

The Fear Of God (Part 3)

Head Toward Sanctification

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At the beginning of sermon number two, we saw the same immense capacity of God's mind that enables Him to conceive, create, and maintain this awesome creation is also what enables Him to now maintain His focus on us as individual children. Children who are mere specks as compared to the immensity of the universe, but each one of us is more important to Him than the whole of all the stars and planets.

After that part, we began to look into this oft-occurring sequence of chaos, restoring of divine order, then revelation of God's glory, and then of judgment.

We saw several Old Testament examples of this sequence where the judgments were swift, and dramatically violent.

We then proceeded into the New Testament to the ministry of John the Baptist. He was undoubtedly used by God to restore a measure of divine order following a long, long period of spiritual chaos, so that Jesus could then reveal the glory of God to the Jews generally and to the church specifically.

Now Jesus did His job far better than John did, but do you know what? Something interesting happened along the way! And it did not happen to Jesus Himself, specifically. It was not an event that occurred to Him, but it was something that happened because of whom He was.

Consider this: You can see very clearly in the books of the New Testament that there were times when He preached before thousands of people. There was one time where He fed five thousand. Another time he fed four thousand. In addition to that, I think we can safely assume that if you take the cumulative total of all the people He preached to, He may have preached to well over a million, maybe two million people at those times. After all, Israel was only about the size of the state of New Jersey. He traveled from one end of it to the other, and the word about Him went all over the country by word of mouth like a wildfire, and people came from far and near to hear Him preach.

By the time He was resurrected, it says in I Corinthians 15:6 that He appeared to over five hundred people at one time that saw Him in His resurrected form.

By the time the Day of Pentecost arrived, only 120 were present.

I will give you the answer to the question I gave to you because you can see a principle that is at work here. I mentioned to several people yesterday that Herbert Armstrong mentioned this same thing happened to him. When Herbert Armstrong mentioned it, it was not in reference to Christ, it was simply a process that he saw happening to him. Mr. Armstrong compared himself to Billy Graham. He said, "When Billy Graham goes into a city, every day the crowds get larger. When I go into a city, every day the crowds get smaller." This is what happened to Christ.

It is just very interesting to consider that who we are dealing with here is the Man who is undoubtedly the finest, greatest, best, most interesting, fact-filled, truth-filled, powerful speaker that has ever been on the face of the earth! Men marveled at Him—at His ability to teach. "Where did this

man get such learning? We've never heard anything like this!" they said. And yet, *He lost His audience!*

It is not the histrionics that make the difference to converted people. It is what God does! And it is something that is in them—that they do—that causes this interesting process to take place. I think that there is a reason, especially when we begin to relate what happened in the Bible. God threw a little test into those 500 people to see what they were going to do—to see if there was enough fear in them—enough respect for Him, enough reverence for the Word of God—to follow exactly what His servant Jesus Christ said!

Let us look at verse 3 of John 21. Remember, what did Jesus say? He said to those people, "Tarry in Jerusalem until you receive power from on High." (Luke 24:49) It is so simple! "Wait! Be patient!"

John 21:3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

How many others did something similar, and simply wandered away from Jerusalem, not following what Jesus Christ said to do?

We find the inner circle doing this, and what did God through Jesus Christ have to do? He had to go out and rescue them for their failure to do exactly what He said. "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? *Do you love Me?*" (John 21:15-19)

Others may have simply wandered away, or may have gone back to worshipping at the synagogue as they had always done, or they may have in all sincerity decided to go out and preach away from Jerusalem. But the word was *wait!*

We find at the beginning of the book of Acts that 120 of them finally did wait. They were not moved to go away until further word came, because they feared God (we are going to see that) and they submitted to His command.

Those 120 were the ones who trembled at His Word! Even though there was a wavering, these 120 were the ones who trembled at His Word. These were the ones who were committed. They laid aside whatever it was that they might have planned to do—their hopes, their dreams, their goals—and steadfastly waited. Their respect for this simple command had a very wonderful effect.

So, we begin to see a principle here: People who do not fear God *will drift away from Him!* The fear of God *draws us towards Him!* This is just the opposite from what one might think. We usually run from our fears, but this is a fear that we run toward! It is extremely beneficial!

Acts 1:4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me."

He had already said it before. Now look at the effect:

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Unity because they respected God's Word.

Is it any wonder that God looks toward those who tremble and are in fear of breaking His Word? These people can be united with Him because they will not be resisting the very best counsel that they could possibly receive.

You need to understand. This is just another little step toward becoming in His image.

