

**A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF  
THE FEAR OF YAHWEH**

Brian S. Borgman  
THS 544 Sp 92  
Dr. Ronald Allen  
Box 496

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## INTRODUCTION

It was not too many years ago when the term "God-fearing man" was used to denote a person who conducted his life in a godly manner. However, with a strong resurgence of a superficial gospel, and in some cases, an artificial gospel, the term and the concept has diminished in today's world. An anaemic concept of God, a deficient understanding of sin, and an unduly elevated view of man, has lead to the extinction of the "fear of Yahweh" concept.

For many today, God is nothing more then a cosmic mass of sentiment. His majesty, His sovereignty, His justice, His holiness, His real character has been smeared over with an image created by and tailored for man himself. Sin, as would naturally follow, is no longer a damnable offense against a holy God, but rather, "Sin is lack of faith in yourself...the tendency to put yourself down."<sup>1</sup> What desperately needs to be recovered and proclaimed in the church today is the biblical concept of the fear of Yahweh.

With that conviction, it will be the purpose of this paper to set forth a biblical theology of the fear of Yahweh. The approach will be inductive, allowing as much as possible for the texts to set the agenda. The first section of this paper will focus on the fear of Yahweh as a prevailing biblical theme. The next section will deal with lexical considerations. The third section will attempt to define the biblical concept of the fear of Yahweh, emphasizing the predominant components seen throughout the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup>A quote from Robert Schuller, "The Hour of Power," aired March 14, 1992.

The final section will set forth categorical features of the fear of Yahweh. Although the entire Bible will be used to research the fear of Yahweh, a special emphasis will be given to the Wisdom literature due to its noteworthy stress upon this theme.

### I. THE FEAR OF YAHWEH AS A PREVAILING BIBLICAL THEME

The concept of the fear of Yahweh saturates the biblical texts. To list, let alone expound, each text would literally take tomes. However, it is worthwhile to take note of some usages of the concept in various genres and significant contexts. Some may argue that the fear of Yahweh is expressive of an OT image of a harsh, unrelenting God, and that the NT relieves us of any such notion. This survey will establish what John Murray has aptly stated, "The fear of God is the soul of godliness. The emphasis of Scripture in both the Old Testament and the New requires no less significant a proposition."<sup>2</sup>

#### OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

The book of Deuteronomy is a good starting place for this survey. "Deuteronomy consists of a restatement and summary of the law in a compendious form for the guidance of the nation as a whole...Moses is not simply explaining what the laws of God are, but he is earnestly enjoining them upon the consciences of his people, and urging them to take with utmost seriousness God's call to a holy life."<sup>3</sup>

In Deut. 10:12-22 Moses gives a powerful exhortation, which could well serve as a summary of the Law applied. Verse 20 states,

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<sup>2</sup>John Murray, Principles of Conduct (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957, reprint 1991), pg. 229.

<sup>3</sup>Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), pg. 252.

"You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name." McDaniels, in his research, has concluded, "It has been shown that "fear of God" as well as "love," was the accepted biblical expression for the vassal's allegiance to His Great King."<sup>4</sup> So here, as a representative text of the Pentateuch, the fear of Yahweh is one of the dominating commands to Israel.

Another highly significant example of the prevalence of the fear of Yahweh is seen in the prophet Jeremiah. Although the fear of Yahweh is seen consistently in the prophets, it is in Jer. 32:40 that the theme thunders loudly due to its context. The context is the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant, with its bilateral conditions, and haunting pronouncements of judgments, but rather the New Covenant, the unilateral, unconditional pronouncements of mercy and blessing. Verse 40 of chapter 32 records God saying, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me."

The Psalms are also replete with this theme. Psa. 2:11 sets this theme in a context of worship, "Worship Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Psa. 130:4 gives interesting insight into the interrelatedness between God's grace and forgiveness with fear, "But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." The theme is seen again and again in various contexts, especially those Psalms which are classified as Wisdom Psalms (e.g. Psa. 111 and 119).

The historical books are also heavily inundated with this

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<sup>4</sup>R. Dale McDaniels, "The Meaning of the Fear of God Concept in the Mosaic Covenant," Th.M. Thesis, WCBS, 1977, pg. 97.

theme as well. Joshua, after reviewing Israel's history, exhorts his Jewish brothers to, "Fear Yahweh and serve Him in sincerity and truth" (Josh. 24:14). Obadiah, while attempting to avoid an undesirable situation with Ahab, tells Elijah, "I, your servant, have feared Yahweh from my youth" (1 Kgs. 18:12). And again, the examples could go on.

