

BE AFRAID — TO THE GLORY OF GOD
PROVERBS 1:7

When we are afraid, we are tempted to do things we would otherwise consider irrational. Consider these three folks who have a fear of bugs and spiders:

- ✓ A man was filling up his car at a [gas station](#) when he noticed a spider by the car's gas cap and decided the best way to get rid of it would be to burn it with his cigarette lighter. Yup. The flame caught the vapors coming from the car and then spread up the nozzle he was holding in his hand. After that foolish act, he did have sense to grab a fire extinguisher and put out the fire while the gas station attendant turned off the gas, preventing an even bigger problem.
- ✓ Then there was [Scott Kemery](#), who rented a car in Long Island, NY a few years ago and discovered it had bed bugs in it. He had been told that pouring rubbing alcohol on them would kill them. So that's what he did. And then he got in the car and lit a cigarette. Yup. He set his car, himself, and two other cars on fire, and was treated for second degree burns.
- ✓ Topping even that was the [Seattle man](#) five years ago who spotted an 8-legged spider in his laundry room and attacked it with spray paint and a lighter. Yes. The expected happened. He ignited his house, causing \$40,000 in damage to the structure plus the cost of \$20,000 to replace and repair the damaged contents of the house. Moral? *Don't use fire to kill bugs.* As one news commentator sarcastically noted about this event, "Nobody can confirm if the spider survived or not. So basically, this spider could have gotten out alive and then watched the house burn from the safety of a nearby tree...laughing maniacally."

Fear makes us do irrational and unwise things. While fear might keep us from dangers like stepping off or even getting on ledges on tall buildings, too often, fear does not work to our benefit. We see that today, don't we? The pandemic of Covid-19 might also be called "the pandemic of fear." Never have so many fears been exposed, along with a variety of irrational and ungodly behaviors. So the biblical admonition, "Do not fear," which is given some 160x in Scripture should be heeded.

But there is a good and godly kind of fear. *There is a time to be fearful.* There is a good kind of fear to cultivate. We should be fearful of God. Listen to **Proverbs 1:7**. Let's summarize that verse this way:

ALL MEN ARE TEMPTED TO FEAR. THE WISE MAN PURSUES FEAR OF YAHWEH.

Solomon reminds us of two principles about fear in this verse:

1. The Kind of Fear that **PLEASES** God (v. 7a)
2. The Kind of Fear that **DISHONORS** God (v. 7b)
3. Some Ways to Cultivate a Fear of God

1. There is a Kind of Fear that PLEASES God (v. 7a)

• Who should fear God? The subject of fearing God

- ✓ Proverbs is a father talking to his son (v. 8) about wise living; while he is not talking to us directly, the application is clear — this is the kind of wisdom that every father should give every son.
- ✓ While verse 7 is not an imperative (it's a declarative statement), it implies an imperative — if the beginning of knowledge is found in fearing God, then the son (and we) should fear God.
- ✓ Further, every person falls into one of the two categories in this verse: we are either those who fear God, or we are those who do not fear God. Another way to say that is that we either orient our lives around God (we are theocentric), or we ignore God (and are anthropocentric).
- ✓ When we say that, we are affirming that the fear of God “is a worldview: it is the grid through which we perceive, arrange, understand, interpret, and interact with the world. And what is a worldview without a viewer?” [Phillips, *God's Wisdom in Proverbs*.]
- ✓ In other words, we are all interpreting the world in some way, and Solomon is advocating that we should view the world the way God views it.
- ✓ Paul uses this argument when he calls all men to repent (Acts 17:30-31).
- ✓ So who should fear God? Solomon should. His son should. Everyone should. *You* and *I* should.

• Who/what should be feared? The object of our fear.