Now what occurred?

Acts 2:2-4 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Everything was now in place. The divine order was satisfied. And just as surely as in the construction of the Tabernacle under the Old Covenant, that when God revealed a portion of His glory, fire erupted, heavenly lights shined—effulgent glory. But now, in this case, the tongues of fire rested on each of them and a portion of His glory *came to dwell in the midst of them!* This time it was literally in them, because *they* were the Temple—they were the Tabernacle. This time, God was dwelling in men.

Now, if you are following the sequence, what follows? Judgment begins! Judgment begins on the House in which God is the builder.

I Peter 4:17 For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

I Peter 1:15-16 But as He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

During this time of our judgment this is the major goal in order that we be in His image. This encompasses a very great deal, and we are not going to go into it, but it is important to know where we are to head. We are to head toward holiness. This is different from the holiness that comes as a result of forgiveness and justification. We are holy then.

But, the holiness is a state that God puts us in. It is a legal state. We are now free and clear before Him. Sanctification, which is holiness—that to which we are to head toward with our lives—is a process in which the holiness of God literally becomes ours, because we are living like He lives. The Spirit of God is alive and active within us. It is a process of growing into the mind and character of God. This is our major goal right now. This is what we are being judged upon from God from that point forward.

So, this commandment by Peter to be holy, "for I am holy," is given in the context of conduct. Brethren, it sets an extremely high standard for us to the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now let us go to Acts 4 and beginning in verse 32. The judgment is beginning, the process is underway, and now at this period of time in the story here, we have reached a critical juncture.

Acts 4:32-37 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul: neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power the apostles gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet. And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The group was undoubtedly growing by leaps and bounds. The apostles were speaking with great power, and almost amazingly, they were still very united in spirit, as well as physically.

Barnabas must have made what was a significant offering—not necessarily the amount, although the amount could have been large—but it could have possibly been a great sacrifice. There was something about his attitude in doing this that indicates these things. It was important as well, because God recorded it, and it must have proven to be what triggered the tragic event that Ananias and Sapphira got themselves into immediately following in chapter five. You will notice that the beginning of chapter five begins with the word "but." It is directly connected to—it is contrasted to—what Barnabas did.

Acts 5:1-5 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And, after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God." And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

Acts 5:11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

The Bible does not say what motivated their sin. But I think that we can read between the lines, because God inspired the word "but" to be put in there—that a contrast is made to Barnabas, and there was a difference in attitude, primarily, between what Ananias and Sapphira did, and what Barnabas did.

Now, maybe Ananias and Sapphira were driven by envy, jealousy, and/or the desire for acclaim of men. They may have seen what Barnabas did earned him a lot of "pats on the back," and people were shaking his hand and saying, "Boy, that was really generous of you to do that! We know what it cost you to give up all your possessions so that we could eat and live and carry on with this work." But whatever it was, they were moved to attempt to deceive men so as to appear that they gave all when they had only given a portion. It is clear that the portion to be given was not forced—that can be discerned by what Peter said—nor was it demanded by the apostles. Their sin was deception—hypocrisy. I think that beneath the deception was surely the desire for the acclaim and praise of men. Their reputation before men was more important to their pride than was truth and integrity.

From events of this nature, an important to know principle arises. If we desire the praise of men, *we will fear men!* And, if we fear man, we will serve him! This is because we serve what we fear.

Ananias and Sapphira, feared men—including themselves—more than God. This caused them to reason away their actions, and attempt to stand in the presence of God without holy fear, without respecting His right to *everything* that they owned without deception. He was not asking for everything, but only honesty, integrity, and truthfulness before Him and before men.

They paid just as dearly as Nadab and Abihu did. If they were really afraid of God, they would never have lied to Him through His representative, Peter, and the other witnesses that were with him as to what they did.

Is the God of the New Testament any different from the God of the Old Testament? No, He is not! He takes all matters into consideration in giving His judgments, and what they did was just as bad as what Nadab and Abihu did, just as bad as what Uzzah did, just as bad as what the priesthood did under the Old Covenant.

Now notice! Great fear came upon all the church. Some from without the church as well. But as it is pointed out, it came upon the church. Now, maybe in the light of all the wonderful things happening to the church then, people were already becoming loose and liberal! God cut it off at the pass knowing that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. At this time of the church's existence, He wanted it to be more powerful and a better witness, honoring and glorifying Him, than at any other time in its existence. He intervened very quickly! Whatever it was, God gave the church a very thorough jolt out of its complacency that might have already been building.

