



[Romans 3:18](#)

(18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
New International Version

Why are people lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of [God \(II Timothy 3:4\)](#)? Why are people so indifferent to the state of their spiritual well-being? Why has the Bible been relegated to little more than a coffee table display? Why are people so defiant toward heaven and so little concerned about sin? [Romans 3:18](#), following a long list of sins prominent among men, says in summation, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Do today's churches of [this world](#) teach the fear of God, or has their teaching turned Him into a divine, snugly teddy bear, a benign but doddering grandfather, or maybe an absentee landlord busy doing other things? God's Word says, "The fear of the LOORD is the beginning of knowledge" ([Proverbs 1:7](#)), adding later, "The fear of the LOORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" ([Proverbs 9:10](#)). These two verses, even without any other confirmation, reveal that the fear of God is very important, yet so frequently the ministry of this world tries to blunt the force of the word "fear." Nevertheless, it means in Hebrew exactly what it means in English, encompassing everything from a faint but grudging respect to outright terror.

However, neither outright terror nor faint respect produces a good relationship. Neither will win another's heart. God wants more from us, more than a mere healthy respect. He wants us to have a deep, abiding, and reverential awe for Him. Being all-powerful, holy, just, good, kind, careful, encouraging, inspiring, merciful, patient, loving, forgiving, and wise, He is far more than One we should simply respect.

Americans, especially, have been taught to be familiar and casual in our attitudes toward others, and this carries over into our attitude toward and relationship with God. It is a form of the "I'm just as good as you, and you will just have to accept me just as I am" approach. A disrespectful and sometimes even defiant attitude is born. But what is the Bible's counsel? Paul tells us that even among ourselves, "Let nothing be done

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through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" ([Philippians 2:3](#)). What about familiarity with God? Peter tells us to honor all people, love the brotherhood, and honor the king—but we are to fear God ([1 Peter 2:17](#)). Do we hear much teaching that will incline us to revere God's majesty?

Do we unconsciously think that the fear of God is something only the unconverted need? Since [Proverbs 9:10](#) says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," and since wisdom in its simplest form is skill or right application, who needs wisdom more than God's children? Reverential awe is wisdom's foundation, because it moves us to obedience, and God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him. Paul writes in [Philippians 2:12](#), "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

We need this quality more than anybody does because our eternal life is on the line. It used to be that someone known to believe in God was referred to as "God-fearing." This was obvious to others because they knew the person obeyed God and was very concerned about what God said. It marked his relationship with God and set him apart from others. Fearing not only makes a great witness before others, it also pays great dividends, as [Psalm 103:13](#) shows: "As a father pities His children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him." We all want God to be compassionate toward us.

In [1 Peter 2:21](#), the apostle instructs us to follow Christ's steps, suggesting that He is the model after whom we must pattern our lives. Did He fear God? "[Jesus], in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear" ([Hebrews 5:7](#)). Notice especially the link connecting His being saved from death and being heard because He feared. Christ acknowledged God's sovereignty through a deeply held reverential awe, showing that answered prayer, eternal life, and the fear of God are intertwined.

This is true because the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is right application, and right application is obedience. Jesus obeyed God perfectly. His fear was not an occasional burst of deep respect—as ours so often is—but sustained and built throughout His entire life. It had to be this way because His trials intensified as He aged, and His need of godly fear became ever more urgent.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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