

Elements Of Motivation (Part One)

The Fear of God

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I found something in a publication called *Melchizedek Vigilance* that I want to pass on to you. It does not have a great deal to do with the sermon that I am going to give today; it has more to do with the series I gave on the covenants that was just concluded a couple of weeks ago.

Psalm 145:17: God is **holy**.

Romans 7:12: The law is **holy**.

I John 4:8: God is **love**.

Romans 13:10: The law is **love**.

Matthew 5:48: God is **perfect**.

Psalm 19:7: The law is **perfect**.

John 4:24: God is **spiritual**.

Romans 7:14: The law is **spiritual**.

Psalm 145:17: God is **righteous**.

Psalm 119:172: The law is **righteous**.

Deuteronomy 32:4: God is **truth**.

Psalm 119:142: The law is **truth**.

Psalm 25:8: God is **good**.

Romans 7:12: The law is **good**.

Genesis 21:33: God is **everlasting**.

Psalm 111:7-8: The law is **everlasting**.

Deuteronomy 32:4: God is **just**.

Romans 7:12: The law is **just**.

I John 1:5: God is **light**.
Proverbs 8:23: The law is **light**.

Anyone who attacks God's laws is attacking God's person and His character, since His law *is* His character. Everywhere God goes, His character, His law, goes and God's Spirit permeates the entire creation. When we are renewed by His Spirit, it is in **His** character, **His** law which is written in our hearts.

That was from *Melchizedek Vigilance*.

I just finished a long series ["The Covenants, Grace, and Law"] showing that the Bible clearly teaches that we are to observe, we are to do, we are obligated to obey the law of God. Let us not be deceived in living as though having this knowledge is going to save us, because correct doctrine is of value only as it is used. It is always good for those of us in the church of God to remember Jesus' admonishment—to whom much is given, *much* is required. Somehow we have to find the motivation needed to drive ourselves on to live by faith, or all the true knowledge is going to dissipate away and will be of no value.

I think that we have all heard the cliché that there is nothing certain in life except death and taxes. I am sure that the person who came up with that intended to inspire a cynical smile in those who reflected upon the truth of that proverb, because it succinctly grasps an element of life that everybody has wearily experienced.

When a person is called and becomes converted, he begins to learn that there are certainties to this way that everybody experiences. Every one of us has certain things in common that bind us into a family, a group, a team, a church, and it is commonality—the sharing of interests—that make families.

For instance, one that we should be able to recognize is that we all share a common blood. Paul used this in Acts 17 when he was talking to those people on Mars Hill, and He said that we all descended from Adam and Eve. The human family shares that common blood. In God's Family we all have to repent. We all have to have faith in Jesus Christ. We all have to share the

same Spirit, and if we do not, it is certain that we are not part of the same family.

Even though an unconverted person may seem to be a nice person, they might be a very fine neighbor, somebody that you enjoy, let us say, living near or doing business with. That person's spirit, though, is at war with God, because the carnal mind is enmity against God, and sooner or later that spirit—that carnality—is going to break out against God and all who share the same spirit as God, because we have a commonality with God. Did not Jesus say that "If the world has persecuted Me it will persecute you"? In another place He said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you." We might say, when the *world* speaks well of you.

For a long time, I have been looking for common elements in people that I have observed, combined with what I have seen in God's Word, that will produce success in God's way. Or, it might be better said, will produce growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Mr. Armstrong had his booklet *The Seven Laws of Success*, and each one of those laws is basic for success not only within the church, but in almost any endeavor. I feel that there is a need for us to carry those laws one step further, because simply being able to recite the laws will not produce success. In any endeavor, it is only those who are motivated to *use* the laws who are going to find success, or are going to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I am going to begin today a series that is going to deal with the elements that I feel are necessary for motivation. I am not claiming that this list is complete, and I also want to make it clear that the direct purpose is to focus on growth in the relationship that we have with God. Not on salvation, because salvation is by grace through faith. But growth does produce fruit and it will produce it right within the here and now, and it will produce reward in the Kingdom of God. It is through the fruit produced that we get to enjoy, take comfort, and to be encouraged by God's Word and in God's calling.

