

## 11-01-20 Fearing God

### Acts 5:1-11

Do we fear God? Do we really? When we are in sin? When we sit back and watch from the sidelines?

Some redefine the fear of God for believers to “respecting” Him. While respect is included in the concept of fearing God, there is more to it than that. A biblical fear of God, for the believer, includes understanding how much God hates sin and fearing His judgment on sin—even in the life of a believer.

**Hebrews 12:5-11** describes God’s discipline of the believer. While it is done in love (**Hebrews 12:6**), it is still a fearful thing. As children, the fear of discipline from our parents no doubt prevented some evil actions. The same should be true in our relationship with God. We should fear His discipline, and therefore seek to live our lives in such a way that pleases Him.

Believers are not to be scared of God. We have no reason to be scared of Him. We have His promise that nothing can separate us from His love (**Romans 8:38-39**). We have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5**). Fearing God means having such a reverence for Him that it has a great impact on the way we live our lives. The fear of God is respecting Him, obeying Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshiping Him in awe.

God has revealed a heart condition in my life, a longing for the old days. Days where we could go on vacation and not worry about it. Where we could gather for church and shake hands. Have big fellowship dinners.

Those aren’t bad things! But was I doing what I am called to do in those days?

Were there times God’s desire was for me to service, minister or worship and I was busy over here? Was I praying for God to use me, but not in that way? Was I taking for granted the time He was giving me?

Fearing God is good because it saves us from caving into our own sinful nature. In fact, **Romans 3**, a classic chapter on sin, says that our chief sin is when we "have no fear of God at all" (**Romans 3:18**).

I need to read scripture like **Acts 5:1-11**. I need to be reminded the intensity God requires of me. God calls us to holy living. Rule following doesn’t come easy to me. I am way too rebellious for my own good! (corn maze with the teens and following Mitchel)

Matter of fact the only times I have followed the rules and not rebelled is because God was controlling me, like a video game boss.

### **Read Acts 5:1-11, responsively.**

To get a full sense of what happened it’s important to set this text in context. Chapter 4 ends by celebrating how Barnabas sold a field and laid the proceeds at the apostle’s feet. It was cool how God’s people willingly gave of their possessions to help those in the church that were in need.

The unity they experienced along with a sense of purpose was palpable. Verse 33 describes how “great power”, and “great grace” were at work among them.

**Acts 5:1** begins with “**But,**” which is a word of contrast. Barnabas was looked up to for his extravagant generosity. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to get some props as well. They too had a piece of property and sold it, but instead of giving the entire amount, they kept some back for themselves. The phrase “kept back” means “to embezzle or pilfer.”

They made a pretense of giving all the proceeds. I was reminded of what Jesus said about holy hypocrites in **Matthew 23:5**: **“They do all their deeds to be seen by others.”**

Instead of getting applause, Peter called him out for his hypocrisy. No matter how old we are or how long we’ve been walking with Christ, Satan is always tempting us to sin. The name “Satan” means, “adversary.” Like Paul says in **Ephesians 6**, the battle we all fight is not in physical places but in spiritual spaces.

Peter was quick to say Ananias didn’t have to sell the land and even if he chose to sell it, he didn’t have to give all of it to the church. The problem was he had lied about it. He was trying to put a ‘spin’ on his sin. In his hypocrisy, he was trying to hide his heart. It’s interesting Peter says Satan filled his heart to lie but he also says that Ananias “conceived this thing (deed)” in his own heart. Satan deceived but Ananias did the deed. The same is true for us. Satan may tempt us, but we can’t blame him when we sin.

BTW, this younger generation, they have keen hypocrisy meters. I was reading an article the other day, that the younger Millennials and Gen Z could make the biggest impact for Christ. Way bigger than baby boomers and Gen X. The reason why is they see the hypocrisy that we are trying to sell as truth. They see how many of us are excusers, procrastinators, always searching for the next thing, book, idea and never doing anything. Too many of us like to talk the talk but not walk the walk.

Ananias and Sapphira were in harmony about their hypocrisy, even though they were testing the Holy Spirit. BTW, sin affects both men and women, couples, and singles.

How did the church respond to God dealing with the sin in the church? **Read verse 11** again. There is that word Mey-gas again, **“great”**. Along with great power and great grace, “great fear” came upon those who were following Christ and those who were not.

How many of us have thought, or wished the church were more like the church in the Book of Acts? So powerful, unified, seeing thousands led to Christ.

First, if we want that, we must properly fear God, be ready to be held accountable for your lack of faith and sin in your life. Are you willing to be called out? Called onto the carpet?

Second, get ready to be persecuted. Satan hates God fearing people, churches that are after God’s heart.

We need to be heart attack serious about fearing God.

We must focus, be vigilant on fearing God. I fear the American church has lost the fear and awe of God.

It’s easy to take a potshot at another church, so, again, I wonder how I’ve compromised my view of God. Do I see Him as holy? Do I reverently fear Him? Is Bethel growing in the fear of God?

I was offended by a quote I read this last week. It didn’t make me feel good. It made me pause, ponder, and struggle with the TRUTH in it.

It was a quote from someone 400 years ago! Jeremiah Burroughs wrote in his book, “Gospel Worship,” 400 years ago.

*“It is fitting that God should be glorified, whatever becomes of you. You are dear to God, but God’s name is dearer to Him than you are.”* Ouch!

The proper perspective of our fear, reverence, awe of God helps us to be faithful to Him. The fear of God will help us be faithful to God. No fear of God, demonstrated in us living life our way is sin.

