

The Fear of the LORD

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[0 : 00] Well, we are going to turn now to our reading, and Paul has been so very helpfully leading us through some studies in the book of Proverbs.

We've looked at various of the subjects and the topics that come up in Proverbs, but we're going to the heart of it tonight, really. We're going to the beginning of the book. We're going to read together a bit from chapter 1 and a bit from chapter 2.

All about the perfect wisdom of our God, and that's what Proverbs is all about.

It's really what the whole Bible is all about, the wisdom of God that is the way of life. So I'm going to read Proverbs 1, 1-7, then we're going to read the first six verses of chapter 2 as well.

The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. To know wisdom and instruction.

[1 : 02] To understand words of insight. To receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity. To give prudence to the simple.

Knowledge and discretion to the young. Let the wise hear and increase in learning. Let the one who understands obtain guidance.

To understand a proverb and a saying. The words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

Fools despise wisdom and instruction. So chapter 2, verse 1. My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your hearts to understanding.

Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding. If you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures.

[2 : 17] Then you will understand the fear of the Lord. And find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Good. Well, please do have Proverbs open in front of you.

And as of previous weeks, we'll be jumping around different places. But in our final point, we'll be focusing in on those words from chapter 2 that William was reading.

So perhaps have a finger there in chapter 2. But thinking this evening about the fear of the Lord. Which is really the very key to the book of Proverbs.

Chapter 1, verse 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. To speak of fear of the Lord will no doubt conjure up certain images in your mind of what it looks like to fear the Lord.

[3 : 36] Perhaps you have particular sort of negative associations with the term. You imagine grim-faced, severe men who have never knowingly cracked a smile.

And if they did, they immediately retracted it. Maybe that's in your mind. You think about fear of the Lord. But such mental images of what it is to fear the Lord is a long way from how the Bible describes it.

We're focusing here in the book of Proverbs. But listen to how the New Testament speaks of fear of the Lord. You read this in Acts chapter 9.

It says, As a consequence of living in this way, in the fear of the Lord, the church, we see in Acts, was being built up.

It experienced the comfort of the Holy Spirit and saw multiplication of numbers. So these associated experiences suggest that going on in the fear of the Lord does not indicate some sort of crippling anxiety or some sort of overwhelming dread in the face of God.

[4 : 57] Instead, this fear of the Lord, biblically defined, in Acts at least, inspired vigorous activity. It led to great blessings in the church as they walked in the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is a positive attribute. And actually, it's absolutely central to the whole of the book of Proverbs. The fear of the Lord is a term we should treasure and use.

To say that someone walks in the fear of the Lord is a very positive thing. As a parent, your great desire should be that your children learn to fear the Lord.

As a Christian, all of us should fear the Lord. And it's a proper fear of the Lord that undergirds everything we read in the book of Proverbs. You cannot benefit from the wisdom Proverbs contains unless you fear the Lord.

It is, as one writer put it, the basic spiritual grammar for understanding the book. What the alphabet is to reading, what notes are to reading music, what numerals are to mathematics, is to be praised.

[6 : 07] The fear of the Lord is fundamental to the whole book of Proverbs. Fear of the Lord is something we must strive for and seek and value and cherish. Because we must.

And because of what fear of the Lord leads to. The fruit that comes from fearing the Lord is abundant and rich. So let's consider first the benefits that come from fearing the Lord.

Proverbs sets it out so vividly. Then we'll ask, what does it mean to fear the Lord? And then lastly, how? How do we fear the Lord? So first, what are the benefits of fearing the Lord?

What does Proverbs say comes from fearing the Lord? Chapter 10. Chapter 10. The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.

In the fear of the Lord, one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

[7 : 14] Chapter 14. The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. Chapter 22. Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Chapter 28. Proverbs lays out the great benefits of fearing the Lord. It shows us the goodness of going God's ways.

Those who fear the Lord enjoy life. It is a fountain of life, says Proverbs, rather than a snare of death. And as we've seen several times in our studies in Proverbs, life, as Proverbs defines it, is not just our three score and ten, but life in Proverbs is seen as stretching out through physical death and beyond into eternity.

