

GODLY FEAR : The Fear of God

By Dr. Charles Stanley

Key Passage: [Deuteronomy 13:4](#)

Supporting Scriptures: [Joshua 1:9](#) | [Psalm 33:8](#) | [Psalm 34:7](#) | [Psalm 37:4](#) | [Psalm 91:1-16](#) | [Psalm 119:120](#) | [Psalm 145:19](#) | [Psalm 147:11](#) | [Proverbs 1:7](#) | [Proverbs 3:7-8](#) | [Proverbs 9:10](#) | [Proverbs 10:27](#) | [Proverbs 14:26-27](#) | [Proverbs 16:6](#) | [Proverbs 19:23](#) | [Ezekiel 18:4](#) | [John 3:16](#) | [Romans 1:21-32](#) | [Romans 2:5](#) | [Romans 3:10-18](#) | [Romans 6:23](#) | [Galatians 5:22-23](#) | [Philippians 2:9-11](#) | [Hebrews 9:27](#)

Summary

What does it mean to fear the Lord? Should we be terrified of Him, or does it mean something else?

If we are lost and living in sin, we have a good reason to be afraid of God because we are not right with Him and are destined for judgment and condemnation. But if we are His redeemed people, there is no reason to be terrified of Him. However, we have every reason to show Him reverence and honor Him.

For those of us who know Jesus Christ as our Savior, **fearing God means to revere, honor, exalt, hold in high regard and esteem, worship, obey, acknowledge as worthy, and honor Him as our Creator and Judge.**

What does Scripture say about fearing the Lord?

- In Deuteronomy 13:4, God commands His people to follow Him, fear Him, keep His commandments, listen to Him, serve Him, and cling to Him. All these actions are the result of honoring and exalting Him in our lives. Psalm 147:11 says, “The Lord favors those who fear Him.”
- We receive His grace and blessings when our attitude toward God is one of reverence and high esteem.
- According to Psalm 33:8, God desires everyone to fear Him: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.”
- However, Romans 3:18 reveals the world’s current attitude toward God: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Instead of honoring Him, they see the Lord as a problem. His commands are contrary to their desires, and His conviction of their sin makes them uncomfortable.
- Although the world presently ignores or rejects God, one day every knee will bow to Christ, and every mouth will confess Him as Lord ([Phil. 2:9-11](#)). Those who don’t fear God now will miss heaven and find themselves being forced to bow to Christ as their Judge.

Why should believers fear God?

- The Lord requires it of us. “You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him” (Deut. 10:20).
- Fearing God gives knowledge. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). Many people are smart, well-educated, and knowledgeable on many subjects, yet they are totally ignorant about what matters most because they don’t know or fear God.
- It makes us wise. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). Wisdom doesn’t come from education but from God. He’s the one who gives us insight regarding what to do, when to act, how to respond, what to believe, and what to reject. The only source of true wisdom is almighty God, and He’ll give it to us when we ask and are willing to surrender our lives to Him.
- It keeps us from evil. “By the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil” (Prov. 16:6). A deep reverence for God produces a desire for righteousness and a hatred of sin. We’ll be quick to repent and deal with any sin in our lives.
- It’s healing to our body. “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones” (Prov. 3:7-8). As believers, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit who indwells us, and we should treat them as such. When we hold God in high esteem, we’ll seek to please Him by doing what’s right and abstaining from evil. This doesn’t mean that living a lifestyle of obedience to God will guarantee us a long, healthy life, but it will keep us from the ailments that result from indulging in sinful practices.
- It gives confidence. “In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence” (Prov. 14:26). Boldness comes as a result of living in dependence upon God. As He lives His life in and through us, He produces godliness and the assurance of His continual presence and help in every situation we face.
- It’s a fountain of life. “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life” (Prov. 14:27). When we reverence and exalt God, we’ll understand that He’s in control of our lives, watching over us and guiding our path. And as Christ’s life flows through us, His Spirit produces the attitudes He desires us to have—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, selfcontrol” (Gal. 5:22-23).
- God will fulfill our desire. “He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him” (Ps. 145:19). If we are following the Lord in obedience and living as He wants, He will give us the desire of our heart and hear our prayers. However, this doesn’t guarantee we’ll receive everything we request. Fearing God means we will want what pleases Him. As we first delight in the Lord, He responds by giving us those desires that align with His will (Ps. 37:4).
- The fear of the Lord gives divine protection. “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them” (Ps. 34:7). We should never underestimate the mighty power of God and His willingness to protect us. Psalm 91 speaks of His awesome protection for those who live in His shelter.
- It leads to life. “The fear of the Lord leads to life” (Prov. 19:23). This verse isn’t speaking merely of our physical life but our spiritual life. Many people are looking for happiness, peace, and joy but are continually turning away from God—the only One who can provide

these things. The fear of the Lord brings every blessing imaginable because we're honoring, obeying, and surrendering to Him.

- It prolongs life. "The fear of the Lord prolongs life" (**Prov. 10:27**). People who have lived 40 years fearing and obeying God have lived more life than a 70-year old without Him. Furthermore, none of us can be saved and receive eternal life without fearing the Lord and surrendering our lives to Him.

The wisest decision we can ever make is to fear the living God by honoring, obeying, exalting, worshipping, and trusting Him for our salvation. He alone should have first place in our minds and hearts throughout our days.

RESPONSE

- How would you reconcile the fact that God is love, yet we are also commanded to fear Him? How does an illustration of a parent/child relationship help you understand this divine concept?
- As you examine your own life, what would the fear of the Lord look like in practical terms? In other words, could anyone tell by how you live and what you do whether you fear God or not?
- Do you tend to think that the fear of God is displayed more by what you avoid or what you do? Why are both required?
- <https://www.intouch.org/watch/the-fear-of-god>