



THE FEAR FACTOR

REDISCOVERING THE DYNAMIC OF
FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

O.S.
HAWKINS



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To John Jones

My partner in ministry at GuideStone as we are on our way to two decades together. His dedication to excellence in serving our “pastors at the crossroads” encourages and inspires me everyday of my life. He epitomizes the truth of what was said of King David. He leads with the “integrity of his heart and the skillfulness of his hands” (Psalm 78:72). Only heaven will truly reveal how much this good and godly man has done to be Christ’s hand extended in “serving those who serve the Lord.” Simply put, he is the best!



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INTRODUCTION

One only needs to read the book of Acts to see the disconnect between the spiritual dynamic of the early church and the seeming lack thereof in the 21st century church. Perhaps no single verse brings this to light as well as Acts 9:31: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” We should be captured by that word “multiplied.” Today we seem to be overjoyed when the church has a few “additions,” and yet, this early church was being multiplied. Thousands were being swept into the Kingdom of God; three thousand in Acts 2, a few weeks later, five thousand are mentioned and then, repeatedly, we begin to read that they were “multiplied.” Whole families and communities were swept into the family of faith. Those early believers were not simply engaging their culture; they were seeing it converted to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus

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Christ. In fact, the Bible says they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

The church is not making this type of impact today, especially in the western world. And yet, we have so many modern conveniences and technological advances in which to translate the gospel which the early church could not have imagined in their wildest dreams. They did not have what we have today. There were no church growth materials, no surveys in which to study the culture, no marriage manuals, no gospel tracts, no commentaries, no devotional or spiritual motivation books and no prayer journals. The printing press was not invented until fourteen centuries after they lived and ministered. They did not have the New Testament. It had not even been written when we come to Acts 9. They did not have television or radio or the internet or short wave, much less twitter accounts. They had no air travel or any of the other modern means we have today of translating the gospel to a lost and dying world. And, yet, they were being multiplied...and we are not! Yes,

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they did so much with so little, and we often do so little with so much.

Did they have something that in the midst of all our sophistication and our knowledge of theology and church history which we may have lost along the way? And, this is not to mention all our cultural studies and surveys and all our modern technology by which we can communicate the gospel: I am convinced they had something we have lost. And, I am also convinced that, if we are to ever recover the dynamic of first century Christianity, we must rediscover a vital spiritual discipline. One of the secrets to their spiritual success is tucked away in one verse of scripture. If we could recapture this secret, we could be well on our way to once again turning our own world “upside down” for the gospel.

Read carefully again those words in Acts 9:31: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spir-

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it, they were multiplied.” AND WALKING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD! Who is doing that today? Who in our churches could even define what it is to live in an environment of “the fear of the Lord?” Some believers have sat in their pews for years and have not heard a single message on the fear of the Lord. This is the forgotten discipline in the modern church. And yet, it is laced throughout the pages of Acts and “walking in the fear of the Lord” was, without a doubt, a signal secret of the dynamic and explosive growth of the early church.

Perhaps the two words which distinguish the first century church from the 21st century church more than any others are “influence” and “power.” The church of Acts did not have enough “influence” to keep Peter out of prison, but they had enough “power” to pray him out (Acts 12).

Some modern church growth gurus seek to influence us to minister by polling data and popular opinion. We are quick to criticize those in politics for abdicating true leadership in favor of leading by the popular

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polling data they have obtained only to furnish their constituents with what they “want,” instead of what they “need.” The modern church too often falls into the same trap. One church recently revealed that their musical selections were chosen by surveying what radio stations their congregants enjoyed. Music style was then determined by the “wants” of the people. There is an inherent danger when the church becomes overly “man centered” in its ministries. This approach lends itself to the dethroning of doctrinal truths related to the nature of God, the nature of man and the nature of sin, in favor of a subtle self-help, “feel good about yourself” philosophy, which is totally void of the idea of “walking in the fear of the Lord.” Today, some seem consumed with “marketing the church.” Those early believers were consumed with “churching the market,” and there is a vast difference between these two ideologies.