It is apparent, from the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Historical Books, the Psalms, and the Wisdom Literature (to be dealt with later), that the fear of God was a prevalent theme in the OT. There are a multitude of examples of men and women who feared God, from Abraham to Joseph, from Moses to the prophets. The question that now must be answered deals with the fear of Yahweh and its relevance to the NT.<sup>3</sup>

#### NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

There are five highly significant NT texts that will be surveyed. They are significant because of their context, and they will help provide a foundation for the meaning of the concept of the fear of Yahweh under section III.

The first text is Matt. 10:28, and it stands out because of the Person who is the speaker in this given text. The Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the perfect revelation and representation of Almighty God, said, "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (Matt. 10:28).

The second and third texts are given by Paul. In 2 Cor. 7:1, Paul exhorts the Corinthians, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all

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<sup>3</sup>I have personally experienced a number of occasions, in Bible studies in church and prison, where people have seriously questioned fearing a God of love, and that is why I stress the continuity between the Testaments here.

defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Here Paul uses the theme as motivation for living a holy life. Paul also states in Eph. 5:21, "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."<sup>6</sup> This is significant because the object of fear is Jesus Christ Himself.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth text is found in 1 Pet. 1:17, where Peter is exhorting his readers to be sober (v. 13), obedient (v. 14), and holy (v. 14-16). The motivation behind this is that they have a Father, who will judge them according to their works, and so they should, "conduct themselves in fear during the time of their stay" (v. 17). This passage is important because Peter has conduct, fear, God's Fatherhood, and redemption (v. 18-19) all tied up into one thought.

The final text is in Rev. 15:3-4. This text stands out because of its context. The scene is Heaven, the participants are the Tribulation saints who have overcome. Obviously, being in Heaven they are perfected and without sin, which gives all the more the weight to the words they sing. "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy" (Rev. 15:3-4).

With this brief NT survey, it is indubitable that the concept of fearing Yahweh is a unified theme that crosses both Testaments. Any appeal to a God of love in the NT as opposed to a God of wrath

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<sup>6</sup>Nestle-Aland's 26th ed. lists a textual variant here. The alternative reading could be *Κυρίου*, but even in that case, the reference would still probably be to Christ.

<sup>7</sup>It is worthy to note that in the Tribulation, during the unleashing of the sixth seal, that men will cry for the mountains to fall on them to "hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from *the wrath of the Lamb*" (Rev. 6:16).

in the OT, as a basis for rendering this theme obsolete, is in vain. Now that this has been demonstrated, it is proper to travel to the Wisdom literature, where this theme finds its fullest expression and exposition.

#### WISDOM TEXTS

To say that the fear of Yahweh concept is prominent in the Wisdom literature is an understatement. In commenting on Prov. 1:7, Kidner states, "This is also the motto of the Wisdom writings in general."<sup>9</sup> Even this seems to fail to capture the importance of this theme. Allen is much closer when he says, "These words speak of the basic foundation for true wisdom and of its ongoing structure."<sup>10</sup>

Although the theme is expounded in many different ways (and in section IV these will be categorized), there are five verses which characterize the teaching of the Wisdom literature, they are Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Psa. 111:10; Job 28:28. In each statement the writer connects the fear of Yahweh with the beginning of knowledge, wisdom, or understanding. To say that the fear of Yahweh is the "beginning" of wisdom, etc., should not be understood as "a mere beginner's step in wisdom, to be left behind, but the prerequisite of every right attitude."<sup>11</sup> The beginning here is, "the first controlling principle,"<sup>11</sup> that remains all of one's life.

The Wisdom literature sets forth wisdom and folly, as two

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<sup>9</sup>Derek Kidner, Proverbs, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), pg. 59.

<sup>10</sup>Ronald Allen, The Majesty of Man (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), pg. 158.

<sup>11</sup>Derek Kidner, The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), pg. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Kidner, Proverbs, pg. 59.



antithetical paths. Von Rad has said, "Folly is practical atheism."<sup>12</sup> The fool "despises wisdom" (Prov. 1:7), but the man who fears God is wise and has knowledge (Prov. 1:7; 9:10, etc.). "Israel attributes to the fear of God, to belief in God, a highly important function in respect of human knowledge."<sup>13</sup> This is the theme of the Wisdom writers, and it is plainly manifested as the fear of Yahweh pervades their thought.

