

Fearing God

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Fear is your enemy. Fear is my enemy. Fear is the enemy of all God's firstfruits—the enemy of all God's people. We cannot fear men, governments, wars, riots, food shortages, or COVID. Let us turn to Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:28 [God tells us] "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him [there is the word fear] who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Matthew is telling us not to fear the world we live in or its inhabitants, but to fear God.

Luke 12:4-5 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more they can do. But I will show you who you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

We have been living with COVID for some time now. Because of fear COVID has taken a toll on God's churches and God's people worldwide. It has taken a *big* toll. The fear of COVID has divided whole congregations. Brethren have left one group for another all because of different opinions on COVID. Not doctrine—over COVID. Brethren failed to keep the Feast of Tabernacles for fear of getting COVID last year.

Now I want to mention something that Mark [Schindler] already mentioned, but think about this. The Church of the Great God had a normal Feast last year, meaning we did not wear masks unless you wanted to, of course. We shook hands. We hugged, we sang hymns, we passed the collection basket. We sat next to one another and no one came down with COVID. Think about that. When you fear God and you do what is right, God is with us. Martin

Collins told me, like Mark mentioned, that there were a lot less anointing of people in general than there normally was. Wow. Go figure. When we try to live by every Word of God, God is with us. We all know that we are commanded to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Leviticus 23:34 "The fifteenth day of the seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord."

Leviticus 23:41 "You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month."

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching.

You might think this sermon is all about COVID. It is not, brethren. It is about living by every Word of God, and what fear does to us. Let us turn to Isaiah 51. Here God is telling us that He comforts us and that He takes care of us.

Isaiah 51:12 "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass?"

Let us turn to Deuteronomy 5. In this next verse, God is saying that if we would fear Him, things would go well with us. I like "well," do you not? I really like "well."

Deuteronomy 5:29 "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever."

Another verse here in Hebrews 13. This verse is telling us where God wants us to be. This is the attitude that God wants from all of us.

Hebrews 13:6 So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

We as God's people fear all kinds of things that man can do to us. A lot of people fear their mates. Most brethren that fall into this category have unconverted mates so they have a problem with tithing, keeping the Feast, and not celebrating pagan holidays. Just to mention a few of the things that fear of their mates creates in their lives. Some of God's people fear their mates more than they fear God Himself. Brethren fear their college professors and high school teachers so they only keep the Feast for four or five days. Now these brethren have careers that they are thinking about and grades to think about so they fear what their professors and teachers can do to them.

A lot of God's people over the years feared their bosses or employers much more than God. Over the years I have known brethren that have worked on the Sabbath out of fear of losing their jobs. I have known brethren that have missed the whole Feast of Tabernacles because of their employers saying that they could not have the days for the Feast off. They are afraid for their jobs. We all need money, that is a given.

We as humans and firstfruits fear many, many things more than we fear God and His Word. Last year, a number of people within the greater churches of God did not keep the Feast of Tabernacles because of fear of COVID, a manmade disease. There were a number of people that told me they were going to keep the Feast of Tabernacles at the beach or in the mountains or in a hotel or a rented room. These people had convinced themselves that by renting a temporary dwelling as the Bible says and streaming the Feast, they were good to go and God would be with them. But was He? Leviticus states differently.

Leviticus 23:39 "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there should be a sabbath-rest, and in the eighth day there shall be a sabbath-rest."

Leviticus 23:42 "You shall dwell in booths [which these people did] for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths."

But the brethren that stayed at home because of fear of COVID or lived in booths, I mean, went to a hotel, did not live by all the words of God when it comes to the Feast of Tabernacles. There is more. The brethren that rented hotel rooms, condos, or houses by the beach or in the mountains, and streamed the Feast of Tabernacles, lived by only half of God's Word.

Deuteronomy 16:13-16 "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, and your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. [God is talking about all the people and everyone who lived in Israel.] Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place the Lord chooses [He did not choose the hotel room or a place by the beach, He chose right here. This is where God places His name for this group. He places His name in other places for other groups.], because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice. Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place [again] which He chooses [We do not get to choose, brethren.]: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed."

None of the words that we are talking about, the words of God, are complicated or hard to understand in any way. The next verse is really a very easy verse for us to understand. This is what God wants from us.

Deuteronomy 10:12 "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

Now, I am going to give us some fabulous examples here, brethren, fabulous examples of brethren you and I all know and love who always tried to put God first and to live by every Word of God and who always feared God. At least to my knowledge, they always feared God. These are people we know. These are examples for *this* church, brethren. The other churches of God have their examples. These people are our examples.

