

# THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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## Fear the Lord and Live

Dan Huff

There are many things we can fear. But one thing is necessary: to *"fear God and keep His commandments. For this is man's all."* This was the conclusion of Solomon, who was given great wisdom by God. He went on to say why: for we must give account to Him for our lives, and how we choose to live (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**). The word "fear" in the Bible can mean several things. However, the context will often help us understand how it is used.

*Now all the people witnessed the thunderings the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin" (**Exodus 20:18-20**).*

It was important for the children of Israel to witness the power, beauty, and majesty of God Almighty. The children of Israel were trembling at what they saw and experienced. God through Moses told them not to fear. The first fear is to be afraid, frightened, to dread, or to be intimidated. This is not what God desires for those who serve Him. Rather, God desires for His people to have a deep reverence, piety, and awe for His power and authority. A proper fear will lead souls to faith, love and obedience. The fear of God is so that we may not sin, so that we may live.

In **Exodus 32**, we see one example of why it is important to fear God. Some days after the events in **Exodus 20**, we see that the people didn't fear God. They were dancing around the idol, the golden calf they had molded with their own power and wisdom, even giving it credit for bringing them out of Egypt! They had left their Deliverer and made a perversion of what He had provided.

The fear of God restrains us from doing stupid things by following our human nature. When there is no fear of God, when restraint is cast off, mankind tends to degenerate swiftly down a slope into chaos and sin, where selfishness rules. Paul quotes a list of sins in **Romans 3:10-18** from which he draws the conclusion, *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

None of us would think of sticking our finger in a light socket. Why? We have a healthy dose of fear; we respect what can happen. We have a knowledge and understanding of the power of 120 volts of electricity flowing through that socket. We don't want to get shocked or burned. Therefore, fear is good and a benefit to us. How much more should we have a healthy fear, respect, and reverence for God, who is far superior to, and mightier than, man-made electricity, lest we get eternally burnt?

I like to think of the fear of God as being like a magnet; on one side it repels us from doing things that will harm us and our relationship with God. A healthy fear of God includes the fear of disobedience and the consequences following (**2 Corinthians 5:10-11**). On the other side there is a drawing effect that draws us nearer to God through obedient faith and strengthens our relationship with Him. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (**James 4:8**)*. Again, in this verse we see the need to remove ourselves from sin and its corrupting influence, purify our hearts, and by faith draw near to God. As we do so, He will draw near to us.

In the Scriptures the fear of God is used in a positive manner. There are a plethora of examples wherein fearing God is beneficial. Here is a smattering: *"The fear of the Lord is clean" (**Psalms 19:9**)*. It is wholesome and for our good! *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (**Proverbs 1:7**)*. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments" (**Psalms 111:10**)*. Fear of the Lord can bring about obedience. Consider **Hebrews 11:7**: Noah, because of his faith, *"moved with godly fear, [and] prepared an ark for the saving of his household."* God has mercy on those who fear Him (**Luke 1:50**). *"The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will be satisfied" (**Proverbs 19:23**)*.

The more we fear God and keep His commandments, the more it will have an impact on our relationships with others. We will have more concern and care for our fellow man (*"Love our neighbor as our self."*). We will make efforts to seek our neighbors' good, attempting to understand our neighbors, and putting ourselves in their shoes. We will have civil conversations, even over things that we disagree on (**Matthew 5:43-48; 22:36-40**).

The more we fear Him, the more we learn to trust Him, His word, and His plan (**Proverbs 3:5-6**). We develop an understanding that our heavenly Father is interested in our eternal welfare and life. The relationship grows and evolves from one of fear of punishment to one of love and desire to serve and please the Lord, motivated by our love for Him (**1 John 4:19**). As His children we don't want to offend or disappoint Him.

God is not in heaven watching us, just waiting for us to sin or falter, so He can rain down his fury upon us. This is not how our Creator works. We should never lose sight that we are valuable in God's eyes. Jesus said, *"Do not fear therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows."* But He tempered that with, *"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (**Matthew 10:31, 28**)*. God's purpose is He wants us to choose Him and live! Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (**John 10:10**)*.

*continued on the next page...*

If we love the Lord, we will keep His commandments (**John 14:15**). If we keep His commandments, which are not burdensome but for our good and our living (**1 John 5:3; 2 Peter 1:3-4**), then we do not have a reason to be terrified of God, and of eternal punishment in the Day of Judgment (**1 John 4:17-18**).

*"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).*

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## Overcoming Fear - Part 2

Charles Ingle

God shows us how we can control those thoughts that tempt us to worry and despair. Let's see if we can figure out how God says to do it.

