

Embracing the Fear of the Lord

By Kenneth L. Birks

In this section, the discussion has been about the essential elements of our faith that are needed in our preparation to be a part of the wise virgin class of believers. These are the elements that will make us useful vessels as we serve the prophetic purposes of God for our generation as David did. Another important element that must be discussed is that of embracing the fear of the Lord. As quoted in the book of Proverbs, *“The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.”* If we are to be wise in the ways of God, it begins by embracing the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.*

Notice in the above Scripture, a direct correlation is made between the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of the Holy, which brings understanding. The fear of the Lord is designed to bring us into a deeper realm of intimacy with our Lord and Savior. Without the intimacy that comes from fearing God, we will not be known to our bridegroom in the manner in which He desires to know us. Therefore we must embrace the fear of God with all of our hearts.

There is much to say concerning the fear of the Lord throughout the Bible. Moses said we are required by God to fear Him and walk in His ways.¹ David said God is greatly to be feared in the congregation of His saints.² Solomon said the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments.³ Isaiah said we are to sanctify the Lord and let Him be our fear.⁴ Jesus said we are to fear a Him who can destroy our soul in Hell.⁵ Peter said we are to pass our time of sojourning in fear.⁶ The writer of the book of Hebrews said it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.⁷

With all of these great heroes of our faith including Jesus exhorting us to fear God, it's a wonder we aren't hearing this message from pulpits throughout the world. It's a message Satan doesn't want us to hear. It seems all we're hearing is the message of the goodness of God. Paul spoke of the goodness and the severity of God. When the goodness of God is preached without equal time to the severity of

¹ Deuteronomy 10:12

² Psalm 89:7

³ Ecclesiastes 12:13

⁴ Isaiah 8:13

⁵ Matthew 10:28

⁶ 1 Peter 1:17

⁷ Hebrews 10:31

God, there's a big lack in the knowledge of the Holy which leads to licentiousness—an absence of restraint that produces lewd and lawless behavior.

Jude 1:4 *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Vines Expository dictionary defines licentiousness or lasciviousness as excess, absence of restraint, indecency, and wantonness. Websters dictionary defines it as lewd and lawless behavior. Other words to describe this behavior are debauched, promiscuous, carnal, lustful, indecent, obscene and smutty. This is what happens when one takes the grace of God and uses it as a license to sin.

Romans 6:1-2 *what shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

Licentious behavior is what will lead to those of the unwise virgin class accepting the mark of the beast during the great tribulation period, thus blaspheming the Holy Spirit and being eternally damned to hell forever. It's the fear of the Lord with a knowledge of the Holy that gives us the understanding that prevents this from ever happening.

The fear of the Lord is designed to keep us from sinning and turning the grace of God Into licentious behavior as Moses warned the children of Israel.

Exodus 20:20 *Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."*

What is the Fear of the Lord?

As we have seen, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, but what does that involve? It is an awesome respect and awe for who God is in His sovereignty majesty, and power. However, it also entails much more as we consider how it affects our walk with Him. It is something that needs to be embraced with all our hearts, minds and souls as we seek to be all that God has called us to be.

The fear of God found in Old Testament Scriptures is derived from two Hebrew words — “*Yir'ah and 'Yare.*” These two words mean to tremble at His presence with fear, dread and terror as we stand in awe of a God, who placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, though the waves roar, and are unable to pass over it.

Jeremiah 5:22 *“Do you not fear Me? Says the Lord. ‘Will you not tremble at my presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual*

decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though it's waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.”

In this passage, the prophet is rebuking the people of Israel for not standing in an awesome reverence and fear of God, that should cause them to tremble at His presence because of His unlimited and creative power. David said something very similar as seen in the following passage.

Psalm 2:11-12 *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss the Son, lest, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed be all those who put their trust in Him.*

In today's Christian culture, the fear of God is often watered down when it comes to trembling in His presence. It settles for a sense of awe and respect, but the fear of God goes beyond that. Our tendency is to just focus on the goodness of God and leave out His severe side. The truth of the matter is, we must embrace His severe side and tremble before a God, who is able to cast our souls in hell for eternity. The writer of the Book of Hebrews bears this thought out as well in the following passage.

Hebrews 12:28-29 *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹For our God is a consuming fire.*

It would be impossible to fully appreciate the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ without a comprehensive understanding of all that the fear of God entails. We must fully consider the dread and terror of the Lord as well as having an awesome sense of His reverence and respect for who He is. We must see Him as perfectly holy and righteous in His severity and goodness as He becomes involved with us as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:12-13 *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 with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and do for it is His good pleasure.*

We are also urged to tremble at God's word, which would mean having a high regard for it. It is as we take time to read It and commit to applying the truths that come forth, we come into more of an intimate understanding of who He is and what He desires from us.