**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 Spirit, they were multiplied."**

**Acts 19:17, "This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."**

**Philippians 2:12, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;"**

**1 Peter 1:17, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;"**

**Hebrews 11:7, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."**

**Hebrews 12:28-29, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire."**

God is holy, holy, holy and we are called to fear Him. A.W. Tozer: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

The fear of God will help us be faithful to God. Because **Acts 5** is brimming with implications and applications, let's ask God to help us put these truths into practice.

#### **1. Don't Love Your Stuff Too Much.**

**Proverbs 15:27, "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live."**

**1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."**

- Give with generosity and with sincerity.

**2 Corinthians 9:6-7, "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."**

- Make sure what you do give as an offering to the Lord is what he says and the motive behind the offering is right.
- BTW, we, you and I need to heed the example of Ananias and Saphira, I know I have been guilty of doing things in my life to appear or seem more spiritual than I really was.
- If God gave His best, why shouldn't we? If I have a proper perspective of fear, I know all I have is His, to manage, to continuously seek what He wants done. (money, possessions, children, talent, time)
- How do we respond with what God has called us to manage?

- Do we fear a virus or man more than God? Are we doing things in the world but not in the church or for His glory? Are we chatting with man about everything under the sun, but not mentioning God's Son?

## **2. Repent of Known Sin.**

- Do you have any secret sins? Any fatal flaws or messed up motives? Have you been rationalizing some rebellion?
- While it's easy to point out the sins of our society, it's humbling to admit God always begins by cleaning His own house according to **1 Peter 4:17**.

**1 Peter 4:17, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"**

- The sin we think we are hiding is in full view of God.

**Hebrews 4:13, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."**

- We are way too good at doing what we want and numb to conviction. That is not fear of God, that is **Romans 3:18, "There is not fear of God before their eyes"** sinfulness.
- If we want "Megas" power, and grace in our life and in our church, we must live a "Megas" fear of God.
- What if you are the one person in the local church body that is holding it back from a church wide revival?

## **3. Be Introspective, Beware of Hypocrisy in Your Own Life.**

- It's telling that hypocrisy was the first sin dealt with in the early church. Jesus hated hypocrisy in those who were religious and always hit it hard.
- If you are brave enough, if you have a Christian friend; remember a friend tells you the truth?! Ask them if there are any areas of possible hypocrisy in your life. If you have a family and best friend like I do, they have no problem telling you.
- But isn't that what Paul did? When he told others to follow him as he followed Jesus? Why are we any different?
- This is where the rubber meets the road. I know there are people right here in this church that in their hearts are saying, NO WAY!
- Recognizing where we fall short sinfully is the road to recovery, edification.

## **4. When Things are Going Well, Satan Goes to Work.**

- In **Acts 4**, Satan sent persecution from without and in **Acts 5**, he stirred up problems within.

- One commentator said, *“Where there is light, there will also be a shadow; where God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel at its side.”*
- Here’s a warning for us. When there’s a lot of harmony and excitement because God’s Kingdom work is being done, we need to be watchful and stay steady... Satan hates unity.
- Satan desires us to be lulled into a place of complacency, become ok with mediocracy. He wants us to be comfortable.
- I often forget that we are fighting an **Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”** war.
- Show the State house celebrating January 23rd, 2019, after passing the law that abortion can happen at anytime during pregnancy. (Cuomo’s signing of a law allowing abortions until birth in some cases, and letting non-doctors commit abortions.)

#### **5. Be Filled with the Holy Spirit.**

- The best way to avoid hypocrisy is by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Go back to **Acts 5:3** for a moment. Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” The word for “filled” has the idea of filling a hollow place. Ananias, a believer, was influenced by Satan, not the Spirit!
- The best way to avoid being swayed by Satan is to make sure you are saturated with the Holy Spirit! If you’re hollow, Satan will fill you with unholy thoughts.

**Ephesians 5:18, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,”**

#### **Conclusion**

1. We can put a spin on our sin and spin out of control.

or...

2. We can grow in our fear of God and become more faithful to God.

Let’s face it. We’re all pretenders to some degree. Each of us struggle with trying to be something more than we really are. The truth is if God judged us for our hypocrisy like He did Ananias and Sapphira, we’d all be vaporized.

But God did judge someone, His one and only Son. He took all your sins and placed them on Jesus, who fell and breathed His last by dying on the Cross.

If you’ve never been saved, call out to Him now. Repent and receive the free gift of forgiveness so you can be set free from your sins. If you’re ready to do that, you could pray something like this...

God, I confess I am a pretender. I’m not only a hypocrite but I am a sinner, and my sins are consuming me. I repent of how I’ve been living and turn now to You. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die in my place on the Cross and to rise again on the third day. I believe and I now receive Jesus into my life.

Save me from my sins and make me born again. Teach me to fear You so I can be faithful to You the rest of my life. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.

If you're already a Christian but have been compromising in some way, confess your hypocrisy to Him right now. If you're backslidden, it's time to come back. If you're saved but you're not living a surrendered life, make this the day you rededicate yourself to Christ.

Maybe you need to stop allowing excuses and procrastination win. Instead of reading a book or finding a new program and talking about it, how about you get off your backside and do something. I don't think Covid-19 has harmed the cause of Christ. I think more that it has exposed the cracks in our churches, our hearts, that we aren't what we portray to others that we are. In too many cases, we are lazy and self-centered, God can't use us because we aren't able to hear Him.

What would happen if believers spoke as boldly into your life as the believers did in the early church? We like to point out how the early church took care of the needs of others. But we don't talk about how they held each other accountable. I think we would be so offended that we would leave the church.