Uriah drunk, and he did get him drunk, but Uriah still would not do what David wanted in order to cover his sin. Finally, David wrote a note to Joab: "You put Uriah in the foremost front of the battle and then you would retire from him that he may be smitten." He also said, "Let not this thing displease thee because one dieth in battle as well as another." Thus David purposefully and deliberately had Uriah killed by the children of Ammon.

Again, the Bible says in verse 27, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." There was a great deal of displeasure in David's actions, that is for sure.

What did God do? God sent the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan gave him a little story: A rich man had plenty of sheep, while a poor man had one little ewe lamb. He nourished that lamb, which lay in his bosom and was like a child to him. When a man came to visit the rich man, he spared to take from his own flock; instead, he took the poor man's little ewe lamb, killed it, and fed his visitor. David was extremely upset and angry. He said, "The man that hath done this thing shall restore fourfold, and he shall surely die." Nathan simply said, "Thou art the man. This is what you have done."

In 2 Samuel chapter 12, beginning with verse 7, the Bible says that what David had done displeased the Lord. Why did it displease the

Lord? Verse 7 says, “And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. And I gave thee thy master's house and thy master's wives into thy bosom. And I gave you the house of Israel and Judah, and if that had been too little, I would more have given unto thee such and such things. Now watch. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with a sword, and thou hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart out of thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.”

“Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of the sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.”

Notice what the Bible says in verse 9. God asked David, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?” Is it possible for a real, genuine believer to despise God? The answer is yes, for David most certainly did so. Moreover, there are a multitude today who actually despise Him. How do they despise Him? Exactly the way David despised Him. Verse 9 says, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight?” The very first thing David did was to despise God’s commandment. What were His commandments? “Thou shalt not covet” would be one. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” would be another. “Thou shalt not steal” would be another.

For he took a man's wife. And then how about the first one? “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

It is impossible to violate any of the commandments of God without violating the first commandment to begin with. When you violate any of God's law, you have already, in your own mind and life, dethroned God and enthroned yourself. You have said, “God is not God; I am God. I make my own law, and I do what I please to do.”

So David despised God's commandment—or, more accurately, commandments. It was not just one that he despised; he despised a number of them. In fact, we could say he despised all of them, for James says that when you violate one, then you are guilty of all.

Despising God's Law Is Despising God

“Now therefore the sword shall never depart out of thine house; because thou hast despised me.” David began by despising God's commandment, but now God says, “You have despised Me, and you have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.” Understand this: when one has no regard for the law of God, he has no regard for God. God and His law cannot be separated.

A king rules by his law. That is true of God, and it is true of man. Although we do not have a king in America, Trump, the president-elect, will change things—not everything, and probably not some things that we won't change. But he is going to do it a little differently than Obama. At least I hope so and pray so. When Obama came in, he changed things.

When God gave His law, He was saying, “This is My will for your life.” Therefore, to have absolutely no regard for the law of God means that you have no regard for the God who gave that law. To despise the Word of God and the Law of God means that you despise God who gave that Law.

That is why David said in Psalm 138, verse 2, “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” God has placed His Word up here, and if His Word ever fails, then God is not God. He has placed such high regard upon His Word that if you despise that Word, you are despising God.

It is impossible to have one attitude toward God and a different attitude toward His law. I have heard people say something similar to this in my years of preaching: “Well, I love Jesus Christ, but I don't care about all the Bible. I don't really love the Bible.” Really. Or, “Well, I love the Bible, but I don't know that I believe in Jesus Christ.” That's impossible. You cannot maintain one attitude toward

Jesus Christ, or toward God the Father, and a different attitude toward His Word, because they're one and the same.

In John 12 and verse 48, our Lord puts this thing together. He said, “He that rejecteth Me”—remember, Jesus Christ is the living Word—“...he that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words”—that is the written Word—“...hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” Jesus Christ is the living Word, and the Bible is the written Word. He said, you can't reject Me without rejecting My Word, and you can't reject My Word without rejecting Me. So it is impossible to have one attitude toward the one true and the living God, and a different attitude toward His Word or toward His Law.

When a Christian then refuses to obey the Word of God, he's guilty of despising God's Law. And when he's guilty of despising God's Law, he's equally guilty of despising the God who gave that Law. The Christian cannot separate his attitude toward God's Law from his attitude toward the God who gave that Law.

Esau as a Fornicator and Profane Person

When we despise God's law, and we end up despising God, we become like Esau. We become a fornicator and a profane person. Hebrews 12, verses 16 and 17, says, “...lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau.” These words are used in regard to what happened to Esau.

When you and I think about fornication, we think about sexual sins. But may I remind you that the word fornication is an exceedingly broad word. In fact, the truth of the matter is, when you look at fornication in the Bible, usually it has far more reference to spiritual fornication than physical. And here also, it's going to refer to a spiritual fornication.

In verse 16, “...lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” So, Esau being called a fornicator and a profane person is in reference to selling his birthright. He says in verse 17, “...for ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he

found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Why did God call Esau, in this instance, a fornicator?

May I remind you that fornication refers to the unlawful use of the body. The Bible says that Esau, being the firstborn, was to inherit the birthright. But he despised his birthright. The birthright basically included three things. Number one, Esau would have become the patriarch of the family. In other words, he would be the head honcho, so to speak, the man in charge of the family clan.

Secondly, his birthright would give him a double portion of the inheritance. Because the one who had the birthright received that double portion, he therefore had the responsibility of taking care of his elderly parents when they could not take care of themselves. That is why he got the double portion. And then, thirdly, the birthright included the lineage of the Messiah.

So, Esau despised the birthright. Esau despised his responsibilities. He despised his duties, his obligations, and his privileges. And he said, "No, I will not have those things. What I will have is a mess of that pottage." What is he doing? He is using his body unlawfully. First Corinthians 6:13 says, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them." Now watch this statement.

"Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." God made our bodies for Himself; He did not make them for fornication. "And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are God's."

What did he say? “I own you. You are mine. I bought you. I paid for you. Your body belongs to me. You may not use your body in an unlawful manner.” This does not refer only to sexual sins, but to anything unlawful. We cannot use our bodies as we please, because our bodies are made for the Lord. Thus, when we become disobedient, like Esau, and despise the things of God, we are fornicators: we are using our lives and bodies in an unlawful manner.

It does not matter what area it is. In Hebrews 12:16 he says, “...lest there be any fornicator or profane person.” Why was Esau called a profane person? I preached a message many years ago entitled “Preaching Profanity,” demonstrating how most preachers actually preach profanity. We think profanity is cussing. Certainly cursing, especially taking God’s name in vain, could be profane. But profanity is far more than that. How could Esau be called a profane person? We get our English word “profane” from the Latin “profanum.” “Pro” means “before” or “in front of,” and “fanum” refers to the temple. It means someone standing outside the temple—someone treating something holy as unholy. Esau had a holy duty, responsibility, and obligation as the firstborn, but treated it as nothing, as if it were common or unclean.

And he said, “I’m willing to trade my birthright for a mess of pottage.” So God called him a fornicator and a profane person. Likewise, when we use our bodies in an unlawful manner, we are fornicators. When we treat God and His Word, or anything in relationship to God, as one that is common or unclean, we are profane individuals. We are treating that which is in the temple as something that is outside of the temple.

Old Testament Warnings Against Despising God

Interestingly enough, Israel in the Old Testament despised God, despised His Word, and continued to despise Him over and over and over. I want to show you how God confronted them and warned them time and time again.

In Leviticus 26:14, God says, “But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;” Already we can see that they were not wanting to listen. He said, “If ye will not hearken unto

me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it." Notice the words, "if ye shall despise my statutes and hate my judgments."

Again, He says it in regard to the land. Leviticus 26:43 says, "...the land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes." Did you know that Israel went into captivity for hating God and hating His commandments?

In Numbers 11, Israel had complained, whined, and bellyached because they were tired of the manna. They wanted meat, and God said, "OK, I'm going to give you meat." He said, "Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; but even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying,"

"Why came we forth out of Egypt?" I could put it like this: whining, bellyaching, and complaining against God's providence is despising Him. That is exactly what they did here. They were whining and bellyaching: "Oh, why did we even get into this? Why did we listen to Moses? Why did we come out here?" And God says, "It is despising Me."

Look in Numbers chapter 14 and verse 31. You remember how the people said, "Well, you brought us out here to kill us and kill our little ones." Notice particularly verse 31: "But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised."

Now wait a minute. How did they despise the land? Do you not remember how God commanded them to go in and fight? They refused to go in and fight. Joshua and Caleb brought back a good

report; the other ten brought back an evil report. They believed the men with the evil report and not Joshua and Caleb. So they were despising God's land. God said, "Those little babies that you said were going to be a prey, they're going in. You're going to fall in the wilderness."

Look in Numbers chapter 15, beginning there in verse 29: "Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them."

But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

Doing something presumptuously means that I know better. Let us say that Kevin has a pistol that I really like and want, but he does not want to sell it or give it to me. I know that the Scripture says, "Thou shalt not steal," but I want it, so I steal it. That is a presumptuous sin. I know better. God said that when we sin presumptuously, we are despising His commandment.

Isaiah chapter 5 sets the stage by showing us to whom our Lord is speaking and with whom He is dealing: "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes."

Then He says, "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard." He goes on to tell how He will destroy this vineyard because it is not producing as He wanted and expected, though He did everything He could for it. The vineyard is identified in verse 7: "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

Remember, we are talking about Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem. “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!”

"Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcases were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."

Why did God judge these people so strenuously? Because they despised His Word. Those were His people. They despised His Word.

Some people, when they hear all of these verses being read, are going to say, "But Brother Weaver, all of those verses are in the Old Testament." That is true. Of course, I am going to show you some in the New Testament as well, but listen to me: we have one Bible, not two. The Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament. We have one God, not two.

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Everything in the Old Testament was written for our learning. It is there for us.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Let us begin reading with verse 1 and read through verse 6: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;"

Paul writes, “and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” Then verse 5 says, “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” Every time I see that verse, I kind of smile: “But with many of them God was not well pleased.” How many of the original men who came out of Egypt got into Canaan land? Two: Joshua and Caleb. The rest were overthrown in the wilderness. Yet he says, “But with many of them God was not well pleased”—with all of them except Joshua and Caleb, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Paul continues: “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

Everything just read in the Old Testament was written for us and for our admonition about despising God's Word and about despising God. There are warnings scattered throughout Scripture. We have Old Testament illustrations and New Testament illustrations. Proverbs chapter 1 gives us some of these warnings. “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:” Wisdom can be either the Word of God or the Lord Jesus Christ, for in Proverbs chapter 8 Jesus Christ is wisdom personified. “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?”

The scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.” Now look what God says: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand,

and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Despising the Word of God is despising God. Proverbs 13:13 says, "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded." God says that if you despise His Word, you will be destroyed; but if you fear the commandment—that is, obey it—you shall be rewarded. Proverbs 19:16 says, "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die." If you keep God's commandments, you are keeping your own soul. But if you despise His ways, you will die.

Here is the general principle, found in 1 Samuel 2:30. Eli was an unfaithful priest with two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas. He failed to restrain them and would not rebuke them, even though they were committing fornication at the door of the tabernacle. God said, "Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli all died on the same day. God says, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Is it any wonder that most of our prayers are unanswered? Is it any wonder that we spend most of our lives in an unblessed manner because we hold our Heavenly Father in contempt and treat Him vilely? We despise Him. According to 1 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 30, if we despise Him, we shall be lightly esteemed as well. What father wishes to honor a disobedient and rebellious child?

I usually tell the story about our two oldest grandkids. They are now twenty-eight, but when they were about two or two and a half, they wanted some cow boots. They could not even say cowboy boots; they called them cow boots. We took them to Walmart. This was twenty-six years ago, and I had twenty dollars in my pocket—everything we needed for groceries. We planned to try the little boots on them, see what size they were and how they fit, and come back for them in a week or so when I had more money.

We put the boots on Casey and Renee. They walked around in them, saying, “Cow boots, cow boots.” Then we took them off, put them back in the box, and returned them to the shelf. I picked up Casey to leave, and Alice picked up Renee. Just as we were walking away, Casey said in that little pitiful voice, “Bye-bye, cow boots.”

I looked at Alice and said, “Get them. We’ll go hungry.” So they got the cow boots. Do you think for one minute that if Casey had started screaming and pitching a fit, hollering, “I want those boots!” Papa would have bought her a pair? She would have done without. No father wishes to honor a dishonorable child. No grandfather.

God said the same thing in Malachi 1 and verse 6: “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name.” God says, “You think I’m going to honor you when you despise My name?”

We despise God by holding Him in disdain and contempt, by refusing to serve Him, by refusing to worship Him, and by refusing to give Him our best. We despise God and count Him as vile and worthless.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (KJV)

New Testament Confirmation

I want you to turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Everything that I've been preaching to you from the Old Testament is exactly the same in the New Testament. There is no difference.

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to

> walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.
>
> "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit."

If I remember correctly, David was charged with despising God's commandment. He was charged with despising God because he coveted another man's wife. He committed adultery and murder. He violated the first commandment. He set himself up as God by dishonoring and dethroning God.

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” We already know this is the will of God. It is God's will that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, and that you are not to live in the lust of concupiscence, even as the unsaved who know not God. “That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we have also forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”

If I abstain from fornication, that means I have to obey the tenth commandment: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, thy neighbour's daughter, or anything that is thy neighbour's.” It also means I have to obey the seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” It means I have to obey the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal,” because he talks about defrauding, and to defraud someone is stealing. If I am violating the tenth commandment, the seventh commandment, and the eighth commandment, I am already violating the first commandment. “He

therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit."

Do Christians despise God? Oh, yes. How do they despise Him? By despising His Word. They refuse to read it, study it, apply it, and obey it. When you despise the Word of God, you despise God.

Despising God's Messengers

In 2 Chronicles 36, beginning in verse 15, the Bible says, "And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:" Whenever God is going to have compassion on the people, He always sends them His messengers, His preachers. "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

Verse 15 says that God had compassion and sent His messengers. But verse 16 says, "But they mocked the messengers of God and despised his words." Notice that messengers is plural, because God sent more than one. The messengers were carrying God's Word. When they mocked the messengers, they were not merely despising the words of the messengers; they were despising God's Word, the God who sent those messengers and gave them His Word. So to despise the men who are bringing the Word of God is to despise the Word and the God who gave that Word and sent those messengers. Remember 2 Chronicles 36 in the light of what our Lord said in Luke chapter 10, verse 16.

When He sent out His disciples, He said, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." Isn't that amazing? Is it possible to despise God? Yes, even Christians. When we despise His preachers and His Word, we are despising God.

Applications and Seriousness

It is possible for Christians to despise God, the God whom they profess to love, the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. In order to make sure that we do not despise Him, we have to examine our lives, our attitudes, our actions, and our conduct. We need to make sure that we bring our lives into conformity with His Word and not against His Word, because acting against His Word is despising Him. This is a necessary examination for every Christian who professes to love the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

There is a second application. We must see the absolute seriousness of despising the Lord and His Word. Look in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 28.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." In the Old Testament, there had to be a minimum of two witnesses. When someone did something worthy of death, and there were two witnesses, he was immediately put to death. There was no appeals court. He was simply put to death.

Look in verse 29: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Do you realize that despising God means trampling the Son of God under our feet? It means counting Him as worthless and vile, as nothing more than an old, dirty, filthy foot mat with which we wipe our feet. We count the blood of the covenant as nothing, and we despise the Spirit of grace.

If someone died without mercy under the law given through Moses, of how much worse punishment shall he be thought worthy who treads under his feet the Son of God? We need to examine our lives and live in such a way that we do not treat our Father, our Savior, and our Lord with contempt, as though He were vile and worthless. We need to determine in our hearts that we will obey Him and do that which is well pleasing in His sight.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this night. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Lord, we confess that we have despised You in so many times and in so many ways, and we ask Thy divine forgiveness. Help us to examine our lives, repent, and bring our lives into conformity with Your Word. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Despising God

Introduction: The Reality of Despising God

"He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him" (Proverbs 14:2). We will go over this truth several times.

Each one of us has used the word despise over and over, applying it to almost everything. We despise persons, things, events, actions, attitudes, conduct, personalities, and sometimes we even despise our own lives. Usually, when we use the word despise, we are talking to someone and, in a fit of anger or loss of control, saying, "I despise you."

Many people have not understood that there is such a thing as a temporary despisement. Usually, once we calm down and get everything back in perspective, we are sorry we said that. We may dislike things about that individual, but we certainly do not really and truly despise them. There is not only a temporary despisement, but there is also a permanent despisement, which I will talk about a little bit later.

I am building up to tell you this, and this is not a side note; this is a fact: we often despise God. I am not talking about the wicked, the lost, or the ungodly; I am talking about Christians. It is possible—and I will show it to you—that a real, genuine Christian, a true believer, can despise his Heavenly Father. We know and understand what it is for the wicked to despise God, but for a child of God to despise his Heavenly Father is something that we have not really considered.

Have you ever considered the fact that we can despise God? Have you ever pondered how we despise God? Our English word despise means to regard with contempt, distaste, disgust, disdain, or scorn, and to loathe. In other words, we scorn God, we loathe God, and we disdain God. Before I finish today, I will show you that the Hebrew words mean exactly the same as our English word.

The Principle of Lex Talionis Illustrated in Eli's House

Now, the truth of the matter is this: this is a grievous sin, and God does not take this sin lightly. In fact, in God's retributive justice, there is something known as the lex talionis. That is Latin for the law of retribution. That is where God makes the punishment fit the crime, or God makes the punishment fit the sin. Before I begin, I want to give you a good, clear illustration.

Here is a story of Eli and his sons. You remember that Eli was an elderly priest. His two sons were priests in his stead, and his two sons were exceedingly wicked and vile. Although Eli rebuked his sons, he did not restrain them. God now is turning to judge not only Eli, but his sons as well.

"Now Eli was very old and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel, and how they lay with women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." So they were adulterers and fornicators. That is not all, but that is one of their main sins. And he said unto them, "Why do you such things? For I hear of your evil doings by all this people. Nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people to transgress." And then he says this: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him. But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?"

"Notwithstanding, they hearken not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would destroy them."

These boys were exceedingly wicked. In verse 27, a man of God came unto Eli and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt at Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?"

Then he said, "Wherefore kick you at my sacrifice and at my offering, which I have commanded in my habitation and honors thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people." If you read the whole story, God had prescribed certain parts of the sacrifice for the priest. But when the people brought the sacrifice, the priest's servants would go out and say, "No, he's not going to have it like this. He's going to take this part and he's going to take that part. He wants it roasted. He didn't want it sodden." And they would steal the sacrifice.

Notice verse 30: "Wherefore, the Lord God of Israel said, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me forever. But now the Lord said, be it far from me."

"For them that honor me, I will honor and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come that I will cut off an arm and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, and all the wealth which God shall give Israel, and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart, and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon my two sons, upon Hophni and Phinehas, and one day shall die both of them."

God says, "You have despised me, you've honored yourself and you've honored your sons above me, and now all of this curse comes upon Eli and his household." Go back to verse 30: "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel said, I said indeed that thy house and the house of

thy father should walk before me forever. But now the Lord said, be it far from me." Look at this principle.

"For them that honor me, will I honor. And they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." The Hebrew word for lightly esteemed is qalal. It means to be cursed, to be treated as light and insignificant, to appear trifling, to be made despicable, and to be lightly esteemed. So God says, "Those that despise me, those that count me as a despicable being, I'm going to despise them."

In God's retributive justice, there is the principle of lex talionis. That is the law of retribution, where God makes the punishment fit the crime. Eli and his sons despised God, and God ended up despising them.

We have to understand the context of Proverbs chapter 14, and especially the words in verse 2, so that we can comprehend how this would apply to us today. It is absolutely possible for a Christian, a child of God, to despise his Heavenly Father. Proverbs 14:2 says, "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him."

Exegesis of Proverbs 14:2: Two Contrasting Walks

First, take note of the word walketh. The Hebrew word is halak. It means to walk, to proceed, to traverse, and to walk about. Walking is a continuous action, and it indicates a way of life. For instance, you walked in here and sat down; you will get up and walk out, walk to your car, go to your home, get out, and walk there. In other words, we are constantly moving and constantly walking, usually traversing certain paths and certain ways.

