

THE FEAR OF THE LORD PART VIII: THE MARKS OF THE ONE WHO FEARS THE LORD
Proverbs 8:13

(NIV) "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech."

INTRODUCTION

See if you can figure out what's wrong about this story. A wife asked her husband one morning, "If I were to die first, would you remarry?" "Well," he said, "I'm in good health, so why not?" "Would your new wife live in my house?" she asked next. "It's all paid up," he replied, "So yes." "Would she drive my car?" asked his wife. "Yes," he said, "it's new; do probably so." His wife then asked, "Would she use my golf clubs?" "No," he replied without thinking, "She's left-handed."

Here's another story to reinforce the moral truth of the first one. "Son," ordered a father, "Don't swim in the pond today, on your way home from school. You promised to help me with the car." "OK, Dad," he answered. But he came home that evening carrying a wet bathing suit. "Where have you been?" demanded the father. "Swimming in the pond," answered the boy. "Didn't you promise not to swim there today?" asked the father. "Yes, Sir," answered the boy. "Why did you?" he asked. "Well, Dad," he explained, "I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn't resist the temptation." "Why did you take your bathing suit with you?" he questioned. "So I'd be prepared to swim, in case I was tempted," he replied. The professed loyalties of this husband to his wife, and of this boy to his father, were betrayed by their wandering hearts.

This is our eighth message on the theme, The Fear of the LORD. We've learned Biblical, God-honoring "fear of the LORD" consists of Awe of God's *Power*, Reverence for God's *Person*, and a Passion for God's *Pleasure*. No more terrifying or awesomely wonderful power exists than the power of "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (**Genesis 14:19**, NIV). God's majesty should inspire deep Reverence for His Person, as **Exodus 15:11** (ESV) proclaims, "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" And can we honestly claim to love the LORD if we do not have such a Passion for Him that it hurts us to fall short of pleasing Him? The key question for us today is, Does the LORD ask that we fear Him mainly to honor Him and to make Him feel good, or does He ask that we make Him the central focus of our lives primarily for our good? **Deuteronomy 10:12-14** (NASB) answers this question, "[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?" In essence, our Lord gives each of us this comforting assurance: "Keep me, your Creator and Savior, as the center of your life, follow My loving guidelines for how you should live, and I will protect you from what would harm or destroy you." Thomas Jefferson warned of "the inevitable doom which the laws of nature pronounce against departure from [God's] justice, individual or national." Our nation's Founders used the phrase "laws of nature" (or "natural law") to refer to God's general rules of conduct a government could require of all citizens, regardless of their personal religious faith. Everything that is wrong, souring, and decaying within our country as a whole, and much of what has proved ruinous in our own lives, is a result of our departure from our Creator's wise, loving, and eternally good guidelines.

But we need to live up to what God expects of us to fully benefit from what God says we can expect of Him. "The Marks of the One Who Fears the Lord," describes three identifying marks specified by **Proverbs 8:13** of one who properly "fears the LORD": Hating Evil, Humility, and Honorable Words.

I. HATING EVIL

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech," reflects the age-old maxim you can often tell what a person is for by knowing what he or she is against. Here are quotes seen on actual bumper stickers. "Don't wish for it... work for it"; "If you can read this you're in

range"; "Don't miss heaven for the world"; "Don't steal, the government hates competition"; "Forget about World Peace... Visualize Using Your Turn Signal!"; "Insanity is hereditary; you get it from your kids!"; "Graduate quickly, millions on welfare depend on you"; "The More You Complain, The Longer God Makes You Live"; "Lottery: A tax on people who are bad at math"; and "Do not put a question mark where God put a period." Bumper stickers are often an effective way to promote something worthwhile by warning of the dangers of doing the opposite of what is best for us or society to do. I once had a car with this bumper sticker: "Don't Be Caught Dead without Jesus!"

Is it fair for others to gauge how devoted we are to God by how much we hate what is ungodly? God thinks so. **Romans 12:9** (NLT) strengthens **Proverbs 8:13**: "Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good." One of the best tests of whether we've truly given, "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (**Jude 4**, NASB) His rightful place in our hearts is how disgusted we are by what is evil. The Bible defines "evil" as anything that is contrary to God's nature of goodness and love. We do evil in the Lord's eyes because we don't have enough what for what is good? Love.