Did this early church have something that, in our honest quest to reach the lost we may, along the way, have inadvertently lost sight and left behind? Indeed,

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and it is specifically this attitude of living constantly with a consciousness of “walking in the fear of the Lord.” We live in what might be called a “no fear culture.” We have raised a couple of generations in the western world who, by and large, have been taught there are no moral absolutes. Thus, relativism runs rampant in their thinking processes resulting in their having no fear. Repeatedly, in our culture we hear of teenagers doing dangerous and daring things because many of them live without any fear of consequences whatsoever. There is even an apparel company that markets to this segment of society. We have all seen shirts and caps that simply say NO FEAR embroidered across them. We live in a “no fear culture” all around us.

Unfortunately, in many settings, instead of the church influencing the culture around us, we awaken to see that the culture has invaded and influenced the church. Many churches now manifest their own “no fear culture” where the fear of the Lord, so prevalent in the mindset and attitude of the early believers, has be-

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come a forgotten subject, seldom, if ever, mentioned. In the midst of a modern “no fear culture” many churches are emerging into what appears to be nothing more than impressive, self-help clubs and motivational assemblies. Little mention is given to such subjects as sin, judgment or wrath, much less the fear of God. Thus, there follows little mention of anything as drastic or archaic as a call to repentance. (Now there is a forgotten word in our Christian vocabulary.)

We have raised a couple of generations who have never been taught “the rest of the story.” Some have convinced themselves that people only need to hear of God’s love, mercy, and kindness accompanied, of course, by unconditional acceptance, regardless of their lifestyles. When we immerse ourselves in Acts, we discover that some of what takes place in modern church philosophy today is foreign to the New Testament pattern of church growth.

There seems to be a “new trendy gospel” today which has replaced the “New Testament gospel.” The

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New Testament gospel places emphases on self-denial; the new trendy gospel has self-fulfillment as its main objective. The New Testament gospel has its focus on Christ and His plan of redemption; the new trendy gospel has its focus on man and his need for happiness. These two gospels are in diametric opposition to one another. The new trendy gospel has a flawed anthropology about it. It sees man as basically good and in need of fulfillment in life while the New Testament gospel sees man as a sinner in need of a Savior.

This volume is a clarion call to today's church to rediscover THE FEAR FACTOR and, with it, to reclaim the dynamic of first century Christianity so it might be said of us what was said of them: that we "had peace and were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, we too were MULTIPLIED."

"We begin the journey in Part One with a "WHY QUESTION." That is, why does the church seem to be living today in a no fear culture? Then, in Part Two we

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will examine a “WHAT QUESTION.” What does it mean to “walk in the fear of the Lord?” Does it mean that we must live in constant fear that God has a big club of retribution and if we say something wrong, or do something we shouldn’t, some evil will befall us? This concept of the fear of the Lord is as far from the Biblical meaning as it could be. Finally, Part Three asks a “HOW QUESTION.” That is, how can we put a handle on Biblical truth so “walking in the fear of the Lord” might become a daily discipline for us, as it was for those who went before us...that we might embrace THE FEAR FACTOR and rediscover the dynamic of first century Christianity.



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PART ONE: A "WHY" QUESTION

Why is it that the church seems to live today with a “no fear” mentality in our culture? Could it be that in our church culture we have raised a couple of generations who know little of the nature of God particularly as it relates to His holiness? Too often we are tempted to tailor our church ministries to appeal to the selfish, self-centered desires of those we are striving to reach.

In an honest quest to reach these lost generations around us, often the temptation is to take God off the throne of His holiness and bring Him down here on our level so that He becomes more like a “good buddy” or someone to whom we seem to owe little reverence. There is little mention of the nature of a holy God in certain segments of the modern church today. We have replaced Him, in some circles, with the idea of a sort of contemporary who is into back slapping and giving high fives.