Paul says in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**,

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) **CASTING DOWN IMAGINATIONS**, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and **BRINGING INTO CAPTIVITY EVERY THOUGHT** to the obedience of Christ.*

Paul says this war is a war of our minds and hearts, and that is where it must be fought. He tells us to **CAST DOWN** imaginations. Worry is imagining bad things happening. **REJECT** those imaginations. **STOP** imagining those worries that lead you away from Christ. **BRING INTO CAPTIVITY** every thought. Notice it doesn't say "don't have the thought." Thoughts come to our minds (all kinds of them) -- that is how our minds work. But Paul says to take those thoughts captive — take control of the worry temptation when it presents itself and cast it out of your mind.

But that sounds much easier than it is. Have you ever tried to just make yourself stop thinking about something? It is an exercise in futility because the more you try to not think of it, the more you do think of it.

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matthew 6:33-34).*

This passage gives us two pieces of instruction:

1. Seek the kingdom of God: focus your mind and attention on godly thoughts
2. Stop thinking about tomorrow's possible evils.

Peter tells us, "*Wherefore **gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope** to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).*" "Gird up the loins

of your mind" means to intensely and repetitively take control of your creative thoughts, imaginations, and understanding (Strong's: "gird" and "loins"). It takes intentional, repetitive rejection of those thoughts to get yourself to stop imagining bad things. You aren't likely to succeed after just resisting them one time.

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by **prayer and supplication with thanksgiving** let your **requests be made known unto God**. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall **keep your hearts and minds** through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are **true**, whatsoever things are **honest**, whatsoever things are **just**, whatsoever things are **pure**, whatsoever things are **lovely**, whatsoever things are of **good report**; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things**. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you (Philippians 4:6-9).*

That is God's recipe for replacing worry thoughts with good thoughts. The thought is a temptation, and God has given us the ability to decide whether we are going to take that thought and form it into worry and fear, or if we are going to reject that thought and think about what is true, what is honest, what is just, what is pure, etc. Whenever you catch that temptation to worry coming to your mind, reject that thought, lock it up, don't imagine more details of it, don't scare your body into a fear reaction. Instead, identify something that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, or well spoken of. Plan ahead and identify a specific thought you are going to focus your attention on when the temptation to worry comes. With practice, you can refuse the temptation to worry and divert your thoughts to the replacement thoughts, and you will stop being frightened by them.

For example, remind yourself of what you have to be thankful for and thank God for it. If you need something, pray and ask God for it. Then focus on the replacement thought and His peace will **keep your hearts and minds**. **Romans 12:2** tells us to be transformed by renewing our minds — we can control and change the course of our thoughts towards the good, acceptable, perfect will of God because He has given us His Spirit. **2 Timothy 1:7** says, "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a **sound mind**.*" Psychology calls this "thought stopping" and "replacement thinking," but God designed it when He created us.

My concern is that the temptation to worry is hitting all of us as a whole more than any other time we can remember. This pandemic and the fear of it has been in our face day after day, tempting us to imagine the worst. Tempting us to worry. The fear of it has been portrayed in detail to us over and over as we see pictures of stacked bodies of the dead and hear stories of people just like us who have died from it. We have seen the fear in other people's eyes that we interact with. We are encouraged to isolate from everyone, keep away from our support, for fear of getting it and dying or killing them by exposing them. Can COVID-19 cause people to die? Yes, it is true that the virus does pose some level of danger to us, but it is difficult to determine how much to each of us individually. It is not the death sentence that it has been portrayed as, with only a 1.8% mortality rate in the US (Johns Hopkins University). We tolerate many things that have about the same

mortality rate, but we don't let them control our lives. We can do some things to try to reduce the danger, but not eliminate it. However, watching the daily count of the number of people who have died and hearing the emotionally charged stories of specific people's experiences of loved ones dying from the virus has given us lots of worry material. With every detail, we are tempted to imagine how that could be our experience in the future. This tends to take a situation that has some level of danger and shoves it into a near phobic reaction of worry and frequent fight/flight/freeze responses. It promotes a sense of panic, helplessness, and hopelessness that can cripple us and interfere with our ability to deal with everyday life. I'm afraid it can even cause us to hide Christ's light of hope from the world.

Whether it is the virus, politics, or something else, the temptation to worry is always present. If we can no longer function effectively because we are imagining all kinds of terrible things happening, then we need to take the advice of our heavenly Father. If your thinking is causing you to feel hopelessness and despair, **who** do you suppose is encouraging those thoughts? Not God. God is the God of hope (**Romans 15:13**). If your thinking is causing you to be afraid of interacting with others and separating you from the support of your brothers and sisters, **who** do you suppose is happy about that? If your thinking is creating feelings of anger, who do you think is pleased by that? Not God. God is love (**1 John 4:16**).

The answer to all of these is Satan. Satan is lying to us and telling us that we can't control those thoughts. Satan is lying to us about the thought taking us captive against our will. Satan is lying to us to convince us that it is hopeless. Why would he do that? Because he wants us to be where he is: hopeless.