Number one was Carol Ford. We all remember Carol Ford. We all know she had terminal cancer and was dying. Carol never missed the Feast during her sickness. She always assembled herself for the Sabbath. She did not miss the Sabbath. She was sick and on God's holy days she was there. You might think that her family—her husband Mike, son Cody, two daughters, Tara and Kelly—pushed her and coerced her to keep the Feast and the Sabbath and the holy days, but that is not true. Carol wanted to live by every Word of God and to put Him first, no matter what was going on in her life with her health or with any other problems or world conditions. Carol loved God and did all she could to fear Him and live by every word of His. Carol was a fabulous example for us, brethren.

Number two, we all remember Geoff and Susan Preston, do we not? Two more fabulous examples. We were at the Feast in Topeka, Kansas a few years ago and my son and I would go down for breakfast each morning. It was the third day of the Feast and JB and I were eating breakfast together and JB said to me, "Look at Geoff Preston. Look at what he's doing." Geoff was putting two or three bananas in his pocket. JB said to me, "Geoff does that every morning. I've been watching him. What's that all about?" I said, "I don't know. I'll ask Geoff." Later that day when I asked Geoff why he took two or three bananas in his pocket every day, he said that bananas in Australia at that time were \$13 a pound. Can you imagine that? He also said that apples were over \$5 a pound. In America at that time, bananas were about .49 a pound. You could afford two of them pretty easy. Apples are around a \$1.49 a pound.

Then Jeff went on to tell me that to keep the Feast he and Susan had turned off the gas to their house. Think of that—for a whole year. He also said that they had bought a thermal bag, you know, one of those camping bags, and they would fill it with water and would lay it out in the sun so it would get hot. The Preston's would shower with the water out of the bag. They would

wash their dishes and clothes with the water out of the bag. They did this so they could afford to go to the Feast here each year, but this is not all they did to live by every Word of God. They also bought one round steak each week and cut it into six pieces. They ate this round steak with potatoes every night for six nights to save money to come here. On the Sabbath, they would go whole hog and buy a vegetable and maybe a piece of chicken or even a better cut of beef.

This was not all that they did to live by every Word of God either. They also made the grueling flight from Australia to America. Coming from Oregon here is not fun, brethren. I can only imagine coming from Australia. Susan told me that some layovers in the flight might last four or five hours and they would sleep in those miserable chairs at the airport. They were not young chickens. They were old people. The flight from Australia to America is long and miserable. But Geoff and Susan endured the very long flights from Australia and they were not young, like I said. After Geoff's death, Susan continued to fear God and try to live by every Word of God. She kept the Feast with all of us until she ended up on oxygen and could barely walk across her living room. What fabulous examples these two people are for us, brethren.

Another great example was Gary Garrett. You all remember Gary and his wife Deana, and Gary's mother Lucille Brown. Gary was literally dying from cancer and yet he feared God more than man and he wanted to live by every Word of God. So Gary told Deana to pack up their truck with the things that they would need for the Feast and his mother's stuff. Now think of this. Deana is a little skinny girl. No offense, Deana. And she packed everybody up and drove from Iowa to Myrtle Beach. That is a 24 hour trip with a sick man. Having cancer and being as sick as he was, he could have died en route to the Feast. He could have died during the Feast. He could have died on the return trip from the Feast. But Gary feared God more than man or earthly things or what was going on in his life. Gary wanted to live by every Word of God so he attended the Feast with all of us even though he was very, very sick. What a fantastic example, brethren.

I want to ask all of you a question. The question is this: how many times during the Feast that year did you go to Gary's room and visit him? Because he was unable to come down here, brethren. If you visited him after services,

did you take Gary and Deana lunch, or if you visited him in the late afternoon, after dinner, did you take them dinner? Gary and his family were pretty much confined to their room. Now, I am not pointing the finger at any of us about love. I had to call Deana myself and apologize to her for my own ineptness on these things.

The question is: do we as God's people really practice love all the time? Love is nothing more than outgoing concern for each other, brethren. Love is praying for each other and all the people on the prayer list every single day. Love is sending out cards to sick people who are having difficulties in their lives. Love is visiting people when they are in the hospital. Love is calling people on the phone when they are sick or having difficulties. Love is sending another brother a few bucks when they struggle financially and we really do not realize what a few bucks can do a lot of times.

