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Exodus 20:20

“20:20 Vision – the Fear of God”

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According to one source, there are as many as 530 fears or classified “phobias.”¹ Some of the most familiar would be: Claustrophobia (fear of confined spaces), Acrophobia (fear of heights), and Arachnophobia (fear of spiders). A list of those we may not be familiar would include: Phalacrophobia (fear of becoming bald), Francophobia (fear of France or French culture), Lachanophobia (fear of vegetables), Consecotaleophobia (fear of chopsticks), Omphalophobia (fear of belly buttons), and Ecclesiophobia (fear of church).

Everyone wrestles with fears of one kind or another or to one degree or another. The Bible tells us that there is a fear we should have, and that’s the fear of God. The truth is that not much has been said about possessing a healthy fear of God. There is far more spoken and written about the love of God, or the grace of God. But God has some interesting things to say about the value and benefits of fearing him, one of which is that those who have a healthy fear God will sin less. It’s important for us to understand that once we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we are not expected to be sinless; we are expected to sin less. This should be of great encouragement to all of us that [Exodus 20:20](#)² gives us God’s prescription for sinning less – fear him!

Good Fear – Bad Fear

1. We might ask the question, “How can it be that the Scripture tells us to *“not be afraid”* and *“fear of the Lord will keep [us] from sinning”*? How do we reconcile the two?

¹ <http://phobialist.com>

² *“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.’”*

- a. We must remember in life, there are good fears and bad fears, healthy fears and unhealthy fears.
 - b. Healthy fear keeps us from danger when we look both ways before crossing the street, because we are afraid of being hit by a bus.
 - c. Good fear is seen when we seek shelter during a lightning storm rather than stand outside holding a golf club, because we are afraid of being struck by lightning.
2. Some fears are intended to protect us, and this is something we have to teach children, because oftentimes children are fearless.
 - a. Kids don't know not to pet the huge dog that's bearing its teeth.
 - b. Kids don't know not to wander off or touch hot stoves or put dirty things in their mouths.
 - c. Adults have to instill in children a healthy respect for some things, which we would consider to be good fear.

Comfort From God's Word

3. In [Exodus 20](#) we see that God addresses both good and bad fears.
 - a. The Israelites had reasons to be afraid, having heard God's thunderous voice, which sounded like a trumpet, and seeing lightning and smoke, but God wanted to reassure them that he was not going to harm them.
4. Someone has discovered that the Bible has at least 365 verses that teach us that we are not to be fearful.
5. There are unhealthy fears that are terrifying and debilitating: the fear of failure, bad news, the future, and death, but God's Word addresses each of these fears in our lives with words of comfort.
 - a. [Isaiah 41:10](#) - *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*
 - b. [Psalm 46:1-2a](#) - *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear..."*
 - c. [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."* (King James Version)
6. If we know God in a personal way, through faith in Jesus Christ, we should never fear his divine wrath, because the Bible gives us assurance of our salvation.
 - a. [John 5:24](#) - *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*

- b. **1 Thessalonians 5:9** - *"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Warning From God's Word

7. It should be pointed out that those who should be very much afraid of God's divine judgment are those who stubbornly refuse to surrender their lives to him.
8. Those who want to live for their glory, their pleasure, their honor, their desires, as well as those who defiantly oppose him and reject his son, Jesus, as the way to be saved, are in danger of God's judgment.
9. **Luke 12:4-5** - *"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."*
10. **Hebrews 10:31** - *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

What Does A Healthy Fear Of God Look Like?

11. **Exodus 20:20b** - *"... the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."*
12. Every Christian should have a healthy fear of a holy God.
13. Some have embraced a watered-down definition of what it means to fear God, which basically says that fearing God means to have a holy reverence for him, which is a partly true, but incomplete understanding of what the Bible has to say.
14. Even a healthy fear of God should be mingled with a little trembling, because he is awesome, majestic, powerful, and holy in all his ways.
15. When we have a constant awareness of the awesome purity, holiness, majesty, and presence of God, we'll be motivated to want to please him, honor him, and obey him.

16. The opposite is true, and when we lose sight of God's presence, dismissing him like he can't see us, or he has little or no concern about what we do, thinking he's distant and far removed, we'll have no desire to honor and obey him.
 - a. We can't treat God like he's our buddy or pal, because this diminishes his majesty and greatness.
 - b. If we live like this we'll invite all kinds of compromise and sin into our lives, for the simple but devastating reason that we have not practiced the fear of God.

17. **Philippians 2:12** - *"... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling..."*

18. **Acts 9:31b** - *"[The early church] was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."*

19. **Acts 5:1-11** tells us the account Ananias and his wife, Saphira, and how they sinned against the Lord by withholding a portion of an offering, pretending to give more than they actually did.
 - a. God's judgment was swift and sure!
 - b. God did not kill Ananias and Saphira because of the amount they gave, but because *"they lied to the Holy Spirit"* by pretending to bring 100% of the proceeds from the sale of property they owned.
 - c. Ananias and Saphira did not have a healthy fear of a holy God.
 - d. When we read **Acts 5:11**, which tells us *"great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events,"* it's easy to see how there was an immediate and renewed emphasis for having the fear of God!
 - e. God did an extreme thing in the early years of the church to set the tone - you don't mess with God!

Built-in Benefits From Having A Healthy Fear Of God

20. **Psalms 128:1** - *"Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways."*

21. Wisdom
 - a. **Psalms 111:10a** - *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding."*
 - i. Knowledge - Accumulation
 - ii. Understanding - Interpretation
 - iii. Wisdom - Application
 - b. There are a lot of smart people in the world who are not wise.
 - c. Knowledge without application is just information!

22. Love And Mercy
- a. [Psalm 103:11](#) - *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.*
 - b. The Hebrew word for "love," is checed, which means, mercy or kindness.
23. Avoidance Of Evil
- a. [Proverbs 16:6](#) - *Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.*
24. Confidence
- a. [Proverbs 14:26](#) - *In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.* (King James Version)
25. Long Life
- a. [Deuteronomy 6:2b](#) - *... fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you... so that you may enjoy long life.*
26. Protection
- a. [Psalm 34:7](#) - *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*
27. Provision
- a. [Psalm 34:9](#) - *Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Exodus 20:18-20](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. What were you afraid of in childhood?
4. What are you afraid of today?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself when it comes to having a healthy fear of God?

6. Have you found it to be true that you've "sinned less" since you came to faith in Christ?
 - a. How does your life show the fruit of repentance?
7. Read and discuss [Psalm 128:1](#).
 - a. How has God "*blessed*" you because you're "*[walking] in his ways*"?
8. Read and discuss [Isaiah 41:10](#), [Psalm 46:1-2a](#), and [2 Timothy 1:7](#).
 - a. How have these Scriptures been a comfort to you?
9. Read and discuss [John 5:24](#) and [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#).
 - a. Are you confident in your relationship with the Lord?
 - b. What are some of the reasons we lose our confidence in our relationship with the Lord?
 - c. Do you have the assurance of your salvation?
10. Was there a time in your life when you experienced God's judgment in such a way that you had a greater understanding of [Hebrews 10:31](#)?
11. Read and discuss [Acts 5:1-11](#) and the account of Ananias and Saphira.
12. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: rejoice in the goodness of God that they can experience the seven built-in blessings of God for those who have a biblical, healthy fear of God; (have someone ready to read and pray these Scriptures):

[Psalm 128:1](#) - "*Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.*"

[Psalm 86:11](#) - "*Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.*"

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).