But our creator gave us control over what we do with those thoughts when they come. He has given us the power to choose what we think about. He won't take that away from us and He won't allow Satan to take it from us. Which thoughts are we going to feed and nurture? Will we stop imagining bad things in more detail and choose to entertain the thoughts God wants us to think about? Will we take our requests to God with thanksgiving? Will we choose to think about what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and good? If we do, then, with God's help, we can stop worrying and we will be filled with peace from God.

We can TRAIN OUR MINDS and TAKE THE CONTROL that God has given every one of us and be at peace. Jesus says, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*" (**Matthew 11:28-29**).

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## From Dust to Dust

Kevin Crittenden

*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return*

*unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (**Genesis 3:19**).

Earlier this year, on January 13, I received the message that my only sibling, my brother Joel, had been hospitalized with severe congestive heart failure complicated by pneumonia. His lungs were filled with fluid and his kidneys had shut down. I immediately went to see him, having been granted permission by the hospital, but he could no longer speak. I did not recognize him at first as he had grown so gaunt. At the end of my visit, I hugged his failing body and told him that I loved him. He died the next day.

Joel had chosen to be cremated, and, as I left the mortuary carrying both urns containing the ashes of his mortal remains, I couldn't help but think of the lyrics, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother. . ."

I also thought of **Genesis 3:19** reminding us that, by God's Grace, we are formed from the dust of the ground and back to dust we shall go. All of us.

It is, for me, a sobering and NECESSARY thought that I, too, will in a few-years' time be remains inside a little container. It is a NECESSARY thought because it reminds me of the proper attitude of humility.

Whatever accomplishments I might have achieved, whatever possessions I might have owned, whatever status I might have attained, even my reputation — those things won't fit inside my urn.

Nor do those things define me in the eyes of God. He is not impressed by the awards hanging on the wood-paneled walls of my paid-off house in this upscale California suburb. Even my new iPhone 12 Max Pro with 128 GB of memory does not raise His eyebrows.

So, does this mean that my life, beginning with nothing and ending with nothing is a complete wash? If nothing I accomplish from now on will outlive me, shall I just watch reruns of, "This Is Your Life" on TV?

*And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind* (**Ecclesiastes 4:4**).

I need to think about the things that I use to define myself, those things that I believe to give my life purpose and value, those things that I do in order to receive praise from others, to achieve the status of a "pillar of the community," which gives me a place of honor in the city gates.

I need to then contrast THOSE things with the things that God DOES care about. And are those things a mystery? Has God some "secret knowledge" about His Will for me that He challenges me to discover? If I open my Bible, is there a large "X" where His Will might be found if I dig hard enough? Must I be a member of Mensa to understand His will for me?

Of course God doesn't try to "hide" his Will for us or make it "difficult" to discover. What does the Bible say? "*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*" (**Micah 6:8**).

What does God want with us? Relationship. He delights in us. We are part of His Creation; that part in which God was



***Please check your expiration date!***

*Continued from page 3: "From Dust to Dust"*

also pleased. We were good-to-go, turnkey humans entirely acceptable to God when we were created. He wants us back. Through the sacrifice of His son, He has provided a way for us and wants us to return to Him in humbleness and contrition.

The quote from Ecclesiastes above mentions envy of others as being the basis for worldly accomplishments. But completely transparent and openly revealed in His Word, we find over and over again that we are to love one another (see **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**). Envy should have no place in our relationships with one another.

So, going forward in the certain knowledge of death and the dissolution of this body into dust, how should I live my life? In a way that is pleasing to God, staying in relationship with Him, and trusting in the One in whom I live and move and have my being. The One who has sacrificed so much out of His love for me that I CAN have the opportunity for eternal relationship with Him.

*... Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).*

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## *Glory to God!*

The **Rock Creek Church of Christ, Ottawa, KS**, praised God when **Cameron Barnes** was born into the kingdom of God this past month.

The **Riverside Road Church of Christ, Ozark, MO**, welcomed **Janel Welte** as a member of the church in January.

## *Here and There*

Your editor was contacted last month by a subscriber with a special request. He is in the market for a wheelchair-accessible van. He estimates he will need it by the end of May. If any of our subscribers has a wheelchair-accessible van, please contact either your editor or publisher and we will put you in contact with the brother. Thank you!

## *Special Meetings*

The **Old Lamine Church of Christ** plans their annual **Family VBS** for July 17. The theme for this year is "Tool Time." Classes will be available for all ages.

### **2021 Meetings**

- May 29.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO
- June 12-13.....Vandalia, IA
- July 5-9.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
- July 17.....Family VBS, Old Lamine, Rural Blackwater, MO
- September 4-5.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA

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