

mp3/76/GRACE & THE FEAR of GOD.MP3

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[0 : 00] For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called.

Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were influential, not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

[1 : 18] God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power.

[2 : 28] The title of my sermon this morning is Living in the Fear of God. I hope you'll understand what I mean by that as we go on. Now, if you were here last week, you know I looked at the matter of how we, as we set off in this new year, 2013, should be those who seek to grow in grace and maturity in the Lord Jesus Christ, to grow spiritually.

What I did last week was to take the great example of our Lord Jesus Christ, to see how he grew, not only physically, not only mentally, but the Lord Jesus grew spiritually as well.

We saw that he grew spiritually by the fact that he searched the Scriptures. He wasn't born, if I can put this rightly, he wasn't born with all the knowledge of Scriptures in his mind.

He had to learn the Scriptures in the same way that we do. The Lord Jesus, as he grew, went about his Father's business.

He communed with God. He prayed frequently. He rejoiced in the presence of God. And we reminded ourselves that if we are to grow in grace and maturity, then that's something that we must do to be frequent in prayer.

[3 : 50] And then thirdly, we saw that the Lord Jesus grew spiritually as he fellowshiped with God's people. We wouldn't have naturally have thought that Jesus needed the fellowship of God's people, but we saw that that was a very real point.

He delighted to be with the people of God. He delighted to have them around him. And it reminds us of the importance of the people of God.

Coming here on a Sunday is not just something Christians do on Sunday mornings. There is real purpose here. We come to worship. We come to search the Scriptures as we hear the preaching of God.

We come to commune with God as we pray together. And we come to grow as we fellowship together. I was most encouraged, I have to say, last week, to find that nobody seemed to rush off after the service.

It seemed empty up here. I didn't realize that when I went downstairs, the place was full. And that was most encouraging. Because that's an essential part of what we do if we're to grow and develop as Christians.

[5 : 05] In Luke chapter 2 and verse 52, we saw last week that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men. So I want to ask another question this morning.

Last week we looked at how Jesus grew spiritually. This morning I want to look at how Jesus grew in wisdom. How did Jesus grow in wisdom? Verse 52 of Luke chapter 2, Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men.

So how did Jesus grow in wisdom? Well, as always with these things, we must turn to the Scriptures to find our answers. And the first thing we need to do is ask the question about growing in wisdom.

I hope many of you are already ahead of me as to the verse which helps us as to where we might find that answer. In the Proverbs chapter 9 and verse 10, we read this, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We might find that quite surprising. To say Jesus grew in wisdom is to say that he lived in the fear of God.

[6 : 24] But we may want to argue, of course, well, hold on a moment, didn't Jesus surely trusted God? He loved God, his Father. There was that great companionship with his Father, that union, the great Godhead.

But Jesus the man grew in the fear of God. Can we actually say that? Does that have reality? To say that Jesus feared God?

Yet this is what the Scriptures teach us. Wisdom, if we were to grow in wisdom, means we need to learn to fear God.

If Jesus grew in wisdom, it means he also grew in the fear of God. Now, we need to understand what we've meant by that.

Our problem is that the Bible speaks of this fear. In fact, the Bible speaks of two kinds of fear. We just need to take a moment to understand those. Firstly, what is it to fear?

[7 : 28] What is it to fear? In English, we only really have one word, fear, which is linked with being frightened, to be afraid. But in both Hebrew and Greek, there are several words that are translated into our one word, fear, or to be afraid, or to be frightened.

There is a meaning for this word, which means to dread, to be frightened, to be filled with terror, or to have a phobia.

Some people have a phobia, and they have a real fear of certain situations, being in the dark, being closed in, being outside, being high up, or wherever.

There's a real fear, a terror, a dread. But then there's a second meaning of this word, fear, that we find in the Scriptures, and it's the word that means to reverence, to hold in awe.

And the mistake we make is, in thinking about fear, is to imagine that all fear means to be afraid. So let's look at these two types of fear for a moment, because hopefully it will help us understand our subject this morning.

[8 : 41] Firstly, then, under this heading, to be afraid of God. Who should be afraid of God? Who should be afraid of God? Well, the Scriptures make it very clear, that those who are afraid of God, that is the position of the unbeliever.

Those of outside of Christ. To be afraid of God, or have a sense of the terror of God, like a slave might have for his owner, is something of the position of the unbeliever.

The parable of the talents. These various men were given various talents to use. And we read in Matthew chapter 25, that the man who was given one talent, comes back and says to his master, Then the man who had received the one talent came.