Hebrews 11:25 honestly admits we may "enjoy the short-lived pleasures of sin" ("the pleasures of sin for a season," KJV). If we're slaves to immediate gratification, indulging any appetite or desire feels good right then. When Mom made us banana pudding, I enjoyed eating as much as I wanted without thinking of saving it for anyone else; until my big brother got home! Then I got religion, making all kinds of promises for better behavior to be spared his fury (which I rarely kept). The world's religions can do nothing to take away our gluttony, greed, laziness, pride, lust, envy, or wrath (the pre-Christian world's "Seven Deadly Sins"). *The goal of religion is to perform actions to allow us to escape God's punishment despite how much we love doing things God hates.* Christianity alone, by the miracle of the new nature and indwelling Holy Spirit we receive when we are reborn into God's family, can transform us to see evil as selfishly ugly and destructive as God sees it and to hate everything contrary to His good and perfectly loving nature!

A major difficulty for us though, in 21st-century America, is that we have been desensitized to what God views as "evil." The New Testament believers who most struggled with recognizing and abandoning actions that were *abnormal* for Christians and disgusting to the LORD lived in Corinth, Greece. Corinth was the community most saturated with and most approving of many ungodly actions as *normal* for good citizens. As a young man who became a teenager in 1964 and a Christian in 1969, I assumed God approved many actions as normal for Christians because of what American culture had taught me to accept as "normal." Then, for nearly two years, ages 20-21, I purposely avoided television, movies, and music (except Christian music) to assist the Holy Spirit in changing my values to match God's values. How eye-opening different the world around me looked, and how much God redefined "normal" to me, by the end of these two years! Isn't this what our Lord has in mind by His words of **Romans 12:2** (NCV): "Do not be shaped by this world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to Him and what is perfect."

In **Jeremiah 6:10, 15a, 16** (NLT), God provides us with a litmus test to help us know how much we truly love what He loves and hate what He hates. After pleadings with His people to awaken to how cold their devotion to Him has become, God cries out: "'To whom can I give warning? Who will listen when I speak? Their ears are closed, and they cannot hear. They scorn the word of the LORD. ¹⁵ Are they ashamed of their disgusting actions? Not at all—they don't even know how to blush!' ¹⁶ This is what the LORD says: 'Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, "No, that's not the road we want!"' Have we forgotten "how to blush?" because we refuse to "walk" in the "old, godly way" of the LORD? The Hebrew word for "blush" describes being "ashamed" or "offended" over actions that indecently trample upon people who are made "in the image of God" (**Genesis 1:27**) when they are not treated with goodness, honor, and love. How often do we "blush" when we are exposed to actions and conduct that disgusts God? "To fear the LORD is to hate

evil." A non-Christian movie theater owner told Billy Graham he tired of the hypocrisy of Christians in his small town who came to see questionable movies but then complained how they were morally bad, as though this somehow excused them paying to watch them. Contrast the movie owner's words with those of Bernard "Kip" Lagat, a world-class runner from Kenya. During the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia, an interviewer asked him how Kenya has been able to produce the world's finest distance runners for decades. With clever wit, Lagat revealed the secret of how Kenya motivates success in its runners. He said, "It's the road signs. 'Beware of Lions.'" Would you be more motivated to run from the evil of this world if you could visibly see lurking behind it, "your great enemy, the devil [who] prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour"? (**I Peter 5:8**, NLT).

II. HUMILITY

A second mark of one who fears the Lord is Humility. God often warns how much He despises pride in us, as **James 4:6**, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." We recognize the preciousness of humility in someone who lives in awe of the majesty of our Creator and whose heart has been broken over the depths of his or her sinfulness before a holy God. In the early days of our Republic, a stranger asked how he could identify Washington if the President was in attendance at a session of Congress. He was told, "You can easily distinguish him when Congress goes to prayer. Washington is the gentleman who kneels."

Pride wants to claim primary credit for our abilities and achievements without giving credit to our Creator. **I Corinthians 4:7** (GNT) reminds us, "Who made you superior to others? Didn't God give you everything you have? Well, then, how can you boast, as if what you have were not a gift?" What credit can we claim for the physical and mental abilities with which we were born; or the year, country, and family into which we were born? Our responsibility is to give God a good return on His investments in us by developing and maximizing what He's given us. Eleanor Powell (1912-82), American film actress and dancer of the 1930s and 1940s, declared, "What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God." Samuel Morse (1791-1872), inventor of the electric telegraph and originator of Morse Code, humbly responded to the international honors he received by confessing, "I have made a valuable application of electricity not because I was superior to other men but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, must reveal it to someone and He was pleased to reveal it to me."