We do things the same every day. We are creatures of habit. We have our walk. We have our way. A walk is a way. Your walk is your way, and your walk and your way are your way of life. It is how you live. "He that walketh." Psalm 1:6 demonstrates this: "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous," or the walk of the righteous, "but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

So you have two different ways right here. You have the way of the ungodly, you have the way of the righteous. You have the walk of the ungodly, you have the walk of the righteous as well. So, go back if

you would now to Proverbs 14, look again at verse 2. We understand the word walketh. "He that walketh in his uprightness." Now the Hebrew word for uprightness is the word yosher, and it means that which is straight, that which is moral, that which is ethical, that which is right and righteous and meet. So when he says, "he that walketh in his uprightness," he's talking about he that is walking according to the word of the Lord, according to the law of God. He's walking in obedience to God. So he says, "he that walketh in his uprightness." Notice if you would, verse two again, "he that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord." So this validates the interpretation of walking in his uprightness because fearing the Lord means that we obey him. When we fear God, we reverence him.

We honor him. We respect and fear him. Consequently, we obey him. So the contrast is going to be, I trust, exceedingly clear. So watch it now. "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord." Here's the second part. "But he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him." So you have those that love the Lord that walk in uprightness and obey him. You have those that hate the Lord and they're perverse in their ways and they despise God.

Now, let's look at the words. He says, "but he that is perverse." The word perverse is the Hebrew word and it means one that departs, one that turns aside, one that goes wrong, one that becomes crooked. That's what the word perverse means. So again, look, if you would, at the context. When he says, "he that walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he that is perverse, he that is crooked," what? If someone is crooked, if someone departs from the way, in this verse, whose way are they departing from? And whose way are they leaving? Obviously God and His Word that is true. Now watch it. He says in verse 2, "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him." Now the word despiseth is the word bazah, and it means to hold in contempt, to regard with contempt, listen, to treat as vile, worthless, and despicable. Wow.

Put this together, please. There is one who walks in his uprightness, in his obedience, and he fears the Lord. There is another who is perverse—crooked—in his ways, his walk, and his life,

and despises God. Note closely that uprightness and fearing God are opposites of perverseness and despising God.

We are talking about two ways and two walks: an individual who walks in uprightness and fears God, and an individual who is perverse in his ways and despises God. Listen carefully: it is absolutely, totally, completely impossible for both of these to be in one person simultaneously. What do I mean? You are either walking in uprightness and fearing God, or walking in perverseness, sin, and wickedness, despising God. You cannot have both actions and both attitudes in one person at the same time. It is absolutely, totally impossible. You are either obedient, walking in righteousness and fearing God, or disobedient, perverse in your ways, and despising God.

The Foolishness of Man and Despising God's Word

So let me show you. Turn over now to Proverbs 19. Look, if you would please, at verse 3: “The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” We talk about walking perversely back in Proverbs 14:2; now we see that the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.

The fool in the Bible is not a mentally deficient person. The fool in the Bible is someone who will not listen, someone who will not receive correction, someone who will not receive instruction, and someone who cannot be taught. Foolishness is opposition to truth. The foolishness of man perverted his ways.

Proverbs 15:5 says, “A fool despises his father's instruction: but he that regardeth the reproof is prudent.” There is the difference between a prudent man and a fool. A fool despises his father's instruction; he will not listen. Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.” A fool is not interested in understanding or being taught. All he is interested in is playing and doing whatever pleases him and satisfies him. He has no desire for instruction.

Proverbs 27:22 says, “Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.” You are pushing him down; you are beating him down,

yet his foolishness will not depart. Why will his foolishness not depart? Because he is not going to receive instruction, chastisement, or correction.

Put this together with Proverbs 19:3: “The foolishness of man perverted his way.” What is it that perverts our way? The fact that we will not listen, that we will not learn, that we will not receive instruction, and that we refuse to be instructed. It is the foolishness of man that perverted his way. When you will not receive the truth, when you will not be taught the truth, you will believe a lie. Those who refuse to hear God's truth already believe a lie. So he says that the foolishness of man perverteth his way.

Obviously, the word “pervert” here is the Hebrew word salaph. It means to twist, to pervert, to distort, to subvert, to turn upside down, and to overthrow.

Now I am going to give you a good illustration. Hold Proverbs 19:3 and turn to Isaiah 47:10. Look at that verse.

Now I am talking about despising the person of God. Look at Isaiah 47:10: “For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness, thou hast said, None seeth me.” God continues, “Thy wisdom and thy knowledge,” that is, humanistic wisdom and knowledge, knowledge apart from God, “thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee, and thou hast said in thine heart, I am and none else beside me.” In other words, “I am my own God. I make my own law. I do what I will.” God says it is your wisdom, your understanding, and your knowledge that perverts your way, because your way is not my way.

“Your thoughts are not my thoughts,” saith the Lord. When we return to Proverbs 19:3, we see that it is the foolishness of man. He will not be taught by God; he will not accept the word of God; he will not receive the preaching and teaching of God. Therefore he is perverted in his way, in his walk, and in his life. Moreover, the latter part of that verse says, “And his heart fretteth against the Lord.”

The word fretteth is the Hebrew word za'aph, and it literally means to fret, to be wroth, to be vexed, to be angry, and to be enraged. The foolish man is therefore enraged against God. He hates God and is angry with God. It is true that the wicked and foolish man

fights against God, hates God, and is angry with God; but it is also possible for a Christian to do the same thing—not in the way the wicked does, but we indeed do it.

Proverbs 19:16 says that if you keep the commandments, if you walk in the way of God's law and word, you keep your own soul. You are, in essence, despising your own soul, and you shall die. The Hebrew word for despise here is exactly the same word used in Proverbs 14:2. The despisement of God's law and commandments always ends in death. There are multiple ways to die: physically, spiritually, financially, familially, ecclesiastically, mentally, or emotionally. However you violate God's law, however you despise God and His word, you are going to die in that area.

Leviticus 26:13 says, “I am the Lord your God which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their bondman. And I've broken the bands of your yoke and made you to go upright.” That is to be moral, to be ethical, to walk in that which God has commanded. “I made you to go upright, but look in verse 14. But if you will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments, and if you shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that you will not do all my commandments, but that you will break my covenant, I also will do this unto you.

“I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. You shall sow your seed in vain, and your enemies shall eat it.” You can read all the way down for all the curses that come upon despising God and his word.

I have had Christians ask me, “Pastor, I prayed about something. I pray and I pray and I pray. But seemingly my prayers are never answered. Why are my prayers unanswered?” There are a lot of answers that I could give you, but I am going to show you what I believe is one of the main ones.

Unanswered Prayers as a Consequence of Despising God's Word

Proverbs 28:9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.” The word

abomination means a stench in the nostrils. God said, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.”

Now remember, I told you about the lex talionis. That is where God makes the punishment fit the crime. So here we go. Listen carefully: “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.” So here is the question: If you will not hear God, why should God hear you? If you despise his words, do you not understand why he despises your words? It is the lex talionis.

The easiest and simplest way to despise the person of God is to despise his word. You refuse to read it, study it, obey it, or apply it. When you refuse to do those things, you are despising God. In other words, you consider his word unimportant and unnecessary in your life. You count it a waste of time. You disdain it, treating it with contempt, as if it were insignificant.

We are not like David, who said in Psalm 119:127, "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold." The truth is that you cannot separate God from his word. David said it in Psalm 138:2. Whoever despises God's word despises God himself.

In 2 Samuel 12, God was judging David because of his adultery with Bathsheba and his killing of Uriah, her husband, with the sword of the children of Ammon. Nathan was quoting God when he said, "Thou hast despised my commandments." In the next verse, God said, "Thou hast despised me." You cannot despise God's commandments or his word without despising the God who gave the word. If you do not wish to despise the person of God, do not despise his word.

"He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him." You can not only despise the person of God, but also, secondly, despise the promises of God.

Despising God's Promises

God gave the promised land to Abraham and his seed. But what happened? You can read about it in Numbers 11 through Numbers 14. The people barely ate the wine and complained and sighed, and

even ten of the twelve spies brought back a bad report. They said, "It's a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof. It's no promised land whatsoever. Besides that, there are giants in it." In fact, God said, "Despise ye my promises."

God does not lie. God himself is truth. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, the Bible says, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." All the promises of God are yea and amen. Solomon, praying in 1 Kings 8:56, said, "Blessed be the Lord God, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he hath promised, there hath not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant." Nothing has failed. God gave us a promise, and God fulfilled it.

Have you ever wondered why your heart is sometimes filled with unbelief? Why do you think the promises of God are for others, but not for you? When you look at the promises and blessings of God in the Bible, do you think, “Well, they are there, but I am not worthy”? Here is the truth: you are not worthy, and you never will be worthy. But if you are in Jesus Christ, he is the one who makes you worthy.

We have no righteousness, obedience, or works of our own. We have absolutely zilch—nothing, zero. But Jesus Christ has everything. The Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.” And 2 Peter 1 and verse 4 says, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption of the world through lust.”

Despising God's Providence

God has given us all these promises. We cannot dismiss or despise them. Each promise is for his children, and we must relish them, love them, and live in them, by them, and through them. He does not fail, neither do his promises. Thus we can despise not only the person of God, but also his promises, by ignoring them and acting as though they are not there—never claiming them, seeking them, or asking God's blessing.

Now here is a third thing: you can despise God's person, God's promises, and God's providence. Despising God's providence is one of the simplest and easiest ways we sin against him unthinkingly, because we often despise his providence by not thinking of him. We are fallen human beings and sinners, and it is natural and easy for us to do so. Things do not always go right or according to our plans or desires. Sometimes we are upset not only about what has happened, but what is happening and even what may happen. I do not know how we can be upset about that, but when we think about it, it upsets us as well.

We do not like it; hence, we bellyache, complain, and do not understand. There is no such thing as luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world ruled by God. We have only God's sovereign providence. God brings things to pass in our lives for our good and His glory. We may not think circumstances are for our good, but ultimately they are. He makes them redound for our good. We may not understand, like, or appreciate what He brings to pass, but it remains, ultimately, for our good.

SCRIPTURE READING - Numbers 11:4-23 (KJV)

And so what we end up doing is what ancient Israel did in complaining and bellyaching and whining, and we do it incessantly. Turn back in your Bibles to Numbers chapter 11. Watch what has happened here.

"And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting. And the children of Israel also wept again and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" Look what they said. "We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlics. But now our soul is dried away. There's nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes." And the manna was of coriander seed, and the color there was the color of bdellium.

"And the people went about and gathered in, grounded in mills, beat it in the mortar and baked it in pans and made cakes of it, and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. And when the dew fell upon the camp of the night, the manna fell upon it. Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent, and the anger of the Lord was

> kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. And Moses said to the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people?"

The Lord said unto Moses, “Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth a sucking child, unto the land which thou swearest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all these people? For they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand. If I have found favour in thy sight, let me not see my wretchedness.”