It is life in fellowship with God now and forever. It doesn't end with physical death, but continues on.

That's the horizon of life in the book of Proverbs. And those who fear the Lord have that sort of life. Those who fear the Lord have strong confidence.

[8 : 37] Chapter 14. Their children will have a refuge. In other words, those who fear the Lord have real security and confidence. They feel safe and unconcerned because they know in whose hands they really belong.

They know the laws. They know security. Their children know it too. If you're a parent here, then your fear of the Lord brings real blessings and security to your children.

They have a refuge because you fear the Lord. Chapter 19. We read this. The fear of the Lord leads to life and whoever has it rests satisfied.

He will not be visited by harm. Life. Resting. Satisfied. Is there not a wonderful image?

The one who fears the Lord is pictures of being fully satisfied. Every need met and satisfied. Freedom from harm. And of course, the horizon here is not only the immediate, but eternal.

[9 : 48] I remember that the church I grew up in, the pastor's family, had a family saying, which went something like this. Everything will be all right in the end.

If it's not all right, it's not the end yet. And that captures something of the emphasis here in Proverbs as it talks about safety and security.

Not being visited by harm. Everything will be all right in the end. The benefits of those who fear the Lord are real and abundant, but we will only fully realize them in the end.

In the end when Christ returns, all the benefits we read about will be enjoyed in their full. But we're not there yet. We're not yet at the end.

Which is not to say we don't enjoy anything now. We do enjoy some of these benefits. As Proverbs asserts again and again, generally speaking, those who obey God's ways, those who fear the Lord, they're working with the grain of how God has made this world.

[10 : 58] And so in general, things will work out for those who fear the Lord, who heed the teaching of Proverbs. There are real abundant blessings to following God's ways now, but certainly for eternity.

So far from being a negative concept, the fear of the Lord is to be greatly prized. It's an attitude to cultivate our own hearts and our own lives.

As one writer put it, godly fear and true happiness are inseparable. As we see the huge benefits of fear of the Lord, it talks about life and abundance and rest.

All those things are to be cherished, and they come as we fear the Lord. The God-fearer maximizes life as God intended it to be lived.

The life of one who fears the Lord is wonderful. But alongside the great blessings of fear of the Lord, Proverbs sets out the reality of the failure to fear the Lord.

[12 : 11] Most of those verses we've read didn't just set out the positives. They also, by contrast, set out the sober warnings of the foolish failure to follow the Lord, to fear the Lord.

So for those who don't fear the Lord, it's not prolonged life, but chapter 10, the years of the wicked will be short. Not a fountain of life, chapter 14, but snares of death.

Not resting satisfied, but chapter 19, visited by harm. Not blessings, chapter 28, but falling into calamity.

See, in short, without the fear of God, our path is one that leads us away from God, away from all that is good, and into destruction.

To fear the Lord, in the book of Proverbs, it's to pursue life, and peace, and joy, in the sight of God.

[13 : 20] The fear of the Lord, it's a wonderful thing, says Proverbs. That's the first thing. Consider the benefits, of fearing the Lord.

Second, what does it mean, to fear the Lord? What are we talking about? What does it look like? Well, the fear of the Lord, says Charles Bridges, is that affectionate reverence, by which, the child of God, bends himself humbly, and carefully, to his father's will.

I think that's a good summary, of what Proverbs teaches. Affectionate reverence, by which the child of God, bends himself humbly, and carefully, to his father's law.

The kind of fear, that Proverbs speaks of, is not, the same thing, as the fear of harm, or the fear of an enemy, or other dangers.

That's not the sense of fear, we get, in the Bible, or in Proverbs. Those who don't yet, fear the Lord, they are people, who should have, that kind of fear, of the creator.

[14 : 29] His holiness, will bring judgment, which we thought about, this morning. There is a day coming, when Christ will return, as judge. But the fear of the Lord, described here, in Proverbs 1, verse 7, is the fear, of one who loves God.

It's a reverent love, that understands, God's grace, towards the sinner, who trusts Christ. It's a fear, that wants to do, what is pleasing, to the Lord.

