

Fear of the Lord

Scripture Study

This scripture study will explore what it means to “fear the Lord.” This Godly fear should be a guiding influence in every decision we make, in the words we speak, and in the thoughts and feelings of our hearts. Fear of the Lord can deliver us from fear. It is essential to becoming the people of faith He has called us to be.

The following outline poses seven questions or ideas to contemplate as we explore the scriptures on this topic.

1. *Is Fear of the Lord a Commandment? If so, for whom and for what time?*

Old Testament

II Kings 17: 35-36 . . .Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them; But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched-out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice.

Deuteronomy 10: 12-13 And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

13 To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?

Joshua 24: 14-15 Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Psalms 33: 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

Proverbs 23: 17 Let not thine heart envy sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Ecclesiastes 12: 13 . . . Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.

New Testament of the Book of Mormon

When Jesus visited the Nephites after his resurrection, he expounded to them the prophecies of Malachi and told them to write his words in their record. We find them in

third Nephi where they emphasize anew the importance of fearing the Lord under the new covenant.

3 Nephi 11: 19-20 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels. . .

3 Nephi 11: 23 But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall.

New Testament

In the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Hebrew saints (chapter 12) speaks of the old covenant and how much better the new covenant is, how much more we have. He tells them (us) that even though temporal things will be shaken and pass away,

“...we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, should have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; For our God is a consuming fire.” (verses 28-29).

Also in Revelations 19: 5 “And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his saints, and ye that fear him, both small and great.”

Doctrine and Covenants 85:31 *Latter day revelation makes it plain to whom this commandment applies:*

And another trump shall sound, which is the fifth trump, which is the fifth angel who committeth the everlasting gospel, flying through the midst of heaven, unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people;

and this shall be the sound of his trump, saying to all people, both in heaven and in earth, and that are under the earth; for every ear shall hear it, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, while they hear the sound of the trump, saying,

Fear God, and give glory to him who sitteth upon the throne, for ever and ever: for the hour of his judgment is come. (D & C Sec. 85:31)

(emphasis added)

2. God is, indeed, worthy to be feared—what the prophets say about Him.

He is all powerful and mighty—Job declared (37:22) “...with God is terrible majesty.” He is strict—Alma taught his people (21:18) “...the Lord can not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.”

Moses told his people (Deuteronomy 4:24) “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”

Daniel in prayer addressed his Lord as “... the great and dreadful God...”(Daniel 9:4).

Paul told the Hebrew saints “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

(Hebrews 10:31 also verses 26-30 or the whole chapter)

Yet all these men loved God and were speaking highly of Him.

3. Given the grandeur of our God and our own human frailties, how can we hope to ever come into His presence?

In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis is a most profound example of fearing the Lord. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. As Abraham took his long-awaited and much loved son into the mountain to comply with this commandment, the angel of the Lord intervened and told Abraham (verse 15):

“For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only Isaac from me.”

This story illustrates the love and mercy of God. He not only saved Isaac, but sacrificed His own son that we all might have life.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life.

Psalm 103: 17-18 But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Isaiah 43:1 But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

Micah 7: 18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

God’s mercy is extended to us through belief on His Son, Jesus Christ and through following His example. Even Jesus (or especially Jesus) walked in fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:2)

Mosiah 1: 103 And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith, on his name;

116 And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given, nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

Isaiah 53 (*the whole chapter*)

John 14: 6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

4. Definition of fear

Let’s look at the word fear. Here is what Webster says about it:

1. A strong, unpleasant emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger
 2. Anxious concern
 3. Profound reverence and awe especially toward God.
- Synonyms include: dread, panic, terror. Fear implies loss of courage, intense reluctance to face a person or situation.

In searching the variety of applications in the scriptures, it would seem that all of the above can apply to fear of the Lord, depending on the person involved—his relationship to the Lord. The desired response, of course, would be number 3.

5. So it would seem there are categories or levels of fear of the Lord. Let's explore them from the worst to the best.

a) To the wicked, fear of the Lord causes them to cringe and want to hide.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they didn't want to face Him.

Gen 3:14 And Adam and his wife went to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God, amongst the trees of the garden.

When Alma and the four sons of Mosiah were confronted by an angel of the Lord about their wicked activities, Alma was smitten with fear of the Lord. He later related to his son Helaman:

Alma 17:12-13 Yea, and in fine, so great had been my iniquities, that the very thoughts of coming into the presence of my God, did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. O, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

Alma, of course, repented and labored all his life in the ministry. But in recording the history of the wars and the wickedness of his people, he could identify with the fear of some of those who mourned the loss of loved ones.

