

ENDORSEMENTS

The Fear of God: A Forgotten Doctrine is a labor of love: love for this precious doctrine of holy fear, love for those Puritans who lived it in a more compelling way than any who came before or after, love for God's people today who walk in shadows because the fear of man is too much with us, and love for the Word rightly preached, which is able to bring the Church back to an attitude of holy fear. Above all, this book is the fruit of filial love for our Savior Jesus Christ, who alone is able to deliver us from all unholy fears and bring us to a place of trusting all His promises to us. If you would face unholy fears head-on, this book will make you strong for the battle. If you long for reformation in the way the Church worships, begin with the wise counsel you will find here.

Linda Wohleber, Christian wife, mother, Bible teacher

In this insightful treatise on the Fear of God, Pastor Arnold Frank writes as a Puritan born out of time. Frank's love and appreciation for the 17th century English Puritans is evident throughout as he carefully sets forth the forgotten and largely misunderstood teaching of biblical fear. I have personally used Frank's work in my own study and preaching, and commend this book to you, the reader, for similar use. May the Lord be pleased to work in our day not only to give His church a proper understanding of the doctrine, but also give His church the live transforming reality of deeply knowing and fearing Jehovah God.

Jerry O'Neill, President,

Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA

I recommend this book heartily to any Christian wanting to know more about the all-important subject of the fear of God. Dr. Frank unpacks this critical doctrine for Christian life in all its aspects, providing a useful analysis for layman and preacher alike. The reader will come away encouraged to pursue holiness out of love and respect for our Heavenly Father who is worthy of all obedience and love.

Steven Gandy, Christian husband and father, Surrey, England

The biblical concept of the fear of God is too often marginalized or ignored by the Christian church and its preachers today. The result is shallow views of sin, easy belief, and antinomianism. With the aid of Puritan preachers, Arnold Frank sounds a clarion call for a biblical and sure approach to the fear of God. He accomplishes this by distinguishing between ungodly fear and godly fear, the fear of man and the fear of God, spiritual awakening and saving faith, slavish fear and childlike fear, and the “almost Christian” and the genuine Christian. He also explains how childlike fear of God sanctifies affliction; relates to faith and love and worship; and operates experientially in conviction of sin, salvation, and obedience. Frank concludes this much-needed book by providing practical guidelines on how to promote the fear of God through preaching.

*Joel R. Beeke, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

FOREWORD

Ours is a day much like that of the Judges, “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Our churches are marked by irreverence, immorality, and hypocrisy. This problem arises from a lack of the fear of God. When Christians are ignorant of the fear of God, they fail to live their lives *Coram Deo*, aware of the presence of God to whom they must give an answer (2 Cor. 5:10). Aware that one lives life in the presence of God led Paul to conclude, “Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”

Much confusion exists today, however, with respect to the fear of God. Some look on it as a mark of Old Testament piety, which is foreign to the New Testament. This concept flies in the face of too many New Testament references: (Luke 12:5; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 14:7; 15:4; 1 Pet 1:17 to list a few). Others find the doctrine greatly confusing. After all, the apostle Paul, who claims to be motivated by the fear of God, contrasts the spirit of adoption with “the spirit of slavery leading to fear again” (Romans 8:15). And the apostle John says “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love” (1 John 4:18).

The problem, of course, is definitions. We have pretty good ideas about the meaning of faith and love, but what is the fear of God and how does it relate to concepts like faith and love? Our fuzzy thinking concerning the concept of the fear of God is

not because of any lack of clarity in the Bible, but because of the paucity of teaching on the topic. How many sermons have you heard on the doctrine of the fear of God? If your experience is like mine, very few. If you are a preacher, how often do you deal with this truth in your sermons?

When Arnold Frank was exposed to a series of sermons by Albert Martin on the fear of God, he was motivated to study what the Bible had to say on this truth. That study led him to the Puritans and those who have ministered in their tradition, because the Puritans understood the centrality of this doctrine for bold, godly living. This book is the fruit of that study.