That's the sense of fear, we get, in Proverbs. Let's note, how Proverbs describes, this fear of the Lord. What does it look like? Have a look at chapter 3, verse 7.

Be not wise, in your own eyes. Fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

So, there is a recognition, implicit, in this fear of the Lord, that we are not, all knowing. That we do not understand, all things.

[15 : 35] That we have, incomplete wisdom, and that therefore, we should not, be wise, in our own eyes. We do not behave, as know-it-alls. Rather, we submit ourselves, to the creator, covenant Lord.

He is all the things, that we are not. He is all knowing. He is all understanding. He is complete wisdom. He is wise.

And so, we submit ourselves, to him. Rather than being wise, in our own eyes. We fear God, because of who he is.

It's a realization, of who God is, that will lead, to a response, of fear. And one way, we do that, in the second half, of the verse, is that we turn away, from evil.

You see, being wise, in our own eyes, is linked, there, with doing evil. And that's the connection, that Isaiah makes. In chapter five, we see him, talking about those, who are wise, in their own eyes, who do evil.

[16 : 49] He levels his charge, at arrogant, prideful, court officials. Let me read you, a bit from chapter five, of Isaiah. He says, woe to those, who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness, for light, and light, for darkness, who put bitter, for sweet, and sweet, for bitter.

Woe to those, who are wise, in their own eyes, and shrewd, in their own sight. See, being wise, in your own eyes, is the path, to doing evil.

Do not rely, in your own cleverness, says Proverbs three, verse seven. Rather, fear the Lord, by turning away, from such evil.

And such fear, of the Lord, must actually materialize, in the reality, of our lives. We really do need, to turn away, from evil. Do not tolerate, those who call, evil good, and good evil.

Do not tolerate, those who, put darkness, for light, and light, for darkness. Do not stand, for lies, when there are lies, all around us. We must, turn away, from evil.

[18 : 05] Not, turn a blind eye, that's complicity. Rather, we fear God, rather than man, and speak truth, rather than lies.

But the thing is, the truth, sounds like hate, to those, who hate the truth. But we must, speak it anyway. Proverbs 14, verse 2 says, whoever walks, in uprightness, fears the Lord.

But he, who is devious, in his ways, despises him. See, those who do not, fear the Lord, despise him, and his ways. And they'll despise you too.

The truth you believe, the truth you believe, and the truth you speak, will sound to them, like hate, because they despise, your father in heaven.

As chapter 8, elaborates, the fear of the Lord, is hatred of evil. Pride, and arrogance, and the way of evil, are perverted speech, that I hate. You see, fear of the Lord, entails, hatred of evil.

[19 : 13] We see that again, and again in Proverbs. Fear of the Lord, means turning away from evil. And the second half, of that verse, dissects for us, the root of the evil, we are to hate, if we fear the Lord.

Let me read it again. The fear of the Lord, is hatred of evil. Pride, and arrogance, and the way of evil, and perverted speech, I hate. See, first comes, pride, and arrogance.

These attitudes, are the fount, of evil, because, pride, and arrogance, and essence, are a refusal, to bow to rightful authority.

The proud, and the arrogant, knows better, than the creator, of the universe, and goes his own way. The proud, and the arrogant, feel they can stand, in God's place, and determine, when human life begins, or more accurately, when human life, matters enough, to be afforded, fundamental protections.

The proud, and the arrogant, do that. It leads to evil. And such arrogance, destroys, relationship, with the Lord.

[20 : 27] It perverts, order, and leads, to evil behavior, and societal, and societal disintegration. And inevitably, perverted speech, flows, and follows that.

And one, who fears the Lord, is to hate it. We are not, to stand for it. Fear of the Lord, entails, a hatred of evil.

We can't avoid that. You keep bumping into it, again and again, in Proverbs. That is what it is, to fear God. It is to hate evil.

Looking on to chapter 15, we see another aspect, of what it is, to fear the Lord. Perhaps turn with me, to chapter 15, and verse 33, the very last verse.