Master, he said, I knew you were a hard man, harvesting where you've not sown, and gathering where you've not scattered. So I was afraid, and went out and hid your talent in the ground.

So here's what belongs to you. We don't have time to unpack all of that, but this idea of being afraid. That man was afraid of his master. If we do not know God, we should rightly be afraid of that which would come to us.

[10:11] If we think fear of God only in this way, of being afraid, we never really understand, of course, our subject this morning, which is that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, or that Jesus himself grew in his fear of God.

But you must understand, that if you're outside of Christ, when the day comes when you stand before God, you will do so in terror.

I don't say that to frighten you, but to express a reality of what the scriptures teach. This is why God is such a God of love and a God of patience. He gives us so many opportunities, so much time, to put matters right, for us to come in repentance and faith, and to come and to trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a spirit of being frightened, or being afraid of God.

Sometimes Christians find like that as well. Sometimes we still have these vestiges of thoughts in our minds, that God is someone to be frightened of, to be feared, and if we don't do what's right, then, oh, woe be Titus, we're going to get into such serious trouble.

[11:26] And so often that just bows us down with pressure. We need to be delivered from such ideas. That's why it's important to understand what it really means to fear God.

Secondly here, we said firstly to be afraid of God, but now we're going to take the other view, not to be frightened, but to be in awe of God. Sometimes this is called filial fear.

Perhaps we can think of it as the experience that a child has towards its parents. It's not afraid, but there is a respect. There's an awe. When we properly hold God in awe and reverence, it should bring pleasure and joy to our hearts.

When we see God for who he is, it's realizing who God is, realizing his characters, realizing what he's done for us. It's to have a love for God that is so great that we should be ashamed to do anything which would displease or grieve him.

Having a right view of God, having a right attitude towards God and seeing him in all his greatness and his love and his grace and his mercy and his justness, surely has a marked effect upon the way we live.

[12:47] For those we respect, those we hold in awe, we seek not to upset or to grieve by the way we live.

In that psalm I read a few moments ago, Psalm 112, we read this, Praise the Lord, Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands.

Those two verses go together. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. It is that we rejoice in the laws of God.

It's against this kind of background we begin to understand that when Jesus grew in wisdom, he experienced joy and awe towards this great God.

There was pleasure and reverence. They came side by side as he dwelt in the presence of his Father. So then secondly, let's ask the question, what is the fear of the Lord?

[13:54] What is the fear of the Lord? Let's try and understand this question and to see that to fear God is not only a command of God, it's the right response towards God.

Firstly, we are to fear God. That's a command in Scripture. In 1 Peter chapter 2 and in verse 17 we read, Show proper respect to everyone.

Love the brotherhood of believers. Fear God. Honor the King. Series of short, pithy commands which Peter gives us. Fear God.

Sometimes we think of a relationship to God only in terms of the Old Testament commands. But we find similar commands here in the New Testament. For example, when Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 5 and in verse 21, we read this, Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

What we're going to be seeing as we go through this is all of our relationships with God, our relationships with Christ and our relationships with one another, indeed our relationships with the world in which we live, come out of this aspect of living in the fear of God, having reverence for Christ.

[15:18] It came through Moses, if you think, at the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments. We read way back in Deuteronomy and in chapter 5 and verse 29.

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me, says the Lord, and keep all my commands always so that it might go well with them and their children forever.

Here is the God having given the Ten Commandments to Moses. This is the Lord's crying out and saying, Oh, that the people would hear me. And oh, that they would be inclined to fear me.

Now this is not a despot wanting those who are his subjects to be kowtowing to him, but those to have a right attitude of respect, of awe and reverence to a holy God.

In Jeremiah, he speaks of the new covenant. And we find the similar reference to the fear of God here in Jeremiah 32 and verse 32.

[16:34] The Lord's singleness of heart and action so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.

I will make an everlasting covenant with them. I will never stop doing them good and I will inspire them to fear me so that they will never turn away from me.

Again, you see what the Lord is saying here. That God himself will inspire his people to fear him. To hold him in awe, in reverence, in respect, to understand just who God is and the greatness of this God.

Just one last quote here in one of the Psalms of David. Psalm 86 and in verse 11. And we read, David writes, Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth.

Give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name. So if you like, the opposite of having the right fear of God is to have a divided heart.

