

The Fear of the Lord – Part 2

It's really funny sometimes how people change how they behave because of the presence of a pastor. Suddenly the cigarette goes behind the back, the TV changes channels, the music or video is turned down or off. For whatever reason, the presence of a pastor makes some people realise some behaviour should be altered. It shouldn't be that way since a pastor is just a man – but it illustrates what we are looking at: the fear of the Lord.

In Part 1 of this series, we saw the fear of the Lord is when a person realises the presence and power of God – this causes a reaction. It's like we react when we see a traffic officer on the road, like children react when they see the school principal, like workers react when the boss walks in – the fear of the Lord is when we realise who God is, and that He is here.

We can make this realisation a habit by two means. First, being sensitive to the Spirit. Cooperate with Him as He brings the presence of God to mind. Second, be saturated with the Scriptures. If you are hungry for the Person of God in the pages of God, the Spirit will reveal Him to you. This attitude of the fear of the Lord is the same as faith or humility. It's the foundation of everything else.

In the next three sessions, we want to see from Scripture what humility, faith, fear of the Lord, looks like. We know what it is – but what will be seen in my life if I practise the presence of God? The answer is sanctification, strengthening and servanthood.

Sanctification

Sanctification means to become holy. It means to sin less and obey more. First, there is a sanctification event called salvation. It's when you place your faith and trust in Christ as your Saviour, and He sets you apart from sin and its penalty forever.

After that, there is sanctification – the process. This is where you continue to confess and repent from sin and place your faith in God's Word, and trust it in obedience, and He sets you apart from sin's power and enables you to become more like Christ. One is an event; one is a process. But both find their basic roots and reactions in the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 16:6 says: *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil."* **Proverbs 8:13** says *"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil."* How does the fear of the Lord cause me to sin less and turn to God for forgiveness, grace and mercy? How does the fear of the Lord cause me to want to put off the old and put on the new? Let's look more in-depth at **Isaiah 6** to see three stages in how the fear of the Lord affected Isaiah.

First, we see Isaiah realised the presence and Person of God.

Notice that this is not in heaven; this is in the temple. Isaiah realises, 'God is here.' But more than that, He sees who God is. He sees angelic beings called the seraphim surround the throne. These beings behold God all the time, and their reaction is to cover their feet and faces, and cry out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!"

Just these short glimpse reveals something to Isaiah about the Person that God is: He is holy. How strange that God calls sinners to preach on holiness – but we must do our best. Holiness is God's absolute perfection. It is the best and most complete way of thinking, acting and being. It is free from any kind of taint, corruption or failing. It has never lost anything or gained anything – it is the purest and most perfect thing in the universe.

God's holiness is really all His character summed up. Trying to describe God's holiness is like trying to fit the ocean in a bottle. Every one of God's motives is faultless, just and right. Everyone of His attitudes is lovely, good and righteous. Every one of His thoughts is pure, wholesome and truthful. Every one of His words is perfect, clean and upright. Every one of His actions is blameless, awesome and wonderful.

God cannot be anything other than what He is. He has always been this way, and always will be. God has never improved and become more holy, because God was always God – always perfectly, totally, absolutely holy. Anything you can think of in the created world that you use to describe perfection – a diamond, a musical piece, extraordinary scenery, a perfect circle – all these things become ridiculously flawed when compared with the perfection that is God's holiness.

Now, what would any thinking man's reaction be to this holiness? It would notice how unlike they are. Like a beggar in rags becomes more aware of his rags when brought into the throne room of the king, so seeing the holiness of God emphasises what the Bible calls us – sinners.

Sin is simply being unlike God. It is the violation of God's holiness and perfection – in your attitudes, plans, priorities, motives, emotions, desires, thoughts, speech, habits, actions, your occasional behaviour, your non-verbal behaviour, your relationships, your work. It is everything you are and do that is unlike God. And just as a spotlight highlights the stains we didn't see on our clothes, so the holiness of God shows our sin in stark relief.

Then we see Isaiah realised the contrast between him and God.

Isaiah sees the great I Am, and effectively cries out 'Who am I?' by saying, "*Woe is me; I am undone.*" Do you know what Isaiah was saying? He was saying, 'Oh, no, I'm finished. I'm as good as destroyed. God is so holy, and I am such an offence to God, that His power will

destroy me.' Up to now Isaiah saw an awful reality – what he had coming to him was judgement.

