

# Reverent Worship

Ecclesiastes Part 7

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Summary: Prepare your heart before coming to church so you are in a receptive mode, because rash, thoughtless speech proves you to be a fool and displeases God. Vows (commitments) are good because they enable you to commit future versions of your changeable self to a course that you know for sure is God’s will for you. But be very careful. Don’t make them rashly. Count the cost because the consequences of renegeing are severe. Therefore, fear God!

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**Ecclesiastes 5:1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Better to draw near in obedience (lit. draw near to listen) than to offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do wrong. 2 Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive to make a speech before God. (lit. do not be quick with your mouth or be impulsive with your heart to say a word before the face of God) God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. 3 For dreams result from much work and a fool’s voice from many words. 4 When you make a vow to God, don’t delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. 5 Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it. 6 Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For many dreams bring futility, so do many words. Therefore, fear God.**

## Introduction

### Reverence

Of all the things my father taught me growing up, I think maybe the most valuable was teaching me to revere God. I remember once as a kid telling a joke that involved God. It did not mock God or make fun of God in any way – but God was mentioned in the joke. And I told it, hoping to get a big laugh, and instead Dad just said something like, “I don’t like jokes about God. It’s not reverent.” That hit me like a ton of bricks, and it forever changed the way I spoke about God. In our home God was never referred to as “the man upstairs” or “the big guy,” or any kind of wording that conveyed anything but deep reverence. Reverence for the Creator goes beyond just the normal respect we show to fellow human beings. It is fine to mention a fellow human being in a joke as long as it does not reflect poorly on them or belittle them. But with God it is different. It is not enough to just show that level of respect. When you mention God, it is irreverent to mention Him at all in a frivolous way.

Another person who helped set this attitude deep in my heart was John MacArthur. He made an offhanded comment in a sermon once that always stuck with me. He was talking about people who are overly-familiar in the way they talk about Jesus. They are so quick to utter the name Jesus, and they speak about Him the same way they would speak about a peer or a buddy. And he went on to point out that in Scripture you don't see the name Jesus by itself very often. Most of the time it is surrounded by titles of honor...– the Lord Jesus, or the Lord Jesus Christ, or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, or our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He said, "I love using titles of honor for the Lord Jesus Christ." I love that, too. I love it that the Scriptures have given us all those titles so that we can bring Him honor every time we mention His name.

Another thing that never, ever happened in our house growing up was anybody saying the phrase, "Oh my God!" We were taught very early that if you are going to mention God, you had better be actually talking about God. The phrase "Oh my God" means nothing. And it is irreverent to mention God in a sentence that means nothing.

For some of you all this might sound kind of silly. You might think, "Come on – these are just words. It's just a saying – I don't mean anything bad by it." That is exactly the problem! Saying words that do not have meaning is a bad thing to do because words matter. Words are not small, insignificant things. They are huge, important things. And if you doubt that, just glance through the language of this section.

#### **4 When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because He has no pleasure in fools.**

If we don't follow the principles in this passage, we are acting like fools who bring no pleasure to God. Remember, our goal in this book is to enjoy life by pleasing God. So doing something that brings no pleasure to God will cut us off from our goal. Not only that, but look at verse 6. There is a possibility that God will be angry with our words and destroy the work of our hands.

**Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.**

Our words matter, and so it is very fitting that the writer of Ecclesiastes would devote a section to warn us and instruct about this very serious issue.

## **Context**

Up to this point in the book the Preacher has been mostly making observations. There have been implications for how we should live, but not a lot of direct commands. Starting in chapter 5 that is going to change. Now he begins with language that is more directive. Instead of just saying, "I saw this..." he gives commands and tells us specifically some things to do and not to do. And it comes in three parts – before, during, and after the corporate worship event. First, before – while you are approaching the house of God.

## **Be Quick to Listen**

**Ecclesiastes 5:1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.**

**The house of God** refers to the Temple, where the people would come to worship and offer gifts to God. And the command is to **guard your steps**. That means be careful in your approach. Did you know that Scripture regulates the way you drive to the household of God on Sunday morning? It is not enough to just come. God commands us to come in a certain way because some of the worst sins we ever commit are sins of worship. To have proper reverence for God in His house requires some preparation. I love the story Sam told about his dad. When their family was driving to church on Sundays he would ask the family in the car, "Did you spend as much time preparing your heart for church as you did preparing your body?"