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers among them, and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and with thee there—this is significant—and I will take the spirit which is upon thee and will put upon them and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee that thou bear it not thyself alone.”

God said, “Moses, you said you’re unable to do it by yourself; fine, I’ll give you some help.” But look what he did: “I’ll take some of the spirit off you and give to them.” In other words, Moses was capable through God in and of himself, but it was a burden to him. And so God gave him these other seventy.

Now watch verse 18: “And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves again, I guess, tomorrow, and you shall eat flesh. For you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt. Therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and you shall eat. You shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days, but even a whole month, until it come out your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you, because that you have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?”

"And Moses said, The people among whom I am are 600,000 footmen. And thou hast said, I will give them flesh, and they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxen short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not. And Moses went out."

God had given them manna. The manna was not just from heaven; the manna was from God. It was an absolutely perfect food, everything they needed for nourishment and sustenance. But they were not content with what God gave. They wanted meat, and they remembered what they used to eat in Egypt when they were in slavery.

These people were so intent that they were even talking about making a captain and going back into Egypt just so they could have their fish, onion, garlic, and leeks. God said, "You want meat? I'll give it to you. I'll let you have it. And you can eat it till it comes out your nostrils. You'll be tired of it. You won't care anything about it."

When I was twelve years old, I went to spend a week with my aunt and uncle. They had a bakery. I ate doughnuts—cream-filled, plain, chocolate-covered, and jelly doughnuts. I ate more doughnuts than you can shake a stick at. After that week, I was so sick of doughnuts I don't even like them today. That is what God said here. You need to read the rest of this, and also in Psalm 105, I think it is, where, when God gave them the quail, while the flesh was in their teeth, God slew the fattest of them.

Do you realize that sometimes one of the greatest judgments we experience is when God lets us have what we want? When we want something so badly, even though it's contrary as well, God says, "All right, I'll give it to you." Then, when we get it, we wish we had never, ever had it.

In Numbers 11:31, the Bible says, "It was chewed. The wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah. Because there they buried the people that

lusted." It is a bad judgment when God gives us what we want, when we want something contrary to his word and his will.

Learning from Old Testament Examples

Somebody is going to say, "Well, wow, I'm glad I wasn't in the Old Testament, and I'm glad I wasn't there with Moses and those people." Can you learn from what happened to them? Let me show you. Turn in your Bibles, first of all, to Romans chapter 15, and then to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Look in Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime"—that is, the Old Testament—"were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

There is a lesson to be learned from Numbers 11. There is a lesson to be learned from every illustration, every story, and every Scripture in the Old Testament. They were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, and let's begin reading with verse 1. The apostle Paul says, "Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

Now look at verse 5: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." That is all but two. Now look at verse 6: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."

"Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." Look at verse 11: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." So God is saying that

everything that happened is for our admonition. I confess, we find fault, complain, murmur, and bellyache all the time.

I catch myself whining and bellyaching whenever I have to stop at a railroad crossing for a train that is forty miles long. I try to say, "Well, Lord, let me at least pray while I'm sitting here." You cannot do much; you cannot really read, but you can pray. We do not like such delays because they get in our way. We built it. It is like that old adage: "I complained when I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet." There is always someone far worse off than we are.

If we ever understand this simple truth, we do not deserve anything. We do not deserve the least of God's mercies. If we understand that we deserve nothing from God except justice, it will tend to make us more thankful and appreciative for His mercies and for what we do have. I may not have a new truck, but at least I have a truck. When we understand that we deserve nothing, it makes us more appreciative of everything God has given us.

Applications: Guarding Against Despising God

Let me tie these things together and make some applications. We must keep our hearts and minds in such a way that we learn not to despise God's person, His promises, or His providence. If God says, "Thou shalt not steal," and I try to steal from Brother Jim, I am not merely taking what does not belong to me. I am despising the God who said, "Thou shalt not steal." I am saying that I do not regard His sovereignty or His command.

I am like Pharaoh when Moses said, "Thus saith the Lord, let my people go." Pharaoh said, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let thy people go." "No, no, no. I am going to do what I am going to do." That is a despising of God. Sometimes when we sin against God, He chastens us. Three times in the Bible, we are told not to despise the chastening of God.

You'll find that in Job 5:17, Proverbs 3:11, and Hebrews chapter 12 in verse 5. Moreover, God tells us that we're not to despise prophesying, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 20. That is, we're not to despise preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Many people despise it. They won't go to church. Even some Christians despise it

when they hear something they don't like, don't agree with, or don't understand, and they get upset. Instead of asking, they just get angry and walk off. God says that we're not to despise anything of His, especially His Word.

Years ago, I was preaching in Alabama. My text that Sunday morning was 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 1 through 10. Since there are only ten verses in 1 Thessalonians 1, I read all ten. Verse 4 says, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of the Lord." I didn't preach on the doctrine of election, but after the service an older gentleman came up to me and said, "You should not have read that verse."

I asked, "Why should I not have read it?"

He said, "Because it's in the Bible. And if it's in the Bible, I should read it." He said I should not read it because some people do not understand election and it upsets them. I said, "What you're telling me is you don't understand the doctrine of election and you are upset."

He said, "Yes."

I told him that the word elect, election, or its equivalent occurs 73 times in the New Testament alone, not counting the Old Testament. I said, "If you will come to my motel room after dinner, I will take the Bible and go through all 70 passages and try to give you an understanding of the doctrine of election." He agreed. I hurried through dinner, rushed to the motel room, and feverishly wrote down all these passages so I could show them to him and teach him.

My phone rang, and I answered the motel phone. “Brother Weaver, this is so and so.” “Yes, sir. I’m expecting you in just a few minutes.” He said, “That’s why I’m calling. I’m not going to come.” I am quoting verbatim exactly what he said: “I’m not coming because my mind is made up, and I don’t want you confusing me with a bunch of scriptures.”

It is possible to despise God. We do so by despising His Word, His promises, and His providence. It is so easy, so natural, to sin, because we are sinners. We need to learn to pray with David: “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me.” We also need to pray, “Keep back thy servant

from easy, unthinking sins, so that we will not sin against thee," because we can sin without even thinking; that is for sure.

Conclusion: The Horror of Being Despised by God

I want to mention one more time the lex talionis, where God makes the punishment fit the crime. As I told you in the introduction, there is such a thing as temporary despisement, but there is also such a thing as permanent despisement. Think about the ungodly, the unsafe, the wicked, who live their entire lives despising and ignoring God, counting Him as insignificant and unworthy of their attention. They live according to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and they die despising God. Asaph said concerning God, "As a dream, O Lord, when one awakeneth, so when thou awakenest, thou shalt despise their image."

If there were no other punishment for the wicked except this, in my eyes it would be sufficient. I could look at Joshua and say, "Joshua, I despise you." What could I do besides that? I might try to hurt him or do something, but what I could do would be absolutely nothing. Yet consider when the sovereign, supreme, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, immutable God despises someone throughout eternity.

That has to be the horror of horrors. It is the lex talionis: they despise him; He despises them. You reap what you sow.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word. I pray that you would help us to walk in uprightness, fearing thee, and not, Lord, to walk perversely, despising Thee. We pray, Father, for light. We pray, Father, that we might walk pleasing unto Thee and honoring to Thee. Thou deservest all praise, honor, and worship. We give Thee thanks for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And we ask, Father, for Your will to be done in each life; in Christ we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Perfecting Holiness Part 5 of 5 - In The Fear of God

Review of the Series

Our text has been 2 Corinthians 7:1: “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.” This has been our text for the last four messages, and today we finish this brief series with this fifth message. When the Apostle Paul says, “Having therefore these promises,” he is speaking of the promises in chapter 6, verses 16 and 17. First of all, God promised that He would be our God, that we would be His people, and that He would walk among us.

But the second promise is that God would be our Father, and we would be His sons and His daughters if we would come out, be separate, and touch not the unclean thing: “and I will receive you.” The first two messages in this series dealt primarily with God as Father, showing the implications of the fatherhood of God toward His own and our sonship toward our Father. Of course, there are so many benefits and blessings in experiencing this father-son

relationship. We considered the first point, the promises declared, and then came to the second point, the purging described, because he says, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves.”

There is a vast difference between what you and I would call positional holiness and practical holiness. Positional holiness is that which we have in Christ. It is perfect. It cannot be increased; it cannot be decreased, thankfully. But we are talking about practical holiness, and that is something for which we are responsible. That is why he says, “Let us cleanse ourselves.”

Although we are responsible to cleanse ourselves, we do not have the power or the ability to do so in and of ourselves; that comes from God alone. Thus he speaks of the purging here, cleansing ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh and spirit. One whole message dealt with the filthiness of the flesh, showing what it was, and then last week we considered the filthiness of the spirit.

The Perfection Demanded

We must be pure or holy both internally and externally. Spiritual defilement is just as bad and just as wicked as fleshly defilement. Either one will hinder our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Sin sweeps with a desolating influence throughout the whole frame, and usually leaves no part unaffected, though some parts may be more deeply corrupted than others. Therefore, when we are talking about cleansing ourselves from filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, the question that should enter our mind is, How do we perform this needed and necessary purging?

Obviously, it does not come naturally or easily. Such work is not a stop-start action. If we are going to be purging ourselves, it has to be done constantly and continuously. You remember how the Apostle Paul said, “I die daily.” So it must be a daily thing, and sometimes an hourly thing, sometimes minute by minute. This brings us to our third and final point: the perfection demanded. We have seen the promises declared, the purging described, and now the perfection demanded.

The Meaning of 'Perfecting Holiness'

He says in verse 1, “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.”

Consider first the word “perfecting.” The Greek word is epiteleo, and it literally means to bring to an end, to accomplish, to perfect, to finish, to execute, and to complete. What he is telling us is that we are being encouraged to finish, or to bring to completion, holiness in our lives.

Before anyone gets bent out of shape and says, “But wait a minute, perfection is impossible,” let me show you a few verses that relate to this. Look first in your Bibles to Matthew 5:48. Remember, he says, “perfecting holiness.” Matthew 5:48 says, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” That is perfect, is it not? “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Now look in Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. I am going to tell you something about each one of these verses in just a moment.

The Apostle Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." We are not only to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect; we are to prove the perfect will of God in our lives.

In Philippians 3:15, the Apostle Paul says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." It begins, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." James 1:4 says, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

We have been commanded to be perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect, to prove the perfect will of God, and, as many as are perfect, to be thus minded. We are also commanded to let patience have her perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire.