This sermon is also going to assume that we will be praying, studying God's Word, meditating on it, and especially meditating on its application. This

sermon also assumes that one has faith, for faith is not in this list, but you have got to understand that faith undergirds every single one of them. When Paul said in Hebrews 11 that "faith is the substance of things hoped for"—substance means foundation, it means that which "stands under"—and faith stands under every one of these motivators that I am going to give you.

This series of sermons is going to be dealing with elements that are more abstract that I feel are absolutely essential if growth is going to take place. There is nothing radical in any one of these elements, and if you are converted, at the very least the basics of each and every one of them are already at work within you. It is also possible that each and every one of them, or some of them, are going to need to be strengthened. None of these elements stands alone. They overlap with one another and are even interlocked with one another. In many cases they are dependent upon one another.

With that very long specific purpose statement, the first one that I am going to give you is, in a way, most obvious. We must **fear God**. Remember, these are elements of motivation. We must *fear* God. I am going to go through, without a great deal of expounding, some scriptures that we are all familiar with. Let us look at them, beginning in Proverbs 1.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The fear of the Lord is the *beginning*. What is accumulated, or what is the fruit of the fear of the Lord you are going to be successful in producing it—the right kind of knowledge.

In Proverbs 9:10 with slightly different wording:

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

The knowledge, we might say, is the bare facts. Wisdom is the right application of those facts. But again, fear plays a part in motivating the production of them. The implication is, without the fear of the Lord, we are not going to produce the right kind of wisdom.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility.

Let us go back in the Bible just a little bit to the book of Job.

Job 28:20-28 "From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'We have heard a report about it with our ears.' God understands its way and He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heavens, to establish a weight for the wind, and apportion the waters by measure. When He made a law for the rain, and a path for the thunderbolt, then did He saw wisdom and declared it; He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out. And to man He said, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

Did you notice the change in wording? Not only is it the beginning of wisdom—it *is* wisdom!

Now, we will see a little bit more of this in the sermon. I wanted to put that in because of the way that God flipped the fear of God from being the beginning of wisdom to the fact that it was wisdom, or is wisdom all by itself. It is wise to do this. It is wise to fear God.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God swill bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

After Solomon wrote his experiences and his meditations on life, he went up to the conclusion of the whole matter. His summation of everything that he wrote: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man.

I left out the word *duty*. This is the *whole* of man. It certainly is a duty to fear God. Here is the reason why—why fearing God and keeping His commandments is so important to us: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." We are going to be judged. You want to be wise, and the beginning of wisdom is to **fear God**.

This biblical fear runs the gamut all the way from mild respect on through a deep, abiding, and reverential awe, to *sheer terror* that causes one's skin to crawl, the hair to stand on end, maybe the lips to part in a scream, the bowels to move, or for a person to pass out and collapse on the ground.

Fear, as these verses and as our own experience in life shows, is a very effective motivator. Which of us has not seen or heard or experienced something so fearful that the "flight or fight" syndrome began to kick in, and we took immediate steps, either to get out of the way of whatever was terrifying us and that we were afraid of, or filled up with such resolve that we took steps to fight, to face whatever this thing was. But fear is a two-edged sword, and although it undoubtedly motivates, it will either motivate us to be paralyzed in doing nothing but figuratively rolling up into a fetal position, or resolutely facing what is producing the fear and taking whatever action is necessary to overcome it.

In relation to God, one of our most subtle and deceitful problems is that we cannot literally see Him. And because of this, this problem of fearing Him is not always of immediate concern. It is not like a lion springs out of the jungle and confronts us on a path. I tell you, that would move us immediately because we can see it. But God we cannot see. Carnally, we are oriented to what we can see—the physical things. Brethren, the result though, can be just as deadly. The only difference is that the end comes much more slowly.

But if we do not fear God, the relationship with Him is going to die nonetheless. It may die slowly, but it is going to die. The reason is because

our fear of God is not motivating us in the right direction. We are being motivated to procrastinate. There has to be enough of an edge to our fear. Do you understand what I am talking about? There has to be enough of an edge to our fear that we are motivated to act in the right way. You can tie this to the last sermon that I gave ["John 3:16: Does God Really Love the World?"], and that is, without the fear of God there will be little or no reciprocation of His love.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

It is possible that in order to get the effect of that verse, one has to view it in its larger context within the book itself. The book of Romans is the most complete listing and explanation of the foundational doctrines of the church of God in the whole Bible, and Paul goes through them, one right after another. He finally concludes with three chapters—9, 10, and 11 of Romans—that have to do with Israel and its place in the scheme of God's purpose. Now it is after he gives this summation that he says, "What are we going to do with it?" And his charge to you and me is to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Overcoming and growth in the making use of the doctrines of the church of God—the very first thing Paul says is, you have got to be willing to be motivated to sacrifice yourself. *Sacrifice your life!* Brethren, the sacrifice is not cheap. It is costly. And you know it is costly. It is costly because you know that you are going to have to give up things that are very close to you if you are going to make use of the teachings of the church of God. And the fear of paying that cost stops many of us right in our tracks.