- ✓ Solomon says there is a right kind of fear — there is a kind of fear that pleases God, and it is the fear that has Him as our object. *We aren't fearful in general*; we are particularly focused in our fear.
- ✓ And the One who should receive our **fear** is **the Lord** — that phrase is translated that way in virtually every English translation. One exception is the old American Standard Version, which says, “the fear of Jehovah.” I only own one translation that has the best sense — **the fear of Yahweh**.
- ✓ Is it important to make this distinction? Yes. It is.
 - The name used here is YHWH; there is a different word for “Lord” (Adonai), and it isn't used here.
 - The difference between the two is important — one is a title (**Lord**), and one is a name (**YHWH**). When we are instructed to fear Yahweh, we are instructed to fear a Person, not a position. He is not a force or principle or impersonal spirit. He is an infinite Person with the name YHWH.
 - This name is used more than 6800x in the OT. It is rooted in the Hebrew verb, “to be,” and has the sense of One who is eternally and faithfully existent. It's the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses in Ex. 3:14 — “I am who I am.” It is the name He used in “signing” all the contracts (covenants) He made with Israel. He is the “one who is present faithfully.” [Phillips]
 - This is a reminder that we are commanded to fear One with whom we have relationship. There is interaction with Him and fellowship with Him, and that relationship should involve fear.

- There is a massive distinction between saying something like, “I want you to get to know women,” and “I would like you to know my wife, Raye Jeanne.” Her name makes it specific and not general. It is particular. So it is with God — He would have us to know Him not in general terms and not just by His titles and nature, but by His name. Ironically, the Israelites refused to call Him by that name for fear of using it blasphemously, but over 6800x He uses that name with them — it is an invitation to use the name and know Him by the revelation of that name.
- ✓ If you are going to be fearful (full of fear) today, know that it’s appropriate to fear. But it’s only appropriate to fear if you and I fear the right object — and the only One we should fear is Yahweh.
- ✓ That leads to the next question...

• What is it to fear Yahweh? The meaning of fearing Yahweh

- ✓ The book of Proverbs is about fearing God. It is the beginning of the book (1:7) and the end of the book (31:30) and is mentioned directly 16 more times in the book (1:29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:2, 26-27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; this accounts for roughly half he uses of the phrase in the OT, so this particularly dominates Proverbs). So as you read the book, understand that all the miscellaneous topics in chs. 10-31 are about the wisdom of fearing Yahweh.
- ✓ But what does it mean to fear God? There are two main kinds of fear of Yahweh:
 - *An emotional response of shaking, dread, and terror of God.*
 - ... Cf. Gen. 3:10; Dt. 17:13; Lk. 12:4-5 (a NT concept as well).
 - ... This kind of dread also keeps a believer from sin (Gen. 2:16-17; Ps. 119:120; 1 Pt. 1:17)
 - ... Is it appropriate to fear God in this way? Yes. “...it is the essence of impiety not to be afraid of God when there is reason to be afraid of God.” [John Murray]
 - *A response of humble awe and worship that is subservient to and dependent on Yahweh.*
 - ... There is *reverent awe* of God (and awareness of sin): Isaiah 6:1-5; Lk. 5:4-11 (esp. v. 8)
 - ... There is *desire* for God. Cf. Ex. 3:1-6. (In spite of his sinfulness, Moses didn’t run, v. 3.)
 - ... There is *submission* to and *obedience* of God: Prov. 3:7; 8:13; 16:6; Dt. 17:18-19; Ps. 112:1.
 - ... From Prov. 22:4 — “There is a God. You ain’t Him.” [Phillips]
 - ... There is a sense that there is “something wrong” that a sinful man can be close to God, and yet there is an attraction and desire for that fellowship and closeness to God.
 - Combine these two ideas and you have a dreadful, terrified fear that drives you *away* from God, or you have an awe-ful, humble worship that draws you *to* God (the object of our awe).
 - As someone has noted, the one thing that fear of God does not allow is indifference to God — “anyone who can think of God and shrug is not thinking of the God of Scripture.” [Phillips]
- ✓ So let’s summarize what it means to fear Yahweh for the believer: *to fear Yahweh is to worship Him by delighting in Him and obeying Him.* We want His fellowship and we want to serve Him. It is personal. It is worshipful. It is humble. And it is servant-hearted.