[17:52] It means that we do not submit ourselves wholeheartedly to God. Having a right view of God in all his glory is to reverence him and to obey him.

And we're told that such things are the beginning of wisdom. I'll put it another way. This leads us on the path to practical holiness.

These things are not just a bit of theology and a bit of doctrine that we can say, oh, that's interesting. But these are the things which should motivate us. We're called to live in holiness of life. That was our theme last week. How do we grow in grace? How do we mature in the Christian life? And we see here, as we develop in the understanding of what it is to live in the fear of God, we grow in wisdom.

And as we grow in wisdom, we grow in the way that we outwork our Christian faith in our lives day by day. I'm sure I do not need to say to a congregation such as this, that Christianity is only a Sunday activity.

[19:02] It has to be 24-7. Every single day of the year, every day of our lives, it is something that we are seeking to work out.

So that the children of God can be rightly called God-fearing. That used to be a phrase that was used many years ago. It seems to have lost currency, really, but you would say so-and-so was a God-fearing person.

In other words, they had a right attitude to God. They had an awe and respect for Almighty God through Jesus Christ. And this is what makes the Christian life so different.

If we're going to grow in grace, it means we are standing out from the generation in which we live. Living the Christian life means that we hold God in a different way to how the world reviews a God even if they believe in such a deity.

So what is the fear of the Lord? Well, it is, first of all, to fear God, as we said, and then secondly, fear is the right response to God. John Newton summed it up so well in his glorious hymn, Amazing Grace.

[20:14] He says this, God's grace first taught my heart to fear. There's a deeper mystery there, isn't there?

John Newton said, God's grace taught my heart to fear. In other words, he's saying, and he's reflecting what scripture tells us, that it is God himself who inspires us and teaches us to live in the right fear of God.

So the very response we have to God is itself God or grace given. Psalm 130 verse 4 But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.

There is forgiveness in God. What does that mean? True reverential fear is produced by God's love for us. At one time we thought of God as one to be afraid of but now when at one time we viewed him with dread as a holy, righteous, terrifying God of judgment and majesty but now we see that he's a God of grace and a God of love and a God of mercy.

He is a God who brings forgiveness through his son the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a God who is just yet he justifies the sinner in Christ. He is a God who is righteous but he counts the sinner that's you and I if we're in Christ this morning he counts us as righteous in his presence because he imputes the righteousness of his son to us his people.

[21 : 59] Our misunderstanding of fear often comes from a lack of true appreciation of the gospel. people. See if we're to grow in grace so that we fear God like this we must start at the cross.

We must have an understanding of what happened. Do you remember Peter? We all think of his denial and what happened there and Peter's response to Jesus.

He discovered at that moment how weak and sinful he was. Remember when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus when they took him away they all fled and then a little while later someone came up to Peter just a young servant girl and said hey weren't you with this man who's just been arrested and Peter totally denied he was no nothing to do with me and then on two other occasions he was asked the same question and with cursing he denied ever knowing Christ and then we have that little phrase where we find that Jesus has been arrested he's been taken through the courtyard and Peter's just on the other side of that courtyard and just at that moment Peter catches the eye of Jesus and we read that Peter goes out and he weeps why did Peter weep?

Undoubtedly for shame undoubtedly because he realised that he had denied the one he had professed to love and to be with no matter what but could we not also say that when he had saw the eyes of Jesus he saw there that really Jesus looked at him in compassion we know that a little while afterwards on that beach after the resurrection Peter is a recommission to a work of God but it's as if Christ was saying and Peter realising at that moment look Peter I'm still praying for you I still love you that's why I'm going to the cross for you to deal with your sin Peter's weeping response were reverential tears of hope it's the mark of spiritual growth as we rightly respond to our saviour with a proper fear of God thirdly then what happens when we fear God what happens when we fear God perhaps we can understand what this means to believers as we look at the effect of such fear in our own hearts firstly all other fears are removed all other fears are removed it is by learning to fear God that we're delivered from the fear of what people will do to us you worry how people will treat you because you're a Christian because you're trying to live a holy life as we reflect on the death of Jesus that he willingly chose to give his life on the cross so that he might follow his father's will this meant that Jesus was not bullied into kowtowing to the threats of what others might do to him he went willingly to Jerusalem so that he might die he knew what would happen he could have dealt with it and he could have gone another route but he knew it was the father's will for him to go and because of that as we work through the implications of our salvation in the fear of God we're reminded or let me read what Paul says to the