Mr. Frank, in nine very readable chapters, defines the different types of fear, teaches the proper fear of God, and relates it to God-centered worship. He concludes with instruction on how to preach the fear of God to the lost and how to preach the fear of God to the believer. His study of Scripture is richly seasoned by the insights from the Puritans. (Just look at the bibliography!)

I cannot commend this book too highly. Preachers need to study it in order to be better equipped to preach this grand truth. Serious Christians should read it in order to grow in their love and fear of God.

Joseph A. Pipa Jr.

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

To Jean Beryl Long Frank,
gem of a critic,
long-suffering, and helpfully candid

PREFACE

The root of this book is a five-sermon series on the fear of God by Pastor Albert Martin, Trinity Baptist Church, Montville, New Jersey. I had never heard any sermon on the same subject and have heard only a very few since.

Listening to those sermons inspired me to make a concordance-like search on the subject of the fear of God. I read my Bible through once again, documenting my findings in a journal. What I found was that the doctrine of the fear of God permeates the Bible. As such, I was convinced and convicted that since preaching the whole counsel of God is the duty of every Gospel preacher, there needed to be a revival of the preaching of this doctrine.

Simultaneously, I was becoming more familiar with the Puritans through the ministry of Soli Deo Gloria, a publisher of Puritan works. I found copious sermons and treatises on the subject of the fear of God, so much so that it would not be extravagant to contend that no succeeding generation emphasized this doctrine like the Puritans.

The discovery—rather, re-discovery—of the importance of the fear of God provided the impetus for a book-length study. The subject of the fear of God, relatively unknown in our modern age, became a personal passion as my new convictions and desires converged. I wanted to help instill in thoughtful Christians and Gospel preachers a renewed interest in the fear of God.

I principally pursued the research in three seminary libraries. I availed myself of the impressive array of Puritan titles at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary library

(Grand Rapids, Mich.). Dr. Joel Beeke, an authority on the Puritans at PRTS, advised and encouraged me along the way. Research continued in the Luce Library Antiquarian Collection of Princeton Theological Seminary. Steven Crocco, a long-time friend and seminary librarian, provided access to more Puritan titles, including some helpful first editions. I also conducted research at the Library and Rare Books Collection of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Pittsburgh, Penn.). Librarian Thomas Reid accommodated me by providing a place for research and writing virtually within an arm's reach of the Puritan collection.

During the early stages of the project I was pastoring the South Hills Reformed Presbyterian Church, Upper St. Clair, Penn. The elders and the congregation encouraged me in this venture, granting paid study-leave to make it possible. They would be the first to be exposed to the results of my study as I taught and preached on the fear of God.

I have found out that the writing and the publishing of a book is a team project, beyond the encouraging crowd that reminds an author of the interest in receiving a copy when it is available. When the manuscript was written I came to realize that my work was not done. In the always timely providence of the Heavenly Father, Joel Beeke recommended that I seek the assistance of Mark Kakkuri for editorial assistance to polish the final product. Mark's help and encouragement have been invaluable. With the patience and skills of a veteran in these matters he has brought the book to its present readiness for publication. And even here, by divine providence, Mark was able to put me in touch with a publisher, Jerry Nordskog, who

readily agreed, with enthusiasm, to let the book “see the light of day.” These two new-found friends, whom I’ve yet to see and meet, will always be appreciated for their labors and trust.

I am daunted by the realization that this book might be read by some who are far more informed in the literature of the Puritans or far more skilled in preaching. Still, I hope that even they will profit.

Through this book, I hope to contribute to a revival, of sorts, of interest in the Puritans as they have few peers in the preaching of the whole counsel of God. One does not have to read long in Puritan literature to realize how adept they were at relating general revelation and special revelation--after the pattern of the Master Teacher. In reading the Puritans it is hardly possible to remain detached. Many will find themselves, as I have, becoming active participants in the holy drama of soul business.

My supreme hope is that this book will contribute to the rediscovery of that salvation grace called the fear of God that delights to please and endeavors not to offend.

When that rediscovery comes to its fullest flowering, then God’s redeemed people will be better able to identify with Jesus when He said of his Father, “... I always do the things that please him” (John 8:29).

A.L.F.