Alma 15: 48 Yea, and many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo; [Alma had suffered the pains of hell for three days and nights (Alma 17: 14).] 49 While many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, yea, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never ending happiness; [Alma also knew the inexpressible joy of forgiveness and redemption (Alma 17: 18-20).]

Abinidi told King Noah and his wicked priests:

Mosiah 8: 61 But behold, and fear, and tremble before God; for ye ought to tremble: for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him, and die in their sins (also verses 62-65)

Nephi quoted from Isaiah and stressed the importance of searching the words of Isaiah.

2 Nephi 8: 26 O ye wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord, and the glory of his majesty shall smite thee.

The fear of God's glory and majesty strikes terror to the heart of the wicked, but to the righteous His glory inspires a godly fear that causes them to rejoice, to praise, to worship Him:

- Romans 11:20-22 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear;
For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.
Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity;
but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.
- Psalm 145:3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.
4 One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.
5 I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.
6 And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts; and I will declare thy greatness.
21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.
- Jacob 4: 18 Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen.
- see also Psalm 19:9-11

b) *Fear of the Lord can cause the wicked to repent. Proverbs 16:6 says “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.”*
Following are some examples of when the fear of the Lord changed lives.

Book of Jonah: *Jonah tried to hide from God and from the job God had given him to do. After being swallowed by a fish, Jonah feared the Lord and repented. He preached repentance to the people of Nineveh. Because of his warning, they feared the Lord and repented.*

Mosiah 2: 1 And now, it came to pass that when King Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them;
2 And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth.
3 And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying, O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ, that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified...

Enos 1: 36 And the people were a stiff-necked people, hard to understand.

37 And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God;
38 And all these things stirring them up continually, to keep them in the fear of the Lord.

Alma 12: 148 Now when the servants of the king had seen that they had fallen, they also began to cry unto God, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them also.

Alma 17: 5 ...I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.
6 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet, and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us. *(These very wicked men were converted to the Lord in a very dramatic way and went on to convert thousands of souls to Jesus Christ.*

Alma's son Corianton was entrusted with the ministry, but strayed into wickedness. Alma plead with him to repent:

19 Therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that you refrain from your iniquities; that ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more, to do wickedly;

Happily, Corianton did repent and gave good ministry in the future.

Read also the story of Zeezrom—Alma chapters 8 through 10, also the Lamanites whose lives were changed, first through fear—Helaman 2:82-117.

c) Sometimes fear of the Lord translates as fear of punishment. Even that is good if it keeps us on the strait and narrow while we learn that, even as children, we must learn to want to do good for the right reasons.

Mosiah 1:120 But if he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man, and becometh a saint, through the atonement of Christ, the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

The wonderful thing is that, unlike we earthly parents, our Heavenly Father is perfect.

- *He doesn't ask us to do anything we can't, with His help, do.*

1 Nephi 1:65 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father, I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (also 1 Cor. 10:12)

- *He is consistent.*

Malachi 3:6 For I am the Lord, I change not...

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Mormon 4:68 God is the same yesterday, today, and for ever; and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing.

- *He is faithful.*

Deuteronomy 7: 9 Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

2 Nephi 13: 19 And I heard a voice from the Father, saying, Yea, the words of my beloved, are true and faithful.

- *He takes good care of us; we can depend on Him. Unlike the wicked, for whom fear of the Lord causes them to lose their courage, God's children gain confidence through fear of the Lord.*

Proverbs 14: 26 In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge.

- *Like a good father, God requires our respect and our obedience—for our eternal good. Fearing the Lord, accepting His discipline, receiving His rewards, finding Him to be a good parent—we learn to trust and obey. We grow in understanding and begin to appreciate His discipline and have higher motives for obedience.*

d) When we submit to the Father, even to escape punishment, we begin to learn the joy of obedience. We find that fear of the Lord is a desirable thing, a blessing, and we grow in love to Him—which after all is the first and greatest commandment (Matt 22:36-37). Following are some scriptures showing the need and the value of this attribute in our lives and the rewards that can be ours.

Proverbs 15: 16 Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith.

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

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...

Job 28: 28 ... Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

Deuteronomy 6:29 Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!

D & C Sec 52:4e ... he that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise, and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you.

Psalms 19: 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward. *(Those who truly fear the Lord are the righteous; to them His judgments will be sweet.)*

Proverbs 10: 27 The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

Proverbs 19: 23 The fear of the Lord tendeth to life; and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

Isaiah 33: 6 (*speaking of Zion*) And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation; the fear of the Lord is his treasure.