[26 : 04] Philippians in Philippians 2 chapter 12 chapter 2 verse 12 therefore my dear friends as you have always obeyed not only in my presence but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling we're called to work out our salvation it doesn't mean we work for our salvation we can't do that we can't earn our salvation it is something that comes by grace but we are to work it out the practicalities as we grow in grace as we understand more of the fear of God as we grow in our wisdom we work out the practicalities of our salvation in our everyday life and Paul reminds us in this same passage that we do not need to be frightened of those who oppose us Philippians again chapter 1 and verses 27 and 28 whatever happens conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence I will know that you stand firm in one spirit contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed but that you will be saved and that by God do we fear those around us we're living in an age which is changing very very rapidly to be a

Christian today to be a true Bible believing Christian today is not as comfortable as it used to be 10 or 20 years ago there has been a move to privatise our faith it's no longer in the public arena you want to be a Christian that's fine but that's something public don't bring it out don't tell anybody at school or in your workplace you do that at home wherever you want just keep it private that's the idea and if you do bring it out in the open if you were to start saying things well you know God created this world it didn't happen by some evolutionary chance or some big bang we find ourselves ridiculed and mocked if we want to stand out against gay marriage if we want to stand out against homosexual relationships if we want to stand out against abortion and all the other moral issues of the day we are belittled we're told we are to keep ourselves quiet over such things and there's a sense that we could feel frightened concerned over what lies ahead

I'm sure those as are older get quite concerned for our children and grandchildren about the way society is changing but Paul says there's no need to be frightened of others if you're in the right fear of God the right attitude and relationship with God in Christ then you need not fear what the world

might do even though they might promise us harm Peter was writing to those who were suffering all types of persecution and we read in 1 Peter 3 verse 13 who's going to harm you if you're eager to do good but even if you should suffer for what is right you are blessed do not fear what they fear do not be frightened in other words the believer does not fear what those who seek to harm us fear perhaps that's a clue as to why there are those in the world even today who prepare to suffer for their

Christian faith those who suffer martyrdom or imprisonment for Christ secondly we're prevented from sin fearing God presents us from continuing in sin not again in terms of being frightened or afraid but in terms of the respect we have for God therefore we seek to live lives which are pleasing to God which are free from sin oh yes we will falter we know that there are times when we do fall into sin but we seek to live but that grieves us we seek to live free of sin when Moses again after giving the ten commandments says this in Exodus 20 20 Moses said to the people do not be afraid God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning actually if you think about it that was the very reason that Moses was even alive in the first place back in Exodus chapter 1 and verse 17 I'm sure you know the story that all the little children were to be put to death and we read the midwives however feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told him to do they let the boys live they feared God rather than man they feared God and would do nothing to grieve him so fearing God means we're not afraid of the situations that surround us in this world it means that we are prevented from sin we are encouraged to live holy lives thirdly it matures our Christian character such fear means that the Christian is a man a woman of Christian integrity and we find it in scriptures don't we not being straightforward not being devious the word of the Christian is their bond in a world which is full of duplicity this should be surely the mark of the [32 : 18] Christian that they are a person to be trusted and as we fear the God and as we grow in wisdom and mature in our faith then more so will we be men and women of integrity in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 1 since we have these promises dear friends let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit perfecting holiness out of reverence for God that's the reason what's the reason we live a holy life it is out of fear out of reverence for God do you remember Nehemiah he led the people of Israel to rebuild the city we find in Nehemiah chapter 5 verse 15 what had happened there was a hard tradition of governing the people previous governors had governed the people with a rod of iron had really made them suffer and Nehemiah is determined not to go down that route so we read in Nehemiah 5 and chapter 15 but the earlier governors those preceding me placed a heavy burden on the people and took 40 shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine their assistance also lorded over the people but out of reverence for God

I did not act like that but we could spend a lot of time thinking about these sort of ideas perhaps those who are employers those who have others responsible to them out of reverence for God we don't lord it over those we have responsibility for elders do not lord it over the flock out of reverence for God fourthly as we've already indicated it directs us to obedience reverencing God in our lives not only helps us to avoid doing wrong but it gives us the desire to do what is right what is pleasing in the sight of God one of the great characters of scripture is Noah isn't it the building of the ark and all that happened but if you reflect for a moment it took him 120 years to build the ark and he didn't build it in