And when that happened, I am sure that the people thought, "That could easily have been me! I had better rethink my position, my attitude, and my conduct before God and man. He is holy and all knowing."

I am sure that the brethren were moved to search their hearts because they could not have remained unmoved by such a shocking thing happening to someone that they probably knew pretty intimately. And remember this, they had to do this without showing disrespect for God's judgment, as if to point the finger at God, "How could He have done such a thing?" Maybe they thought, "What do I *not* know about God that made Him react so violently?" I am sure that there were not many in the church who were not affected by this. What is there that we do not know about Him? Knowing God is eternal life.

I Peter 1:16-17 Because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

Did you notice that he did not say, "Conduct your life in love"? Now this does not negate love. We are to walk in love with God. But love in no way negates the fear of God as this apostle clearly shows.

The fear of the Lord is not some immature element that one casts off as one grows in love. God is also to be feared, as well as loved, because they work together. They work in harmony with each other.

Love will be limited where the fear of God is limited because the fear of God buttresses the expression of love. We can love someone only to the extent that we know them. If we do not know this aspect of God, where fear is essential, we will not love God to the extent that we should. Both of them are necessary.

Let us go to Hebrews the 4th chapter, and verse 1. This is actually a continuation of the thought that Paul left off with in chapter 3, and it is like a conclusion—an admonition that is also a conclusion. Because of what happened to the Israelites that Paul recorded there in chapter 3, he said:

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering into His rest, let us [Here is the instruction] fear [Hey, we have got Peter and Paul agreeing with one another!] lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

It takes the fear of God to make it all the way. You just do not drop it on the wayside because we have got something better [love]. No! They work together. And that word "fear" there means exactly what you think it does. It means *to be afraid!*

In verse 12 of Philippians 2, a very familiar scripture, but good to repeat at this time.

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 [We are talking about this period of sanctification—"Be holy, for He is holy"—we are aiming at: You work this out] with fear and trembling.

He reinforces the word "fear" with "trembling" so that we get the point.

Psalm 25:12-14 What man is the man who fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that He chooses. His himself shall dwell in prosperity [That means in abundance, goodness, and peace.], and his descendants shall inherit the earth. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

This is a wonderful quality! It is the key to the treasures of GOD! It is what hits Him in the heart, as it were, to find people who deeply respect Him, because those are the ones He can mold and shape into the image that He wants them.

Somehow brethren, we have gotten the impression that there is something negative, weak, or wrong with fearing God. Not on your life!

It should give us some sort of an idea how important this is to God when we understand that right from the beginning in Deuteronomy, the thing about tithing, you are to go to the Feast to learn to fear Him! It is the key to learning to love Him. It is the key to the use of faith. It is the key to having the desire to drive yourself towards the Kingdom of God.

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?"

Oh! This thing they have built for God, this Temple, was beautiful no doubt. But God is making a comparison here between a building built by men, and an attitude that really gets His attention. He says:

Isaiah 66:2 "For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the Lord. "But [Here is what gets God's attention:] to this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word."

Reciprocity again! He respects those who respect Him. And those are the ones He looks to bless! The fear of God is very positive. It is not in the least bit negative.

So why does God say these things? Because the fear of God is what keeps us from doing dumb, stupid, and foolish things like sinning, so that love can do its work! It is the fear of God that is the first line of defense against sin. It is the fear of God that keeps us from taking Him for granted. It is the fear of God that keeps us from growing too familiar with Him and being contemptuous of Him, and therefore, disregarding what He says as being a light, and little, and mean thing, and not really all that important at this time.

Now, do we not fear God's Word when He says, "The soul that sins, it shall die"? It is just as true today as it was when He said it to Adam and Eve. Do we disrespect Him so much that we just shove it aside and take our chances anyway? The answer to this is, "Of course, yes we do!"

But you see the real fear of God would have restrained Nadab and Abihu. It would have restrained Ananias and Sapphira. If Satan had feared God, he would have never done such a stupid thing as to think he could wage war against God and win. And we all do play this same foolish game. Why? Because we do not fear Him yet as we should.

Do not feel overly bad about that, because the fear of God is something we have to grow in as well. We have to learn it. We are ignorant of many things. God is patient with us as we learn it. So as we grow in the understanding of its use—of its application, making it operational, something that becomes a part of our personality—God keeps working to increase our understanding of the important role that it plays right along with faith, hope, and love.

