

# Fearing the Lord

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*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....” Ps. 111:10*

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That is a text most of us have learned and repeated ever since we were “knee-high to a grasshopper.” We’ve heard it at home, we’ve learned it in Sunday School and grade school, we’ve listened to our minister preach a sermon or two on it, maybe even written it on a 3 x 5 card and tacked it up by our desk. It is such a popular text that it has almost become a trite motto or slogan. It was for me, anyway, until I dug into it a little farther to discover how this text applies to me as a present college student, and how it applies to each of you readers. (I imagine the majority of you are presently students, also.)

I ask that you read Psalm 111. In this Psalm the psalmist speaks of our God in all His wonderful works. Then he ends his psalm with the very beautiful text that we have as our theme today.

The fear of the Lord. Fear. Is this fright? Is it cowardice? Is it alarm or panic? Of course not! In fact, it is quite the opposite! Fearing the Lord is piety; it’s reverence; it’s humble submission. Refer to what you just read in Psalm 111: “The works of the Lord are great;” “His righteousness endures forever;” “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion;” “holy and reverend is His Name;” and so on. This whole psalm is intended to excite us to the work of praising and glorifying God. But fearing God is more than just praising God with our mouth. We have to praise God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength! It is more than pious living: it is doing His commandments - it is doing that which leads us to eternal happiness - it is godly living. And it is this fearing the Lord - this godly living - that is the beginning of wisdom. Unless we begin here, we will never attain it.

Now, before we go any farther, let’s distinguish wisdom from knowledge. They have very similar meanings. In fact, the two are inseparable. But there is a difference. Knowledge is the foundation; wisdom is the building on that foundation. Knowledge is the facts, the truth, and the accurate and dependable information. Wisdom is that truth in action.

Knowledge means rejecting our own understanding and instead trusting in the Lord - for our ways are not His ways. The key to this channel of knowledge is instruction - in the home, in the church, and in the school. The knowledge that is above all things precious is the knowledge of God Himself. The knowledge of God is the most important knowledge we can attain. Why? Because the knowledge of God is absolutely necessary for our salvation - it is a saving knowledge. It is a matter of spiritual life and death. Do you see? We must know God because only in His Son do we have eternal life. And, too, salvation is the very highest good; it is covenant fellowship and friendship with our ever-blessed God. How can we be friends with, and have fellowship with, and commune with somebody who we do not even know?

This in itself should be an incentive to study and learn. Our attitude must be one of the desire to know. Knowledge received demands diligence. We are to do as Proverbs 2 says, “cry after knowledge; lift up our voices for understanding.” We are to seek it like we would seek silver and gold or a hidden treasure. Then we will understand the fear of the Lord and will find the knowledge of God.

He who rejects this knowledge or does not even seek it, is a fool. (Prov. 1:7) “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” (Psalm 14:1) To remove God is to remove knowledge because

He is not only the source of knowledge, He is knowledge. No matter how many degrees we have behind our name, nor how many books we have in our library, nor what position we hold, without God, we are without knowledge.

Now that we understand the foundation, let's build the building. In the Bible, a person who could perform well in his particular area of skills was wise. For example, in Exodus 35:30-35 we read of Moses who chose wise men to build the tabernacle. "The Lord called them by name . . . and filled them with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge." With this wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, they did the work of the Lord. They put their knowledge into action and did God's will. These men were wise - they knew the end that had to be reached and understood the means to achieve that end.

That is exactly what we are to do, too - no matter what our position or calling is in life. We are to know the end: everlasting happiness, eternal life, God's glory; and understand the means to that end: fearing the Lord and living a holy and godly life. (See also James 3:17.) We are to remember God's works and diligently study them. Read Psalm 111 again. The psalm speaks of God's wonderful works and ends with the command to fear this Almighty and All-wise God in order to get wisdom. Yes, we are to seek the Lord first and then all things will be added unto us.

And, yes, this is a command! Trust in the Lord. Fear the Lord. It is not a matter of choice! You see, it is part of our striving to be perfect as God is perfect and holy as God is holy. It is putting off the old man of sin and putting on the new man of righteousness. It is part of the antithesis. It is saying "no" when God says "no" and saying "yes" when God says "yes." It is part of our walking as a pilgrim in a strange land; walking as a light in the midst of a dark place.

Wisdom is the principle thing. It is so important that we as God's people need to place a priority on it. Especially as students, we are learning so much and gaining so much knowledge - what a responsibility we have when God says, "Fear me!"

Humanly, it is almost frustrating, isn't it? Maybe even a little depressing. We say, "How can I do this? God is the Creator - but, I'm only a creature. God is perfect but, even my most perfect work is filthy and polluted with sin!"

But, you see, that's where our comfort comes in. We are to ask for wisdom and God gives it - generously and liberally. (James 1:5) Choosing wisdom over wealth brings a reward of blessedness and happiness; eternal happiness! Few of us can afford gold and silver and rubies; but wisdom is far more precious because the rewards are far greater than precious jewels!

I do not write these things because I think I do all things right, and I feel you should follow my example. Oh, no! That is not the way it is at all. You all know the old saying, "If the shoe fits, put it on." Well, let me tell you, this shoe is just my size - it fits perfectly. And I have to put it on and wear it every day of all the years of my life. And you must, too. We are to walk on that straight and narrow path which leads to that eternal happiness.

And that takes wisdom! In and of ourselves we cannot get wisdom. But fearing the Lord is the beginning of wisdom - and it is the middle and the end, too.

Seek that wisdom. Pray for that wisdom - pray without ceasing. He that asketh in prayer, believing, shall receive it. (Matt. 21:22)

Almighty God, give us the grace to fear Thee, to obey Thy commands, and to praise Thee forever and ever.

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