Matthew Henry: “The heaviest rain runs off parched ground, unless it has been first softened by a gentle fall of moisture. Hearts that have no dew of previous meditation to make them receptive are not likely to drink in much of the showers of blessing which may be falling round them.”

Try softening up the ground of your heart a little before you arrive, and maybe the downpour of grace will sink in a little more.

We need to prepare – but how? What sort of preparation do we need?

### **1 ... draw near in obedience (lit. draw near to listen)**

Evidently, the Temple was not just a place where they offered sacrifices. There was teaching and instruction from God’s Word, and step one in going there was to prepare your heart to listen. The house of God in our day is the church. So when we come to church, part of the preparation is to get our hearts into a receptive, learning mode – rather than the default mode of just wanting to express our opinions.

### **Proverbs 18:2 A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.**

We need to be quick to listen.

## **Be Slow to Speak**

Secondly, we need to be slow to speak.

### **1 ... draw near to listen rather than offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do evil.**

Do not **offer the sacrifice of fools**. What is that? The context would indicate that the sacrifice of fools is a lot of empty words. Rash religious talk without much thought behind it. Fools come to church and get caught up in what everyone else is doing, and they jump on board verbally without thinking through whether they really mean what they are saying. They are quick to speak and slow to listen and they offer God thoughtless worship. True worship starts with listening to God’s Word, and then responds to that. If you try to respond before listening, you end up offering God the sacrifice of fools, which is thoughtless worship.

## **Displeases God**

Thoughtless worship is a great evil. It is a huge slap in the face to God. That is one of the reasons we are so careful with the content of the songs we use at Agape. So many songs these days are so incoherent (jumping from one unrelated topic to another just because the words rhyme), and so repetitive, that they cause the worshipper to stop thinking and become driven by feelings and impulses that are not guided by rational thought. And as a result the mouth is saying things that have not been thought through by the mind.

The same thing happens in public prayers. We open or close a meeting with prayer, and it can become an almost completely mindless exercise. You find yourself just saying a bunch of religious phrases that are not really expressions of any actual desire in the heart. Or you find yourself just trying to be eloquent. Or you just repeat old, worn-out phrases. “Thank You Lord for this day. Be with us as we seek to worship You. Lead, guide and direct. Blah, blah, blah...” and if someone asks you two minutes after your prayer what you prayed about, you can’t even remember. There are so many times in church when our mouths outrun our minds, and we just spew out a bunch of thoughtless words.

It is important to understand that the issue is not the number of words. It is the number of empty words – words that run out ahead of thoughts and affections. Jesus prayed all night long and that wasn’t too many words, because they were words that arose from real desires in His heart.

Matthew Henry: “The shortest prayer, which is not animated by a consciousness of need and a throb of desire, is too long; the longest, which is vitalized by these, is short enough.”

## **2 Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive ... (lit. Do not be quick with your mouth or be impulsive with your heart to say a word before the face of God)**

When you worship God your mind should be engaged and working hard – which is counter-cultural. We are an amusement-oriented culture, and thinking hard is something a lot of people just aren't used to. And one of the ways you can grow a really big church is by creating a service that keeps everyone amused without requiring much deep thought, and never having any periods of silence (because silence forces you to either think or be bored. And for some people being alone with their thoughts is awfully lonely). And many times when people come here from a background like that, it is too much for them. They say, "I like the people here but I'm not coming back because it's just too much mental exhaustion."

We exist in a culture that makes this very hard, but that is something we need to overcome because anyone who tries to worship God without thinking deeply and carefully ends up offering the sacrifice of fools, who do not even know what they are doing is evil (v.1). They are sinning against God and they don't even know it.

Did you know that it is possible to do evil while intending to do good? It happens all the time to people who offer thoughtless, impulse-based, feeling-based worship that is not governed by careful consideration of the truth of God's Word. You end up angering God without even knowing it. If you had no way of knowing, that's different. But if our ignorance is simply due to mental laziness, that is displeasing to God, and we are guilty.

## **Accomplishes Nothing**

So thoughtless worship is evil because it displeases God, and secondly, it is foolish because it does not accomplish anything.

