

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

## Lesson 60 – *Fearing God; the Starting Point*

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What does it mean to fear God? To some it means cringing in terror of God's judgment for sins committed. To others it means reverencing God as the almighty God, with the power to forgive sins, driving away all other fears. To others fearing God does not even enter the picture, for they live openly in sin and feel gratified. How does *fearing God* affect your life?

As we consider this question, let us begin our study by turning to the Old Testament. After the Lord gave the Ten Commandments through Moses, the people stood trembling with fear when they saw the lighting and thundering and smoke coming from the mountain. They stood their distance, for fear that if God spoke to them directly they would surely die. It is important that we get a good grasp of what Moses said to the people in response.

**Exodus 20:20 (Amplified Bible)** - *And Moses said to the people, "Fear not; for God has come to prove you, so that the [reverential] fear of Him may be before you, that you may not sin."*

Moses was essentially telling the people *do not fear in terror, but fear reverentially!* Do not fear to be in God's presence, but show honor and respect for what He has to say. God did not come to kill the Israelites, but to prove or test their reaction to Him. Would they fear His sacred presence enough to curb their disobedience? Would they live holy lives before God not wanting to do anything that would grieve Him? Would their awe and respect for God cause them to put away their sin? Tragically, Israel soon lost their *fear of God* when they made the golden calf to worship.

**Exodus 32:4 (Amplified Bible)** - *And he [Aaron] received the gold at their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it a molten calf; and they said, "These are your*

*gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"*

This rebellious action violated the second commandment, which God had given through Moses that they should not make any graven image to bow down to, or worship. (**See: Exodus 20:4-5**) To worship any God besides Him who created the world is idolatry.

The tender love of a Heavenly Father calls His children to obedience. Knowing that the "*Holy One*" has given His "*Only Begotten Son*" on the cross for sinners, should cause us to pause and consider the costliness and passion of His love for us. As God's children, we should become increasingly aware of His love for us; a love that will not leave us unchanged. As we pass the test, demonstrating *reverential* fear and respect for God, we can look forward to a completely transformed life.

### **Fearing God is the starting point.**

**Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)** - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. [emphasis mine]*

The Hebrew word for "beginning" in this verse means "the start". Brothers and sisters it is the *starting point* that is so critical to our spiritual growth. We cannot gain knowledge, nor acquire wisdom of spiritual things, if we start at the wrong point. That wrong point is refusing to fear God.

Turning now to the New Testament, in **Philippians 2:12 (NIV)**, we find Paul making a special appeal to the saints at Philippi.

*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*

When Paul appealed to the Philippians to work out their salvation with “fear and trembling”, he was not referring to “shaking in their boots” type of fear. He was referring to the need for them to exhibit “reverential fear” and respect of the Lord. It is interesting to note, Paul was not telling them to work *for* their salvation, but to work *out* the salvation God had already given them. In other words, they were to work out, or put into practice in their daily lives what God had worked in them by His Holy Spirit. This “working out” was to be done with complete trust in God’s wisdom and not through their own reasoning.

**Philippians 2:13 (NIV)** – “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

At the time we *receive* our salvation, God intends to *work in us* to accomplish His purposes. In view of Christ’s example of righteousness, there are obviously things in our lives that need changing to line up with His will. Whatever God is dealing with us about, we have the power through His Spirit to make those changes. As long as we are cooperating with His Spirit, blessings follow. Energized with the desire to make those changes, we remain steady, interlocked in the flow of the Holy Spirit.

Failure to cooperate with His Spirit, however, leaves us on our own. Apart from God, a person remains ignorant of spiritual things.

**Psalm 55:19 (Amplified Bible)** - God will hear and humble them, even He Who abides of old—*Selah* [pause, and calmly think of that]!—because in them there has been no change [of heart], and they do not fear, revere, and worship God.

### **The evidence will follow reverential fear.**

Many people fight change, yet the Kingdom of God requires change. We must reverence God enough to be willing to change. So, how do we know if we are on the right track? How can we recognize *reverential fear* in ourselves?

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words states the *evidence* or *proof* we are to look for:

- 1 - A tender conscience
- 2 - A watchfulness against temptation
- 3 - Avoiding things that would displease God
- 4 - Constant carefulness in dealing with others in “His fear”

If we are living in *reverential fear* and respect for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our actions will speak for themselves, because our *desires* have changed. Our former empty way of life no longer appeals to us. It is in fact appalling to us. Having encountered Jesus, our desire is now set on living according to God’s absolute standards, rather than living our life according to the shifting standards of the world (situation ethics).

**Matthew 5:6 (KJV)** - *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

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### **Questions for Personal or Group Study**

(Please do not mail to CA for grading):

1. After the Lord gave the Ten Commandments through Moses, the people stood trembling in fear. What were they afraid might happen?
2. Moses response to the people was that God came to prove or test them. What was the purpose in God testing them? (**Exodus 20:20**)
3. Describe the significance of *reverentially* fearing God.
4. The Israelites lost their *fear* of God. Which commandment did they violate in making the golden calf? (**Exodus 20:4-5**)
5. What is the connection between reverentially fearing God and enjoying a completely transformed life?
6. The *beginning* or *starting point* is critical to our spiritual growth. What is that starting point? (**Proverbs 9:10**)
7. Paul said in **Philippians 2:12**, “Continue to ‘work out’ your salvation with fear and trembling.” He was not saying ‘work for’ your salvation. Explain what he meant in practical terms.
8. Vine’s Dictionary of Biblical Words, lists four areas we are to look for as evidence or proof in recognizing *reverential fear* in ourselves. What are they?