

The Fear of The Lord

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This is a phrase that appears many times in the Holy Scriptures. It has caused much disagreement among readers. This study is an attempt to expose as much of its Scriptural use as possible, with the hope that the Holy Spirit will take advantage of your investigation and give you understanding of the matter and access to the power that it promises.

John was fond of the phrase “walk in truth,” which he used several times in his writings. Paul used “walk in the Spirit.” No other writers took up their habits of using the terms. Use of the phrase “fear of the Lord” in Scripture is quite different. At least five writers across both new and old testaments picked it up to describe mindsets and responses to Yahweh.

The phrase presents opportunities for arguments among theologians because of the negative and powerful ideas the word fear can reference. Some of the English words that could be used to translate the Hebrew word *yr’â* (Strong’s number H3374) are fear, dread, terror, respect, and reverence. That broad array of possibilities helps fuel arguments among interpreters. In Acts, where most of the new testament uses of the phrase are, the Greek word *phobos* (Strong’s number G5401) is used, which could be translated into English using the words fear, terror, reverence, fright and alarm.

There is a phrase used in the new testament to describe gentiles who honor Yahweh, but don’t want to become Jews. The gentiles who did become Jews by enduring the initiations of ritual washings and male circumcision were called proselytes. The gentiles who followed Yahweh but did not convert to Judaism were called God-fearers. The Greek word in this phrase that is rendered “fearers” was *sebomai* (Strong’s number G4576), which could be translated to English using the words revere, adore, devout, religious, and worship. This is a much more limited meaning, and could have been chosen by Luke when he, instead, used *phobos*.

Many times I have become convinced that both people in an argument are right. Sometimes, people are trying to force acceptance of their answer to a question as

exclusive, when there is really more than one situation in which the question needs to be answered. If I am convinced that there can only be one answer, I won't be easily swayed to see an alternate possibility.

When I become able to grasp something of the fact that, by some mystery, I am part of the joy that was set before Jesus that empowered Him to endure the cross, scorning its shame (Hebrews 12:1,2), it means that when He is near, I can more easily believe that my enemies cower in fear. Being able to grasp something of His authority and power and righteousness and fierceness when He is seated for the first time as the Judge of all of humanity, and the sight is so awe-full and terrorizing that heaven and earth try to hide from it (Revelation 20:11-15), balances the concept that I still must have such an unwavering submission to His authority and power and desires that I live soberly, and in constant focus on making decisions that will affect my eternal circumstances and my inheritance in His Kingdom:

²³ Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism. (Colossians 3:23-25 HCSB)

Simply having fear of Him is not the appropriate attitude, though; we must know His ways:

²⁰ "And another came and said, 'Master, here is your mina. I have kept it hidden away in a cloth ²¹ because I was afraid of you, for you're a tough man: you collect what you didn't deposit and reap what you didn't sow.'

²² "He told him, 'I will judge you by what you have said, you evil slave! If you knew I was a tough man, collecting what I didn't deposit and reaping what I didn't sow, ²³ why didn't you put my money in the bank? And when I returned, I would have collected it with interest!' ²⁴ So he said to those standing there, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has 10 minas.'

²⁵ "But they said to him, 'Master, he has 10 minas.'

²⁶ " 'I tell you, that to everyone who has, more will be given; and from the one who does not have, even what he does have will be taken away. ²⁷ But bring here these enemies of mine, who did not want me to rule over them, and slaughter them in my presence.'" (Luke 19:20-27 HCSB)

Having fear of a knife means something like being careful around its sharp side or the point on its end. Honoring a knife means I display it in my living room.

We must invest our lives in ways that cause us to see the rewards that the first two men in the parable of the minas above received: because of their proper management of responsibility, they were given authority.

Identifying the Fear of the Lord

Job said (chapter 28) that food is produced in the open on the ground – the surface of the earth. As valuable as food is, more valuable things are available to those who will tunnel deep into the earth, carving mines from which silver, gold, sapphires, iron and every kind of treasure. Difficult work in deep darkness can produce great value to the miner.

Wisdom is of greater value than any treasure that can be discovered in a mine, though. It has an immeasurable value. It cannot be found in the earth, nor in the sea. It cannot be purchased by any of the treasure that can be taken from the earth. Our God established the value of wisdom. He also helped identify it by His declaration: “The fear of the Lord is this: wisdom.” Solomon said (Proverbs 15:33) that the fear of Yahweh is wisdom’s instruction. In the 13th verse of chapter 8, he said that the fear of Yahweh is hating evil. Isaiah said (33:5,6) that Yahweh has filled Zion with justice and righteousness; He is a sure foundation; fear of Him is Zion’s treasure.

Accessing the Fear of the Lord

In Proverbs 22:4, Solomon promised that consequences of humility include wealth, honor, life and the fear of Yahweh. In the first 6 verses of chapter 2, he stated that seeking wisdom, insight and understanding as if they were silver and treasure will cause me to understand the fear of Yahweh and to discover the knowledge of Him.

Being diligent, then, to use my life in pursuit of humility, wisdom, insight and understanding seems to promise that I will gain access to, possession of, and influence from the fear of the Lord.

The Fear of the Lord Grants Access

Psalms 111:10 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

Proverbs 1:7 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge

Proverbs 10:27 - The fear of the Lord prolongs life

Proverbs 14:26 - In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence
and his children have a refuge

Proverbs 14:27 - The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,
turning people from the snares of death

Proverbs 16:6 - ... one turns from evil by the fear of the Lord

Proverbs 19:23 - The fear of the Lord leads to life; one will sleep at night without danger

The Fear of the Lord is a Result of Effective Ministry

Acts 2:43 – New believers devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles,
to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.
Then fear came over everyone.

Many signs and wonders were being performed by the apostles.

Acts 5:5 – Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear fell on all who heard about it.

Acts 5:11 – Sapphira dropped dead, then great fear fell on all the believers and, in fact,
everyone who heard about it.

Acts 9:31 – When it was discovered that the Jews in Jerusalem intended to kill Paul,
the brothers sent him off to his hometown of Tarsus.
The believers in Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built
up and walking in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement
of the Holy Spirit, and their numbers grew.

Acts 19:17 – When the seven sons of the Jewish chief priest Sceva attempted to cast a
demon out of a man in the name of Jesus for pay in Ephesus,
the demon recognized that they were not followers of Jesus
and stripped them and beat them until they were bleeding and
running down the street.
Everyone in Ephesus heard about it, and fear fell on everyone.
The name of Jesus was magnified through the confrontation.