The interesting thing is that, in these four passages, the word "perfect" is translated from one Greek word: teleios. It literally means to be perfect, mature, lacking nothing in completeness, a full-grown adult, or one who is of full age. It refers to that which has been brought to its end and is finished.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness." Although the word used in Matthew 5, Romans 12, Philippians 3, and James 1 is not exactly the same as the word in 2 Corinthians 7:1, it is very closely connected to it.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, the Greek word is a present active participle. What does that mean? It means that you are presently and actively engaged in doing something: "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." You are in the process of becoming perfect, becoming mature, or becoming complete.

Commentators on Perfecting Holiness

It does not state that you have reached that goal, but it does state that you are headed for that goal. Albert Barnes says that the word “perfecting” means properly to bring to an end, to finish, and complete. The idea is that of carrying holiness out to its completion. Holiness had been commenced in the heart, and the exhortation of the apostle is that they should make every effort that it might be complete in all of its parts.

He does not say that this work of perfection has ever been accomplished, nor does he say that it had not been. He only urges the obligation to make an effort to be entirely holy. This obligation is not affected by the inquiry whether one has been or has not been perfect. It results from the nature of the law of God and His unchangeable claims upon the soul. The fact that no one has been perfect does not relax the claim. The fact that no one will be in this life does not weaken the obligation. It proves only the deep and dreadful depravity of the human heart and should humble us under the stubbornness of guilt. The obligation to be perfect is unchangeable and eternal. Tyndale, that is William Tyndale, renders it, “and grow up into full holiness in the fear of God.”

The unceasing and steady aim of every Christian should be perfection: perfection in all things, in the love of God, of Christ, and of man; perfection of heart, feeling, and emotion; perfection in words, plans, and dealings with men; perfection in prayers and in submission to the will of God. No man can be a Christian who does not sincerely desire it and constantly aim at it. No man is a friend of God who can acquiesce in a state of sin and is satisfied and contented that he is not as holy as God is holy. Any man who has no desire to be perfect as God is, and who does not make it his daily and constant aim to be perfect as God, may set it down as demonstrably certain that he has no true religion. How can a man be a Christian who is willing to acquiesce in a state of sin and who does not desire to be just like his Master and Lord?

John Gill takes it a little farther as he explains the term "perfecting holiness." He says, "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God: by holiness is not meant the work of sanctification upon the heart, for that is wholly the work of the Spirit of God and not of man. He begins it, carries it on, and perfects it of himself. But he is speaking of holiness of life and conversation; it is here designed, which in conversion the people of God are called unto, and which highly become them, and this they are to be perfecting.

"Not that a believer is able to live a life of holiness without sin being in him, or committed by him. This is impossible and impractical in the present life. But the sense of the word is that he is carrying on a life of righteousness and holiness to the end. To the end of his life. He is to persevere as in faith, so in holiness. As he is to go on believing in Christ, so he is to go on to live soberly, righteously, and godly to the end of his days. Which requires divine power to preserve him from sin, and keep him from falling, and the grace of God, the strength of Christ, and the assistance of the Spirit, to enable him to perform acts of holiness, and the several duties of religion, and to continue in well-doing, all which is to be done in the fear of God."

What both Gill and Barnes are saying is that there is in your life an ongoing, consistent, and continual growth whereby you are progressing in holiness and righteousness. Perfecting holiness means that we are constantly and continually progressing more and

more in our lives and conforming our lives more and more to the Word of God.

Perfecting Holiness vs. Regression

Now turn to Hebrews chapter 5, and let me show you what the Apostle Paul does not mean by perfecting holiness. Most folks say Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. I really do not know for sure, but possibly he did. In Hebrews chapter 5, verse 12, the apostle writes, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”

For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.” The apostle, in Hebrews 5, is dealing with regression. That is not perfecting holiness; it is regression. “For the time when ye ought to be teachers, all of a sudden ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God.”

He said, “You're reverting back to babyhood. You need milk instead of meat.” When we're talking about perfecting holiness, we're not talking about regression, going backwards, or becoming a babe again. No. We're talking about going forward. In Psalm 84 and verse 7, the Word of God says, “They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” They go from strength to strength. If we are perfecting holiness, we are gaining ground, not losing ground. We are going from strength to strength, from faith to faith, from glory to glory.

In other words, there is no backing up in our lives, no backing down, and no turning around. We are increasing in spiritual adulthood and in conformity to the word of God. If you will turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 3, verses 13 and 14, notice what the apostle Paul wrote concerning himself. If I were to ask you who was the greatest apostle, probably most of you would say Paul. But notice what the greatest apostle wrote of himself. He says, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

What did Paul say? “I count not myself to have arrived. I haven't gotten where I want to be.” But he said, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind.” Let me ask you a question. Would it not be the grace of God if we could forget a lot of things in our past? They may enter my mind every now and then, but I'm not dwelling on them. What I'm going to do is reach forth and press toward the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus my Lord. That's exactly what perfecting holiness is: increasing and becoming more and more conformable to Jesus Christ.

We should be more holy this year than we were last year, more holy this month than we were last month, more holy this week than we were last week, and, practically speaking, more holy today than we were yesterday. That is perfecting holiness. It is maturing. It is bringing a completeness and a totality in your life.

The Goal of Perfecting Holiness

Ephesians 4:11 says, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” Pastor-teachers are actually one word. A real pastor teaches. Why did God give pastor-teachers? Verse 12 answers: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

This is why you should listen to the Word of God being taught: that we might all come into the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man—that is, a mature, complete man—unto the stature of the fulness of Christ. In other words, we become like Christ. He says that we henceforth be no more children.

I find it absolutely amazing that in most churches the pastor still has to stand around and burp everybody. He has to beg them to come to church, to be faithful, and to give. There is something wrong if the pastor has to spend his time burping so-called adult Christians.

You should have come to those conclusions and principles a long time ago on your own.

The Bible says that this is exactly our goal. We are to become a perfect man in Christ. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Arm yourselves with the mind of Christ. That means bringing every thought and every imagination into subjection and conformity to Jesus Christ.

This is what he means by perfecting holiness: we are constantly and continually climbing upward and onward. Every day we are gaining knowledge, gaining ground, and becoming more and more holy. Our goal is to become perfect. We may not be it in this life, but that is still our goal. I would still like every thought brought into subjection to Jesus Christ. I can say, like David, “I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.” I hate it when things pop into my mind that I know should not be there.

I’m not dwelling on these thoughts. They just pop in there, and I have to fight to get them out just like everybody else. I can’t waste my time thinking about vain, stupid, useless, worthless, fleshly thoughts. So we have to continue to work every day. Since we know that we are perfecting holiness, and that we should be perfecting holiness, what is the sphere in which we are to do our work?

The Sphere: In the Fear of God

He tells us: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness”—where?—“in the fear of God.” The only sphere in which we will be able to perfect holiness is in the fear of God. You cannot perfect holiness outside of that sphere and that realm. We are to be constantly and continually perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Earlier I quoted from John Gill on the phrase “perfecting holiness,” but I did not finish the quote. Gill explains this fear of God: perfecting holiness should be accomplished “in the fear of God, but not in a servile, slavish fear, a fear of hell and damnation, but in a filial fear, a reverential affection for God and humble trust in Him and dependence on Him for grace and strength. It is that fear which has God for its author, is a blessing of the new covenant, is

implanted in regeneration, is increased by discoveries of pardoning grace; it has God for its object, not his wrath and vindictive justice, but his goodness, grace, and mercy. This shows from what principle and upon what views believers act in the course of righteousness and holiness, not from a fear of hell, nor from the fear of man or with a view to gain their applause, but as in the sight of God from a reverential affection to him, a childlike fear of him with a view to his glory."

Gill says that if we are going to perfect holiness, it must be in the fear of God. But it is not a fear of damnation and hell; it is a filial fear, or reverential fear. There are different kinds of fear mentioned in the Bible in reference to God. I want you to look first of all at Jeremiah 5 and verse 22.

The Fear of God and Obedience

Jeremiah 5:22 shows us what God says: "Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it? And though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it." God asks, "Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence?" He speaks of His act of creation, of placing the sand on the seashore, and of how, no matter how the waves toss themselves, they cannot pass over it. God is saying, "Are you not going to fear me? Look at the power that I have."

It is true that we do not serve God out of a fear of hell and damnation. I do not preach and I do not live merely because I am afraid of going to hell or damnation. In fact, because of Jesus Christ, I am not afraid at all. He is my salvation.

But consider what Moses says in Exodus 20:20: "And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." On the one hand he says, "Fear not." On the other hand he says that the fear of God needs to be in us, lest we sin against Him. When we talk about the fear of God, we must understand that there is indeed an awesome power in God, and we must come to grips with the reality of that

power. Even in a reverential fear of God, or a filial fear of God, there is still an aspect of understanding the awesome power of God.

God chastises and disciplines. My earthly father was around six feet two inches tall and weighed over two hundred pounds. To be truthful, I never really enjoyed being whipped by him. He could not only hurt while he whipped; he could make it hurt a long time afterward. If I respected my earthly father's power and ability to discipline, shall I not much more respect my heavenly Father's power and ability to discipline? Turn to Hebrews chapter 12.

Now I want you to hold that passage because we're going to come back there in just a little bit. But let me ask that you look at verse 9 right now. Hebrews 12 and verse 9. We will come back there. But look right now at Hebrews 12 and verse 9. Look what he says. Hebrews 12 verse 9. This is an argument. He says, "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?" Isn't that the same argument that I just gave you? If I respected the power of my father to discipline and to whip and to chastise, and I did, because I did not want to be whipped by him, how much more shall I respect my heavenly Father's power and the ability to discipline? So I believe there is a proper sense in which we respect that power and that ability to chastise and to discipline. And I believe in another sense of the word, respecting that power prompts us to obedience. Because if I didn't want to get whipped by my earthly father, I obeyed him. And he only whipped me when I disobeyed. So, the same thing is true of our Heavenly Father.

Now, look in your Bibles. Just mark Hebrews chapter 12. But go to 1 Peter chapter 1. And look if you would please at verses 13 through 16. 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 13 through 16. 1 Peter 1 verse 13.

The Lord says through the Apostle Peter, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy

in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

Go back to verse 14. "As obedient children." Now he tells you what obedient children do not do. Obedient children do not fashion themselves according to the former lusts of their ignorance. In other words, obedient children do not live the way they used to live. They do not think the way they used to think. They do not act the way they used to act. What does an obedient child do? According to 1 Peter 1 and verse 15, an obedient child becomes holy in all manner of conversation—that is all manner of conduct—as He is holy.