Isaiah 11:2 (*speaking of Jesus*) And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

Psalm 25: 14 The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.

Psalm 147:11 The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Psalm 22: 23 Ye that fear the Lord; **praise him**; all ye the seed of Jacob, **glorify him**; and **fear him**, all ye the seed of Israel. (*On this level, we begin to understand that fear of the Lord is consistent with, even calls forth, our praise and worship of Him.*)

Read also Exodus 1:15-21 about the Hebrew midwives who feared God more than they feared Pharaoh.

e) *When we learn to truly love and fear the Lord, He becomes our sanctuary, our security. He takes away our fear. God does not want us to be afraid. When we fear Him, what is left to fear?*

Isaiah 8: 13-14 Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary...

Psalm 33: 18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;

19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in a time of famine.

20 Our soul waiteth for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.

21 For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.

Psalm 34: 7 The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

8 Oh taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

9 Oh fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him.

Psalm 115: 11 Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; he is your help and your shield.

Psalm 91:1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (*read the rest of the Psalm too*)

The following scriptures show us that God does not want us to be afraid even though we need to walk in the fear of the Lord.

2 Timothy 1: 7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a sound mind.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear...(also Moroni 8:18)

Isaiah 43: 1 ...O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

Deuteronomy 31: 6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them; for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law;13 And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God...

Psalm 96: 9 Oh worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him, all the earth.

Psalm 2: 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Psalm 33: 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

6. Knowing Who we should fear, what do we often put in His place? Who or what do we think is so strong that He cannot protect us from it? Forces of nature? War? Illness? Our past? Our enemies? Our friends?!

Deuteronomy 7:21 Thou shalt not be affrighted at them; for the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.

2Nephi 5:82-85 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law;
Fear ye not the reproach of men; neither be ye afraid of their revilings;
For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool.
But my righteousness shall be for ever; and my salvation from generation to generation.

Proverbs 29: 25 The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.

Psalm 118: 6 The Lord is on my side; I will not fear; what can man do unto me?

7. What are some practical ways we can exercise this Godly fear? Give some examples of people you feel exemplify the fear of God in their lives.

2 Nephi 11: 146-147 (also Isaiah 29) And again it shall come to pass, that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him, Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men, therefore, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people; Yea, a marvelous work, and a wonder... *This passage is talking about the need for the Restoration. It is interesting that part of the problem is “their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men.”*

D & C Sec 36:2g The fear of the Lord was upon all nations, so great was the glory of the Lord which was upon his people.

Enoch’s people achieved Zion. How greatly it is needed in our day. If we had that city shining with the glory of God, it could bring the fear of the Lord upon all nations—and repentance.

Mosiah 13: 41 And I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; *Chapter 13 records the ending of the reign of kings over the people of Nephi and the setting up of a government by the people. They were given instructions in the various aspects of this process and told to do them all in the fear of the Lord. When we vote, when we have any civic duty to perform, we need to take it to the Lord. (also read Mosiah 11:119-121 and 2Chronicles 19:4-9)*

2 Corinthians 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. *This is Paul’s letter to the Corinthian saints commending them, but also encouraging them to go on to perfection with fear of the Lord. He also rejoices in their godly sorrow. Godly sorrow, I’m told, is being truly sorry for your sin, while worldly sorrow is being sorry you can’t get away with it. (Mormon 1:37)*

Acts 9: 31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

What peace and comfort we often forfeit by forgetting to walk in fear of the Lord and to call upon the Holy Ghost.

Proverbs 31:29-30 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty if vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

Philemon 2: 12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Even our witnessing (or especially our witnessing) is to be done in fear of the Lord. What an awesome responsibility to share the Word with another soul. It is to be done with preparation, humility and reliance on the Holy Ghost to direct.

I Peter 3: 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer with meekness and fear to every man that asketh of you a reason for the hope that is in you.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of scriptures on this subject. And the ones listed are only brief quotes; it is important to read what comes before and after them for a better understanding. The commentary (in italics) is my interpretation, based on my limited understanding, and subject to error.

As we study His word on this subject, ponder and pray over it, and endeavor to put it to work in our lives, only then can we begin to understand what it means to walk in the fear of the Lord. Among other things, we can be sure it requires true humility on our part—recognizing the vast chasm that separates mortal man from the glory of God. It also involves utter faith and trust in His ability to bridge that chasm if we are willing.

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