No matter where one is in the Bible, OT or NT, Prophets or Pentateuch, the Gospels or the Apocalypse, the theme of fearing God is present. It permeates the thought of every writer, and is displayed in the lives of godly men. The fear of Yahweh is a prevailing biblical theme.

## II. LEXICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Word studies can be a dangerous thing, as many have well warned.<sup>14</sup> The good news is that linguistics and biblical languages are coming together with a new vigor, and many of the errors and fallacies are being corrected, at least at the level of higher education.

With that caveat, it is time to approach a vital section of this paper. The concept "the fear of Yahweh" obviously contains a very significant word, which is אָרַר. BDB lists אָרַר, in the Qal, as meaning, "fear, be afraid, to stand in awe of, reverence,

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<sup>12</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972), pg. 65.

<sup>13</sup>Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, pg. 67.

<sup>14</sup>James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language, Moises Silva, Biblical Words and Their Meaning, J.P. Louw, Semantics of New Testament Greek, and D.A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies.

honor."<sup>15</sup> Andrew Boling, in the TWOT, gives אָרַץ the semantic range of "1) the emotion of fear, 2) the intellectual anticipation of evil without emphasis upon the emotional reaction, 3) reverence or awe, 4) righteous behavior or piety, and 5) formal religious worship."<sup>16</sup>

A word that is often a conceptual equivalent with אָרַץ is יָרַשׁ. BDB lists "dread, be in dread, be in awe,"<sup>17</sup> as the lexical meaning for יָרַשׁ. It appears that when יָרַשׁ is used in "the fear of Yahweh" or the "fear of God," it is generally used of unbelievers, or unbelieving nations (e.g. 2 Chron. 14:14; 17:10; 20:29). In Psa. 36:1, it is interesting that the ungodly has no יָרַשׁ of God, and the implication is that due to his transgression, he should. There are some important exceptions to this generalization, and they will be mentioned in a later section.

It is interesting to note that in all of the passages listed in section I, the LXX has the word אָרַץ translated φοβέω.<sup>18</sup> BAG lists the lexical meaning as, "be afraid, have reverence or respect."<sup>19</sup> Louw and Nida, in examining the word according to its semantic domains, have stated, "φοβέωμαι, to be in a state of fearing (25.252), to have profound reverence and respect for deity,

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<sup>15</sup>B-D-B Hebrew-English Lexicon (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1979, original ed. 1906), pg. 431.

<sup>16</sup>R. Laird Harris, Gleason I. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, eds. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament 2 Vols. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), vol. 1, pg. 399.

<sup>17</sup>B-D-B, pg. 808.

<sup>18</sup>The only exception is Job 28:28, where זֹרְעֵי אֵרֶץ is used, meaning, "reverence for God, piety" (BAG, 358). It is translated in 1 Tim. 2:10 as "godliness."

<sup>19</sup>Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pgs. 870-871.

with the implication of awe bordering on fear (53.58), to have such awe or respect for a person as to involve a measure of fear (87.14)."<sup>20</sup>

It is crucial at this point to state that context determines meaning. Although lexicography is necessary, "the context does not merely help us understand meaning-it virtually *makes* meaning."<sup>21</sup> Although there are a number of different contextual levels, it will be argued and later developed that "the fear of Yahweh," in a narrow contextual sense, has an inherent connotation based on the fact that Yahweh is the object of fear in each context.

Lexically, the term "the fear of Yahweh," would seem to imply much more than a simple "fatherly respect." However, as has been mentioned above, the contexts must determine what it means to fear Yahweh. The next section will attempt to establish what is the biblical concept of the fear of Yahweh. In other words, the nature of the fear of Yahweh will be examined, exploring components of that nature which are consistent throughout the entirety of Scripture.

### III. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THE FEAR OF YAHWEH

The first thing that needs to be stated is that there cannot be a distinction made between "being terrified" of God and "standing in awe and adoration" of God, merely based upon lexical evidence. It would be wrong to assume that אָרָא always means to revere God, and יָרָא always means to be terrified of God.