Now let me ask you a question. Why does Peter differentiate between obedient children and disobedient children? What happens to disobedient children? They get whipped, spanked, disciplined, chastised. Basically, he is saying, “If you do not want to be chastised, be an obedient child.” That is why he says, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” You cannot be holy and be disobedient. You cannot be biblical and be disobedient. The disobedient child is the one who receives punishment. When God disciplines us, it is for our benefit and blessing. Go back to Hebrews chapter 12. I want you to go back there. I want you to see something there, beginning with verse 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? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

In verse 10, our earthly fathers chastened us oftentimes after their own pleasure. God the Father does not chasten us that way. Sometimes I think my father chastised me, whipped me, simply because he was angry with me—not because I had done anything particularly wrong, but because he got mad at me. Of course, I have

whipped the wrong daughter before, too. We have identical twins, and I would grab ahold of one and start to whip, but she would say, “I’m Leah, I’m Leah!” I would answer, “I know who you are!” Then I would find out I had whipped the wrong one. I would say, “Well, I did that one on credit.” But God knows exactly what He is doing.

When He whips us, notice what the Bible says: “that we might be partakers of his holiness.” He chastises us to make us obedient, to make us holy.

In Hebrews 12:5, He begins by saying, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” Obviously, we must not despise God’s chastening. It is for our benefit and blessing; it is to make us more holy, but that is not all. “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” God’s chastening is not only to make us holy; it is to keep us from becoming more rebellious and being condemned with the world. God’s chastening is always a blessing.

Peter said, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." What is an obedient child? When the Father speaks, we obey. An obedient child does not need to be admonished, rebuked, or coerced. He does what is right because it is right to do what is right. An obedient child is one who obeys, willing and ready to obey. If we are going to perfect holiness in the fear of God, we have to understand that we have a Heavenly Father who is holy and who wants us to be holy. Out of a filial fear, a reverential trust in God, and dependence upon Him, we look to Him as our Heavenly Father.

That is why He said, back in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." It is this filial fear of God, which respects God as Father, acknowledges His authority and power, loves His person, trusts His judgment and His word, and enables us to continue to purge ourselves from filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. It is this

filial fear that restrains us from committing sin and indulging the flesh. This filial fear, this fatherly fear, motivates us to be holy as He is holy. Filial fear inspires us to worship Him and Him alone, because we recognize that He is our Father. He deserves all honor, all praise, and all glory.

Deuteronomy 6:13 says, "Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." Deuteronomy 10:20 says, "Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen."

Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” Note what this means: the fear of the LORD is to hate evil. If you fear the Lord, you are going to hate everything that is contrary to Him.

Proverbs 16:6 tells us why we should be perfecting holiness in the fear of God: “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” You will never ever depart from evil unless you fear the Lord. It is just that simple. If you fear the Lord, you will cease and desist from evil. When you find out something is sinful and wicked and contrary to Him, you will stop, or you will never enter into it. You will never engage in it. It is only as you fear the Lord that you depart from evil.

Now look in the book of Job, chapter 28, verse 28. This is a tremendous verse: “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” The fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

Now go back to 2 Corinthians, chapter 7, and look at verse 1: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved”—the promises revealed in verses 16 through 18 of chapter 6—“let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting, maturing, completing holiness in the fear of God.” The sphere in which we are to perfect or complete holiness is the fear of God. Listen carefully: it is impossible to make progress in holiness or in the Christian life without a biblical fear of God. It is impossible. If you remember the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 3, when he

talked about all the wickedness in the world, he climaxed by saying, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

That's why people are wicked: they do not fear God. If we understand that God is our Father, we understand that He loves us, protects us, provides for us, and preserves us. But as a Father, He also disciplines and chastises us. If we do not want to be chastised, then we must be obedient, because the Scripture says, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." God only disciplines His own.

Applications from J.C. Ryle

If a person can sin, commit blatant ungodly acts, and never be disciplined or chastised, it is probably because he does not belong to God. God chastens His own. If we do not want chastening, we must be obedient.

The first application is from J.C. Ryle's book, Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots. He quotes Hebrews 12:14: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Then he asks, "Are we holy? Shall we see the Lord?" In this hurrying, bustling world, let us stand still and consider holiness. It is a solemn thing to hear the word of God saying, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." A man may go great lengths in religion and yet never reach true holiness.

What is true practical holiness? It is not knowledge—Balaam had that. It is not a great profession—Judas Iscariot had that. It is not doing many things—Herod had that. It is not zeal for certain matters in religion—Jehu had that. It is not morality and outward respectable conduct—the rich young ruler had that. It is not taking pleasure in hearing preachers—the Jews in Ezekiel's time had that. It is not keeping company with godly people—Joab, Gehazi, and Demas had that. Yet none of these people were holy. These things alone are not holiness. A man may have any one of them and yet never see the Lord.

Ryle lists twelve things. First, holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in the Scripture. Secondly, a holy man will endeavor to shun every known sin and to keep every known commandment. Thirdly, a holy man will strive to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, a holy man will follow after meekness, patience, gentleness, kind tempers, and government of his tongue. Fifthly, a holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. Sixthly, a holy man will follow after love and brotherly kindness. Seventhly, a holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence toward others. Eighthly, a holy man will follow after purity of heart. Nine, a holy man will follow after the fear of God. Ten, a holy man will follow after humility. Eleven, a holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations of his life. Twelve, last but not least, a holy man will follow after spiritual mindedness.

That was just a summary from Ryle's exposition on holiness. You may live through this life without a lot of things, and you may live through this life doing a lot of things, but one thing is sure: without holiness, no man will see the Lord. It is not that we merely want to be positionally holy in Christ; we want to be practically holy in every avenue of our life. The promise of God as our Father should induce us to holiness and sanctification.

Conclusion and Call to Holiness

It should encourage us to abstain from all the fleshly lusts which war against the soul. At the same time, it should make us willing and desirous to depart from sin and wickedness and lay aside all bitterness, wrath, anger, evil speaking, and malice. If we understand that our Father is holy, it should make us want to be like Him. We must live in righteousness and holiness. We must not only be partakers of His holiness; we must have practical holiness in our life. If you genuinely want to be holy, you cannot be content with any sin in your life, no matter how small or insignificant it is. It must be abhorred, repented of, turned from, and forsaken.

You remember it was Solomon who said, "Little foxes spoil the vines." Remember when Lot was escaping Sodom? He wanted to go to this town. He said, "Oh, is it not a little one?" The little foxes spoil

the vines. "Be ye holy; for I am holy," saith the Lord. We must persevere and continue in holiness, in the sphere of fearing the Lord. If we truly fear Him, we will be holy, and we will endeavor to perfect, mature, and complete that holiness in our lives.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. Lord, we indeed ask for holiness. We ask, Father, that You would renew our minds and enable us to see that Thou art holy, and that we are under duty and obligation to be holy as Thou art holy. Give us grace and the power of the Spirit, that we may be holy in every area of our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Learning to Fear the Lord

Introduction: The Question of Fearing the Lord

The psalmist says in Psalm 34:11, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” Do you fear the Lord? Have you ever been taught the fear of the Lord? If you answer yes, then my next question is, who taught you to fear the Lord? That is an excellent question, because Isaiah 29:13 says, “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” God says there is a real saving fear, as well as a real biblical fear, and then there is a fear that is simply taught by the precept of man.

In fact, the Lord uses this passage in Matthew chapter 15 and in Mark chapter 7, where He is rebuking the Pharisees and the scribes. In Matthew 15:7–9, our Lord looked at those Pharisees and said, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

The only thing they had was not a real, genuine, saving fear of God or a biblical fear of God. They just had what the rabbis had taught them, and it was based upon a lot of misapplication as well as misinterpretation. When you ask the average professing Christian, “Do you fear God?” the automatic answer is going to be yes.

The Nature of True Fear: Obedience and Wisdom

But may I point out the fact that fearing God is not just simply an intellectual belief? Fearing God is not saying, “Well, I believe that God created the world.” Fearing God is not saying, “Well, I was baptized and I am a church member.” There is a real, genuine fear of God, and that fear always leads to obedience. So if one is not obedient, then obviously, according to Scripture, he does not fear God.

If you look in your Bibles at Deuteronomy chapter 29, you will find that most professing Christians find themselves in the same predicament that the Israelites did of old. Beginning with verse 2, Moses called all Israel and said, "Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land." He said, "Your eyes have seen this." Verse 3 continues, "The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles." Now look at verse 4: "Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day."

Their eyes had seen, but they really did not see. Their ears had heard, but they really did not hear, and their hearts did not perceive what God was actually doing. They had seen the great temptations, signs, and miracles, yet they did not understand what God was doing.

And so it is today. Many, many professing Christians will say, "Yes, they fear God," but at the same time, they do not really hear, they really do not see, and they certainly really do not believe. The Bible teaches that one who does not fear God is absolutely foolish and has no understanding. Psalm 111, verse 10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever."

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that obey, that do His commandments, where does that leave the individuals who do not fear God and do not obey God? In other words, the Bible would say that they are absolutely foolish and without understanding. So a question that also arises in light of the fear of God is this: What kind of fear do you possess if you say, "Yes, I have the fear of God"?

Four Kinds of Fear (Spurgeon)

What kind of fear do you possess? Let me give you a quick quote from Psalm 34, verse 11, written by Spurgeon in his commentaries. “The master of sentences dwells from this verse on the four kinds of fear: mundane, servile, initial, and filial.”

He describes them: “Servile, when we fear to commit sin simply because of hell torments due unto it. Mundane, when we fear to commit sin simply because we lose some worldly advantage or incur some worldly inconvenience. Initial, when we fear to commit it, lest we should lose happiness in heaven. And then filial, which of course is family, when we fear only and entirely because we dread to offend that God whom we love with all of our hearts.”

What kind of fear do you have? Do you have a mundane fear, a servile fear, an initial fear, or a real, genuine family fear? Matthew Poole said on this verse, “The fear of the Lord is the true and principal way of worshiping and serving God with acceptation.” In other words, it is that worship and service that God will accept.

The Absence of Fear Leads to Wickedness

I have already made the statement that if one does not really, truly, biblically fear God, he is not going to obey God. It is the absence of the fear of the Lord that leads to wickedness. Turn back in your Bibles to the book of Genesis, chapter 20.

Abraham and Sarah had gone down into Kadesh and Shur, unto Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” Even she herself said, “He is my brother.” It is true that she was his half-sister, the daughter of his father, but not the daughter of his mother. So

there was some truth in that. Evidently, Sarah was a very, very beautiful woman.