I am going to tell you a little story here. Debbie and I sent a woman and her two kids a number of years ago, a long time ago, 100 bucks. Now I do not want you to think about us. It is not about us sending \$100. A lot of us send money to the brethren and give money to one another, which is great. We support one another in that way and that is a wonderful thing. But I want you to think about what one lousy \$100 can do for somebody. It was about a month later after we sent them this money, the woman called and thanked Debbie for the gift. Do you know what one lousy \$100 did for this woman and her children? She told us that she was able to feed herself and her two kids for a whole week with \$100. That is how broke they were. I can barely feed myself for two days on \$100 now with inflation. We never know what a little outgoing concern to do.

Now I am going to tell you something else. I am talking about outgoing concern here and I am talking about love. You know what happened to me this year, brethren? First off, we were going to get our plane tickets to come here and they were going to be \$900 each. Then I rented two minivans. They were almost \$1,700 each. That is what is going on in America now. Well, I was talking to Ryan McClure on the phone and I told them about the rental cars and he got mad. He said, "You're kidding!" He said, "You can't pay that." He said, "I'm going to bring you a car." He was going to bring two cars to the Feast so I could have a car. But then he told Bill Onisick about it and Bill said, "We've got an extra car, my son Zachary's car." I am driving

Zachary's hot rod, guys. And so Bill brought Zachary's car here because Zachary was going to Hawaii for the Feast. "Thank you, Zachary. I love your little car." But think about that. They were willing to drive two cars from their house. That is love, brethren, to serve me and my family.

I have got another example. It is about Tiffany and Derek Schulte. Tiffany was as pregnant as you could possibly be last year. She and Derek feared God more than man and wanted to live by every Word of God. So they loaded up their buggy and drove from Iowa to Myrtle Beach for the Feast, 24 hours again. A pregnant gal ready to pop. I mean really close. Now Tiffany could have had the baby at any moment. Tiffany told me that her first child was kind of a hard delivery but she did not fear that. She came here. Nevertheless they left for the Feast. Tiffany did not pop on the way to the Feast, but on the Last Great Day of the Feast she gave birth to her second baby, Ziva. I cannot believe that! In her hotel room room with no one there but her husband in attendance. There was no doctor, no nurse, and no midwife. Only Derek as the catcher, that was it. God blessed Tiffany with an easy delivery. She told me she stood up and out popped the baby. Wonderful! Derek caught this baby. Derek, you should be playing for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

This example really blows my mind because I know what my wife went through delivering our three children, but this was not the end of it. Tiffany gave birth to Ziva at 8:30 in the morning and about four hours later she brought Ziva to services for the Blessing of the Little Children. Can you imagine that? Now, Richard asked the blessing on this child and I still remember what he said, "I have never asked a blessing on such a young baby before." Four hours old, wow!

What a wonderful example all these people are for all of us. Let us turn to Psalm 31. When we put God first, God promises us great blessings, brethren. I want blessings and I know you do, too.

Psalm 31:19 Oh, how great is Your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!

Let us look at another fabulous example of a family that always has a good attitude. A family that fears God more than man and tries to live by every Word of God. That is the Fletcher family. They go to church with most of you every week. I want you to think of all this family has been going through for a number of years now, yet they are always at Sabbath services almost every week and they are always here at the Feast. Dan's wife, Carol, had a massive stroke four years ago. She cannot walk or talk much. And their three children, Jamie, Dana, and Hannah take excellent care of their mother and their father. All the kids have pretty much put their lives on hold in order to care for their parents.

Not only did Carol have a stroke, but dad Dan needs a heart transplant—a double whammy—which the doctors will not give him because they are afraid that he will have kidney failure. So Dan is on a heart pump and he has an infection to go with that that the doctors say cannot be cured, only managed by medicine. Every time I talked to Dan on the phone, he is so up and so positive that he is a great encouragement to me! I am calling him to encourage him but he encourages me. Think of what his family endures day in and day out, but they have not given up, brethren. They fear God more than man and try to live by every Word of God. More fabulous examples.

Let us turn to Psalm 89.

Psalm 89:6-7 For who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord? God is greatly to be feared [not man. Men can only kill us. We are not going to live forever anyway.] in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him.

I had a friend in the church who lived in California (you will not know this example). This man and his wife had two little kids. This was an Irish family. This friend of mine called me one day and said he had a fabulous opportunity with his job and his employer but he had to move back to Northern Ireland. So he asked me if I would help him move all of his stuff down to the dock in Los Angeles harbor so they could sail off to Northern Ireland. And I said, "Of course I will," and I went and helped him. This man had a very good job here in America. He had a really nice house in San

Clemente looking over the ocean. A high dollar house. Houses in California are not cheap. This man and his family lived in Northern Ireland for two years with a war going on before he went bankrupt there. With the war going on, he could not make any money and he went bankrupt. For two solid years every Saturday he and his family would get dressed for church and load themselves into their buggy and drive off for Sabbath services every Sabbath.