### **3 For dreams result from much work and a fool's voice from many words.**

The word for **work** here is the same word used throughout the book to describe the frustrating, exhausting, anxiety-producing struggle to gain control of life. He has been telling us all along that that results in nothing but futility. The only thing you get out of it is a restless night's sleep and a bunch of bad dreams. And what are dreams? Nothing. If you get \$100 in a dream, how much of it do you wake up with? None. If you work really hard in a dream, how much work actually gets accomplished? None. None of it is real. Dreams are nothing. There were a few rare occasions when God spoke to a particular person through a dream, but the vast majority of the time a dream is just ... nothing. And just as all our struggling and toiling to gain control of providence gets us nothing but a bunch of bad dreams, so a whole lot of words amounts to nothing more than a fool's voice. The only thing you get from all that talking is confirmation that the words coming out of your mouth are coming out of the mouth of a fool. That is all thoughtless words accomplish – they just expose the foolishness of the one speaking them, nothing else.

Can you ever remember a time when you said, "That guy is an absolute motor mouth, but everything he says is wise"? No one ever says that. The only time you hear people say, "Everything that guy says is wise," is when they are talking about someone who doesn't talk much. Why? Because no matter how wise we get, no one is so wise that he can ramble on and on without mostly foolishness coming out of his mouth.

### **Proverbs 11:12 a man of understanding holds his tongue**

He holds his tongue a lot because he understands...

### **Proverbs 10:19 When there are many words, sin is not absent, but the one who controls his lips is wise.**

Thomas Corley has written a book titled Rich Habits where he compares the lifestyles of wealthy people with those of poor people, and he found a lot of very interesting contrasts. There are all the ones you would expect, like 67% of wealthy people write down their goals and only 17% of the poor write

down goals. Or 88% of wealthy read 30 minutes or more each day for education vs. 2% of poor. 6% of wealthy people watch reality TV vs. 78% of the poor. Those are all statistics many of us might have guessed. But how about this one? This is a direction quotation: “6% of wealthy say what’s on their mind vs. 69% of poor.” When you get the idea that just because something came into your head it has to come out of your mouth, that is a foolish way to live.

If wisdom is a mark of maturity, then one of the most reliable markers of when a boy becomes a man is when he lets go of the silliness of childish speech. Boys get together with friends and 90% of what comes out of their mouths is just silliness and goofiness and clowning around to get a chuckle out of their buddies. With girls it might be gossip or just chattering on and on about the most trivial, shallow things in life. And you can tell when a young man or woman is finally transitioning into adulthood when they finally give up that childish chatter and begin to get serious with their words. But for some people it never happens. And the Bible calls those people fools. Fools are always running off at the mouth.

**Proverbs 12:23 A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly.**

And they might actually say just as many wise things as a wise person, but those wise comments get lost in the avalanche of chatter.

So why control your tongue in church? First, because you do not want to dishonor God by offering the sacrifice of fools, which is thoughtless worship. And second, because thoughtless chattering accomplishes nothing except to expose you as a fool. It makes your life as empty as a bunch of dreams. He makes that same point again down in verse 7.

**7 For many dreams bring futility, so do many words. Therefore, fear God.**

When everything is said and done, usually a lot more is said than done because it is so much easier to talk than to act.

## **Be Faithful to Follow Through**

So, prior to coming to the house of God, prepare your heart to be receptive and listen to the Word of God. Then while you are there, be slow to speak. First think, then speak. Boy, we could save ourselves a lot of heartache and trouble if we could just get that order down, couldn’t we? First think, then speak. So before worship, prepare your heart. During worship, think before you speak. What about after worship? After worship, follow through on what you said during worship. Be quick to listen, be slow to speak, and when you do speak, be faithful to follow through.

**4 When you make a vow to God, don’t delay fulfilling it, because He has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow.**

A vow is when you commit to doing something. In our culture we don’t usually use the term “vow” (unless it’s in a wedding ceremony). The word we prefer is “commitment,” but it is the same thing. A vow, or commitment, is a statement about something you are going to do in the future that goes beyond just saying, “I’m intending to do this” or “I plan on doing this” or “I hope to do this.” A vow is when you say, “I am making a commitment to do this. Go ahead and put my name down for that – I’m going to do it.”

## **The Purpose of a Commitment**

Vows to God generally involve either doing something in His service, or giving Him something. Why would someone do those things? Why do we do things in God’s service? Does He need help? No. Why do we give things to God? Does He need our money or other gifts? No. So if He doesn’t need our help or gifts – why do we give them to Him?

## *Worship Gives*

We do it because giving to God is one of the most fundamental aspects of worship. We honor God by giving Him things that are of value to us. And there are two ways to give to God: directly and indirectly.