- ✓ Fear of other things is similar — because we worship and serve other desires (health/life, money, relationships), when we don't get (or anticipate we won't get) them, we respond in terror by doing irrational things (like buying TP...) in order to create the illusion we can get what we want.
- ✓ *The correction to our ungodly fears is to cultivate godly fear.* Listen to Albert Martin [*The Forgotten Fear*]: Do you know why you are fearful of circumstances and indifferent to God? "It is because you do not live life with the fear of God before your eyes. You look at life as nothing more than one extended opportunity to pursue what will please you. What your lusts dictate, you do. What your desires and appetites crave, you pursue. The fear of God — that controlling sense of His majesty and holiness and the profound reverence that it draws forth — is nothing to you. No part of it dwells in you. If that is the case with you, my friend, may God by His Spirit teach you the fear of the Lord before it is too late."
- ✓ To get rid of our fears, we need to fill our minds with Yahweh — with the person of God and the relationship we have with Him and cultivate a desire for Him that is greater than anything else. We are fearful of our circumstantial problems because we have not cultivated fear of YHWH.
- ✓ The tragedy of unrighteous fears is that we fear the loss of lesser things and do not fear the loss or absence of the greatest thing — fellowship with God and delight in Him.

• What happens when we fear Yahweh? The result of fearing Yahweh

- ✓ *We start to get wisdom.* Solomon says that the fear of YHWH is ***the beginning of knowledge***. Fearing YHWH is the starting point for wisdom. All wisdom flows from fearing YHWH. Fearing YHWH is the controlling point and foundation of life. There is no wisdom for living in anything else.
 - The word ***knowledge*** is being used in parallel to ***wisdom*** (line B). It is understanding, insight, and discernment. Knowledge and wisdom about how to live starts with YHWH. Life makes no sense without God at the center of it. Life is about our relationship with God and Christ (Col. 3:1ff).
 - When we fear other things, we are saying, _____ is the beginning of knowledge (life, health, avoidance of troubles, \$\$\$, haircuts on demand).
- ✓ *We get a future (with God)/we are not cut off from Yahweh.* That God uses His personal name with us suggests this reality. The joy of fearing Yahweh is we get Yahweh. Proverbs 23:17-18 states this explicitly. When we fear YHWH we get Him and we do not get His wrath (cf. Rev. 1:17-18).
- ✓ *Other fears will dissipate.* We will know how to live life and small fears will not control us (29:25). J. Oswald Sanders was right when he said, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."
- ✓ So the question is: what fears do you have today (because of, or apart from Covid-19)? Do those fears demonstrate that you are fearing God or that you are not fearing Him?
- ✓ Friend, if you do not fear God, I exhort you to begin fearing Him today by repenting of your sin and trusting Him for your salvation and for all your life by pursuing Him (cf. Ps. 130:3-4).

2. There is a Kind of Fear that DISHONORS God (v. 7b)

• Who doesn't fear Yahweh? The kind of people who don't fear

- ✓ The **fool** is the one who doesn't fear YHWH. Proverbs uses three words for fool. This particular word points to one who is "thick-headed" — he has a closed (dense) mind — and that denseness is combined with stubbornness and arrogance. He is pridefully hardened in his choices.
 - All three words for fool refer to one who is morally deficient. He is sinful, corrupt, rebellious.
 - He not only has not chosen wisely, but he is insolent, disrespectful, and brazen. He flaunts sin.
 - See **27:22** — "You can beat him like a bongo drum and grind him like pepper, but he will stay just as morally and spiritually dense, barring a miracle (...cf. 20:12)." [Phillips]
- ✓ The fool is the one who doesn't fear God, who ignores God and acts as if God is irrelevant, uncaring (of his sin), or incompetent (cf. **14:9**; 15:7; 10:8; 28:26; **Ps. 53:1**; 36:1-4).
- ✓ People who don't fear God and people who do fear anything (and everything) else are those who want their sin and do not want to repent. They want what *they* want, and they do *not* want God.
- ✓ When you see a fearful person (and isn't it a grace from God that one thing He is doing is revealing all kinds of fears that have been previously hidden), know that you are seeing a rebellious person. He has set his desirous heart on many idols in an attempt to replace God. Now those idols are being taken away (or might be taken away) and he is angry and he is afraid that he really might have to stand before YHWH and give an account to Him (and his conscience is telling him he won't make it).