How many of you were confronted as you began to be converted with the keeping of the Sabbath day, and in order for you to keep the Sabbath you were going to have to sacrifice that portion of your life that maybe you have given yourself over to for twenty or thirty years? You might have to give up twenty or thirty years' seniority in a company—give up your pension, or

whatever, in order to keep God's Sabbath. That is quite a sacrifice. That is just an illustration.

If you are going to grow in this way, sacrifice is very deeply involved within it, and our problem is, brethren, we fear the wrong thing. God we cannot see—the job we can. God we cannot see, but the deprivation that may come into our life—I mean the economic deprivation that may come from losing our job because we keep a commandment of God—we can see that very clearly.

I hope we do not get stuck on the Sabbath day, because the same principle applies to anything God requires of us in keeping the teachings of the church of God. In many cases, the thing that is against the law of God is very close to us and it requires sacrifice, and we fear giving up the thing more than we fear God. So what does it do to us? We put it off. We procrastinate till a more convenient time.

I am not trying to run anybody down. I am trying to help us see the principle involved here, of what it takes to be motivated to grow, and the fear of God is right mixed in in all of this. There may indeed be times when the fear of God that is needed is sheer terror, but over the course of life, what He wants to develop in us is an abiding, a continuing, a remaining reverential awe of Him.

Turn with me to Acts 24:10. We are going to kind of begin there. I will just give you a running account here. Paul is on trial before Felix. Felix was the procurator—the governor—of Judea at the time, and Paul was on trial because the Jews had brought a charge against Him; actually they had brought three charges against him:

1. That he had incited to riot;
2. That he was a member of a sect; and
3. That he profaned the temple.

The last of these three was the most important to the Jews, and it was the one that was least important to the Romans, that is, to the Roman Felix. Felix,

just by way of a little background, was a former slave, and he had this position as procurator of Judea for about six years. So at the time of this trial he was experienced in what he was doing, at least reasonably so.

In Acts 24:11-13, Paul answers the first charge, and basically his answer is, "Hey look, Felix. I've only been here twelve days. From the time I entered Jerusalem until now, it's only been twelve days. How can I be accused of inciting a riot? Twelve days is hardly time to start a riot against the Roman government!" And then, almost like an afterthought he says, "And hey, where are the Jews' witnesses? Oh." There were not any!

In Acts 24:14-16, he answers the second charge, and he denies that Christianity is a sect, but he admits that he is a part of it. He also basically says that he has not departed from the same path which his ancestors trod. The ancestors he is talking about were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That he has not departed from the law, that he has not departed from the hope of the resurrection. So, basically, what he says is, "Hey look, Felix. Christianity is the fullness of the Old Covenant, which was just a bud of what we now have."

In Acts 24:17-21, he answers the charge about profaning the Temple. And again, Paul basically said, "Now look, Felix. I came all the way from Greece to worship there (in Jerusalem). That was no small walk! I came all the way from Greece to worship there, and besides that, when I came, I brought alms for the people." You have read of that in I Corinthians 16, "that there be no gatherings when I come." He said that when he was worshipping there at the Temple, it was the Jews from Asia that incited people against *me*. Again he asked, "Where are my accusers?" Well, there were not any.

In Acts 24:22-23, there was only one righteous decision for Felix to make, and that was to set Paul free. But Felix, because of his fear, gave in to the same temptation that Pilate yielded to whenever Jesus was before him. Felix knew that the church was not the source of the trouble and that Paul was innocent, but he temporized, fearing that he would antagonize a much larger and more influential group of people—the Jews! So what did he do? He procrastinated! He put off his decision indefinitely, until, it says, that he could hear from Lysias. Lysias was a centurion who had Paul brought there! You see, the truth of the matter was Lysias could add nothing to what Paul

had already given. The Jews had no case, and the liberty that Felix gave Paul is proof that Felix knew his indecision was an injustice.