Abimelech took her. God came to Abimelech that night and said, “If you touch her, you're a dead man, because she's a wife of a man, a wife of a prophet.” Abimelech said, “In the innocency of my hands and the integrity of my heart have I done this.” He said, “Said he not unto me, ‘She is my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’” And God said, “I know that.”

God said to Abimelech, “Therefore I have withheld thee from sinning against me.” He also said, “But if you touch her, you’re a dead man,” and commanded him to restore the man his wife. Abimelech then confronted Abraham and asked him why he had lied and done such a thing. The answer is given in Genesis 20:11: “And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife’s sake.” Where there is no fear of God, people are not afraid to murder; they are not afraid to do anything. It is the fear of God that leads to obedience. If one truly fears God, he will obey Him. Fear and obedience go together; it is impossible to have one without the other. It is the lack of fear that leads to rebellion and sin.

In Leviticus 25:17, God says, “Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the Lord your God.” What is it that will stop someone from oppressing another? It does not matter whether it is financial oppression, slavery, or tyranny. What will stop someone from oppressing another individual? The answer is the fear of God. Where there is no fear of God, there is oppression.

In the same chapter, verse 36 says, “Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee.” God is speaking of a brother who has waxen poor and fallen into decay. If you lend to him, you cannot lend him usury or increase. Why? Because you fear God. If you do not fear God, you will take advantage of him for anything and everything you can get out of him. Once again, it is the fear of God that will stop this from taking place.

Then, in verse 43, God says, “Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.” He is speaking of a brother who has

become your servant. God says you are not to rule over him with rigor, but you are to fear your God.

What is going to stop someone from oppressing, defrauding, and tyrannizing over anyone else? It is, in each instance, the fear of God. What will cause one to deal gently with his brother and not oppress and tyrannize him? The answer is the fear of God.

Deuteronomy 25, verses 17 through 19, says concerning Amalek: "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth from Egypt." What did Amalek do? "How he met thee by the way," that is, he purposely pressed an attack and smote the hindmost of them; he ambushed them. "He smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary." Look at this: "And he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it."

Amalek was the grandson of Esau. Esau, of course, despised spiritual things, and Amalek is a type of your flesh. Just as Amalek did not fear God, your flesh does not fear God. That is why you can be praying and have filthy, vile, wicked, carnal thoughts enter your mind. You can be studying the Scripture, you can be reading the Scripture, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, something will flash through your mind that should never be there. That is because your flesh does not fear God.

Why have innocent men and women been viciously and violently attacked, and many times elderly men and women? What is the cause of the knockout game, when in some of the northern cities youths slip up behind an older man, waylay him, and try to knock him out with one punch? Why are people being tortured? Why are people being hurt in vicious and vile ways? The answer is this: men do not fear God. I just read this week where an older woman was attacked by a youth. She was beaten in the head, and a picture showed her in the hospital, with her eye all swollen and some of those orbital bones broken, just for no reason. He did not even know the woman; he simply attacked her.

So the point is this: Why is all this happening? The answer is because men do not fear God. You have to remember all the litany of sins that the Apostle Paul lists in Romans chapter 3. When he gets to verse 18, he tells you why all those sins are existing, and that is because there is no fear of God before their eyes.

The Bible tells us in the book of Proverbs chapter 8, verse 13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” When you get to Proverbs 16, verse 6, the Bible makes it exceedingly clear: “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.” So if you do not fear God, then you are not going to depart from evil.

The Source of the Fear of God: Regeneration

I have a very quick quote for you from John Gill on Psalm 34, verse 11. Gill wrote, “The psalmist,” that is, the one who wrote Psalm 34, verse 11, David, “the psalmist could not give, nor can any man, the fear of the Lord. He can only teach it, show the nature of it and what it consists of, how it shows itself, and what are the effects it produces.”

"This is the first lesson to be taught and learned, for it is the beginning of wisdom. It includes all grace and every duty, and regards the whole worship of God and the manner of it." Let us mark this down: Fallen man, by nature, does not fear God. He may fear the just punishment of his sins; he does not want to be punished. But that is merely a servile fear. He does not fear God in the sense that he respects God, reverences God, loves God, and wants to stand in awe of God. No. The reason for the wickedness is that men do not fear God.

Jeremiah 2:19 says, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord." Why did they forsake God? Because His fear was not in them. Why did they backslide and do wicked things? Because His fear was not in them.

Gill correctly points out that all man can do is teach the fear of the Lord; he cannot implant it, give it, or initiate it. The implantation of

the fear of God comes through the act of regeneration. It is an act of God's sovereign power and authority. When God sovereignly regenerates us and gives us a new heart, He places His fear in our bosom, in our heart.

Jeremiah 32:38-40 says, "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." So where does the fear of God come from? It comes from God Himself.

He implants it in us at regeneration. This same truth is stated in Ezekiel 36, though in different wording. God says, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

It is the new heart given to us in regeneration that causes us to fear God and walk in His statutes. God Himself causes us to hear, see, heed, and understand, because He gives us a new heart.

I recently preached a message on Christian metamorphosis and pointed out the four stages of a Christian. There is the little babe, of whom the apostle Peter said that we are to desire the milk of the word, that we may grow thereby. Then, in 1 John 2, there are little children, young men, and fathers. Thus there are four stages in the Christian life. Each of us begins as a babe, progresses to a little child, then hopefully to a young man, and finally to a father in Israel or mother in Israel.

Increasing the Fear of the Lord: Five Biblical Ways

In other words, we mature in Christ. The understanding of each stage is different. A little child understands more than a baby; a young man understands more than a little child; and a father

understands more than a young man. Thus there are degrees and stages in the Christian life.

Our Lord also spoke of bringing forth fruit. Some brought forth thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold. Whatever stage you are in—whether a babe, a little child, a young man, or a father—you will bring forth some fruit. You will not bring forth as much as a father if you are not a father, but you will bring forth fruit. Not only are there degrees in fruit bearing; there are also degrees in faith.

Stop and think about it. There's faith. Our Lord also spoke of little faith. He told His disciples, "O ye of little faith." And then He said of that centurion, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." So we know there's faith, there's little faith, and there's great faith. We know that faith can be increased because in Luke chapter 17, verse 5, the disciples prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." So just like your faith can be increased, so the fear of the Lord also may be increased.

First question: How do we increase our fear of the Lord? Second question: How do we increase our fear of the Lord without it simply being the precepts of men? If there is an increase in the fear of the Lord in your life, there's going to be an increase of faith, submission, obedience, and humility.

Three times in Scripture, God tells us what He requires of us. Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 12: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, 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?"

So what does He demand of us? That we fear Him. If we fear Him, we are going to walk in His statutes, serve Him, and love Him with all of our hearts and souls. Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verse 13 says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Fear God and keep His commandments. If you fear God, you're going to keep His commandments. And then Micah chapter 6, verse 8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" In these three verses describing what God requires of us,

we see that if we fear God, we're going to walk in His ways and keep His commandments.

We're going to serve Him, and we are going to love Him. Now, let me repeat our questions. How do we increase our fear of the Lord? And how do we increase our fear of the Lord without it being just simply the precepts of man only? You may be surprised at the simplicity of the answer. There are five passages of Scripture that directly relate to those questions—five passages that will give us the answer to those questions.

I want you to follow me as we look at them. The very first one is Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 9 and 10. The Word of God says: "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons. Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." God said, "You gather them together, I'm going to make them hear me, that they may fear, may learn to fear the Lord thy God."

Now, listen to what I'm about to say, and then I'm going to explain it. If you want to increase the fear of the Lord in your life, then you must hear the voice of God. You say, "What?" Yes, you must hear the voice of God. The Israelites heard the voice of God from Mount Sinai. The delivery of the law from Mount Sinai was an era never to be forgotten by the Israelites. You will find all of that given to us in Exodus 19 in detail, but I want you to understand that the totality of Exodus 19 is summarized for us in Hebrews chapter 12. So go to Hebrews chapter 12 for a moment. We will begin reading there with verse 18, and you will understand the passages that follow. In the book of Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 18, the Word of God says:

Verse 18 describes Mount Sinai: "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest." No one could touch it. It burned with fire; there was blackness, darkness, tempest, lightnings, and thunders. Verse 19 says, "And the sound of a trumpet, and the

voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more."

In Exodus 19, God spoke to them out of the mountain with all of this occurring, and they did not want to hear any more. They said, lest they die. "For they could not endure that which was commanded. And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart." So terrible was the sight that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake."

But here is the contrary: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." When you think about Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, when God descended upon that mountain with fire, thunder, lightning, terrible tempest, and darkness, He nevertheless spoke from it.

Deuteronomy 4:33 asks, "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" They did indeed hear the voice of God. Deuteronomy 5:24 says, "And ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth."

Then they said, "Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die." In other words, they were scared to death. They heard the voice of God and said, "We don't want to hear it anymore, lest we die."

We are not standing on that mountain where they stood. We were not present there. How then shall we hear the voice of God? His Word is His voice.

Here is the definition of inspiration. We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. In 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, the Bible says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." "Inspiration" is the Greek word theopneustos, literally meaning "God-breathed" or "God-exhaled." That is what the Scripture is saying about inspiration: every word that we have has been breathed out of the mouth of God.

Inspiration is the strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, qualifying them to give utterance to the truth, so that the words they spoke and wrote were and are indeed the words of God. This demands that we understand that Scripture came from the mouth of God.

God spoke these words. So we hear God's voice today in His Word.

Now, let me show you. They did hear the voice of God at Mount Sinai. But I want you to turn right on over to Deuteronomy chapter 30, and look, if you would, at verse 10. Deuteronomy 30, verse 10. This is well after Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy 30, verse 10. Look at it if you would: "If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul." Now, how in the world do you hearken to the voice of God? By keeping His commandments and His statutes, which are written in this book of the law. In other words, this book is His voice. Now, if you would turn over in your Bibles to Psalm 95, verse 7, and I'm showing you these few verses just so that you can understand, the word "voice" is still used well after Mount Sinai. So in Psalm 95, look if you would please at verse 7.

Psalm 95, verse 7. Here it is. The Bible says, "For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness." This same passage is quoted in Hebrews chapter 4, and it's quoted, "If ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Now, one more, if you will look in Jeremiah chapter 26, verse 13. Jeremiah chapter 26, and look, if you would please, at verse 13.