The Fear of the Lord Embraces God's Ongoing Presence.

God is always watching us, even though His presence is most often not sensed, He is constantly watching over us. Every motive, thought, word, and action passes before Him and will be judged by Him. It is as we are continually aware of His ongoing presence, we will be more careful with our secret thoughts, words and actions, knowing that we will be judged by them. The fear of the Lord takes this into account as we sojourn in fear.

Proverbs 5:21 *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths.*

Luke 8:17 *For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.*

Matthew 12:35-36 *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

The above passages should bring a soberness to us as we realize He hears all of our secret thoughts and knows the motives of our hearts towards Him. We are instinctively concerned about what others think of us, but we should be more concerned about what pleases our Father in heaven as He evaluates our thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, and motives.

Luke 12:3 *Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on house tops.*

The Fear of the Lord Embraces God's Hatred of Sin

God has shown throughout the Old and New Testaments His hatred for sin. He sees it as something that goes against the grain of all that He has destined for those who follow Him. He sees the destruction that it causes to world He created. It is sin that gives birth to all the evil in the world, which causes the breakdown of cultures, resulting in the decay of all that He has created. Therefore, He expects us to have a hatred for sin and evil in the same way that He does.

Proverbs 8:13 *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way.*

Psalm 97:10 *You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves them out of the hand of the wicked.*

Romans 12:9 *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good.*

God's desire towards us is that we would fear Him by hating sin and evil so that we can live in harmony with His standard of righteousness. In this way we are able to honor Him in all that we do.

To Fear God is to Embrace His Discipline.

Once we are saved and born again, it doesn't take very long to realize we still have foolish and sinful ways that need to be dealt with. God has a way of using discipline to bring these areas to the front and center to be dealt with.

Hebrews 12:5-8 *And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons: My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶for whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. ⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten.*

God's chastening comes in various ways. It may be through His gentle voice revealing an area in your life that needs changed or it may come through negative circumstances that come as a result of reaping what you have sown. It may be a brother or sister in the Lord, pointing out something that is destructive to your well-being or it maybe someone who is over you in the Lord, pointing out something that is not only hurtful to you, but to those around you. Nevertheless, we all need to open our spirits to the examination of the Lord and give Him permission to correct us.

We should be like David who said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked or hurtful way in me."⁸ When we are proactive with are faults as David was, we eliminate hardship and being chastened by the Lord. This is the greatest way to embrace the fear of the Lord in the area of chastening. It's also a much faster process with our growth in the Lord.

The Fear of the Lord and the Reality of Hell and the Lake of Fire.

⁸ Psalm 139:23-24

Romans 11:22 *Therefore consider the goodness and the severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you will also be cut off.*

I often refer to the goodness and the severity of God as the two guardrails of life. When we lose sight of God's goodness, it has the potential of producing a recklessness in us that could cause us to crash hard. Because God is a faithful and merciful God, He has put the guardrail of His severity in place to keep us from going over the edge and crashing into the abyss below. To fall into the hands of a living God is the fear of God.

Jesus spoke of it when He said, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who can destroy both the soul and body in Hell.”*⁹

I understand how the fear of the Lord is an awesome respect and reverence for God, but it also entails what Jesus spoke when He said, *“Fear Him, who ‘can destroy the soul and body in Hell.’”*¹⁰ With this comes the necessity of a healthy Biblical understanding of what Hell is and who's going there.

The Reality of Hell

There is much to say in both the Old and New Testaments concerning Hell and the Lake of Fire. The Bible teaches that life continues after the physical death of the body. God created man with a natural, physical body and an eternal soul. The soul of man consists of who we are. It is the center of our mind, will, and emotions. The Bible teaches that life is eternal. Because the soul is immortal, we will either spend eternity in Heaven or Hell.

Daniel 12:2 *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

God created Hell for the devil and his demons to inhabit. It is such an awful place that Jesus said it would be better to cut off your hand or gouge out your eye rather than to go there. There will be crying and total darkness in Hell—a lake made of unquenchable fire and brimstone with intense pain and agony.

Mark 9:43 *And if your hand makes you sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.*

⁹ Matthew 10:28

Mark 9:45 *And if your foot makes you sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.*

It is true that people can partially experience hell on earth. Those who live in rebellion against God and His ways do experience, to a small degree, some of the things that those in Hell are suffering. This experience is, however, only a slight foretaste of the miseries that the occupants of hell will experience forever.

Hell will be a place of intense torment, pain, and weeping, described as a furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.¹¹ “The story of the “Rich Man and Lazarus” illustrates to us the intensity of the pain that will exist in Hell. The rich man tormented in the flame did not wish this place of torment upon anyone.¹² He cried out saying, *“Father, Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”*¹³

I’ve heard people say at various times they would rather be partying in Hell with their friends than walking in gardens with their enemies. What an absurd statement! If they only realized how ridiculous it is. There will be no partying going on in Hell, only extreme loneliness, blackness and darkness forever as the Bible describes it.¹⁴ Now is the day of salvation that will save you from this terrible existence throughout eternity.

