

THE FEAR OF THE LORD PART I: THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM  
**Proverbs 9:10; 3:5**

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."  
"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding."

### INTRODUCTION

One day a policeman walking his beat grew so intent upon keeping his eye on a suspicious character that he barely felt a tug on his coat. He turned and there stood a little girl. "Can I help you?" he asked her. "My mommy told me that if I needed help I should find a policeman." The policeman suddenly grew somewhat alarmed. "Oh. What's wrong," he asked. Looking down, she put out one of her feet and asked: "Could you tie my shoes?" This child knew the policeman would help her. She knew he could be trusted. She knew she had nothing to fear from Him. This is not always true in other lands. In Mexico City, Emma Herrera, age 27, was mugged twice in 2015 within three months. "The police don't feel like a protective element in Mexico," she reports. "When you're in danger, they're the last people you think to go to." Are we grateful that law enforcement in the U. S. can be trusted, with rare exceptions, to have our best interests in mind?

But suppose you're speeding on Houghton Road south of I-10 at 65 mph? You're not the only one; at least five other drivers are cruising along at 65-70 mp. A police car then tops the rise in front of you, coming your way. What do you think will immediately happen? First, most of you will likely slow down. Secondly, you will all hope the police officer did not have time to clock your speed. None will probably think the officer is there to help you. Why is a police officer the last person you wanted to see, unlike the little girl who came to the policeman for help? Your guilt of wrongdoing! Yet, should this officer ticket you or others for speeding that day, is the officer still watching out for the best interests of our society? Yes. One night, two Christian policemen in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area were on routine patrol when they fell in behind a car in traffic. This driver's behavior became erratic almost immediately; he clearly watched them in his rear view mirror while he drove through a stop sign and then a stoplight! These officers knew people often became nervous with a police car behind them; they often overlooked *some* faulty driving. But this man's behavior grew so bizarre they finally pulled him over. They soon discovered he had a car full of stolen merchandise from a house he'd just burglarized! Did he have good reason to be nervous with a police car behind him?

Have you ever viewed God as a Celestial Cop, as someone to fear, who dogs you to find something wrong with you even if you're honestly trying to follow His laws? What the Bible means by "fear of the Lord" has nothing to do with seeking to flee *from* the Lord's arms; it has everything to do with seeking to flee *into* the Lord's arms. God's Presence is meant to be an assurance of His protection, as a policeman's presence should be an assurance of protection. Would you care to live in a community with no law enforcement officers?

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." H. G. Wells (1866-1946), author of such science fiction gems as *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*, stated, "If there is no God, nothing matters. If there is a God, nothing else matters." The first way to apply what it means to "fear the LORD is this: (1) We honor God as our Creator-Lord by making serving and pleasing Him our #1 Priority in life." **Deuteronomy 13:4** (NASB) urges, "'You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.'"

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding" identifies a second way to apply what it means to "fear the Lord": (2) We trust Him to be our moral guide through life, meaning we want to view ourselves and the world around us through His eyes and by His values. Does the Lord want us to fear Him for our good or for His good? In **Deuteronomy 10:12-14** (NASB), God explains, "[W]hat does LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?" Does what God asks of us sound

reasonable? In essence, our Creator- LORD holds out to each of us this promise: "Keep Me as the center of your life, follow My wise and loving guidelines for how you should live, and I will protect you from what would harm or destroy you." The kindest, most powerful, and most wonderful Person in the Universe, who created all we see around us, asks us to take His hand and let Him be our Guide through life. Could we dare to dream He would do more for us? Yet, fearing the Lord, honoring God as God, is not really simple, is it? Today, let's look at Rivals to God's Rightful Place in Our Lives, and God's Rightful Place in Our Lives.

## **I. RIVALS TO GOD'S RIGHTFUL PLACE IN OUR LIVES**

Can you think of anyone or anything we sometimes allow to influence our decisions and our actions more than the Lord? I will suggest four things we allow to rival or to displace God's place in our lives.

**A. Peer Pressure.** None of us like to be thought foolish by our friends or peers. The insecurity of youth makes them the most susceptible to the desire to "fit in." A university psychologist designed an experiment to show how teenagers handled peer pressure. Teens were placed in a room in groups of ten and each group was instructed to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on a chart. One teen did not know the rest were previously told to vote for the 2nd-longest line, no matter what the instructor said. This "stooge" (the teen being tested) would typically glance around, frown in confusion, and slip his or her hand up with the group. A 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chart were shown. In 75% of the groups, the self-conscious stooge would say a short line is longer than a long line from a lack of courage to challenge the group or to avoid being the only one the group called "wrong." The results were the same for middle and high school teens. Though the results were truly harmless to the "stooge," peer pressure can also make us stooges of harmful conformity. If our peers seek to push us away from God, what should we do? Find godlier peers. A reporter once asked a 104-year-old-woman, "What's the best thing about being 104?" She replied, "No peer pressure."