### *Indirect*

We give to God indirectly when we give to those in need for His sake. In Matthew 25 Jesus said “**whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.**” When you give to God’s people because they are God’s people, you are giving to God indirectly. That is worship. In 2 Corinthians 9:12, the Corinthians’ gift to the poor is called *leitourgia*, which comes from *letreuo* - the word for worship.<sup>1</sup> Remember what the angel told Cornelius in Acts 10:4? **Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.** This is why giving to the benevolence fund is part of our corporate worship service – because it is worship. You are giving to God indirectly.

### *Direct*

Another aspect of worship is giving directly to God. This is giving that does not go to feed the hungry or do anything in particular – but that is simply given just for the direct purpose of honoring God. This is a crucially important part of true worship, because if you find that all your giving is only the indirect kind – giving to people in need, and none of it is the direct kind, that puts a question mark on your motives. Are you trying to express love for God or are you only concerned about people? In Matthew 26, a woman worshipped Jesus by pouring expensive perfume on His feet.

**Matthew 26:8 When the disciples saw this, they were angry. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me."**

So giving gifts to God – both directly and indirectly, is an essential aspect of worship.

### *Throughout Scripture*

You see this everywhere in the Bible. We see it in the book of Revelation, in the ultimate worship service in heaven where they give their crowns to God. We see it in the Epistles, where we are instructed about giving to the church. We see it in Jesus’ teaching, when He said, “**Give to God what is God’s**” (Luke 20:25). Before that, when Jesus was born into this world, the first time the word “worship” appears in connection with Jesus is when the Magi came. And in that account there is no mention of any singing or shouting or praying or music – just bowing and the giving of gifts. And before that, in the Old Testament, in the Mosaic Law God commanded all kinds of offerings and gifts as part of their worship. And even before that, if we go way back – all the way back to the first two people born into this world, we see them giving gifts to God.

The entire account of Cain and Abel is all about the gifts they gave to God and God’s response.

**Genesis 4:3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.**

The very first thing that happens in human history after the Fall is that people come and give something of value to God as an offering. Cain’s gift was rejected because it was not firstfruits. It was just leftovers, and God does not accept leftovers. Abel gave the firstfruits of his flock, which was an act of faith, and faith is what honors God. So giving isn’t automatically acceptable – it only glorifies God if it is

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<sup>1</sup> He also refers to that gift as a blessing (eulogia) in 2 Co.9:5 – we get our word “eulogy” from that word. It’s the same word for the blessing we say over the cup in communion. He calls it a koinonia (fellowship) in 2 Co.8:4, a diakonia (ministry) in 2 Co.8:4, and, of course, a charis (grace) several times. Those are not financial terms or accounting terms. They are all terms derived from the vocabulary of human relationships with God and sacred acts of worship.

done in the Abel way and not the Cain way. If you want to study that further I covered it in some detail in the sermon titled “Wallet Worship,” which is in the Worshipping Church series. But for our purposes now the point is simply that one of the most important ways to honor God is by giving gifts to Him.

That is why we have offering boxes in the sanctuary. It is why we put one right up front in the center on the communion table and people come up and give their gifts while we are singing praises to God. The offering is a very sacred, holy portion of our worship service.

So all that explains why we give gifts, but what about vows? Vows, or commitments, have to do with the future. If you have an impulse of love or gratitude that you want to express, but you are not in a position to do it right at that second, you can vow to express it. Or you might make a commitment to do something for a month or a year or for the rest of your life. The fact that God allows us to worship Him through making commitments or vowing to give things or do things in the future allows us to take the love we feel for Him right now and stretch it out into the future.

## **The Freedom of a Commitment**

That is a wonderful gift God has given us, but it is also a dangerous gift. It is dangerous because there are significant consequences for making a vow and failing to follow through. And those consequences are serious enough that...

### **5 Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it.**

Making vows to God is a good thing to do, and many godly people in Scripture did it (both Old Testament and New Testament). And when God wanted to describe people who were godly, listen to how He does it:

**Isaiah 19:21 ... they will know the LORD on that day. They will offer sacrifices and offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and fulfill them.**

That is a description of godliness. Vows are not commanded, presumably because they are a spontaneous gesture of love. As soon as you turn something like that into a rule, you spoil the whole point of it.