Bible teacher, Kevin Conner is quoted as saying, *“Hell will be an awful place, separated from the presence of God, the rejected Lamb, the holy angels, and the redeemed. There will be no light, life, peace, joy, righteousness, nor salvation. Only darkness and torment of conscience will be there for those who rejected and despised God’s grace.”*¹⁵

The important thing to keep in mind is that Jesus did not come to condemn the world. He came to save the world from this awful place of torment.

John 3:17-19 *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the*

¹¹ Matthew 13:42 & 50

¹² Luke 16:19-28

¹³ Luke 16:24

¹⁴ Jude 1:13

¹⁵ The Foundations of Christian Doctrine - Kevin Conner

condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

2 Peter 3:9-11 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

A Lot of People Will End Up in Hell.

They'll come from every background, race, society, religion, and culture. Among their numbers will include those who the Bible describes as:

- Those who do not know God - *2Thessalonians 1:8*
- Those who don't obey the Gospel - *2Thessalonians 1:8*
- Sinners and hypocrites - *Isaiah 33:14*
- Those who practice lawlessness – *Matthew 13:41*
- Cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murders, sorcerers, sexually immoral, idolaters, and all liars - *Revelation 21:8*
- Adulterers, thieves, homosexuals, covetous people, drunkards, and extortioners - *1Corinthians 6:9-10*

The Bible says the road to Hell is wide, and the road to heaven is narrow. Which road are you traveling? *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”*¹⁶

Are We Secure in our Salvation?

You may be thinking, “I’m secure in my salvation. I can never lose it.” If that’s what you believe, this next section may be somewhat challenging for you. I would encourage you to read it and ponder it. Allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves without trying to interpret them through any school of thought. Our loyalty needs to be to God’s Word, not to schools of thought.

Personally, I do not believe a person goes through a continuous cycle of being saved and lost over and over again. Therefore, I do not think because a person is in a backslidden condition they have necessarily lost their salvation, but I do believe there is a point where you can become so deceived in your backsliding that you eventually disown Christ by no longer believing. At this point, you fulfill the Scriptures that speak of disowning Christ.

¹⁶ Galatians 6:7

Notice in the following passages: Christ cannot disown you, unless you, first of all, disown Him. Keep in mind, you cannot be disowned by Christ unless you are first owned by Him.

Matthew 10:33 (NIV) *But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*

2 Timothy 2:12 (NIV) *If we endure, we will also reign with him, if we disown him, he will also disown us.*

You may think you could never get to the place where you could disown Christ. The problem with that kind of thinking is, once you begin the slippery slope of backsliding, you open yourself up to Satan's devices and deception to a greater degree. You have no idea where deception could lead you. Jesus speaks of a strong delusion that is coming upon the world before His second coming. He says, "If it were possible even the elect would be deceived."¹⁷ Paul speaks of a great falling away before the coming of Christ—a time when many will disown Christ.

A great deception is coming. To keep from being deceived, we will need both guardrails in place—the goodness and the severity of God. Those whose hearts are cold towards the Lord through their backsliding wouldn't have a chance. The enemy is already walking around looking for those whom he can devour. A backslider is easy pickings for him.

There will be a Great Falling Away.

Paul speaks of a great falling away.¹⁸ Those who fall away are those who have defected from the truth of the Christian faith. To fall away implies a strong rebellion or revolt that happens before the Second Coming of Christ. The point is, there will be people who will fall into this category. They are the ones who disown Christ.

Is it Possible to Fall Away Never to be Saved Again?

There is a point where the once saved believers are completely reprobate in their minds and actions. The writer of the Book of Hebrews addresses this issue in the following passage. However, the stipulations shown below reveal that it is only a mature believer that is capable of committing this sin.

Hebrews 6:4-9 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away,*

¹⁷ Matthew 24:24

¹⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:3

to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame.

This passage shows, very clearly, there is a point where a Christian has backslidden so far that they can't come back. The Greek word for "fall away" is "*parapipto*," which means to fall aside or to apostatize.¹⁹

These Christian believers were once:

- Enlightened - *John 1:6-12*
- Tasted of the Heavenly Gift - *John 3:16 & Romans 6:23*
- Made Partakers of the Holy Spirit - *Acts 19:2*
- Tasted of the Good Word of God - *Hebrews 5:12-14*
- Tasted of the Powers of the World to Come - *Acts 1:8*

This person has given up their birthright in the same way that Esau did. Giving up one's birthright is when backsliding leads to the extreme position of disowning Christ as Paul warned Timothy.²⁰ John refers to disowning Christ as the sin that leads unto death.²¹ The writer of the Book of Hebrews refers to it as "willful sin" in a later chapter about the person who has trodden underfoot the Son of God and insulted the Holy Spirit.²² Jesus referred to it when He spoke of the individual who blasphemes the Holy Spirit and commits the unpardonable sin.

