

"FEAR THAT PLEASES OR DISPLEASES THE LORD?"-PART IV  
**Micah 6:6-8**

(NASB): "With what shall I come to the LORD and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? <sup>7</sup> Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

## INTRODUCTION

Germany overran Slovenia in April of 1941 (since 1991, a sparkingly beautiful independent nation south of Austria). Janez Rus lived as a young shoemaker in the Slovene village of Zalna. He bought into the lies of the Nazi's new world order and cooperated with his German captors against his own country. When Germany surrendered in May, 1945, Rus dreaded what his town would do to him for his pro-Nazi activity. He went into hiding at his unwed sister's farmhouse. Months turned into years of fearing his villagers. He would stare at his town in the valley below, longing to return to a normal life surrounded by family and friends. Often, he would cry at the sound of happy voices outside his sister's home, but he never left the house, even to attend his mother's funeral. Finally, in 1987, after 32 years, some grew curious about the large supply of bread his sister purchased and came to her house to investigate. They found Janez Rus. "If I had not been discovered," Rus told a reporter, "I would have remained in hiding. So I am happy this happened." Long past the time he'd have suffered more than disapproving stares from his villagers, for whom WWII had become a distant memory, his entire life remained gripped by constant, paralyzing fear.

Wrong ideas about how to respond to perceived dangers can have a tragic or crippling impact upon us. We can be tormented by imagined terrors that never or no longer exist, as did the young shoemaker of Zalna who grew old in terror of an anger that had long cooled in the hearts of his countrymen. Sadly, our lives can also be damaged by distorted fears of our Creator-Heavenly Father. Even those who have long walked with the LORD and experience a devastating personal or family tragedy may allow grief to haunt them with fears the LORD might be punishing them for sins of their past. Job cried out to the LORD from the depths of his confusion and agony, "God, please just give me these two things, and then I will not hide from You: <sup>21</sup> Take Your punishment away from me, and stop frightening me with Your terrors. <sup>26</sup> You write down cruel things against me and make me suffer for my boyhood sins" (**Job 13:20-21, 26**, NCV). Job's fearful misinterpretation of Satan's assaults upon him as God's unreasonable demands drove Job to words and actions unworthy of God, of which Job later sorrowfully repented.

If we allow ourselves to be driven by needless fears of God, we may let ourselves be pushed into doing things we know are wrong; things God certainly wouldn't approve! David Jeremiah has served since 1981 as lead pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in San Diego. He's heard daily on *Turning Point* radio broadcasts (KFLT & KGMS locally; multiple times). He once preached in Charleston, SC. After dinner one night with some families from the church, a man told him, "My wife has been waiting for you to come so she could ask you a spiritual question." His wife said, "I'm afraid that if I die before my husband does that he'll marry somebody else and when we get to Heaven he will have two wives. What will we do?" David said the Bible teaches in Heaven we "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (**Luke 20:34-36**) and tried to explain to them both all that this means. His wife replied, "But I can't help it. Just the thought of him being with somebody else—I can't stand even the thought of it!" Without cracking a smile, her husband then told her, "Well, honey, if you die, I'll try to marry somebody who's not going to Heaven."

We've been focusing upon "the fear of the LORD" that God hopes will capture our hearts. **Job 28:28** (NIV) reveals what our Creator-God impressed upon our earliest ancestors at the dawn of Creation: "And He said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

Giving the LORD His rightful place in our lives gains us the security and the insight to navigate safely through life's complex moral choices to avoid being shipwrecked by our poor judgment. This is because Biblical, God-honoring "fear of the LORD" consists of three factors: Awe of God's Power—no more terrifying or awesomely wonderful power exists than the power of "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (**Genesis 14:19**, NIV). In the days of Jeremiah the prophet, around 600 B.C., God asked the people of Israel who worshiped Him in name only, "Have you no respect for Me? Why don't you tremble in My presence? I, the LORD, define the ocean's sandy shoreline as an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the boundaries I set.<sup>23</sup> But My people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned away and abandoned Me.<sup>24</sup> They do not say from the heart, "Let us live in awe of the LORD our God"" (**Jeremiah 5:22-24a**, NLT). True "fear of the LORD" also includes Reverence for God's Person—"He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords" (**I Timothy 6:15**). Our great God is worthy of all the respectful honor and service we can give Him. And genuine "fear of the LORD" includes a Passion for God's Pleasure (meaning it hurts us to fall short of pleasing our beloved LORD). Paul wrote in **I Corinthians 5:9** (TLB): "So our aim is to please Him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with Him in heaven." If our hearts are captured by such awe, reverence, and passion toward the LORD, God's will then gains the priority in all we do and our well being is assured!

But there are ways to "fear the LORD" that are unworthy of Him and deny us blessings rather than gain us blessings. We have previously identified three such Needless Fears: Fear That Seeks to Purchase God's Favor (due to *ignorance* of our guaranteed access to our Heavenly Father's Presence by praying "in Jesus' name," *insecurity* over our relationship with God, or *insincerity* of seeking our will over God's); Fear of God's Purpose (distrust of what God may do with us if we yield full control of our lives to Him); and Fear That Placates God from wrongly believing He's so easily enraged that the best we can hope for is to pacify an angry God with little love for us. Today we look at a fourth Needless Fear, Fear of God's Presence.