Now, you know what? Every Sabbath for two years the first thing they encountered is they came to a British military roadblock and the British soldiers would surround the car with their guns and point them at them. And the officer in charge would always ask the same question. "Are you Protestant or are you Catholic?" My friend would say neither. He would say that he and his family were on their way to Sabbath services. Well, this would change the attitude of the soldiers and they would let him pass. Down the road a ways he would run into another roadblock manned by the Irish. The Irish would stop his car, surround them, point their guns at him and his family, and asked the same question that the British had asked him. "Are you Protestant or are you Catholic?" And he would say neither, again, and he would tell them that they were on their way to Sabbath services. This again would change the attitude of the men at the roadblock and they would let him pass. It was the same every Sabbath for two years. This did not deter him from Sabbath services. My friend was in the middle of a war zone, brethren, people were being killed regularly. But my friend feared God more than man. It did not matter to him what was going on in Northern Ireland or in his life. He wanted to live by every Word of God. Another fabulous example, brethren.

(My friend had to move back to America after two years and he was broke and he could not afford to live in California anymore so he moved to Phoenix.)

Psalm 112:1-2 Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears [there is the word again] the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on the earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

We have another fabulous example set by our leaders, John and Evelyn Ritenbaugh. We all know that Evelyn was extremely sick and John is 88 years old, yet they get to most Sabbath services. And they hardly missed a day at the Feast last year with COVID. They set a fabulous example for us, brethren. They did not let COVID deter them from the Feast. Let us turn to Psalm 147.

Psalm 147:11 The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him [You want God to have pleasure in you? You have got to fear Him.] and those who hope in His mercy.

The last example that I have for us is someone that I have known very well, my wife of 51 years. I am not going to go into a lot of detail, but in the last 13 years of her life she had kidney failure, and she had to have dialysis three times a week at the Feast here. But she never missed a Feast. We never missed the Feast, brethren. I do not think that any of you know how much preparation it takes to come to the Feast when you have dialysis. Oh, it is miserable. You have got to send all the records and everything to the place where you are going and then they say if you can come or you cannot come, and on at least two occasions the dialysis units where we were going to go told us, "Don't come, there's no chair for you guys." We went anyway and God always worked it out. One of the regular patient of the dialysis unit would get sick and end up in the hospital and free up a chair for the three days we needed the chair, and at the end of the last dialysis run that we needed, the head nurse would come and say, "You guys are all done. We can't dialysis you anymore. Our patient is coming back." And I would say, "Well thank you very much, we are going home." So it always worked out very well, brethren, for us.

Now let us turn to Matthew 29. These scriptures are talking about the tares and the wheat. I want us to think about this in fearing God. We all know these scriptures well. Christ tells His disciples in the 29th verse to let the tares grow with the wheat. So, we are all aware that there are tares among us. My question for all of us is this: Who are the tares? Are you a tare? Am I a tare? Who are the tares? It is very difficult and almost impossible to distinguish the tares from the wheat. When the Worldwide Church of God started moving towards full-blown Protestantism, I thought I could pick out

the brethren that would stay true to God. I thought I could pick out the brethren that would leave the church. Boy, was I wrong! Absolutely wrong. I found out that I could not pick out the wheat from the tares. Can you?

Let us turn to Matthew 25. These verses are talking about the ten virgins. We all know these scriptures very well, too.

Matthew 25:11-12 "Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' [A full half of the virgins were tares.] But He answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

In my mind none of these tares knew they were tares. All of the virgins were together and all slept and slumbered, waiting for the return of Christ. They all kept the Sabbath, brethren. They all kept the Feast of Tabernacles. They kept the holy days. But half of them did not qualify for the Kingdom of God. They did not know that they were tares. Why? Why did not they know they were tares?

I think the problem for the tares is this. They did not pray daily. And I mean every day, earnest prayer, not bologna prayers about us. A real earnest prayer. They did not study the Word of God every day. See, they did not put God first. They did not have outgoing concern and love for the brethren. They did not fear God more than man. And they did not try to live by every Word of God.

Fear is one of our biggest enemies. We cannot fear man, governments, wars, riots, school teachers, our bosses, or our mates. We must fear God and we must live by every word of His. That is our job, brethren.