### ***Not an Excuse to be Non-Committal***

So we have freedom in this area. You do not have to make any particular vow. And it is better not to vow at all than to make a commitment and fail to follow through. So what should we do? Some people read this and think, “This is great. God is telling me to be slow to make commitments – that’s right up my alley. I just won’t commit to anything! I’ll come to church as an observer and just remain unengaged and uninvolved.”

Is that what God wants? After all, we are changeable creatures, right? We understand that the way things are right now might not be the way things will be next month, and so isn’t it better to just avoid tying our hands with commitments so we can just wait and see what happens? Why make a commitment about the future when I don’t know the future?

### ***Make Commitments Now While You Are in Your Right Mind***

Here’s why: We should make commitments about the future *because* of the fact that we are so changeable. And in many cases it is a change for the worse. But making commitments can help prevent that. The point of this passage is not that we should avoid commitments so that we don’t have to worry about faithfulness. The point of the passage is to avoid thoughtless or rash commitments.

But thoughtful, reasoned commitments are a very good thing. We need them to keep us on track. I might be sitting in church, listening to a sermon, and I begin to see clearly. The fog clears, and I know with certainty that God is calling me to do something. Maybe I am listening to a sermon about the deacon ministry in Scripture and through His Word the Holy Spirit opens my eyes to see that He has been calling

me to serve for at least a year as a deacon. That is where all signs are pointing, and it is crystal clear to me at this moment, yes, this is what God wants me to do. Doing this would bring glory and honor to God.

But I have a problem. This is spiritual Darrell who is seeing this. And I know that once I get out of this place and get back into my day to day life, sooner or later lazy Darrell is going to reappear. And lazy Darrell is not going to like this commitment. Lazy Darrell wants to keep the option of ongoing inactivity on the table. So how can I handle that? What I want to do is somehow get a message to my future self that says, "Hey, when lazy Darrell comes back, don't listen to him. Don't listen to his arguments. Right now I see clearly and I can assure you, serving as a deacon is what God wants me to do." How can I send that message to my future self? By making a commitment right now and telling some people about it. Once I know for sure this is what God wants me to do, I have the power to commit all future versions of myself to this course of action right now by making a commitment. I want to make as many decisions as possible right now while smart Darrell is in control before stupid Darrell comes back and takes control. That is the value of vows and commitments.

## **The Danger of a Commitment**

So it is a good thing to make commitments – good, but dangerous. Dangerous because of the risk of failing to follow through. Each particular vow is voluntary up until you make it, and from that moment on it is no longer voluntary.

**6 Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands?**

Evidently they had Temple messengers who would come to collect on the vows you have made. And if they came to collect some gift you vowed to give to God, you do not have the option at that point to say, "You know what? That vow was a mistake. I fully planned on giving it, and I would love to give it, but now my circumstances have changed and I'm afraid I'm going to have to back out."

**Deuteronomy 23:21 "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to keep it, because He will require it of you, and it will be counted against you as sin. 22 But if you refrain from making a vow, it will not be counted against you as sin. 23 Be careful to do whatever comes from your lips, because you have freely vowed what you promised to the LORD your God.**

He makes it very clear. You do not have to make a vow. But if you do make one, you had better take it seriously, because making it and failing to fulfill it is sin. The temptation to overpromise is like a trap.

**Proverbs 20:25 It is a trap for anyone to dedicate something rashly and later to reconsider his vows.**

And that is exactly the same warning the writer of Ecclesiastes is giving us. There are two people who could have saved their lives by reading that paragraph in Deuteronomy 23. At the end of Acts 4 people were selling their property to give to the church. And Ananias and Sapphira got caught up in what everyone else was doing, and they said, "We'll do it, too." And they sold the land, and ... "Wow, this is a lot of money. Let's keep a little bit of it." Was it wrong to keep some? No. There was no law saying they had to give any of it. The problem is they said they were giving all of the proceeds from the sale. And whatever we say in worship is binding. God holds us to it. And so when that couple didn't give the whole amount, and then claimed that they were giving it all, God struck them both dead. And that happened in the New Testament. Making a commitment to God is a very serious matter.

But very often people do not treat it as a serious matter because they don't fear God. In our day there is such an emphasis on the nearness of God that they forget about the holiness and greatness of God. Is God a nearby friend? Yes. But we must also remember that God is also a great, awesome King who dwells in a high and holy place.