Job certainly did not entertain this view of God.

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When confronted with the holiness of God, He said, “I abhor myself and repent in sackcloth and ashes” (Job 42:6). When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the holiness of God, his first inclination was not to run up and give Him a high five. He exclaimed, “Woe is me for I am undone...for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). And what about John exiled out on Patmos? When the Lord Jesus was revealed to him in His glory, he reported, “I fell down at His feet as dead” (Revelation 1:17). In our ecclesiastical world we have created a no fear culture, primarily because, in a dearth of doctrinal teaching, some of us have lost our concept of the holiness and awesomeness of our Creator God.

The Lord Jesus came to bring forgiveness to sinners, not to tell them that they are all right and that they simply have a self-esteem problem. He said the world “hated Him” because He testified that its works were evil (John 7:7). While many churches place doctrinal truth on the bottom shelf in favor of a self-help, market driven approach to ministry, the church knows less and

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less of a holy God, and a knowledge of the Biblical concept of “walking in the fear of the Lord” is a forgotten concept.

If we had space in this volume, we could walk through every man and woman in the Bible who had the power of God upon them and woven through the fabric of each of their lives we would find one common thread...in one way or another it is said that they walked in the fear of God.

This was the single common characteristic of all the Old Testament saints. Remember Noah? The Bible says, “Noah. . . moved with godly fear, prepared an ark” (Hebrews 11:7). Do you remember the Hebrew midwives in Exodus who saved the male babies from Pharaoh’s death decree? The Bible records, “But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive” (Exodus 1:17). They feared God more than they feared Pharaoh. Moses led the children of Israel through forty years of wilderness wandering before he ascended Mt.

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Nebo and died there without going into the Promised Land. Before he died, he preached a series of sermons to his people who were about to enter Canaan without his decades long leadership. We call this series Deuteronomy in our Bible. He gathered the people together and among his parting words were these, “Now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? But to fear the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 10:12). Joshua led them through the Jordan and began the conquest of the Promised Land. Then at the end of his own long life, he gathered his people together and left them these parting words, “Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth” (Joshua 24:14). And what about the Proverbs 31 woman who gets paraded out in pulpits every Mother’s Day? What was the secret of her extraordinary life? If one reads far enough into Proverbs 31 the answer is plain: “A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). All the saints of the Old Testament lived consciously and consistently in an environment of the fear of the Lord.

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We turn our Bibles to the New Testament and it is all through the gospels. In Luke one we are introduced to a young teenage, virgin girl with the Christ alive and growing in her womb. She sings her sweet song of praise we call The Magnificent and she says, “His mercy is on those who fear Him” (Luke 1:50). In the same chapter Zacharias lost his speech and when it returned, the Bible says, “Fear came upon all who dwelt around” (Luke 1:65). In Luke five the Lord healed a paralytic, and we read they “were all amazed and they glorified God and they were filled with fear.” (Luke 5:26). Two chapters later, He is walking through the village of Nain and comes upon a funeral procession of a widow’s son. Jesus heals the boy and the scripture then says, “Fear came upon all, and they glorified God . . .” (Luke 7:16). The Lord sent out the twelve saying, “Do not fear those who kill the body but who cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). And after the resurrection, those at the tomb “went out quickly from the tomb

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with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word” (Matthew 28:8). The four gospels are laced throughout with this idea of “walking in the fear of the Lord.”