Acts 24:24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

The scene has shifted, and it is very interesting. Now Felix is on trial before God's representative, Paul!

Acts 24:25 And as he [Paul] reasoned of righteousness [keeping the commandments], self-control, and the judgment to come ["Hey Felix, you are going to have to stand and answer before God!" Look at those next words:] Felix was afraid and answered [here was a powerful governor of a Roman state, and he was shaking before Paul, as he reasoned about these things! And what did he do? He did the same thing!], "Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient time, I will call for you."

The scales were before Felix, and he was being weighed in them. Which way would the scale go? It all depended on the choice that Felix made. It was unpleasant. He (Felix) feared the wrong thing, and the scale tipped in the wrong direction.

I remember once reading in an article by a man who was a Protestant—about as Protestant as one can get—and yet even he recognized that there is an end to God's patience. Here is a quote of what this man wrote. He says,

Let me remind you, that however beautiful, however gracious, however tender and full of love and mercy and good tidings the message of God's love in Jesus Christ is, there is another side to it—a side which is meant to rouse men's conscience and to awaken men's fear.

Part of God's Word is intended to awaken in us a sense of failure, of insufficiency, of defect, and to create in us a certain dread that if we set ourselves against the great law of God, it is going to crush us. And that is intended by God to lead us to the love of God in Jesus Christ. And

deliverance through the relationship depends upon being excited by the painful dread of the power of the law. The wages of sin is death! God means what He says. We need to thank God for pain and the fear because they play their part in helping us to avoid tragic conclusions. Do not let yourself be deceived into procrastination and fearing the wrong thing, like Felix did. Even though he trembled before Paul, the fear of losing his office was too big, too great, too much to give up. The consequences were overwhelming to him.

I recently read of a characteristic of sheep that I was aware of, and I know that you are aware of, too, but what I read brought this more strongly to mind: sheep have a very strong inclination to follow what every other sheep in the flock is doing. We all know that it is a general fact, but what I read was a specific example of this fact, and that is, if a shepherd is leading a flock of sheep, either on or out in front of a confined area, and where they have to go through a gate, and a shepherd puts a bar across the gate maybe about a foot or so off the ground, so that the sheep have to jump over it. Well, if after the first few sheep going through the gate jump over the bar, and the shepherd pulls out the bar so that it is no longer there, all of the rest of the sheep will continue to jump every time they get to the gate.

I had a personal experience with this, when back in the '60s we had some sheep, and basically this is what happened: Sheep will worry a fence. If there is a little opening, they will make it into a big opening, because they want to get out. The grass is always greener on the other side! Well, they found a weakness in the fence. This happened to be on the Sabbath day. So the first few went through, and all the others followed right after, because they found the opening too great to resist. Well, this opening, unfortunately for me, was at the top of a bank. It was probably elevated at least ten or twelve feet above the flat area below, and on the flat area was a train track. Okay, the sheep got out, they got on the train track, and they started wandering away to find something to eat.

A while later, a neighbor called and said, "Mr. Ritenbaugh, your sheep are down here." So I went down and was able to get them through the place they had broken through the fence. In this case it was better for me to take them back through there than it was to go all the way around the neighborhood to go to the gate. At least that is the way I thought it through, anyway. The

problem was, how do I get those sheep to climb back up that bank and go through the tiny hole?

Well, the first one I literally had to wrestle, carry, drag—and she weighed probably near a hundred pounds by this time, and I had a handful of wool—on my hands and knees. On the Sabbath day you know how guilty you feel—straining your gut out on the Sabbath day and worrying at the same time that the train was going to come along and slaughter all my sheep! But I learned something. Once I got the first one up the bank and through the hole, the rest of them helped me get them up there. They just followed the other one through. You know, sheep are good climbers. So the rest of them I had no problem with. There is a moral to that story which I will be able to get to in a bit.

Now let us go back to the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 5:14-15 Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provision. But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people: but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

Nehemiah did not do what the other governors before him had done, because of the **fear of God**. His fear of God motivated Nehemiah to be a nonconformist. Nehemiah was not a sheep. I will explain further.