"Arrogance" could be defined as, "preoccupation with the rightness of our own position." Arrogant people act as if the world should revolve around them and others should change to suit them, instead of the world revolving around God and people changing to suit Him. A self-important U.S. battleship Captain, who'd remained on the bridge in a night of patchy fog and poor visibility, beheld a steady light approaching off the starboard bow. Believing it to be another vessel, the captain ordered, "Signal that ship: 'We are on a collision course; advise you change course twenty degrees.'" Back came the signal, "Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees." The captain's next message was, "I'm a captain, change course twenty degrees." Back came the reply, "I'm a seaman second-class, but you had better change course twenty degrees." The captain became furious and spat out, "Send: 'I am a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.'" This reply then flashed: "I am a lighthouse." This ship's Captain could have profited from reading **Proverbs 16:18**, "Pride goes before destruction and an arrogant spirit before a fall." Humility makes us considerate of the opinions and needs of others as being as important as our own.

III. HONORABLE WORDS

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." The "perverse speech" God hates is speech that seeks to "overthrow" or "reverse" the LORD's ethical values in favor of morality that is upside down to how God designed us to live. **Ephesians 4:27-32** adds that we can "grieve God's Holy Spirit" by our words, neutralize His presence and power in our lives, and "give the Devil an opportunity" to gain influence over us. To prevent our words from being perverted into Satan's

tools, God commands us in **Ephesians 4:29** (ESV), "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." The Greek for "corrupting" is related to the Greek word behind "septic." We know what goes in to a septic tank. Putrefying matter that is fit only to rot. Septic words that rot God's values and undermine His goals in anyone's life should never spew from us but should be buried by us safely away from everyone.

A farmer was known in his community for his bad language. Parents kept their children from him whenever they could. Then, one day, he accepted an invitation to church and committed his heart to Christ! This brought about a great change in his language. He testified later in church, "I've been changed so much that even my horses don't understand me." Has God made any changes in the words that come from your mouth? When I was about two years old in the Lord, God showed me He was not amused by my sense of humor. I'd been using humor in a cynical way, putting people down with zingers, but of course I thought it was for their own good. When God opened my eyes to how hurtful my quips were, this shut my mouth. I wouldn't allow one-liners out of my mouth for over a year while I allowed God to transform my heart so that my humor would encourage people to experience the quality of life God intends for them, not discourage them. Words whose only purpose is tearing someone down (including gossip and put-downs that are vain attempts to make us look bigger) should die on our lips rather than fly from our lips!

CONCLUSION

General Robert E. Lee was once asked what he thought of a fellow officer in the Confederate Army, an officer who had made some mean-spirited remarks about him. Lee thought for a moment, then rated him as being very satisfactory. The person who asked the questions seemed troubled. "But General, I guess you don't know what he's been saying about you." "Oh yes," answered Lee. "I know. But I was asked my opinion of him, not his of me."

A practicing lawyer loved to attack others through scathing letters printed in newspapers. In 1842, he ridiculed the wrong man. James Shields did not take kindly to the anonymous writer who lampooned him in the Illinois *Springfield Journal*. Mr. Shields tracked down the attorney who'd publicly embarrassed him and challenged him to a duel. This man was a lawyer and a writer, not a fighter, but he could not get out of the duel without losing his honor. He was given the choice of weapons and chose swords in hopes of using his long arms to his advantage. He trained with a West Point graduate as he prepared to fight to the death.

On the appointed day he met Mr. Shields on a sandbar in the Mississippi River. At the last minute their seconds intervened and convinced the men to stop the duel. The lawyer returned to his practice as a changed man. Never again did he openly criticize anyone. Years later, when he heard his wife criticize the Southern people during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln told Mary, "Don't criticize them; they are just what we would be under similar circumstances." Lincoln had by then thoroughly read the Bible and allowed the LORD to conform Lincoln's values to God's values. Abraham Lincoln once stated, "I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this Book."

CONCLUSION

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." Hatred of Evil, Humility, and Honorable Words should be among the changes others can see in us, that mark the lives of those who profess to be in Awe of the *Power* of our Savior, to Reverence His *Person*, and to have a Passion to please "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (**Jude 4**).