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<sup>20</sup>J.P. Louw and Eugene Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains 2 Vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988,89), pgs.316, 540, 735, vol. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Moises Silva, Biblical Words and Their Meaning (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), pg. 139. Italics are his.

Although there appears to be general patterns, as mentioned in section II, the exceptions would exclude any sort of categorization based on root meanings.

The single component that stands immutably true, throughout each and every context where the "fear of Yahweh" is used, is that the object of fear is the unchanging, majestic King, the sovereign and holy God, Creator of heaven and earth, Yahweh. To be sure, this immutable component will express itself differently according to the relationship of Yahweh to the fearer. However, there will also be some similarities, based simply on the *Mysterium Tremendum*.

"A God comprehended is no God."<sup>22</sup> Behind the fear of Yahweh is that incomprehensible nature of the God who has revealed all we need to know about Him, but has not revealed all there is to know about Him. As Otto develops the *Mysterium Tremendum*, he reminds us that there is the element of Awfulness, the element of 'Overpoweringness,' the element of Urgency, and that God is 'Wholly Other' than us. It is these elements which put fear into fearing the "Awful Mystery." Perhaps the greatest sin of the day is a peer-level familiarity with Almighty God, that drags Him down to the level of man, and is blasphemous to its very core. God's words of condemnation in Psa. 50:21 fit this generation well, "You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you." To be sure, some degree of dread should be present whenever one genuinely considers Yahweh, solely based on that incomprehensible aspect of His character. As Moses said, "Who understands the power of Thine anger, and Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Terteegen, quoted by Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy (New York: Oxford Press, 1923, reprint 1970), pg. 25.

<sup>23</sup>Psa. 90:11. This Psalm is extremely significant because Moses knew God intimately, and uniquely (Ex. 33:11).

Not only is God's incomprehensibility behind the fear of Yahweh concept, but also that which has been openly revealed. God's wrath must be a factor in the fear of Yahweh. "If we would truly know God, and be known of Him, we should ask Him to teach us here and now to reckon with the solemn reality of His wrath."<sup>24</sup> It is this knowledge of His wrath, His justice, and His holiness that cannot be divorced from His fear.

What is also known about God is that He is a God of grace, mercy, love and forgiveness. However, this must always be kept in balance with His other not-so-popular attributes. Yet even these attributes of grace should elicit fear. Psa. 130:4 marries the two themes beautifully, "But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." "A truehearted man will all the more hold God in reverence and respect, just because God has been so gracious in bestowing pardon."<sup>25</sup>

At the risk of being accused of illegitimate totality transfer, I would like to suggest that the fear of Yahweh always contains the element of terror and dread, and awe and reverence. "There is the dread or terror of the Lord and there is the fear of reverential awe. There is the fear that consists in being afraid; it elicits anguish and terror. There is the fear of reverence; it elicits confidence and love."<sup>26</sup>

Although one element may dominate the other in a given situation (some examples will be given later), both elements should be co-existent, although not necessarily co-equal. The concept of

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<sup>24</sup>J.I. Packer, Knowing God (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), pg. 142.

<sup>25</sup>H.C. Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1969) pgs. 904-905.

<sup>26</sup>John Murray, Principles of Conduct, pg. 233.

the fear of Yahweh is so intricately linked to Yahweh's own nature, that to say "fear Yahweh" automatically carries with it connotative meaning. "Here we move away from objectivity to subjectivity, away from cold grammar to flesh-and-blood utterances. Words are not, in fact, the neutral entities we might intuitively assume them to be. Each of us develops a relationship towards words, based on repeated experiences of their usage and of the referents which lie behind the words."<sup>27</sup>

It is the contention of this paper that the connection of fear with Yahweh always has the connotation of the *Mysterium Tremendum*, the holiness, the justice, the wrath, and the grace of God. Therefore, when a believer approaches God, there is awe, reverence, and adoration (cf. Psa. 130:4), and also an element of dread. "For he who ponders within himself what God the Father is like toward us has cause enough, even if there be no hell, to dread offending Him more gravely than any death."<sup>28</sup> This is bore out in Psa. 119:120, "My flesh trembles for fear (TNS) of Thee, And I am afraid (X7?) of Thy judgments." This element of dread is also seen in Hos. 3:5. Although this element is not primary for the believer, it simply cannot be dismissed.