Psalm 34:8-10 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints, for there is no want [lack] to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

"Shall not lack with any good thing." Let me say it again: There is nothing wrong with being afraid of Him. Now that can be taken to an extreme, but it is intended to be part and parcel of the whole package of our relationship with Him. He is not like anybody else! "To whom will you liken Me?" We have never had contact with anybody quite like Him! And, we do not understand Him. We do not grasp Him, and He wants us to be patient and keep working toward that understanding of Him, and respect Him enough to know that He is right in what He says for us to do, how He reacts to us, and the circumstances of our lives.

If you will think about that principle, you will see, then, that the fear of the Lord works with faith. The two of them are needful. The fear of the Lord helps to make faith operational, and if you use faith, the fear of the Lord is increased. They all work together.

A number of times, Evelyn has told me that it was the fear of her father that kept her from doing foolish things. I want you to understand that her fear of her father in no way kept her from loving her father! I have been witness to that. She loved her father. And, there was no war—no antagonism—between them. They probably did not always understand each other, but there was real love there.

There was, especially when she was a great deal younger, a fear of her father's reaction to what she might do that might be dumb, stupid, idiotic, childish, immature—things that she had been instructed not to do. When she would get between a "rock and a hard place" with other kids who were trying to persuade her to do something that was risky, she was very happy—relieved!—to say to them, "My father won't allow me to do that." She could put the blame on him.

There is a simple principle at work here: That fear kept her—protected her, it gave her safety—from sin, and all of its destructive powers. The same principle is at work with God.

Now what is "wrong" with the fear of God is people's misconception of it! The fear of God is a very positive attribute to our personality.

Turn with me to II Corinthians 5. A very interesting statement by the apostle Paul:

II Corinthians 5:9-10 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be welling pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ [He is including himself in this.], that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Now we understand that judgment is going on right at this moment. Notice this next statement in verse 11. This is from an apostle! Surely one of the greater, or greatest Christians who ever followed Jesus Christ—a man whose understanding of God's will, and God's way, was probably more specific, more complete, than any other person following Jesus Christ. He was used to write fourteen books of the Bible. This man explains many of the technicalities of Christianity. He knew it inside and out. And you would think he would have no fear!

II Corinthians 5:9-11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

Was there something wrong with this man that he knew the terror of the Lord? I do not think so! So, what he says is, "We're well known to God. Our lives are open and manifest before Him. God knows what is going on." And he says that this should always be a part of our thinking—knowing the terror of the Lord!

The apostle John said in I John 3:21 (paraphrased) that if we do well, then we are confident. Now the apostle John taught us so much about the operations and importance of love. And that love of God is truly wonderful. It is also interesting that Paul counterbalances that, because he is the one who reminded us that God is also a consuming fire, and that He is a terror. When looked at the right way, they feed into one another. They give their strength to each other. They are something that we need to be aware of and make a part of our lives.

In saying, "Knowing the terror of the Lord," Paul indirectly put his finger on why the fear of the Lord is so necessary to our lives. Let us go to a verse that states this very clearly. I have been saving this

verse until now, and it is a kind of keystone, along with the one "that the fear of the Lord is the key to the treasures of God."

Back in the book of Proverbs, let us go to chapter 8, and verse 13. Here we have one of those brief, succinct Bible definitions of a term. I John 3:4 says that, "sin is the transgression of the law." That is something simply and easily stated. I John 5:3 says, "for this is the love of God that we keep His commandments"—a definition we can carry around with us that provides a basis for understanding.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverse mouth I hate.

And then gives a couple more: "Pride" is another thing to hate; "Arrogance," which is a demonstration of pride; "and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate."

Even as love is synonymous with the *keeping* of the commandments, and sin is synonymous with *breaking* the commandments, the fear of the Lord is synonymous with hating evil. Do we not avoid, stay away from, and have nothing to do with the things that we hate?

Then why do we sin? Because we do not *hate* sin!

It is a simple answer. But it is true. We do not hate evil as much as we need to hate evil, because we do not see—we do not grasp; we do not understand; we do not get it.

Human nature is always trying to persuade us in the other direction; we really love to cuddle up to evil that we find particularly satisfying, and gratifying. We all have our weaknesses, areas in which it shows up that we find very hard, difficult, to resist. And we fear those things, or we fear the loss of those things more than we fear God.

This is not difficult to understand at all. If one hates evil, and sin is evil, and God most assuredly hates it, then we will not sin!

The fear of the Lord is the first line of defense against sin. Sin is failure. It devastates. It destroys. It deteriorates. It corrupts. It eventually kills! This is why God hates sin.