The fear of the Lord, is, instruction, and wisdom. And humility, comes, before honor. To fear the Lord, is to humble yourself, so that you are able, to receive instruction.

[21 : 40] A proud heart, can't receive God's word, because a proud heart, sees no need for it. A proud heart, knows better, understands more, perceives more accurately, than the Lord does.

To fear the Lord, entails humility, and a recognition, that instruction, needs to be gladly received. And one last verse, in chapter 23, let not your heart, envy sinners, but continue, in the fear of the Lord, all the day.

The fear of the Lord, is to be, what consumes, our thoughts, and our energies, not, envy of sinners.

Do not look, at the lawn, of those who hate God, and think that it's greener. Do not long, for what sinners have, rather long, for what God provides.

Continuing the fear, of the Lord, all the day. So the fear of the Lord, it's a mark, of our response, to who God is.

[22 : 53] It's a response, of humility, and love, and trust, for him. A willingness, to submit ourselves, to the ways of God, to shun the ways of evil. To say no, to going evil's way, and following the Lord alone.

It is a God-centered view, of life, that includes, a real reverence, for God, because of who he is. And without such fear, we can't gain wisdom.

Chapter one, says the fear of the Lord, is the beginning, of wisdom. Without it, we cannot possibly begin, to attain it. And what all this means, in practical terms, is that the wise person, the one who fears the Lord, will submit themselves, in every aspect, of their lives, to him.

And, we need to remember, that, it is relational. The Christian, loves God, and fears him.

It is profoundly relational. Fear of the God, fear of the Lord, is to be seen, in this relational sense. To fear God, is not to, it's not at odds, with our love of him.

[24 : 15] They are, complementary. They're not at odds. Love and fear, go together. And that's what you see, for example, in Deuteronomy, it's fear of the Lord, and love of God, being synonymous.

In other words, they are absolutely aligned, with one another, not opposites. So, in Deuteronomy 5 and 6, Moses unpacks, first, fear of the Lord, and then, a few verses later, the love of God.

He says, Oh, that they have such a mind, as this always, to fear me, and to keep my commandments, that it may go well, with them, and their descendants, forever. And then, a couple of verses later, Moses says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love, the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. Love and fear, properly understood, are not antithetical, they are complementary.

There is no true love of God, without proper fear of God. In the same way that, mercy and justice, meet in the cross, so love and fear, meet in the life, of a healthy Christian.

[25 : 24] The fear of the Lord, biblically understood, is not a sort of, rabbit in the headlights, frozen, scared, stiff sort of fear. It's not that sort of fear.

Rather, it's a fear, marked by reverence, and awe, by obedience, and action, activity, a desire to please, our Heavenly Father. So we love Him, by fearing Him.

Fear of the Lord, is that affectionate reverence, which we, as children of God, we bend ourselves humbly, and carefully to His word. So on the one hand, there is awe, and reverence.

But on the other, there's real, intimate fellowship. And it's both. It's never one without the other. But it's not such intimacy, that we become familiar, and casual.

No, there's intimacy, but there's fear, alongside it. And so we come to Him, humbly, and reverently. It's only with that posture, that we can receive, all the abundant wisdom, and Proverbs.

[26 : 40] It's only with that posture, that we can come to Him, in repentance, and faith, and receive, the ultimate gifts, of forgiveness, and eternal life, and a restored relationship. The proud, can't receive, such gifts.

Nor do they want to. We must, fear the Lord. That is fundamental, to receiving wisdom. But how do we do it?

How do we fear the Lord? Well, it's really just teasing out, the implications, of what we've just said. What does it look like, to show affectionate reverence, for the Lord?

What does it look like, to humble ourselves, before Him, and seek His word? What does it look like, to turn away from evil, and turn to Him alone? We'll flick back, to chapter 2, and in the last few moments, we'll focus on these words.

Chapter 2, verses 1 to 6. My son, if you receive my words, and treasure up, my commandments with you, making your ear, attentive to wisdom, and inclining your heart, understanding, yes, if you call out, for insight, and raise your voice, for understanding, if you seek it like silver, and search for it, as for hidden treasures, then, you will understand, fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God, for the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth, come understanding, and knowledge.