Next, we turn the page to the book of Acts and find this concept of “the fear of the Lord” on virtually every page. After Peter preaches the great Pentecostal proclamation and three thousand people are ushered into the kingdom, we read, “Fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). In Acts five, we are introduced to a couple in the church causing dissension by lying to the church and to the Holy Spirit. God struck them dead and immediately we read, “Great fear came upon all the church” (Acts 5:11). After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we read the early church began to multiply and went forward “walking in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31). In Acts ten Peter took the gospel to the first gentile convert, Cornelius, saying that “in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accept-

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ed by Him” (Acts 10:35). In Paul’s first recorded sermon at Pisidian Antioch, he addressed his hearers with these words, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen . . .” (Acts 13:16). When Paul visited the city of Ephesus, we are told that “fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” (Acts 19:17). One cannot turn a page in the book of Acts without observing the prominent role “walking in the fear of the Lord” played in the explosive growth of the first century “called out ones.”

In our journey through the Bible we turn now to the epistles which serve to instruct us in this dispensation of grace in which we now live. The fear of the Lord permeates every one of them. To the Romans, Paul laments a people who had “no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18). Later, in the same epistle, he admonishes them, and us, to “stand by faith, do not be haughty, but fear the Lord” (Romans 11:20). To the Corinthians he says, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in

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the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). In a frequently quoted passage in Ephesians he reminds us to “submit to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). In Peter’s epistle, he admonishes us to “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17). The fear of the Lord saturates the epistles.

Finally, we turn our Bibles to the last book, the apocalypse, the Revelation. Recorded for us there is that grand and glorious coming day when all the redeemed of all the ages, from every tribe and tongue and nation and people, are gathered around the throne singing praise to the only One worthy, the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of all the amens and alleluias, things come to a stop, and a “loud voice” comes from the throne saying, “Praise our God all you his servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” (Revelation 19:5). Those who will be praising Him in heaven are those who “fear Him.”

So we are confronted with a “why question.” Why, when all the Old Testament saints...all those in the gos-

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pels...all those in the early church in Acts...all through the epistles instructing us in how to live today...and even when we get to heaven...the constant theme of all God's children is this concept of "walking in the fear of the Lord"; why is it a forgotten concept? It is the common thread woven through every book of the Bible. Why, then, when it has been the single common characteristic of all those generations before us, is it seldom, if ever, mentioned in the modern church? Could it be that in our rush to study the culture we have actually fallen into it ourselves and this major theme of all the saints before us has sadly become, for many of us, a forgotten concept resulting in a 21st century church that desperately needs to recover the dynamic of first century Christianity?

The concept of the fear of the Lord is the single most important missing element in the church in our day. The answer to the question of "why" lies in the fact that many of us may have lost our sense of reverence and awe in our relationship with our Sovereign Lord.

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When we rediscover the holiness of God, which comes in understanding the great doctrinal truths, we will have the same healthy and wholesome fear that characterized the saints before us in scripture. Then, we too, might recover the supernatural dynamic which comes in “walking in the fear of the Lord.” Then we would not be so consumed with studying and surveying the culture but would stand by in amazement watching it be converted...and the church multiplied.



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PART TWO: A "WHAT" QUESTION

What does it mean to live in an environment of the “fear of the Lord”? Does it mean we must live daily in constant fright, or constant flight, that, if we do something wrong or say something wrong, God has some type of club of retribution and something unpleasant will befall us? Does it mean we have to walk around in fear like those in certain transitional neighborhoods who are terrorized by gang members on a regular basis?

Unfortunately, there are many in our society who grew up in the homes of physically or emotionally abusive parents. Some might confuse the idea of the “fear of the Lord” with the fear they knew in living with an abusive father or mother. But the fear that God is waiting to punish us or motivate us to right living by some club of retribution is foreign to the Biblical concept.

In the Old Testament the most common Hebrew word translated into our English word, “fear,” means to stand in awe before the Lord with reverence and re-

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spect. This word describes one who recognizes the power, purity and position of another and offers him respect. This concept is hard to find in a church culture which often portrays God as “one of the boys” and who is sometimes addressed in prayer like one might address another over a hamburger. If the modern church is ever to recover the dynamic of first century Christianity, it must first recapture this sense of reverential awe in our relationship with the Father.