• What do people who don't fear Yahweh do? The attitude of non-fearers

- ✓ Proverbs tell us many things that a non-fearer does: he goes to the adulteress (7:22); babbles with his words and lies (10:8, 10), spreads slander (10:18); is angry (12:16); runs to evil (13:19); rejects discipline (15:5; 26:3); has perverse speech (18:2; 19:1); repeats his folly (**26:11**).
- ✓ This verse focuses on one dominant attitude that the fool cultivates: he **despises** God and wisdom.
- ✓ To **despise** wisdom is to be contemptuous against it, to ridicule Yahweh's wisdom. He has no place for God's wisdom in his life (interestingly, Prov. uses this word more than the rest of OT combined).
- ✓ The fool is uninterested in God and will do all he can to remove God from his life.
- ✓ This does not mean he is unintelligent, but it does mean he doesn't understand life. He might understand how to build and sail a ship, but he does not understand the one who made the wind, the waves, tides, and currents that enable him to sail (**Ps. 107:23-27ff**).
- ✓ What do people do who don't fear God? They despise God and all that God commands and they will do anything to rebel against Him — *and then will be fearful when their rebellious plans fail them.*

• **What happens when people don't fear Yahweh? The results of ungodly fear**

- ✓ This particular verse doesn't tell us what happens as a result of ungodly fear, but other Scriptures do.
- ✓ In brief, he will reap what he sows. He will suffer the consequences of rebelling against God. He will not get the idol he desires, he will not get God, and he will suffer for his rebellion.
- ✓ He will run up a bill against God that he is unable to pay (13:13; 1:24-29ff).
- ✓ There *may* be debt to pay on earth; there *will* be an eternal debt to pay after this life is over — and that debt is unpayable. The result of ungodly fear and rebellion against fearing God is eternal judgment and wrath.
- ✓ There is hope — there is always hope — for repentance. Cf. 1:22-23. If one repents, God will restore and give life and remove debt. He is in the business of opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf (20:12). If you are not fearing God today, I urge you to repent and believe...

3. Some Ways to Cultivate a Godly Fear of God

- **Spend time in and saturate your mind with Scripture.** Fear of God is *learned* — knowledge of Yahweh and Christ is acquired and learned from His revelation (Dt. 4:10-12; Ps. 119:38). You won't learn of Him without this book. "Fear of God is produced by the Word of God." [Phillips] Today, one fitting application is to make sure we are reading Scripture more than we are reading/watching the news.
- **Repent of every known sin as quickly as you can** — the non-fearer delights in sin and runs to it; the fearer hates sin and turns away from it. And when we repent, He forgives (Ps. 130:3-4).
- **Delight in the freedom of obedience.** Sin is not freedom; it is enslavement (Rom. 6:20). The God-fearer is the one who delights to obey what the beloved YHWH and Christ tell him to do (Jn. 14:15, 24). To love Christ and fear YHWH are synonymous terms — to love Him is to obey Him. That may be momentarily hard, but it always produces the fruit of satisfaction and joy.

CONCLUSION: Of what are you fearful today? Spiders? Loss of job? Loss of bank account? Loss of health or even life? Loss of position and status? Loss of relationships? Loss of normalcy?

All our fears are revealing what we love and what we live for. There is only one thing worth pursuing — God revealed in His personal name YHWH and His Son Jesus Christ. *Fear Him, and all your other fears will fade away.* The message of this day is not just "do not fear" (Jn. 14:1), but learn to fear God — to be afraid, to the glory of God.

BENEDICTION: Anglican Benediction

Remember Zoom Room 1, and someone will be at GBC from 1-2 p.m. today if you want to drop off checks.