I would suppose most of us do not know a great deal about Nehemiah or the times that he lived in, and our thoughts of him would probably draw a picture of him as being austere, maybe even harsh. We might even call him a Pharisee. But there is no doubt, from what is presented of him, that he was serious about his responsibilities; that he was a brave man. I kid you not. He was circumspect, he loved God with all his heart, and God shows him here in a lofty, nobleness of character. Regardless of what we think of him, God thinks very highly of him. His life was so remarkable God included a big mess of it in His Word for our instruction.

When he was appointed the governor of the Jewish exiles to return to Palestine from Babylon, Nehemiah discovered that the governors before him were in a habit, as we would say today, "squeezing the people" in order to make sure that they had a great deal for themselves. Nobody would have wondered if Nehemiah had not done the same thing. Is that not what politicians do? They live off the people. They use the power of their office to make it better for themselves. They accumulate great wealth while they are in office—making hay while the sun shines.

Is that not the way people in government operate? "Everybody does it!" You know what would happen? The people would have just shrugged their shoulders, fully expecting that that is the way things are done. Cynically doing it. Death and taxes. It was the custom.

But you see, Nehemiah was no ordinary man. His standard was exceedingly higher than anybody who had been in that office before. Nehemiah must have his hands absolutely clean! Why did he do what he did? Because of his fear of God. You see, Nehemiah's way of life reached right down to the nitty-gritty of everyday life. He would not operate the way the world does. He would not conform.

Unless we are willing to say *no*, and do it often, your life might very well, as a Christian, be shattered from the beginning. What did Paul talk to Felix about? Righteousness. There is an interesting progression here: Righteousness, self-control, where you say no to yourself in order to keep those commandments, because we are going to have to face the judgment of God. The world and God do not have the same perspective on how to live life, and once we have the right standard—that is, God's standard—saying "no" to ourselves is of paramount importance if we are going to take on the image of God.

We must also have the image of this world erased from our character because the world, combined with our carnality, keeps pressuring us to conform to it (Romans 12:1-2). Be a living sacrifice; be transformed. Do not let the world squeeze you into its mold. It takes the fear of God to not allow

that to happen, and to overcome our natural aversion to the pain that sacrifice might bring upon us. The fear of God becomes a foundation stone to us, of the kind of nobleness of character that Nehemiah possessed.

I do not care what the problem is, whether it is losing weight because of past gluttony, or whether it is pandering to covetousness that has put you deeply in debt. Do you know that a recent report said that at least sixty percent of adult Americans are overweight? One important person in the health field, whose name has escaped me, said that he felt that sixty percent figure was low.

In regard to debt, is it any wonder that the American government is on the verge of bankruptcy, and in debt to the amount of trillions of dollars? The government, brethren, is merely reflecting what almost every American himself is facing. Debt right up to our noses! Because for the most part we do not say **no** to our desires. We allow ourselves to be talked into buying things that are hardly necessities. That is the way the world does things!

Do you honestly think that Jesus would be overweight, or that He would be in debt up to his nose? I have a hard time to bring myself to think that. I think that He would control His desires and trust God to prosper Him. The fear of God has to drive us to be a nonconformist to the way the world does things. A Christian has to do things out of the fear of God, not out of the fear of the world, because the world does not fear God. You cannot afford to carelessly do what the Romans do in matters of morality, because the world walks to the beat of a different drummer.

Now, why do we not all operate the way Nehemiah did? Partly it is because of laziness; partly it is because of cowardice; partly it is because of ignorance, where we are uninformed, but I think, brethren, that it is mostly because of this powerful sheep characteristic to just go along with the impulse of the moment because everybody else is doing it.

In the wake of the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God, do you know what I have observed? This is my opinion. I think the number one reason why people are settling into certain groups (It is sort of a bit like all of those

that I just mentioned—I mean those things about laziness, not being informed, whatever.) is because of fellowship, because family and friends are going in a certain direction. It is the sheep instinct.

Let me tell you something, if you do not already know this. There is no tyranny like the tyranny of the majority. It is every bit as harsh as the tyranny of the despot, and unless you are willing to look at things through the eyes of God and stand on your own two feet because you fear Him, you will be just as helplessly enslaved to the opinions of others as ever. It is a historical truism that truth in almost any issue often lies within the minority. The opinions and ways of the majority are almost always impulsive and it generally follows the line of "let us take care of the moment" without being concerned with the long-range effect. Now you contrast that to God. He is concerned with the way things end. The end is better than the beginning. The conclusion of the matter is more important than the start. How things finish is what counts.