Mark 3:29 (NIV) *But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.*

The words "fall away" describe the person's willful and independent position. It means to walk alongside or out of the will of God with no intent of returning to God's way—total apostasy. There is an open renunciation of Jesus Christ and a gathering together with the enemies of Christ.

There Is a Point where God Cuts off those who Disown Him.

If God did not spare natural Israel when they committed apostasy, what makes us think that He will save us if we fall away? We must continue in the goodness and severity of God. Otherwise, we, too, will be cut off.

¹⁹ Strong's Greek Dictionary Concordance #3895

²⁰ 2Timothy 2:12

²¹ 1 John 5:16

²² Hebrews 10:26-31

Romans 11:21 *For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.*

The writer of the Book of Hebrews gives us a strong warning about drawing back unto perdition by letting us know that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He takes no pleasure in those who draw back. We see this again in chapter ten.

Hebrews 10:31,38-39 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. ³⁸Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him." ³⁹But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

When the above passage speaks of those who "draw back unto perdition" or waste and destruction, it is a possibility, or it would not have been written to warn us. The word perdition indicates loss of well-being, not of being. The destruction then is everlasting without annihilation.

Hebrews 10:26-27 *If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

Some would like to say this is referring to a person who continually rejects Jesus after they are convicted many times. It's just not so, as we see in the following Scriptures.

Hebrews 10:29-31 *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine," says the Lord, And again "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

This person:

- **Was sanctified by the blood of Jesus:** To be sanctified means to be set apart from the world unto God.
- **Has trodden underfoot the Son of God:** To trample underfoot the person of Jesus and all that He is and has done is to count Him as refuse. Trodding underfoot the Son of God is an act of utter contempt for Christ.
- **Has counted the blood of Jesus as unholy:** To value the precious, sinless blood of Jesus as that of a pig or unclean thing.

- **Has done despite unto the Spirit of Grace:** He insults the Holy Spirit, who he had received by God's grace by insulting all the work of the Spirit he had been a partaker of, such as salvation, baptism, healing, gifts, fruit, etc. to insult the Holy Spirit is to blaspheme Him for which there is no forgiveness.

As we have seen, to "fall away" consists of total renunciation or disowning of Christ and Christianity. However, we must keep in mind; backsliding is where the process begins. Once a person begins to backslide, they open themselves up to greater deception from Satan. Our enemy is a devouring lion, who goes after those who are weak in the faith. Don't be fooled! He will come after you with everything he has. As you begin the downward spiral of backsliding, His goal will be to get you to commit apostasy. That's why I'm afraid to backslide. I am well aware that I have fallen into the hands of a living God.

I don't believe anyone knows where this cut-off point is. We are not the judge nor could we because we don't have all the facts in each case. Even if we did, we would not have the wisdom to analyze them. God is the righteous judge, and there is a point where God says, "No more—that's it!"

Judgement Awaits those who Blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

The entire second chapter of Peter's second epistle describes believers who go back and become apostate.

2 Peter 2:20-21 *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.*

We must give serious consideration to this passage. It says, "*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness.*" How could it possibly be better not to have known the way of righteousness? Could it be because they have committed the unpardonable sin and eternal judgment is what awaits them? There's no opportunity for them to turn back to the Lord. They're done!

Hebrews 10:26-27 *If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of sins, ²⁷but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

2 Peter 3:17 *You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.*

As seen from the testimony of Scripture, there is an agreement that it is possible to lose your salvation. I have been purposely laborious so that you can see for yourself how the Scriptures on this subject are in agreement with one another. As you take this to heart, you will have built a stronghold of righteousness as a strong guardrail to keep you safe and secure.

Be assured, as you stay close to the guardrail of God's goodness with a heart of thanksgiving you will be safe and secure. If not, the guardrail of the severity of God is there to stop you from your foolishness and from falling into the abyss. As you take the time to build both of these guardrails by getting these Scriptures and principles embedded in your heart, you will be safe and secure throughout your journey in the Lord. As you are careful to build your guardrails, you will experience eternal security!

Psalm 107:43 *Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.*

As we are faithful to observe everything regarding what it means to fear God, we will be a part of the wise virgin class, prepared as useful vessels, who bring glory and honor to our Lord and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fear of the Lord is a major piece of our wedding garments in making ourselves ready to be His bride.

One last thought: Fear God and enjoy the company of His angels as they encamp around you and protect you from all that is evil.

Psalm 34:7 *The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.*