**B. Society's Values.** Many values in any given society are merely cultural or morally neutral. In Saudi Arabia and Thailand, it's considered offensive to touch a woman in public, including shaking hands. Should Christians in these countries honor this social norm? Yes. As **II Corinthians 8:21** (GNT) points out, "Our purpose is to do what is right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of others." Leaving a tip when dining out is engrained in our culture to commend good service and to supplement the often low wages paid to restaurant workers. But leaving a tip in a restaurant in South Korea is offensive. It's assumed to be a sign of pride or pity by the giver. It's when the values of our society conform more to "the god of this world," Satan (**II Corinthians 4:4**, NASB), than to the God who made this world, that Society's Values rival God's rightful place in our lives. How far have we as a society fallen away from doing what God approves? On January 23, 1996, Pastor Joe Wright of Wichita's Central Christian Church offered this "Prayer of Repentance" as the guest chaplain for the opening session of the Kansas House of Representatives:

Heavenly Father, We come before You today to ask Your Forgiveness and seek Your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good" [**Isaiah 5:20**], but that's exactly what we have done. We have lost our Spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values. We confess that; we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it pluralism; We have worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism; We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle; We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery; . . . ; We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare; We have killed our unborn and called it choice; . . . ; We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem; . . . ; We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression; We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. Search us, O God, and know our hearts today; . . . Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of this state and . . . ordained by You, to govern this great state of Kansas. Grant them your wisdom to rule and may their decisions direct us to the center of Your Will. I ask in the name of your Son, The Living Savior, Jesus Christ.

Some State Legislators walked out in protest that day, but commentator Paul Harvey featured this prayer on his radio program, "The Rest of the Story," and received the largest response of any program he ever aired.

Has our nation as a whole displaced Christ's moral values with Satanic values in recent decades? The moral impact upon our society has been devastating! But haven't professed followers of **Jesus** as Lord and Savior continued to reject ungodly behavior, no matter how much society has "normalized" what God clearly condemns? Tragically, no. Christian researcher George Barna identifies "born again Christians" as those who claim to have made a personal commitment to **Jesus** Christ that is still important in their life today and who indicate they believe when they die they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted **Jesus** Christ as their Savior. Barna's recent survey of Baby Boomers (1945-64), Baby Busters (1965-1983), and Millennials (1984-2002) revealed these striking findings. Among born-again Americans, 33% of pre-Busters (53 and older) now believe cohabitation is morally acceptable for them as "Christians." Nearly twice that many (59%) of Baby Busters (34-52) do and an even higher percentage of Millennials. This same response pattern was evident when it came to gambling, sexual fantasies, abortion, sex outside of marriage, profanity, pornography, same-sex marriage, and the use of illegal drugs. The stark conclusion is that the more our American society chooses to ignore or distort Christian standards of morality, the more American Christians believe these actions are not as disgusting in God's eyes as the Bible proclaims!

**C. Authority Figures.** Parents, teachers, employers, civic leaders, or a myriad of so-called "experts" could encourage us to embrace God's will. George W. Bush, as Governor of Texas, proclaimed June 10, 2000 "Jesus Day," stating, "By volunteering their time, energy, or resources to helping others, adults and youngsters follow Christ's message of love and service in thought and deed." To the extent we obey an authority figure to do something contrary to God's will, however, we displace the Lord from being our God.

**D. Our Own Thoughts and Desires.** But God's greatest rival is not Peer Pressure, Society's Values, or Authority Figures. What most often displaces God from His place as Lord in our lives is Our Own Thoughts and Desires. We decide we *don't want* to do something and won't do it regardless of what anybody else says; friends, family, or God. Or, we decide we *do want* to do something and we're determined no one or nothing is going to stop us. In other words, even if God says "Go," we say "No." Or if God says, "Whoa," we say, "Go." We trap ourselves in ruin by displacing God with our prideful, sinful desires. God warns us of this in **James 1:14-15**: "[E]ach person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires.<sup>15</sup> Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death." The Greek words for "drawn away" and "enticed" were drawn from the realm of hunting and fishing. James' first century readers understood his words to mean, "Our own cravings provide the baited hooks that lure us with the promise of a few morsels of pleasure and we are caught like a fish or trapped like an animal to our ruin." Through much of 1780, Benedict Arnold carefully plotted to surrender the crucial military fort of West Point, and our Continental Army's Supreme Commander, George Washington, to the British. This seemed inconceivable. Arnold had been Washington's most trusted and admired General. But consumed by desires to be a hero, he recklessly received a severe wound in 1777 that nearly cost him his leg and left him a permanent cripple. He then became driven by a lust for revenge upon those who received honors he believed he deserved. If Washington, by God's intervention, had not stumbled upon this plot on a routine inspection of the fort and escaped Arnold's trap, our fight for Independence would have collapsed. Instead, Arnold died in disgrace as a "man without a country"; shunned by British and Americans alike. **Proverbs 14:12** (NLT) chillingly warns, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death."