In the New Testament the most common word translated “fear” is closely akin to the Hebrew word. It connotes an attitude of such reverential awe that it becomes the controlling motivation of one’s life. It is not so much a fear of His awesome power and righteous retribution as it is a wholesome fear of displeasing Him. When we read of the “fear of the Lord” in scripture it is not there to move us to the fear of being slapped down or embarrassed. It is the thought of bowing before Him in awe and reverence, acknowledging that He is in total control of His creation and worthy of all respect, love,

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praise, honor and worship.

What happens in a church culture when walking in this “fear of the Lord” becomes a forgotten concept? There emerges into the psyche of the culture an antinomianistic attitude that exhibits little restraint of evil. It manifests itself in the same manner as it did in ancient Rome when the apostle Paul spoke of a people who had “no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18). Thus, moral failure becomes epidemic in the church. And, not just in the pew but in the pulpit as well. Even over the course of writing this small volume I have heard reports of numerous pastors whose own moral failures have shocked their churches and devastated their families. How can this happen? Could it be we are reaping the results of a generation of church leaders some of whom have never taught on the fear of the Lord and who, in fact, live their lives with “no fear of God before their eyes?”

There are many other by-products of those who do not walk in the fear of the Lord. For example, there is

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little respect for submission to authority. Paul admonished us to “submit to one another in the fear of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:21). Could this be at the root of the growing problem of submission to authority in the home, at school, in the work place and in the civic arena? When “walking in the fear of the Lord” becomes a forgotten concept in the church, a lack of submission to authority follows as naturally as water running downhill.

The early church in Acts lived under tremendous pressure and persecution from the Roman Empire. Today’s church is also under attack, but in the western world the attack comes from within much more than from without. In fact, we seem to be living out the words of Jude in our New Testament. He metaphorically presents a shocking picture of what is taking place in some of modern church growth. Jude speaks of a day when churches would be led and attended by those who are “without fear” (Jude 12). He describes these church leaders as hidden reefs, clouds without water,

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trees without real fruit, wild waves of the sea and wandering stars which are out of their orbits. We are living in such a time when the fear of the Lord is seldom, if ever even mentioned, in our church settings. If ever a generation needed to heed Jude's challenge, it is ours... "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

I was converted to Christ as a seventeen year old young man at the Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth. My pastor, and father in the ministry, was W. Fred Swank who led our home church for over forty years. There were over one hundred of us who were called out into gospel ministry from that great, soul-saving station. After my seminary days, my wife and I served churches in Oklahoma and Florida for over twenty years, before returning to Texas to pastor the First Baptist Church in Dallas. Soon after our arrival in Dallas we heard there was an upcoming reunion of all those folks who had been at Sagamore Hill in the 1960's, most of whom I had not seen in well over a quarter of a

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century. On the given date my wife, Susie, and I returned “home,” and that special evening brought back a myriad of memories.

In the aftermath of that reunion, I began to think about how wonderful it was to go back and see every one of those girls I had dated and all the guys with whom I had hung out with...and have no real regrets! Back into the recesses of my mind I journeyed asking myself, “What did we have back there as teenagers when our hearts were so hot for God, and we went out to turn our own world upside down?” And, I remembered I had a pastor who, as a teenager, taught me to walk in the “fear of God.” He taught me that the fear of God was not the fear that God would put His hand of retribution and punishment **ON** me. It was the fear that God might take His hand of blessing and anointing **OFF** me!

That is the issue! This is the point! We are to live our lives in such a way that we do not want to go somewhere, say something, do anything that might cause God to remove His hand of protection, anointing and

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blessing from us. This was what Paul meant when he revealed to the Corinthians that he feared, “When I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). He was concerned that God might cast him away, put him on the shelf, take His hand off him. It is also what the prayer of Jabez is all about. This prayer has been perverted into some kind of a magical key to enable one to become wealthy. What did Jabez pray? He prayed, “...that your hand would be with me . . .” (1 Chronicles 4:10). And when the early church in Antioch was exploding numerically, we read, “And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed” (Acts 11:21). To walk in “the fear of the Lord” is to live in an environment in which you do not want to initiate anything that might cause God to put you on the shelf or take His hand of blessing and anointing off of you.