Mansfield, Ohio

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INTRODUCTION

The Fear of God is a major theme in the Bible. The expression is found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Its New Testament appearances are spread evenly throughout, in the Gospels, the Acts, and in the Epistles, with a major emphasis in the book of Revelation. On three occasions in Revelation the worship that will prevail in the New Heavens and the New Earth is characterized as being in the fear of God (14:7; 15:4; 19:5).

In spite of the prominence of that expression, its presence in contemporary Christian worship, preaching, and publications is conspicuous by its absence to a significant degree. Modern translations of the Bible regularly translate the original words for “fear” as “reverence” or “awesome,” terms sufficiently broad to lose the vital sense of what the “fear of God” is meant to convey.

First of all, this book was written as an endeavor to alert the attention of the Christian reading public to the frequently found expression “fear of God.” Within this purpose, I wanted readers of God’s Word to identify the meaning of the fear mentioned according to its contextual setting. There is a world of difference of meaning in “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Psalm 130:4) and “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment....” (I John 4:18). Beyond understanding what is meant by the “fear of God” is establishing the necessity of the fear of God in the life and experience of every Christian. The biblical understanding of the fear of God is that one cannot be a Christian without this fear, any more than one cannot be a Christian without the love of God. The fear of God and the love of God belong together

like two sides of the same coin.

This book was written also with preachers of the Word of God in mind. To assist in their high calling of preaching the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), three chapters give the description of three kinds of fear and three more chapters provide application both for counseling on misplaced fear and for the place of the fear of God in Christian worship. The final chapter “How Shall We Then Preach” is dedicated exclusively to the preaching of the fear of God unto salvation and unto sanctification.

The three chapters on the kinds of the fear of God are amply illustrated by Puritan comment and are identified here, briefly:

“Exclusively Ungodly Fear” (Chap. 3) is a fear that many have. It is a fear that is ungodly because it always drives one away from God, never toward Him. Ungodly fear is the experience of those who can never trust totally in Christ because they are never sure that enough has been done to make them welcome. Martin Luther was once a prime example.

“Provisionally Godly Fear” (Chap. 4) is possessed by those who have been made acutely aware that the chasm between the sinner and God is impossible for the sinner to span.

Filled with the fear of utter inability, the sinner realizes he has only one place to go with the plea: “God, be merciful to me, the sinner” (Luke 18:13). This chapter deals with an issue that is missing in most of contemporary evangelism.

“Perpetually Godly Fear” (Chap. 5) comes with all of the other spiritual gifts and graces at the moment of the new birth. In today’s Christian community this spiritual grace usually goes unidentified. Yet, it may be recognized in the new child

of God by a sense that Jesus articulates when, on one occasion of opposition, he said, "I always do the things that please my Father." (John 8:29). This kind of fear always wants to please the Father and never wants to displease.

The three chapters of application also abound with Puritan insights and are here identified briefly:

"Peculiarly Problematic Fear" (Chap. 6) identifies a fear problem from which none are exempt: the fear of man. Where the ungodly fear of man is dominating, the godly fear of God cannot be. The true godly fear of God is the only antidote to this crippling fear, in a multitude of forms, which afflicts all people. This fear heads the list of sins that qualify one for the "lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8).

"Peculiarly Afflicting Fear" (Chap. 7) is concerned with the subject of the assurance of salvation. While it is true that an authentic believer in Christ can go to heaven without any such assurance, the Scriptures commend the spiritual grace of the certainty of one's salvation. While Satan cannot keep a true believer out of the Kingdom of God, he does attack that believer's assurance of being a true Christian with troubling doubts and unsettling accusations. The genius of Puritan spiritual counseling on this vital issue is demonstrated in a series of one-on-one settings that expose Satan as the true culprit.

"Worship-inclining Fear" (Chap. 8) describes the worship of the triune God as the one thing that the goal of all of human existence "is really all about." The Puritans, who have often been misunderstood and misrepresented, majored on the worship of God, personal and corporate, as a setting in which the majesty and holiness of God are the defining parameters.