## II. GOD'S RIGHTFUL PLACE IN OUR LIVES

Even if *we do desire* to give God His Rightful Place in Our Lives, misguided zeal and personal or sinful immaturity may lead us into honest mistakes about what it means to fear the Lord. These mistakes in actual Church Bulletins conveyed the opposite of what was intended to be said: "Don't let worry kill you—let the church help." "Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community"; "For those of you

who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs"; "Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use the large double doors at the side entrance"; and "Pastor is on vacation. Massages can be given to church secretary."

When **Proverbs 9:10** tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding," this means the portal or "beginning" point to access the wisdom that will give us God's perspective upon our actions and decisions is "the fear of the Lord." The word for "understanding" in Hebrew refers to our intelligence; our capacity to learn new information and to grasp the true meaning of the reality of the world around us. In other words, until we know what some fact reveals to us about what God is like, or until we have God's perspective (viewpoint) about our actions or decisions, we don't really know anything that is based upon eternal truth and is worth knowing. This is why if we are not willing to trust the Lord to be our moral guide through life by praying He will allow us to view ourselves and the world around us through His eyes and by His values, we are not walking in "the fear of the Lord" that "is the beginning of wisdom." As long as we insist upon calling the shots, of having the final say about what we should or should not think or do, we will never experience the blessings and wonder of being guided by God's limitless wisdom, and we expose ourselves to the dangers of being trapped by wrong thoughts and desires to our ruin. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding."

## CONCLUSION

Loretta and I have come to know Dr. Ken Schemmer as a personal friend through our involvement with Hospital Christian Fellowship. He's now retired, after practicing as a physician and surgeon for 50 years. His books provide keen insights into the moral and spiritual dilemmas posed by extensive physical suffering, including *Between Faith and Tears* and *Between Life and Death: The Life Support Dilemma*. Dr. Schemmer's own wife, Karrol, has been wheelchair-bound for 30 years due to Muscular Dystrophy.

In 2012, their granddaughter, Abby, was diagnosed with a very malignant brain tumor at age 13. For the next 3 ½ years, she endured multiple brain surgeries, chemotherapies, and radiation treatments. As a non-Christian teenager, especially one raised in the "me first" world of modern America, how could she have self-centeredly responded to her battle with cancer that robbed her of vitality, her hair, caused her extreme grief and painful side effects, and threatened to snuff out her life as a teen? Self-pity, tantrums, bitterness, and anger are often seen. But Abby turned her life over to **Jesus** during this crisis, rather than turning away from Him. She did not do so as a desperate attempt to be healed of her malignancy but to receive the love and forgiveness Christ had held out to her with open arms all of her life. From that day on, she lived in "the fear of the LORD." Her #1 Priority in life became to draw others to **Jesus** and to live for **Jesus** alone. The last day of her life, July 16, 2016, in the ICU at a California Children's Hospital, reveals better than anything the thrilling impact **Jesus** made upon Abby's life and upon others through her. Several dozen high schoolers from Abby's school came to visit her. They came in groups of 5-6. They quietly entered her room, surrounded her bed, and prayed over her one at a time. These teens ignored various adults in the room to focus entirely upon their beloved friend and her Savior. Most of these prayers expressed similar sentiments.

Dr. Schemmer recorded the words of the first girl who prayed, which expressed the sense of Christ's precious Presence each of these teens experienced that day: "Oh Lord, I do not know how to say this. Before I met Abby, I did not know You. There was something about Abby that was so sweet, that I could not stay away from her. I became one of her close friends. We talked about You and she introduced me to You and I gave my heart to You. What I want to say to You is that it is all right for You to take her home with You now because You and I are close enough that I do not have to have Abby here with me for me to remain dedicated to You. I will miss doing things with Abby. Thank You for putting Abby in my life."

"You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him" (**Deuteronomy 13:4**). This is how Abby lived & taught others to live!