So, we are getting around to something here. What is the fruit an action is going to produce? Here is where the fear of God comes into the picture. Choices must be made with this in mind. Nehemiah had pleasing God at the forefront of his mind. He feared God. He was concerned about the way things were going to end. He was not concerned about the way the people before him had run the office of governor. He was concerned about the way things would end because he was looking at things the way God did. He feared God. He respected God's opinion about things.

You and I have experienced something that fits kind of into this government thing that runs through the book of Nehemiah. The American welfare system I think is an example of the American government run amok, and there is a thread that ties this to Nehemiah. Back in the '30s the Democratic Party discovered a devious way to pander voters to buy their allegiance and to stay in public favor by using public money. There was undoubtedly some altruism involved in the difficult situation that was taking place then. I am talking about the Depression.

But the failure to severely cut back on the benefits once the difficult situation was past was the beginning of World War II when work was once again plentiful. Instead, the system has been continually expanded. Social Security

was added to it. Price support programs. The Federal bank. Along came the Great Society and Medicare. And so today, if I have my figures right, somewhere around seventy-five to eighty percent of the American Federal Government budget is taken up by entitlements of this sort. Huge corporations, elderly millionaires as well as the truly needy, are getting government handouts. Tobacco farmers growing a killer weed are subsidized with your tax dollars. It is a form of welfare.

You know what I am talking about. It is playing a huge part in making the United States government economically bankrupt. To me, the truly frightening aspect of this is that now these people and their businesses, or whatever, feel entitled, that it is due to them, that it is their birthright, and if anybody tries to tackle this—to take a whack out of some of those entitlements—that person is vilified because there is a meanness in them in trying to take those things away from us. What we are really dealing with here is an artificial redistribution of wealth. Over the long haul, it is lowering the standard of living of everybody in the country.

If you read further in the account on Nehemiah, you will find that one of his motivations for doing what he did is that he wanted people to keep more of what they earned, so that they would have more to live with. And so he sacrificed a paycheck, if I can put it that way, because he feared God. So what Nehemiah did was significant enough that God wanted it included as a witness to government leaders, and as well to you and me.

The lesson for you and me is that Nehemiah, unlike Felix, was willing to be different—a nonconformist. He was willing to not be a sheep. His nonconforming was right, his respect for God and what God thought, was greater than the fear of men and what men would think of him, or what he would have to deny himself.

Let us go back to II Corinthians. When I was doing some research on this, I found an author who made a statement that I think is pretty close to right. I do not know whether I fully agree with what he said, but I am going to give you the thought he had there because I think it is worth thinking about. He said that the Old Testament fear of God has its New Testament equivalent as the love of Christ, or the love for Christ.

II Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ compels us; because we judge thus, that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Now I am going to read this to you from the *Amplified Bible*:

For the love of Christ controls and urges and impels us because we are of the opinion and conviction that if one died for all, then all died. And He died for all so that all who live might no longer live to and for themselves, but to and for Him who died and was raised again for their sake.

To me the key there is what the love of Christ does. The old King James word is "constrains us." The modern word would be—it *impels* us. It *moves* us. It *urges* us. It *motivates* us. In this case, it motivates us not to any longer live to please ourselves, but to please the One who died for us! I submit to you that that is *exactly* what the fear of God does. That is what it did to Nehemiah. It impelled him. It moved him to a certain behavior that would be in conformity with the will of God and what was needed to serve those people that he was in a position to serve, rather than taking care of old number one first which everybody else had done before him. You see what I am saying here? The fear of God will *drive* us, *motivate* us, *impel* us to keep His commandments.

Let us refine this a little bit further. I am going to give you a quote out of Colin Powell's book, *My American Journey*.

So the sense of shame is not a bad moral compass. I remember how easy it was for my mother to snap me back in line with a simple rebuke, "I'm ashamed of you. You embarrassed the family."

Powell says, "I would have preferred a beating to those words." You know what Colin Powell expressed here? He feared his mother! He feared embarrassing his family. He had a family fear. The kind of fear a child who has been reared correctly has, in this case, that he might disappoint his mother, embarrass her, or make her feel ashamed because of his actions. You know what I think? I think that is very close to the biblical fear of God.