When an unbeliever is faced with the reality of God, the result should be pure dread, terror, and anguish. Although man, in his depraved condition, does not naturally fear God (Rom. 3:18; Psa. 36:1), whenever a man has his eyes opened, and he catches even

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<sup>27</sup>Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1989), pg. 46.

<sup>28</sup>John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 1, pg. 572.

a glimpse of God, the result is fear and anguish."<sup>23</sup> "Mere awe, mere need of shelter from the *tremendum*, has here been elevated to the feeling that man in his 'profaneness' is not worthy to stand in the presence of the Holy One, and that his own entire personal unworthiness might defile even holiness itself."<sup>24</sup>

To illustrate this balanced view of fear for the believer, there are two OT texts. The first is Ex. 20:20, where God had just delivered the Commandments, and displayed His awesome power in a very visible, tangible way. The Israelites are terrified. The focus of their terror was their impending judgment and death (v. 19). Then Moses speaks, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." The point seems to be clear, the people should not fear death and judgment, but they should fear God in order that they should walk righteously. The thunder, lightning, smoke, and trumpet blasts (what might be called in this case the *Mysterium Tremendum* manifest) would motivate the people to live in awe and respect of a holy God.

The next text is found in the Psalms. Psalm 76:4 reads, "Thou art resplendent, More majestic than the mountains of prey." Verse 7 reads, "Thou, even Thou, art to be feared; And who may stand in Thy presence when Thou art angry?" The point, again, is clear. God is majestic and awesome, He defends Israel (vv. 5-6), but He is to be feared, especially when He is angry.

#### SUMMARY

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<sup>23</sup>This is wonderfully illustrated with Simon Peter in Lk. 5:1-8, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (v. 8).

<sup>24</sup>Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy, pg. 54.

The phrase "the fear of Yahweh," has the two-fold connotation of terror and awe. One simply cannot dismiss the mystery of God's awesome power and holiness, in lieu of a more serene, placid definition of fearing God. The unbeliever should shake and tremble as if he were bound to a train track and tons of steel, in the form of a train, was bearing down upon his feeble body, ready to crush his frail flesh. The believer should have an awe and a holy reverence for God, knowing His mercy, majesty, and grace, without forgetting that "our God is a consuming fire."<sup>11</sup> "For Yahweh Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth."<sup>12</sup>

#### IV. CATEGORICAL FEATURES OF THE FEAR OF YAHWEH

This final section will deal with those features which Scripture says accompany the fear of God. They will be gleaned from the Psalms, Proverbs, Qohelet, and Job, They will be categorized under four main headings.

##### THE SOURCE OF FEARING YAHWEH

Without being redundant, the biblical testimony is clear that it is a knowledge of God's character that primarily produces fear for Him (Psa. 90:11; 130:4; 119:120; Prov. 9:10). This knowledge comes through His written Word, and so David prays, "Establish Thy Word to Thy servant, As that which produces fear for Thee."<sup>13</sup> Apart from a knowledge of God, and a knowledge of His Word, a genuine reverence, awe, and fear of God cannot be in a person's being.

##### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS RESULTING FROM FEARING YAHWEH

Obviously, the concept of fearing God must be expressed in

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<sup>11</sup>Hebrews 12:29.

<sup>12</sup>Psa. 47:2.

<sup>13</sup>Psa. 119:38.



attitude and action, this is the heart of fearing God. The fear of God produces the attitude of God-centered confidence (Job 4:6; Prov. 14:26). It also is reflected in reverent worship of Yahweh (Psa. 2:11; 5:7). Not only are confidence and worship attitudinal responses, but also a humble prudence proceeds from a fear of God (Psa. 90:11-12).

When the attitude is genuinely affected, then actions, by necessity, will follow. Fearing God will have a direct impact on the believer's walk (Psa. 86:11; Prov. 14:2). The fear of God will motivate an individual to turn away from evil (Prov. 3:7; 8:13; 16:6). Ecc. 12:13 gives this principle in summary form, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this is what our humanity is really all about."<sup>14</sup>

"The order of the two points (fear...keep) is significant. Conduct derives from worship. A knowledge of God leads to obedience; not vice versa."<sup>15</sup> The fear of Yahweh, when properly rooted in the minds of His people, leads to right thinking about God, and right actions in life.

#### BLESSINGS THAT COME FROM FEARING YAHWEH

By far, the most extensive features that attend the fear of God concept, are those related to God's blessings in the lives of those who fear Him. "He will bless those who fear Yahweh, The small together with the great."<sup>16</sup>

The main blessing attending the fear of Yahweh is salvation

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<sup>14</sup>The last phrase is a paraphrase, derived from Dr. Ronald Allen.