When we begin to live with this attitude of “walking in the fear of the Lord” God grants unto us supernatural power with the ability to overcome our sinful de-

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sires. Where do we get this? Solomon reminds us that “by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). Did you read that? When we walk in the fear of the Lord, God enables us to overcome those sins to which we so easily and often submit. And what about Moses’ own admonition at this point? After receiving the law at Sinai, he told his people, “God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20). David, also spoke of this very truth, “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Psalm 34:7).

But that is not all. When we begin to “walk in the fear of the Lord” God will also impart supernatural wisdom and revelation to us in order that we might make wise and prudent decisions with life choices. How many times in Proverbs do we read that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10)? David put it thus, “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant” (Psalm

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25:14). Some of us wonder why we continue to read the Bible and do not seem to get anything from it. The reason is obvious. The secrets of the Lord are with those who fear Him. When we begin this journey of walking in the fear of the Lord, it is amazing how revelation, truth and wisdom are imparted to us in order that we might make wise life decisions.

Living with this consciousness of the fear of the Lord is also a channel through which the Lord's mercy can flow to us. The Psalmist said, "Great is His mercy toward those that fear Him" (Psalm 103:11). When we are walking in the fear of the Lord it also brings joy to the Father's heart. We find this amazing truth in Psalm 147:11, "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him."

Recently, my wife and I were in a department store in one of our local shopping malls. While she was shopping, I noted a small security video camera mounted high on a wall and pointed in my direction. I jokingly mentioned this to the sales attendant and asked if we were on television. He chuckled and replied, "Oh, it is

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not real, but just the fact that people think they are being observed is a deterrent to any thoughts of theft or crime.”

I thought about that later. God’s camera is everywhere we go. In fact, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). When we remain conscious of this truth, it brings about a healthy “fear” in our lives. And, unlike the camera at the department store, the Lord’s eyes are always open and always watching...and recording. The fear of the Lord is a conscious awareness that God is watching and that we can only approach Him in reverence and awe, not so much for what He has done for us, but for Who He is.

So, we are confronted with a “what” question. What does it mean to walk in the fear of the Lord? It is a constant and continual awareness of our awesome and powerful God and a desire that nothing we do or say or even think could give Him cause to take His hand of

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blessing and anointing off of us. No wonder, it is said of the early believers, “And the hand of the Lord was with them (on them) and a great number believed” (Acts 11:21).



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PART THREE: A "HOW" QUESTION

We come, finally, to a “how” question. That is, how can we put a handle on Biblical truth that will enable us to begin the journey of walking in the fear of the Lord so it might be said of us what was said of them, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

Where do we begin? We begin at the same place we begin everything else in the Christian life — the Word of God. Before entering the land of promise, God instructed Moses to gather the people together. It would be among his last words to them before he ascended Mt. Nebo and died, and they went forward without Him into their promised possession. In a silent and solemn moment, Moses stood before all Israel, held up the tablet of the law, the very word of God, and read to them from the law “that you may hear and that you may learn

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to fear the Lord...and that your children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land, which you cross the Jordan to possess” (Deuteronomy 31:12-13). Our spiritual ancestors made their conquest of the Promised Land by learning to walk in the “fear of the Lord” which emanated from the hearing and heeding of God’s word.

The signal reason “walking in the fear of the Lord” is a lost and forgotten concept in much of the modern church lies at the feet of churches where the exposition of the Word is no longer a high priority. We have raised a couple of generations in the western world who know little of the word of God and much less regarding the seriousness of sin. Sin is often laughed off as some vice. It is often excused because “everyone is doing it.” Or, it is minimized by thinking it is not as bad as some others are doing. But sin is so serious it necessitated the cross. The fear of the Lord is embedded in us only by the planting of the Word in our hearts and minds.