The pursuit of wisdom begins in earnest with the understanding of a relationship that we have with God. A relationship between two—us and Him. You have a deep regard and concern for one another. I think that a husband who truly loves his wife is also fearful of hurting her feelings, because he does not want to damage the bond of loyalty and trust that ties the two of them together.

The serious pursuit of the beginning of wisdom and the Kingdom of God begins when we truly respect God and our relationship with Him to the extent that we are fearful of offending Him and hurting the relationship.

Brethren, that is an awesome thought. We have the power to hurt God. I know that you know that because of all the expressions of grief that God gives in the Bible, that He is hurt, disappointed, upset, angry, because we do not show respect for Him and for His ways and His Family. We do not show that respect by conforming our lives to the way that He would want it to be.

Turn with me to Matthew 23. Jesus is the one who is speaking, and He says,

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

You think He was not disappointed, maybe almost to the point of weeping?

The fear of God frequently begins with a fright and terror of Him, and a desire to preserve our lives. But it develops into a deep and abiding and loving respect for Him—a respect for Him personally, not as an abstract object—but for Him as a personality. And we want to get to the place where we want to preserve the relationship, to see it grow. We come to the place where we fear to disappoint Him, and this plays a large part in motivating, not only the overall direction of our lives, it even gets into the specifics of them on a daily basis.

David writes in Psalm 34:

Psalm 34:11 Come you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

The fear of God is not something we have by nature, and the reason is obvious once we understand that it arises and grows as a result of the relationship. The relationship begins with God's calling because we did not have that before and therefore we did not know Him, and there cannot be respect, especially the quality of respect that God desires when two do not even know one another. Now, how does it grow? Well, the very psalm we are looking at tells us.

Psalm 34:8 O taste and see that the Lord is good [Taste means to experience, as in eating]; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Psalm 34:12 Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?

The subject is the fear of God. He is going to teach you, in simple terminology, how to make it grow.

Psalm 34:13-14 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The fear of God grows as the relationship develops, and the relationship develops when we submit to Him, when we follow through with His desires as how to conform to His way of life, and we begin to get a taste of what it would be like to spend eternity—always as His companion—*married* to Him. The desire to please Him—to not disappoint Him; to make every effort to protect the relationship—grows from one of abject self-concern merely for the preservation of our life, to one of reverential awe of His great goodness, and awe of His wonderful character through the glorification of His name by means of an intimate relationship. Now can you see how this would begin to motivate us more and more?

I want you to think of the process that brought those of you who are married together as husband and wife—one flesh. There was a time when you did not

know each other. Then there was a time when you were introduced to each other, and as you began to communicate back and forth and you began to date and you began to experience life together, and you began to find a liking for this person that you were dating—what did you begin to do? Did you not begin to be concerned with conforming to this person's wishes and desires? And as you did work to conform to this person's wishes and desires, you came closer together, you began to know one another even more and more, and you wanted to spend more and more time together till finally you were married.

We are talking about the same process here and you can begin to understand why that writer says that the fear of God and the love of Christ are one and the same thing. It is a powerful, motivating force that moves us to please the other. So the combination of access to God, fellowship with God, and submitting to Him within a relationship feeds a growing respect for Him and His way. And as this process which feeds or motivates our desires to reciprocate His love, it will produce growth—the fruit in His way.

Now we will close with three verses.

Psalm 25:14 The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.

Is that not wonderful? I want you to see the rewards of fearing Him, because as we reciprocate back His love to us, He gives us rewards—gifts that we cannot get anywhere else.

Psalm 31:19-20 Oh how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which thou have prepared for those that trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

One of these days, brethren, that is going to be awfully important to you. He will *hide* you, if you fear Him. Is there any reward for doing this? Oh boy!

Psalm 33:18-19 Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

Brethren, there is so much to be gained from working to develop the relationship with God, that it is something that *we cannot afford to not examine*, for we need to make it increasingly better, because what will happen is that we will have greater, increasing motivation to give ourselves in service to Him, His children, and the world, when the opportunity shows itself.

Now brethren, we do have this element, and I know that in every one of us it needs to be strengthened. It is strengthened within the relationship when we use that fear to yield to Him in whatever He commands He wants us to do in order to conform to His way.