

The Joy of Fearing God

Nov. 11, 2018

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Scripture Meditation

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

Meditate on these various passages on fearing God: Psalm 2:11, 25:14, 34:9, 85:9, 103:11, 103:17, 115:11, 130:4, 145:19; Ecclesiastes 5:7; Philippians 2:12; Luke 12:4-5

Icebreaker

What happened today that you expected? What happened today that you didn't expect?

Text for Discussion: Ecclesiastes 12:8-14; Proverbs 9:10a; Job 28:28

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man," (Ecc 12:13). This is what life is all about: We are to fear God and do what He tells us. Which doesn't sound all that freeing or a source for joy. But this is precisely what the Bible promises. God delights in those who fear Him, and this fear is the beginning of wisdom. Psalm 34 promises that those who fear the Lord will lack nothing, while those who are self-reliant (though they may be powerful or strong) will grow weak and hungry. But how can we have a relationship of love with someone we fear? The Bible clearly tells us not to be afraid... but throughout its pages we're also told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. How are we to make sense of this apparent contradiction?

Much of our confusion comes from misunderstanding what it means to fear God. What then is "The Fear of God"? It's knowing our place by living in awareness of God's presence and in awe of His transcendent holiness. It is a posture for our lives, felt and experienced rather than something momentary or occasional. Fearing God is a sense of reverential respect – recognizing we have a Father so holy and mighty and loving that He is beyond our understanding. And this can't help but produce tremendous gratitude and deep loyalty within us. So, though it may sound like quite the opposite, the fear of God is the bridge to learning to enjoy this life.

We are frail creatures, limited and dependant. We don't like to admit this or its implications, but that's why Ecclesiastes so bluntly keeps reminding us of our mortality. Without God, we cannot make sense of life. And our inability to control things leads to frustration and disappointment. Why isn't life fair? Why are our dreams and expectations so routinely dashed? Because we vainly search for personal contentment on our terms. But we've looked at the idea of contentment all wrong. It will never come through achievement or gain.

Contentment is a condition of the soul that does not come from getting what we want. Then where is it found? By learning to give thanks to God for what we already have. Knowing our place. Knowing we have a Father who is so mighty as to be worthy of our fear... but also so full of compassion and love that He forgives and receives us as His children.

God delights in those who are amazed by His steadfast love. Therefore, the awe-inspired fear we feel at the immeasurable distance between God's holiness and our unworthiness isn't the fear a servant has for a master. It is the fear of a forgiven, beloved child toward a forgiving parent. It is an indefinable mixture of reverence, fear, pleasure, joy and awe. Because the more assured we are of His love, the more fearful we will be of offending the One who loves us most and best.

We are far worse than we ever imagined but far more loved that we ever dared hope. This is the tension of love and fear we need to recover. It is a posture of assurance and freedom, and it is how fearing God can fill our hearts with pleasure. We should never live in dread of a loving parent; nor should we want to break the heart of someone who loves us so well. This is what produces a beautiful life of loyalty and gratitude. For only the fear of God can free us from needing the approval of anything else and grant us the contentment and joy we long for.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

If the fear of God is "knowing your place by living in awareness of God's presence and in awe of His transcendent holiness" how does the gospel lead us to fear God rightly?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What does the Teacher want us to know as he summarizes the teachings of the book of Ecclesiastes in this final chapter?
 - How have the words of Ecclesiastes been a delight to you? vs 10
 - How have the words of Ecclesiastes been a goad to you? vs 11
 - Compare vs 13, "Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man." with Ecc. 2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18. How does this all fit together? How are you encouraged?
- What is the difference between being afraid of God and fearing God?
 - Which one comes naturally to you and why?
 - Why do you think there is such a lack of fear of God today?
- If the fear of God is "knowing your place by living in awareness of God's presence and in awe of His transcendent holiness" how does the gospel lead us to fear God rightly?
 - "How could this not lead to AWE? Dread ... that God is holy and we are not. Veneration ... that this God would draw near to me. Wonder ... that he loved me and gave himself for me!" What comes to your mind when you read this from the sermon?
 - Explain how "knowing our place" banishes our anxiety, guilt, and boredom. Have you had an experience of this since our study of Ecclesiastes?
- What practices train us to remember and reflect on God's transcendent awe-inspiring holiness which leads us to joy and freedom?
 - How can you rearrange your life to make room for those practices? Will you need accountability to do that? Who can you ask?
- In your own words describe what the "fear of God" is as if you were telling a child or someone who does not know Christ yet. (See experiment below.)

Prayer

Share prayer requests by praying them rather than telling them. Pray for a healthy fear of God and that you would respond to Him with a loving desire to do His commands. Pray that you would grow in knowing your place and orienting your life to an awareness of God's grace and presence.

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

As a group or in your own quiet time come up with a parable/story describing the fear of God. Pray for opportunities to use this story to help others understand God's holiness and our need for reconciliation with Him. Name three people you will pray for that need to hear this story. If doing the experiment on your own, share the story and prayers with your CG for accountability and celebration.