## II. NEEDLESS FEARS

### D. Fear of God's Presence

Self-serving, prideful, or lustful actions should make us uncomfortable in God's Presence. But this was never God's intention. Danny Dutton, aged 8, from Chula Vista, CA, has a good handle on what God intends His role to be in our lives. Here are some of his thoughts from his homework assignment, "Explain God?" "One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die so there will be enough people to take care of things here on earth. He doesn't make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way, He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers. God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your parent's head asking for something they said you couldn't have. If you don't believe in God, besides being an atheist, you will be very lonely, because your parents can't go everywhere with You, like to camp, but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim very good and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids. But you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and He can take me back anytime He pleases. And that's why I believe in God."

Shortly after our first parents made a god of their self-serving desires and rebelled against our Creator, **Genesis 3:8** (NLT) records their reaction when God came for their daily time of close fellowship: "When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man [Adam] and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees." Not until Adam and Eve fell for Satan's lie that they were better off to break free from obedience to God's uplifting, love-sustaining guidance did the Presence of God become more a source of trepidation (fearful alarm) than a cause for celebration, as God intended (**Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-13**).

**Micah 6** is cast in the form of a judicial contest between the Lord and His people. Around 700 B.C., Israel's southern Kingdom of Judah had begun the downward spiral of wholesale abandonment of the LORD that would result in the nation's eventual destruction. **Vss. 1-2** tells us, "Hear now what the Lord is saying. . . . Because the Lord has a case against His people; even with Israel He will dispute" [legally contend]. The KJV uses the phrase, "the Lord has a complaint" to convey God lodged a legal complaint to be decided in a court of law of which He is the judge. The mountains and hills assume the role of the jury due to their impartial nature. In **vs. 3**, God argues His case. Rather than formally charging His people with violating their covenant promises of loyalty and service to the LORD, in return for the LORD God being their Savior, Blessor, and Protector, God asks His people two simple questions: "'What have I done to you and how have I wearied you?'" The underlying Hebrew of this passage suggests God asked Israel of old the same questions He may direct to us today, "What did I do to you to turn you against Me? Have I discouraged You by heartless demands, or have I frustrated you by failing to live up to My promises?"

We looked last week at how much nitpicking rules of the religious leaders in **Jesus'** day piled up crushingly upon the common people. For example, they created 39 categories of permitted or prohibited "work" on "the Sabbath day" (**Exodus 20:8-11**), and so many sub-categories, that there were thousands of rules to follow, including a limit on the number of steps one could take, or not swatting a fly to avoid being guilty of hunting on the day of worship. No matter how faithfully one sought to serve and honor the LORD God of Israel, the prideful religious leaders branded them as hopeless "sinners" doomed to the angry judgment of a God who hounded them with ceaseless, unreasonable demands. This made them fear God's Presence.

Let's look again at **Micah 6:6-7**: "With what shall I come to the LORD and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? <sup>7</sup> Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" If we did not lack a solid understanding of the goodness of our Heavenly Father's heart and the grace He offers to all who call upon Him with a sincere heart, we'd never believe He hounds us with ceaseless, unreasonable demands. David, with the wisdom of "'a man after [God's] own heart'" (**I Samuel 13:14**, NASB), sings in **Psalms 86:3-5** of God's graciously loving heart that our LORD wants us to count upon: "Be gracious to me, Lord, for I call to You all day long. <sup>4</sup> Bring joy to Your servant's life, because I turn to You, Lord. <sup>5</sup> For You, Lord, are kind and ready to forgive, rich in faithful love to all who call on You." David wrote these words by God's inspiration 300 years before the memorable words of **Micah 6:8**, one of the best known verses of the Bible, where the LORD clarifies what He expects of His people: not perfect compliance with endless rules and regulations but demonstration of the heart of one who truly "fears the LORD": "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

## CONCLUSION

Some years ago (before cell phones were common) an eastern newspaper reported the story of a woman driving home on a freeway one evening when she noticed a huge truck behind her driving uncomfortably close. She stepped on the gas to gain some distance from the truck, but when she sped up, the truck did, too. The faster she'd drive, the faster the truck went. She became frightened. She exited the freeway, but the truck stayed with her. She then turned up a main street, hoping to lose her pursuer in traffic. But the truck ran a red light and continued the chase. Reaching the point of panic, the woman whipped her car into a service station and bolted out of her auto screaming for help. The truck driver screeched to a stop at the station and sprang from his truck. But instead of chasing her he ran toward her car. Yanking the back door open, the driver pulled out a man hidden in the back seat. This woman was running from the wrong person. From his high vantage point, the truck driver had spotted a would-be rapist in her car. He did not chase her to harm her but to save her even at the cost of his own safety. When God pursues us, even at the cost of His Son's safety, it's always to bless us, to protect us, or to rescue us from dangers that may be hidden to us. We have nothing to fear from His ever watchful, ever loving Presence!