God is the God of the living, and if we fear Him, we will hate evil. And brethren, sin will become a non-issue.

What is the result? Love can come into full flower.

You might say, "Is love enough?" The answer is "No," because love is limited by one's capacity to fear God. As we saw earlier, even carnal men have been able to observe that we serve what we fear. So, the greater the fear of the Lord, the less chance there is for sin. The less chance there is for sin, the greater the love for God. And because we fear God, our reaction to sin ought to be similar to our reaction to facing a rattlesnake in our own house!

What would you do then? Especially if it was in the same room you were in. I will tell you, we would react very violently. The rattlesnake would be the cause or object of our fear, but what would be the real fear? Pain and the loss of life for the self, and in order to save ourselves from the rattlesnake, we would do anything to get away from that evil! That ought to be our reaction to sin! Especially, those

sins that so easily beset us. What one fears, is what one serves. Fear, the good part of it, motivates service—service to the thing that it fears.

I remember once when I worked in the steel mill, I was assigned to work with some electricians who were stringing a new electrical line high up at the very top of one of the open-hearth furnace shops. This is where the steel is actually made. The only place from which we could work was a platform of wooden planks that were laid across about a dozen one-inch copper cables carrying 66,000 volts of electricity.

Each of these cables was about a foot apart, so the carpenters had nothing to attach the planking to, but rather, they just laid them across, and tied them to the cables. So, we were working up there about 100 feet up. And I will tell you the truth, I was not so sure I wanted to work up there! It was not the height. I have never been afraid of heights. It was the electricity that was surging through those cables. I was not afraid of the cables breaking, because they were one inch thick, and plenty strong enough to support our weight. And besides that, with the insulation around them, they were about two inches thick.

But I was concerned about the possibility that, here we are, jumping up and down, and maybe, just maybe, the insulation over those cables would crack in some place, and I would be unwittingly standing where they cracked. And 66,000 volts of electricity would leap out and ground through me, because we were all over the steel we were welding things to, so that they could put up the brackets for that new line.

I worked up there for about a week, and I want to tell you something: I was treating that electricity with the greatest amount of respect. I almost tiptoed around up there. Now, I was in the church, but I cannot recall thinking about Nadab and Abihu. I was afraid of what could jeopardize any one of us working up there. I never took it for granted. I never allowed myself to become so familiar with it that I disrespected, or disregarded the fact that that power was still going through there.

Now, that is somewhat similar to what we are talking about here with the fear of God, and how it works. It in no way keeps us from loving Him. But it does drive us from doing things that might injure the relationship, and trigger a reaction that would undoubtedly be good for us, but might indeed be very painful.

Think of something that almost all of us has experienced: When you were dating, or courting, did you not do your best to do the things that would please the other person, because you feared to offend them, thus injuring and destroying the relationship that was developing? That is why we are on our best behavior! And because you had that fear, and because you were careful to control your tongue, you were careful to control your dress, you were careful about the entertainment you went to, you always tried to appear in the best light possible, and it drew you together.

This is exactly what the fear of God does with Him. It actually draws us to Him. It is because we are on our best behavior, best attitudes—*everything*! We are doing that to please the other, because of the respect that is growing.

So, neither does the fear of God destroy the relationship with Him. It does not get in the way of love. All it does is increase our drawing closer; He loves to see someone conforming to Him because that is good for us.

Let us explore something else here: Why is God's reaction to sin not always the same? Why is not everybody just blasted away like Nadab and Abihu or Ananias and Sapphira? Well, the answer to that is: That it is, but yet it is not! Maybe that sounds contradictory, but it is not, and God provides us an example that gives us some of the explanation.

Turn with me to I Samuel. This is a rather long story. I will not go through all of it here. It is the story of Eli and his two sons.

I Samuel 2:22-25 Now Eli was very old, and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So he said to them, "Why do you such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, the God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" Nevertheless, they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them.

Now God had them in the position where He was going to give you and me an example, something that was going to become part of His Word.

Then we have the part about Samuel in there (verse 26). And a man of God came to Eli, and warned His prophet.

I Samuel 2:27 Then a man of God came to Eli, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?'"

In verse 29, Eli receives the blame:

I Samuel 2:29-35 'Why did you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me [Who did Eli fear? He feared his sons—he feared man—more than he feared God.], to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?' "Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the Lord says, "Far be it from Me [Here comes reciprocity again!]; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm [This indicates strength.] and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. And you will see an enemy in My dwelling place, despite all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever. [Maybe some of these people who die very young, seemingly cut off at age 30 or 35 are descendants of this man! Who knows? God keeps his promises!] And any of your men whom I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age. Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them. Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest. . .