Moses indicated it was a learned behavior. How do

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we learn to fear the Lord? By hiding His word in our hearts. Moses recounts how God had instructed him to “Gather the people to Me and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me” (Deuteronomy 4:10). It was at this point that Solomon admonishes in Proverbs saying, “If you receive my words, and treasure my commandments within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures, THEN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE FEAR OF THE LORD” (Proverbs 2:1-5).

God desires that His people hear His words. Why? So that they may learn to fear Him. The primary reason the church lives with so little fear of God today is because of a dangerous void of doctrinal truth emanating from too many modern pulpits who give favor to superficial, feel-good philosophies that are void of true supernatural, spiritual power.

Walking in the fear of the Lord is a choice. Solomon tells of a people in Proverbs who “did not choose the

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fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 1:29). It is a choice, a conscious decision to begin living our lives in an environment that does not want God to take His hand off our lives.

The best way I know to describe this concept of the fear of God is from personal experience. I am an only child, born to my parents when they did not think they could physically have children. They were already forty years of age when I appeared on the scene. I am sure it was not a virgin birth, but it was miraculous, none the less. My parents sacrificed so much for me. My dad worked for the city government all his life on a small income. I don't know how he did it, but if it was baseball season, my glove was just as nice and new as any kid's on the team. If it was track season, my spikes were as new and shiny as any out there. I never remember competing in an athletic event, from Little League on, that my dad was not there in the stands. There was a constant in my life...he was always there. I never remember my mom buying a blouse or skirt or dress.

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Twice a year there would arrive at our home a large parcel from out in West Texas where my great aunt lived, and the clothes she no longer wore she sent to my mom and she wore them. They sacrificed so much for me.

All my life I had aspirations of being a lawyer. As a boy I would ride the bus downtown and sit in the courtroom, hours at a time, listening to trials. I knew that my folks would not be able to adequately help with college and law school tuitions, so during my high school years, I began working two jobs, after school and on the weekends, in order to save money for college. Thus, I needed a car, not for social reasons, but to get from school to work to home, etc. My dad acquiesced, and I got a 1956 Chevrolet when I was a junior in high school. It was almost ten years old, but it was “new” to me. We put \$50.00 hard, cold cash down on that car and financed the remaining \$200.00 at a local bank.

When I brought the car home, my dad laid down four rules for me and my new possession. I could not leave the house without telling him where I was going,

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with whom I was going, what I was going to be doing and when I would be home. It used to really embarrass me when my friends, who had no curfews themselves, would be with me, and I would have to stop at my father's chair before leaving the house and answer those four questions. Where are you going? With whom are you going? What are you going to do? When will you be home? I did not admit it then, but I was really glad he cared.

On a given Friday night, my buddies and I had taken our dates home and then stopped by our local hang out for a soda. It was a little barbeque joint with a large awning stretched all the way across the front. People would drive their cars up under the awning, and attendants, called "car hops" in those days, would come out, take your order, and bring your food and drink to the car on an aluminum tray that rested on your car window. My friends and I had parked at one end of the parking lot and were standing outside our cars drinking a soda, when all of a sudden I saw my dad drive into

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the parking lot. Fortunately, he did not see me and parked at the other end of the long awning. My mind was racing. Why is he here? He once told me he thought this was a sorry place to eat. And, besides that, I had never seen my dad eat out in my life. We always had our meals at home. Not only that, I had never seen him out past nine o'clock at night unless we had gone into extra innings in a tie baseball game. I noted the time, and then I knew why he was there. I was supposed to have been home almost an hour earlier. I watched as he got out of his car and about the time he appeared at the front of his car, our eyes met across the way. Have you ever noted how an F-16 fighter pilot locks into his target about the time he is ready to drop the bomb? Our eyes locked. He stared at me from across the parking lot. My heart was racing, wondering what he was going to do, especially in front of all my friends. He stared... then looked at his wrist and glared at his watch...then locked back in on me...and then got in his car and drove off. I BEAT HIM HOME! Why? I feared my dad.