Isaiah's vision of the worship of Heaven (Isaiah 6:1-6) in which the elect angels continuously exclaim "Holy, holy, holy" is the reflex of the very essence of the fear of God. Such a reflex will once again be experienced in the courts of the New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev. 14:7; 15:4; 19:5). This reflex is rarely noticed today in what is considered to be Christian worship. The God who "seeks worshippers to worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:23,24) does not leave His worship up to human inventions. The chapter calls for a revisiting of the core meaning and practice of the Worship of the God who, alone, is to be worshipped in fear as well as love.

The fear of God is a many-faceted jewel of Biblical truth. One of those facets is seen in the Book of Proverbs in the simple sentence: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The beginning of new life in Christ is the beginning of the fear of the LORD (Psalm 130:4). The beginning of the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). The beginning of wisdom is the beginning of a life lived in harmony with all of God's cause-and-effect systems: natural, physical, social and moral – especially moral. There are only two kinds of people in this world: those who live in willing harmony with God's moral law and those who live in willing rejection of God's moral law. The first kind are considered the Wise. The other kind are called "Fools" (Psalm 14:1). Whatever else this book may accomplish in the providence of Almighty God, the author's delight would be to know that many have been called out of the kingdom of the foolish into the Kingdom of Him who Paul described as "becoming for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption...." (I Corinthians 1:30).

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WHAT SHOULD WE THEN SAY TO THESE SAYINGS?

There is a fear of God that is a salvation grace, an emotive instinct, which works in a child of God to incline him, as a son to a father, to do those things that he knows will please Him and to refrain from those things that he knows will displease Him.

Part of man's constitutional furniture is to fear something. No one is excepted. Life is bracketed by the fear of falling—in the infant and in the ancient. In between, objects of fear multiply. Of all the fears, the two most significant, most life influencing, and most opposed, are the fear of man and the fear of God. In this opening chapter, we will travel to the “top of the mountain” for a view of the fear of God *par excellence*—of which there can be far less but none better.

John Bunyan begins his classic treatment of the fear of God with a text from Revelation: “... Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (14:7). He then pares down the text to the two words “Fear God” and explains, “I shall not trouble you with a long preamble, or forespeech to the matter, nor shall I here meddle with the context, but shall immediately fall upon the words themselves, and briefly treat of the fear of God.”¹ We can be thankful that Bunyan's idea of “briefly” differs from ours; he immerses his reader in the length, breadth, depth and height of what he considers to be the “highest duty towards him [the mighty God]: to wit, to fear him”.²

Bunyan, the “tinker of Bedford jail”, was far from alone in giving attention to the fear of God. Those later 16th and 17th century Puritan successors of the earlier 16th century Reformers left a treasure trove of pious literature that abounds in expositions of this major theme of the Word of God. So natural and appropriate to Christian experience was the concept that Puritan William Brewster, the “Reverend Elder” of Plymouth Plantation notoriety, even named one of his daughters “Fear”.³

THE WORDS OF GOD AND THE FEAR OF GOD

A concordance-like search of the Scriptures reveals a large family of words in a massive amount of Old and New Testament texts that are used to express fully the multifaceted sense of this vital doctrine. The reader discovers references to the fear of animals (Amos 3:8), circumstances (Eccl. 12:5), man (Is. 51:7), angels (Luke 2:9), and God (Matt. 10:28). In God's ordered universe there is a prescribed time and place for a proper fear of animals, circumstances, man, and angels, and to not fear would be abnormal—even foolish or sinful (e.g., Rom 13:1-7). These kinds of fear are linked: a proper fear of God provides a proper context for the other fears. Or, as Thomas Manton describes it: "As one nail driveth out another, or as Moses' rod did eat up the rods of the magicians, so doth the fear of God against all contrary fears and terrors whereby the heart may be turned from God."⁴

What was it that so captured the attention of the Puritan preachers, characterized their lives, and permeated their preaching and writing? Manifestly, it was the fear of God in all of its aspects, with special emphasis upon that fear of God that is a salvation grace, begun in time and enduring throughout eternity. Following is a representative sampling of those convincing and convicting texts upon which the Puritans delighted to dwell.