This is well after Mount Sinai. Jeremiah 26, verse 13. God says, "Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you." Well, where do you hear the voice of God? And the answer is in His Word. So we can hear the voice of God today, not audibly, but we can hear it as we read and study the Word of God.

The second way we learn to fear God is found in Deuteronomy 14:23. This passage deals with the festivals and feasts: “And thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always.”

There were actually three tithes in Israel: the Levitical tithe, the festival tithe, and the poor tithe, which was taken every third year. The festivals were annual events, so the individuals had to go to the specified place—which later turned out to be Jerusalem. There they had to take their tithes, rejoice before the Lord, and learn to fear His name.

How did they learn to fear? The answer is by obedience. They came the way God told them to come, did what God commanded them to do, and did it in the way He commanded them to do it. In other words, they were obedient. The more obedient we are, the more we learn to fear the Lord.

It is impossible to learn to fear God in disobedience or rebellion. The only way we can learn to fear God, first of all, is by hearing His voice in His Word, and secondly, by obedience. If we are going to learn to fear the Lord, we must learn to be obedient in whatever we see in His Word where He commands us and tells us that which must be in our lives.

The third way is found in Deuteronomy 17. This passage deals with the king. God says that if Israel wants a king, these are his qualifications and prerequisites. I will not read all of them, but verses 18, 19, and 20 say: “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life.” Why?

"That he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel."

The king had to have his own personal copy of the law, and God said it was to be read daily. The reason it was to be read daily was so that he might learn to fear the Lord his God. When we read our Bibles, we see God's promises, principles, precepts, warnings, threatenings, and truths. The only way you can ever learn the Bible is by reading and studying it yourself.

I've heard people say, "Well, you know, you can go to Bible school." You can go to Bible school; in Bible school, you may learn about the Bible, but the only way you can learn the Bible is to study it yourself. The king had a responsibility to read the Bible every single day. You say, "Well, goodness, that was a king." Did you know the Scripture tells us in the New Testament that our Lord has made us kings and priests unto Jesus Christ?

We are kings. We have a duty, responsibility, and obligation to read the Word of God every day. If you're not reading your Bible every day, you're not going to learn to fear the Lord. It's just that simple. You have to learn to read that Bible on a daily basis. I remember when God first saved me and called me to preach, I had a very strong desire to learn the Bible. So I put myself on a reading schedule: I read through the Old Testament every month and the New Testament every week.

I did it over and over and over. I have no idea how many times I've read the Bible through. Even now, I start at Genesis and read through Revelation; when I finish, I start back all over again. I am not talking about my study time; my study time is different. I read the Bible every day just for my own blessing and benefit.

God has ordained that blessings always follow obedience and curses always follow disobedience. If we want to learn to fear the Lord, we have to learn to read His Word. What does the Bible say in Psalm 1, verses 1 through 3? "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

If we want to learn the fear of the Lord, we have to learn to read, meditate, and think. It was required of a king. Since our Lord has made us kings and priests, it is still required of us. The reason he had to do that was so that he might learn to fear the Lord his God, so he would not lift up his heart above his brethren and so he would prolong his days. Blessings always follow obedience.

Now, if you will turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 31, we are going to look at verses 12 and 13. Here is the fourth way that you and I are to learn to fear the Lord. Learning is a process. You remember that passage in Ephesians chapter 4: "If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man..." He said, "And have learned Christ." Christ must be learned. Christ must be learned. When we are learning to fear God, we are learning the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith has to be developed. Fear has to be developed. Fruit has to be developed. It is God who gives us faith, but God does not exercise our faith for us. We must exercise it ourselves. God gives us repentance, but God does not turn from our sins for us. We must turn from our sins. You remember that passage in Philippians chapter 2: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” That is verse 12. Is God telling us that we have to work for our salvation? Of course not. Everything has to be taken in context.

In verse 12, he said, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Now listen to verse 13: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” So God works it in; we must work it out. That is why I told you earlier, the only thing man can do is teach the fear of the Lord. God must implant it. But once God works it in, it is our responsibility to work it out.

Look in Deuteronomy chapter 31, verse 12: “Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.” He said, “You get all the

people together that can hear." In the context, they were reading the law of God aloud.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Nehemiah, particularly chapter 8. Nehemiah chapter 8—Ezra, Nehemiah. There was more to reading the law than just reading the law. There is more to reading the Word of God than just reading the Word of God.

Look at Nehemiah, chapter 8, beginning with verse 1: "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday."

That was at least three or four hours. "Before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." The people stood for three or four hours and listened to the reading of the book of the law. But they were doing more than just reading. Verse 8 says, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

Notice the three things in verse 8. There was exposition: "they read in the book of the law distinctly." There was explanation: "and gave the sense." Then there was application: "and caused them to understand the reading."

Expounding the Word includes demonstrating the text and the context, as well as the scope of the passage. That is the first step. The second step is explanation, giving the sense thereof. When I first started preaching, I quoted an awful lot of Scripture in my sermons. Sometimes one sermon would have as many as 150 passages that I quoted. I filled my sermons with Scripture until it dawned on me one day that God's people did not need the Scripture quoted to them.

In those days, you could get a tape and hear the Word of God being read. I realize that God's people did not need the Word of God merely quoted to them. They needed the Word of God expounded,

explained, and applied. You cannot obey what you do not understand, and you cannot obey what you do not know. So they did not simply read the law; they expounded it, explained it, and applied it.

Exposition and explanation are absolutely necessary to application. Preaching, teaching, and exhortation are the means of expounding and explaining. If you wish to learn to fear the Lord, you must make listening to preaching a priority—listening to God's preaching, or preaching from the Word of God. I might remind you that pastor-teachers happen to be a gift from Jesus Christ to His church, and you will find that in Ephesians chapter 4.

My responsibility is to expound and explain the Scriptures. It is true that, just as today and every day when I preach, I give some applications. But my applications are general. They are designed simply to make you start thinking, "What else can I do to apply the Word to my life?" I do not know every problem, need, desire, or circumstance that you have. But I know this: if I expound and explain the Word of God and begin making applications, it will give you some idea that you need to apply it in your life.

It is my responsibility to expound and explain. It is your responsibility to flesh out that which has been expounded and explained and make it applicable to your life. If you do not, the explanation and exposition will be worthless to you. Every Scripture must be applied.

That is why I said, "Gather them together so they can hear, and they can learn to fear the Lord." In the preaching and teaching of His Word, you are to learn to fear the Lord. We are living in a day when most folks think nothing of skipping the preaching: "I stubbed my toe; I cannot go. I have a little headache; I cannot go." We will never learn to fear the Lord until we prioritize listening to the Word of God expounded, explained, and applied.

We have to make those applications in our own lives. The fifth passage, which happens to be our text, is Psalm 34:11: “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

First, “Come, ye children.” I cannot teach you if you are not in attendance. If you do not come, there is no way I can teach you. The

second thing he says is, “Come, ye children, hearken.” You can come, but if you do not listen, I still cannot teach you. If you come sleepy-headed and drowsy, and let your mind wander, I still cannot teach you. “Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” The fear of the Lord, then, is to be the rule of life for every Christian.

Blessings of Fearing the Lord

The fear of the Lord leads us to holiness, obedience, submission, and humility. Fearing God in a biblical manner always leads to innumerable blessings. Since we are in Psalm 34, consider verses 8 through 11: “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

Now look at this. Here is what every man wants: “What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?” That is what we all want. He says, here is what you do.

"Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

"If you'll listen to me, I'll teach you the fear of the Lord." He begins by showing what you must do, how you must submit, obey, and trust. He shows all the blessings and protections God will give those who fear Him.

The reason there is so much wickedness and rebellion is because there is no fear of God in the lives of the wicked. Likewise, when a Christian sins, it is because of a lack of fear of God in his life. If you really stood in awe of God, reverenced and respected God, and loved Him as a Father, you would not do what you have done or what you are thinking about doing. By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.

Applications and Conclusion

When we sin, especially deliberately, purposefully, and premeditatedly, it is because we do not fear God as we should, and we bring the chastisement of God upon ourselves. The Word of God says in 1 John 2, verse 1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." Romans chapter 6, verses 11 and 12, says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." He did not say, Let not sin be in your mortal body, but, Let not sin reign.

Don't let sin hold sway over you. Sin is not your Lord; Jesus Christ is your Lord. Remember the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles chapter 4: "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!" I always pray, when I pray that prayer, "Lord, keep me from evil as well, that I might not grieve Thee." That's the main thing. When you read about Jabez, the next verse says, "And God granted him that which he requested."

I've often thought about this. God withheld Abimelech from sinning against Him, and Abimelech was a wicked, unconverted man. Have you ever prayed and asked God to withhold you from sinning? Have you ever prayed and asked God to help you not to grieve Him, not to quench Him, not to vex Him? When a Christian sins, it is because he does not fear God as he should.

The second application is this: There are multitudinous blessings that spring from a proper fear of God. Psalm 31, verse 19, says, "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 before the

sons of men!" God has goodness laid up for those who have a proper biblical fear.

Psalm 33, verse 18: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." I want God's eyes upon me, looking at me and helping me. Psalm 34, verse 7: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." I would like to be delivered as well. Psalm 34, verse 9: "O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him."

If you and I do not want to sin against our Heavenly Father, we need to fear Him in a biblical manner, and we need to seek for that fear of Him to be increased in our lives. When there is a proper increase in the fear of God, there will also be a proper increase of our faith, our submission, our obedience, and our humility.

All of these things go together. God has worked that in our lives. It is our responsibility, our duty, our obligation, and our privilege to work it out, because God has worked it in us. So we need to ask, "Lord, increase my fruit. Increase my faith and increase my fear, that I might not sin against thee." By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.

And when you stop and think how gracious and kind and merciful and just our loving Heavenly Father has been to each of us, how could we not stand in awe of Him, and respect and reverence Him, and love Him, and desire that we love Him more, and fear Him more, and worship Him more? So come, my children, hearken! And I will teach you the fear of the Lord. I cannot implant it. I cannot give it, but I can teach it. And if you will listen and make application to your life, you will learn the fear of the Lord and increase in that fear.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. And we do pray, Lord, that You would teach us and enable us to increase in the fear of the Lord. May we learn to fear Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

Father, again, we thank You and praise You. We give the honor and glory and ask, Father, that You'd help us in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen, we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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JW00489 | SermonAudio

Chapter 2: Christians That Despise God
JW00482 | SermonAudio

Chapter 3: Despising God
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Chapter 4: Perfecting Holiness Part 5 of 5 - In The Fear of God
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JW01817 | YouTube

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