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Oh, at the time I was a strong teenager, and he was almost sixty years of age. I didn't fear him physically. What I feared that night (and all my life until I held his hand when he breathed his last breath at almost ninety-five) was that, after all he had done for me, all he had sacrificed for me, the thing I feared the most was that I would do anything that would dishonor or displease my dad.

Friend, when we speak of fearing the Lord, this is what we mean. After all the Lord Jesus has done for us, after all He has sacrificed for us, the thing we ought to fear the most is that we would do anything to dishonor or displease our Savior. I am convinced that this is the type of fear, awe and reverence that came upon the early church. It was a fear of disappointing or disparaging the name of the One who had given His all for them. Their passion was not to be made happy in His sight, but to be made holy in His sight. For them, "walking in the fear of the Lord" was a conscious choice which came from an abiding love and obedience to His writ-

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ten and living word.

How can we, too, walk in the fear of the Lord so it might be said of us what was said of them, that we also “turned our world upside down”? We begin, as always, with the word of God. It would do us all well to heed the words God spoke to Moses saying, “Gather the people unto Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me” (Deuteronomy 4:10).



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CONCLUSION

We come once again to the end of a volume. What is the bottom line? What is the conclusion to the whole matter? One, much wiser than I, put it plainly in some of his last words. Solomon, purported to be the wisest man who ever lived, wrote the book of Ecclesiastes to reveal to us the folly of so many things so many of us think are fulfilling in life: laughter and liquor and lust and luxuries. At the end of his book, he put it thus: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.” Now, that should make us perk up our ears, if nothing else does. Here, the wisest man who ever lived, and to top it off, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these words, calling upon us to hear the “conclusion of the whole matter.” What is it? “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: FEAR GOD and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). That is it! The conclusion of the whole matter, of everything — FEAR GOD, FEAR GOD, FEAR GOD!

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King Solomon had more money than any man could ever spend. He had built everything there was to build, drank everything there was to drink, married every beautiful woman he could find (over 700 of them!). His wisdom had deserted him in the midst of his riches and success. Now, closing his life, he tells us that given the chance to go back and do it all over, he would not have so grievously violated the commandments of God. Here is the cry of a man who had seen it all, done it all, and had it all. He is shouting to us that it was not worth it.

Solomon's magnificent temple would lie in waste in a few hundred years. This, his final warning, is his lasting legacy to us. Hear him again emphasizing that the conclusion of the whole matter is to "FEAR GOD and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Oh, that it might be said of us what was said of those churchmen who were before us, that we too "had peace and were edified and walking in the fear of the

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Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit,” we too were “multiplied.” The conclusion of the whole matter? FEAR GOD!

When the 21st century church recovers the truth of “walking in the fear of the Lord,” it will be on its way to also recovering the dynamic of the first century church. The conclusion of it all? FEAR GOD!



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THE FEAR FACTOR

REDISCOVERING THE DYNAMIC OF FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

It is said of the early church that they “turned their world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Repeatedly we read in the book of Acts that they were being “multiplied.” They experienced this spiritual dynamic without all the modern tools we enjoy today in translating the gospel to our world. They had no television, internet, CDs, DVDs, radio or Twitter accounts. Those early believers never saw a gospel tract, a commentary, a church growth manual, a devotional guide. The printing press was not invented until centuries later. They had no church planting techniques and no one was doing marketing surveys for them. But they were being multiplied...and we are not!

Did they have something that somewhere along the way in all of our sophistication and technology we may have lost? I am convinced they did. And, if we can reclaim it, we, too, can rediscover the dynamic of first century Christianity.

Their secret lies in...**THE FEAR FACTOR.**



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