That turned out to be Samuel.

Now it is obvious that they did not have much fear of God. And in chapter 3, we will see this thing about judgment.

I Samuel 3:1-3 Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. [There is Key #1.] And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes began to grow so dim, that he could not see [Hint #2: The leadership did not understand either.], and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down. . .

The keys here are this: The word of the Lord was rare in those days, and there was no widespread revelation. What God is saying is that He did not kill Hophni and Phinehas in the way that He did others, even though they were priests, because of the circumstances surrounding their sin. If you will recall, Nadab and Abihu were killed immediately after the glory of the Lord showed up, and the witness that had been made was very strong in their minds. There had been no period of time in which it could have waned—grown old, dim of memory—that kind of thing.

God was not speaking during the days of Eli, as He had in the days of Moses. And revelation is found in the presence of God. In the days of Eli, there was limited knowledge of His ways due to the lack of God's presence in Israel. Even Eli's eyes were darkened. It was both physical darkness and a symbolic spiritual darkness as well.

Much the same thing happened with Ananias and Sapphira. Their sin took place in a circumstance similar to Nadab's and Abihu's. The revelation of God had just occurred days and months previous to this. They were witnesses of, as it were, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They probably were in that 500 who witnessed Him after His resurrection. And so, because of the nearness of the revelation of the glory of God, there was no excuse for what they did.

Let us apply this to you and me. I believe, brethren, that we are in a time that cannot be too far different from what it was in Eli's day. It has been almost 2000 years since the explosive glory of the first century church. The light of that glory has flickered almost out at times, but during the past 70 years or so, it has flickered into a brightness it has not had in a long period of time.

Even right now, it seems almost to the place where it is being extinguished again. We are undoubtedly in a famine of the Word of the Lord. We do not see much of the glory of God. Even the church has been broken into very small pieces. And we are weak, very weak compared to those people when the explosive burst of glory came in the first century.

Now I know that the gates of the grave will not prevail against the church, but brethren, the light of God is not shining very brightly. But when it does, it can put a person into a very precarious position.

Today, people are not being struck down by lightning bolts from heaven. This indicates to me that God is being very patient with us, because of a recognition of our spiritual weakness—the lack of God's glory that is in our minds—the weakness of the grasp of our understanding. He is taking all these things into consideration, and He is acting with us mercifully, patiently—working with us till such time as we are ready to receive more of His glory.

Now let me tell you—let me warn us all—this has with it a very subtle danger, thus the sermons. This is, because we do not see God acting the way that He did with Ananias and Sapphira ("and great fear come upon the church"), we may be lured into a point of view—a perspective—that God really does not care, that He is not really judging. Remember what Paul said though: "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."

Let us look at what a wise man said in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon says:

Ecclesiastes 8:10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This is also vanity.

Let me give that to you from the "New Living Testament."

Ecclesiastes 8:10 (New Living Testament) I have seen the wicked people buried with honor. How strange! They were the very ones who frequented the Temple, and are praised in the very city where they committed their crimes.

These corrupt people had mocked God by going to "church," and it seemed that they died, apparently, without judgment! They were well thought of! Do not be fooled! Judgment was merely delayed!

Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily [like Nadab and Abihu], therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

Again, from the New Living Testament:

Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 (NLT) When a crime is not punished, people feel that it is safe to do wrong. But even though a person sins a hundred times, and lives a long life, I know that those who fear God will be better off.

Why will they be better off? Because judgment delayed is not judgment denied! In other words, God's judgment *always* takes place. He would not be God, and would not be honest to Himself—He would not have integrity—if He did not judge sin. God's judgment is absolutely sure. He will not fail to judge.

James 5:9 says that the Judge stands at the door. The apostle Paul said in Galatians 6 that we should not be deceived. God is not mocked! He is just being patient with us because we really have not seen a great deal of His glory. He takes that into consideration, and patiently waits for us to grow. But, it is still going on.

Now, we do not have to walk around like there is a cloud over our heads, because of the combination of things that He is doing, if we respect Him, will continue to draw us toward Him. It is not a bad thing, nor an evil thing. In His judgment, what He is doing with us is the safest way—it is best for us. As long as we carry with us that thought that God's judgment is sure—it is not always swift, but it is sure. There is both mercy and justice perfectly balanced in the way that He is dealing with us. He

patiently waits, mercifully waiting. But always, there is that muted threat that judgment is still going on! We can live with that. And, we can grow within it.