<sup>15</sup>Michael A. Eaton, Ecclesiastes, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983), pg. 156.

<sup>16</sup>Psa. 115:13.

(Psa. 85:9). Wrapped up in His salvation is God's loyal, covenant love, which is richly, and eternally lavished on those who fear Him (Psa. 103:11,17). He also promises fatherly compassion and favor for those who fear Him (Psa. 103:13; 147:11). Under God's umbrella of salvation, there is angelic protection (Psa. 34:7) and God's watchful eye (Psa. 33:18), for those who fear Him. The imagery is a storehouse, full of God's goodness and blessings, stored up for those who fear His name (Psa. 31:19).

When an individual fears God, the blessings do not stop at salvific issues. There is godly wisdom, which is the application of the knowledge of God to life (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Psa. 111:10). There is a deep seated satisfaction that comes from fearing God (Psa. 34:9; Prov. 19:23). There is also fulfillment of desire for God-fearing people (Psa. 145:19). Contentment is also a blessing attending the fear of Yahweh (Prov. 15:16; 19:23; 23:17). These four characteristics, wisdom, satisfaction, fulfillment, and contentment, are elusive in today's society, but they are mere by-products of fearing Yahweh.

God's promise of provision is another fringe benefit involved with fearing Him (Psa. 111:15). A prolongation of life is also a blessing that proceeds from the fear of God (Prov. 10:27). Not only is a long life is promised, but also a quality of life which is likened to a fountain, and accompanied by riches and honor (Prov. 14:27; 19:23; 22:4). What could make this blessed life more blessed than the knowledge that all will be well for those who fear Him (Ecc. 8:12).

In summary, the one who fears God is the object of blessings, both now and later. Heaven for eternity and an abundant life for time is the reward for the one who walks in the fear of the Lord.

"The one who fears the commandment will be rewarded."

#### THE RESULT OF NOT FEARING GOD

This section would be incomplete if it did not contain the biblical warnings to those who do not fear Yahweh. Just as the blessings are bright for fearing God, so the results are dark for neglecting this fear. Perhaps the only necessary result to display is the one found in Prov. 1. The scene is set with Lady Wisdom calling out in the street (Prov. 1:20). She urges the naive, the scoffer, and the fool to turn to her, accept her rebuke, and receive her spirit (1:23). But, as Alden observes, "Criticism is hard to take; few respond to it with ease. It is ego-damaging."<sup>1</sup>

Instead of receiving her wisdom, which begins with fearing Yahweh (Prov. 1:7), they refuse (1:24). The naive, the fool, and the scoffer pay no attention, they neglect her counsel, and simply do not want her reproof (1:24-25). Their lot then becomes calamity, dread, distress, and anguish (1:27). When the storm hits, then they call, but there is no answer (1:28). There is no answer because they "hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Yahweh" (1:29).

The result of not fearing Yahweh, simply put, is death and destruction (1:32). Those who do not fear God, in attitude and action, will not reap the blessings of the upright, but rather they will harvest what they have sown, "they shall eat the fruit of their own way."<sup>2</sup>

#### SUMMARY

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<sup>1</sup>Prov. 13:13.

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Alden, Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), pg. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Prov. 1:31.

The categorical features that accompany the concept of fearing Yahweh basically involve the source, the blessings, and the consequences of neglect. Although the life of the God-fearer is not always bliss (Job is an example of one who feared God, yet suffered, Job 1:1), it is filled with blessings for here and the hereafter. The life of the godless, in whom there is no fear of God, can be guaranteed to be short, painful, and eternally regrettable.<sup>40</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION

The fear of Yahweh pervades the pages of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. It encompasses an awe and reverence for God, without negating the dread of the *Mysterium Tremendum*. It is sourced in knowing God for who He is. It affects the attitudes and actions of those who truly fear Him. It is all a reflection of His majestic holiness, awesome sovereignty, and overwhelming love. Those who walk in light of it, shall be blessed. Those who ignore it, through sin or distortion, shall not escape the side of God that causes terror.

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<sup>40</sup>I am not discounting the question of Psa. 73, why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? I am simply setting forth the general wisdom principles from the Wisdom literature.

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