Whitby by the sea he built it on dry land and nobody had seen any rain up to that point and no one had seen great seas but there he is building his ark so we read in Hebrews 11 and verse 7 by faith Noah when warned about things not yet seen in holy fear built an ark to save his family by his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith you could just think about Noah they're building his ark and his neighbours coming by what are you doing Noah I'm building an ark because God has told me to no doubt they mocked him and ridiculed him and persecuted him they thought he was stupid they thought he was daft but he knew the fear of God in his heart and he believed God there's another way of thinking about the fear of God it's believing God's word and the ark of course was in readiness for the day of judgment that would come in the great flood but Noah would rather lose all his friends than lose God fifthly fear of God motivates our evangelism it motivates our evangelism it was the fear of God that made the evangelism of the early church so effective when they would used to gather together for worship what was Paul looking for well he expected a sense of the presence of God that outsiders that's unbelievers would be arrested by very interesting that they would sense that God was present Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said God is really among you he knew that isn't it visitors coming to this place do

they have a sense that God is amongst you

I don't mean by the building we sometimes think you know you're going to you're going to St. Mary's while it's still standing up on the hill there and not slipping down you're going there and because of the structure and so there's a sort of sense of quietness well that's not a sense of the presence of God is it that when people come in here that the church is live people are talking about what God has done they're keen to come together to worship they spend time talking about the sermon and talking about what to one another and helping one another think what an enormous effect that would have upon those who come into our buildings such things of course had happened to Paul back in Acts 9 and verse 31 we read then the church throughout Judea this was after Paul's conversion

[38 : 01] Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace it was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers living in the fear of the Lord Paul's in Ephesus Acts 19 verse 17 when this became known to the Jews and the Greeks living in Ephesus they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord was held in high honour when they were seized with fear it was because of the greatness of God they weren't terrified of God they weren't frightened of God they didn't dread God but they revered him and held him in awe Paul had this great personal experience of God in 2 Corinthians 5 11 we read since then we know what it is to fear the Lord we try to persuade men what we are playing is playing to God and I hope is also playing to your conscience why was

Paul so concerned to declare the glorious message of reconciliation between men and God through Jesus Christ it was out of fear of the Lord because of just who God is verse 14 of that same chapter because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his glorious presence and then in verse 14 of chapter 5 for Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died so we've got a link here between the love of Christ in our hearts compelling us to respond to the word of Christ and the fear of the Lord so the love of God and the fear of God go naturally together and as Paul reflected on what God had done for him convicting him of his sins of his lack of righteousness of the certainty of judgment to come all of those

Paul found mercy and forgiveness it's then we begin to understand how we are to fear God and declare his love for sinners and finally very briefly this morning what is it to grow in the fear of the Lord what is it to grow in the fear of the Lord how then are we to grow in this essential Christian grace we do so as we consider what God has done but if you're a Christian here this morning that God has reached down and touched you by his grace moved you by his love shown you his mercy so that you know that he has chosen you not because of what you've done but because all of his grace and in response you choose to serve him and it's God's working in us that leads us to fear him and reverence him when we think of God's providence the way he's worked in our life the fact that every hair of our head is numbered that he has guided us protected us chastened us provided for us he's overruled all the circumstances of our lives from the very genes of our body come from his sovereign rule we think about his saving grace the gift of his son the sending of his spirit into our lives and into the life of everyone who believes if you are a Christian you have the spirit of God living within you that's the very definition of what it is to be a Christian salvation didn't stop with the Jews it is to come into all the world I said earlier to the children about being fearfully and wonderfully made fearfully made brings that idea of awe and wonder that God has made us this great God has made us in perfection all these thoughts bring us to a reverence and an awe of God in our minds fearing God is a fruit of the spirit it's the beginning of true wisdom in our own hearts the wise preacher of the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes sums it all up like this in verse 13 of chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes now all this has been heard here's the conclusion of the matter fear God keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man this is the duty of every single one of us here this morning and everyone in this world it is to fear God to know him to love him to respect him and to keep his commands if we live in the fear of

God we're afraid of his judgments if we're afraid of what he might do then many of these words will be lost on you but if we have that loving fear that understanding that knowledge holding in such high honour reverencing his name being awed by his character seeing the great love he has poured out on this world in sending his son so it is by grace that we are saved and that's the beginning of wisdom and that's the beginning of true spiritual progress as we said last week if we desire this year to grow in grace in understanding in spiritual maturity then we look to God we fear him and we turn to him and we trust him may the Lord help us to do that for his name's sake amen thank you yeah

for now and we know wow thank you