When a man truly comes to grips with how holy God is, and how that holiness is furious at the corruption of holiness called sin – we will see that we are in danger. Not the danger of a mere human with a gun. Not the danger of even an army of humans with their tanks and guns. No, we stand in danger before the God of the universe. It is as if we have a target painted on us, and the marksman is God Himself. As Jonathan Edwards once put it in his essay *Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God*:

"Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward.

If God should only withdraw his hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it."

For the unsaved man, this is understanding that makes you realise you could be one second, one heartbeat, away from the flames of hell itself. You may feel comfortable, or feel the number of years you have already attained makes you invulnerable, or think death is something that happens to others suddenly, but will only happen to you eventually. But if you had the fear of the Lord – that would change. Edwards continues:

"It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand. It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages, shows this is no evidence,

that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable.

Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear, that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of his providence, to destroy any wicked man, at any moment.

All the means that there are of sinners going out of the world, are so in God's hands, and so universally and absolutely subject to his power and determination, that it does not depend at all the less on the mere will of God, whether sinners shall at any moment go to hell, than if means were never made use of, or at all concerned in the case."

Consider then, what was the correct reaction to understanding the Presence and Person of God? Repentance is what Isaiah had. Isaiah admitted his guilt before God. He was horrified over his sin. He was sorrowful. He didn't want it any more. Remember, this is a prophet – one of the best of the righteous. He calls his mouth unclean. He sees he is unclean and lives among the unclean.

For the unsaved man, this means coming before God and admitting you are a sinner. It's saying, 'God, I am guilty. You are right and I am wrong. Your verdict and sentence on me is fair. I am the criminal. I'm sorry, I don't want my sin. If I could, I'd not do what I did. I'm remorseful.' For the saved person, this is saying, 'Father, I failed you again. I know I wronged you once more. I claim ownership for my sin. I did it. I take the blame.'

1 John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" The Greek word for "confess" here, *homologeo*, means 'to say the same thing about.' It's admitting, 'God, I don't blame, justify, psychologise, ignore or rename my sin. I say about it what you say about it.'

Psalms 51 also shows us the correct reaction to seeing God and then seeing our sin, because if we know God is holy, we know He sees everything. This is part of the fear of the Lord. Knowing you cannot hide sin from God. You cannot escape your sin. God sees your thoughts.

Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:23-24

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do...

Hebrews 4:13

See, God has all the time in the world for sinners who admit their sinfulness – because then they are calling Him holy. Jesus had all the time in the world for repentant prostitutes, tax collectors and thieves. What God does not have time for is hypocrites – people who pretend to be righteous when they are not. They excuse their sin, hide it, blame it, and in so doing, they say God is a liar.

The self-righteous make God's holiness a small thing. They think that they can stand on their own righteousness before God, since they think God's righteousness and their own have no real difference. But let God be true and every man a liar. The world stands without excuse and before God condemned. The right reaction is **Proverbs 28:13**: *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."*

The first correct reaction in both positional sanctification and in progressive sanctification – that is, in salvation and spiritual growth into holiness – is repentance. Seeing and admitting our sin. Identifying sin in our own lives, and turning away from it – no longer wanting it, desiring to put it off. Repentance, contrition, confession – same idea.

If we saw the beauty of God and our sin and knew we deserved judgment and were repentant, it would be just a story of justice. But if we just stopped there, it would be a sad story. There is more, in **Isaiah 6:6-8**, where one of the seraphims flies to Isaiah and purges his sin.

Now understand God is revealing another side of His character to Isaiah. He knows he is in the presence of a holy God who can destroy him for his sin, but instead he sees the same God chooses to have mercy on him, and forgive him. As God cleanses him, Isaiah sees more of the Person of God – how God is merciful, God is gracious, God is longsuffering, God is loving.

God has every right to let that dam wall of judgement come crashing down on us, but His love, His passionate desire for our joy, gives us another chance. God is not only the King standing with a sword in His hand waiting to execute His enemies, He is also the Father in the story of the prodigal son – waiting for his son to return.

God is slow to get angry, and quick to forgive and show mercy. His anger has an extremely slow burn, but His compassion and love has a hair trigger. Isaiah simply had to admit his guilt, and cleansing was on the way. If you but repent and confess, before you can finish the sentence, God has a ring on your finger, shoes on your feet, the best robe on you, and the celebration in heaven has begun.

You don't have to convince God to forgive you, He is not reluctant to show you mercy. The desire of God to forgive you is demonstrated on the cross. There, God Himself, took all the anger of God at sin upon Himself, that incredible, fearful wrath – He took it for you and me. In doing so, God states very clearly: I love you and want to forgive you.