**2 ...God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.**



His throne is in the heavens – though not even the highest heavens can contain him, and we dwell on earth, which is His footstool. He reigns in majesty, sovereignty, and supremacy. He is the high and lofty One who is great and awesome and is above all and sees and knows all and does whatever He pleases. Making a commitment to a being like that is a very, very serious matter. Have you made a commitment to do something in the church and then never got around to it? That is a serious matter.

### ***Feeling and Impulse-Oriented vs. Principle and Commitment-Oriented***

So if no one has to make a vow, why is it that people get in trouble in this area? In some cases it's an effort to manipulate God to get something you want. Or some last-minute damage control. A guy sleeps with his girlfriend and she's late with her period, "Oh God, please, don't let her be pregnant. If You will do that, God ... I'll read Leviticus! I'll give You 11% of my income! I'll be a missionary in Africa, just grant this request!" And God grants the request, "Whew – dodged that bullet." What about your commitments? "Huh? What commitments?" People make vows that aren't any kind of reflection of what is in their hearts. They are just a business incentive to try to control God. And so when God answers the prayer, the vow is very often forgotten because it never was a genuine desire of our heart.

Another reason we make vows is because we don't think it through. We have an impulse, and we speak rashly without counting the cost. So often we allow ourselves to be governed by feelings and impulses rather than by principles and commitments. So we make a vow based on how we feel right now, assuming we will always feel this way, but in a very short time those feelings are all gone and now we don't feel like following through, and since we are governed by impulses and feelings, we renege on our commitment.

That is one reason why we don't do altar calls here. We don't want people to get caught up in the movement of a bunch of people coming forward, so they make a commitment to Christ without counting the cost, and then a few weeks later that commitment is long forgotten. It is better for them not to make the commitment in the first place.

## **Conclusion: Fear God!**

So what is the final conclusion of all this? He does not make it very complicated.

### **7 ... Therefore, fear God.**

All that to say: Fear God! Does that still apply in the New Testament? Aren't we living under grace? Yes, we are living under grace, but that does not negate the importance of fearing God. The fear of the Lord is a huge theme in the New Testament – every bit as much as in the Old Testament. In Acts 19:17 we find that fearing God is part of what it means to hold God in high honor.

**...they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.**

Romans 3 catalogues the horrendous sinfulness of mankind, and in verse 18 it is all summed up with this phrase: **there is no fear of God before their eyes**. Lack of fear is the whole problem with sinful man's approach to God. Did you know fear of God is the key to church growth? You won't see this in any of the best-selling books on church growth, but it is in God's book on church growth (the book of Acts).

**Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria ... grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.**

And the grammar implies that it was because the Christians were living in the fear of the Lord that they grew in numbers. The fear of God is the key to evangelism.

### **2 Corinthians 5:11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men**

It is the motive for evangelism. You know enough about the fearsome wrath of God that you want people to avoid it. It is the key to personal holiness and sexual purity

**2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness by the fear of God.**

The fear of God is the evidence of true repentance (2 Co.7:11). It is the mark of obedience

**Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed --continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**

It is the key to a strong marriage and other family relationships, as well as relationships in the church (Eph.5:21). It is the key to purity within the church, and it is the appropriate response to church discipline

**1 Timothy 5:20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may fear.**

The entire Christian life is to be summed up as a life of fearing God.

**1 Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in fear.**

It should define the way we live our lives. We are under grace, but grace does not give us permission to take liberties with God. The God of the New Testament is the same God as Old Testament times. He has not changed, which means He is just as worthy to be feared now as He ever was.

**Hebrews 12:28 ... (let us) serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.**

Now, in case you have forgotten, the object of all this is the enjoyment of life. The preacher is calling us to enjoy life. But the only way to enjoy life is to get the gift of enjoyment from God. And God gives that gift to those who please Him. And one of the keys to pleasing Him is reverent worship. So watch your steps when you come to the house of God. And when you come, draw near to listen so you do not give the sacrifice of fools. Then when you have listened, and you know what God wants you to do, follow through. And above all, fear God. Take Him more seriously than you take anyone or anything else. And you will be on the path to enjoying life.

**Benediction: Psalm 2:11-12 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

## **Applications Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) What is the biggest hindrance to you showing up at church with the proper attitude (drawing near to listen so you don't offer thoughtless worship)?
- 2) What kinds of things help you offer thoughtful worship?
- 3) Are there any commitments you have made that you need to get serious about fulfilling?
- 4) Are there any commitments you feel the Lord would have you make now?