[28 : 09] Notice verse 5, then, you will understand, the fear of the Lord. If you want to learn, to fear the Lord, then notice, all that comes, before the then, at the start of verse 5.

And there are three ifs, in the preceding verses. If, if, if, then, if, verse 1, if, verse 3, and again, if, and verse 4, then, you will understand, the fear of the Lord.

So if you can grasp, and implement, what's contained, in those three if statements, then you'll know, what it is to fear the Lord. So the first if, verse 1, receive my words, treasure up, my commandments, make your ear, attend to the wisdom, incline your heart, to understanding.

It's God's word, isn't it? receiving, with eager ears, treasuring, His words. That's the first fundamental thing.

A love of His words. Second if, call out, for insight, raise your voice, for understanding. We are to ask, God, to make us wise.

[29 : 36] Ask Him, to give you insight, and understanding. Ask the Lord, to make you wise. Third if, seek it, like silver, search for it, earnestly desire it, make it a priority.

And the best way, to work out, if fear of the Lord, is a priority in your life, is to look at your calendar. What fills your week? What place, does worship of the Lord have? Does life, does life, fit around church, or, does church, get squeezed into, whatever's left over?

See, what we see in those verses, one to five, is an earnest seeking, a searching after wisdom, on our part. We are to do everything we can, to attain it.

But at the same time, in verse six, we're told, that it's the Lord, He gives it. It's a gift, He gives it to us. There's no contradiction there.

Eager searching, and God's revelation of wisdom, are inseparable. We'd never discover anything, unless God revealed it. But the fact that God does, give it, does not mean that we must not, carefully search, and diligently put our effort in.

[30 : 56] We don't sit back, and just hope that it emerges, out of the ether. We don't just switch, our brains off. No. We are to diligently, search for it.

We're to fear the Lord. We are to humbly, submit ourselves to Him, remembering who He is, and who we are. He's the Creator, we are mere creatures. We're to seek it. Perhaps to flip the question, might sharpen us up for it.

How, not to grow, in the fear of the laws? If we didn't want to grow, in the fear of the Lord, what would we do? Here are some steps, you could take, if you do not want to grow, in the fear of the Lord.

Do not, demonstrate eagerness, to receive God's words. Limit your exposure, as much as possible, to the teaching of His word, in the gathered church, to say, once a week, max.

Do not attend, the second service. Don't go to growth group, don't go to the prayer meeting, don't meet other Christians, at any other point. There are more important things, to attend to. Do not make your ear, attentive to wisdom, nor incline your heart, to understanding.

[32 : 10] Ensure that everything, you listen to in the church, is filtered through cynical ears, and reject anything, that challenges, your prior assumptions, about what you believe, and how you behave. Ignore it.

Write it off. I don't like it. Do not call out for insight. Ignore James' teaching, the New Testament, to seek wisdom. Do not ask God, to make you wise.

Do not expend, any energy whatsoever, to seek out, the treasure of God's word. Do not use your brain, when you read the Bible. Expect it to come easily. That's how not to grow, in wisdom.

That's how not to fear the Lord. You see, the Bible will not yield, its treasure, to chance inquiry. Wisdom must be sought. And the Lord, delights to give.

Of course. He loves to give. And for those who ask, for wisdom, he will delight to give it. Because to ask, in the first place, you must be fearing the Lord.

[33 : 14] If you fear the Lord, you will ask. Because you realize who he is, and who you are. So we're to humble ourselves, creatures before the creator, in love, and fear, and to seek his wisdom.

The fear of the Lord, is the beginning of wisdom. We cannot benefit, in any other way. So humble yourselves, fear the Lord.

Let me pray, and then we'll close our time together. Father, you know, the pride, that lurks, in each of our hearts.

And so we ask, you would help us. Help us to humble ourselves, before you. Help us to remember, who you are. Help us to remember, who we are.

And so would we, humbly, and reverently, bow before you, and learn to fear you, and to seek your wisdom.

[34 : 35] And so we ask, please, in your grace, make us a wise people, for your sake, and for your glory. Amen.