For the unsaved man, this means you turn from your sin, and turn to God in Christ. You admit your guilt, but accept Christ's payment for your sin on your behalf by His dying and rising again for you. As you turn away from sin and self to embrace Christ as your new life, God forgives, He takes a coal from the altar of Calvary, touches your life with it, and says, 'This has taken away your iniquity, this has purged your sin.'

I think the most loving statement in the whole Bible is found in **Luke 23:34**: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* Just think about that. The Creator of the universe nailed to a wooden cross. He made the tree that made the cross. He made the iron they used for the nails. He breathed life into the womb of mothers of those soldiers, and made them come into this world. He, by His own words, had legions of angels, and with a word could have created a massacre that day the world has never seen.

If nations exercise take revenge upon other nations for harming their citizens, what ought the soldiers of heaven do to the world for crucifying the King of Heaven? Yet the King, said, 'forgive them Father, they don't know. They don't understand the fear of the Lord. They are ignorant, their sin has blinded them.' His love was restraining His wrath. His desire to die for the very ones crucifying Him is the love of God. There is no sin too great to be forgiven by God, or Christ died in vain. There is no number of sins too great for God to forgive, or Christ died in vain.

What do you think Isaiah's reaction was to this? The same God who ought to destroy me is working for my benefit. He could squash me, send me into eternity with one word and with no turning back. But instead He speaks peace to me, and heals me, cleanses me of my sin. What was Isaiah's reaction to such a loving God? If you quiet your soul and think, 'God who should have destroyed me, died for me' – what does that do for your soul? It is the fear of the Lord – a sense of awe – that causes the right reactions.

Psalms 130:3-4 says: *"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."* So what is the right reaction to such love? Faith.

Galatians 5:6 says *"faith worketh by love."* The love of God towards us produces faith in Him. Isaiah trusted in this good God. He realised that when you turn from something, you have to turn to something else, and knew that he could turn from his sin to God. Faith completes repentance. After turning to God, listen to his desire to serve: *"Here am I, send me."*

Just a moment ago, he was saying, *"Woe is me!"* It is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance. If all we had was a judge, then men ought not to turn, for it would make no difference to the outcome. But our Judge has also become our Saviour – if we will abandon trust in ourselves and turn to Him.

This is the same for a believer. When we see how holy God is, we confess and repent of our sins. When we see how good He is, how He loves us and works for our good, we

trust Him. We then turn away from our sin, believe His Word and obey Him. We say, 'I consecrate myself to You – I want to obey. I'm putting off the old, but I'm putting on the new. Your holiness was threatening to me as a sinner, but as a cleansed saint, it's attractive and beautiful – I want to live like that.'

As you trust His Word, the Bible says, you are renewing your mind. The attitude of heaven, God's perspective on life, is becoming yours. This is the definition of wisdom. Your thinking is becoming less like a child of this world, and more like His. This is trusting faith. I regard God's Word as true, and trust Him, and then step out in obedience.

As we do this – what happens? We are sanctified. We are cleansed of the sin we do, and we receive faith to sin less in the future. We trust God and obey more, and so become, by His Spirit, more like Him.

The same procedure happened with Isaiah. He saw the presence and person of God. This time it was love. His reaction was to consecrate himself fully to God and say, 'I'll obey you. I'll follow you.' This is how the fear of the Lord produces sanctification. As we behold his great holiness, we see our sinfulness. We repent and confess. We put off the old man. We mortify the flesh.

As we are now cleansed we see the beauty of God, and trust Him and His Word. Our minds are now renewed, and we begin to put on the new man. That's the process of becoming more like Christ (**Ephesians 4:22-24**).

The book of 1 John has two "*God is*" statements that sum up what Isaiah saw. **1 John 1:5** says God is light. He is holy. This should cause repentance and confession. **1 John 4:8** says God is love. He is merciful and kind. This should cause faith and consecration. If you and I at all times remember God is here and He is light – we will confess and repent from our sins. If we at all times we realise God is here and He is love, we will trust His Word and consecrate ourselves to obey it by His Spirit.

If you're not saved and you realise that He is here, He is light, and He is love, then you should know that you stand in danger and in sight of salvation at the same time. "*That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us,*" says **Acts 17:27**. You are one heartbeat away from hell, but you are one prayer of faith away from heaven.

God is Here today. He is Light. Let that thought go with you.
God is here. He is Love. Let that thought go with you.