

# What Does it Mean to Fear God?

by Lynn Andrew

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Deut. 10:12

Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of waters. Rev. 14:7

## 1. Do not tell God what to do.

It is better to worship God than to tell him what to do. How many of our “prayer requests” are telling God what to do as if we understand what is needful better than he? How is rejoicing in “an answer to prayer” any different from celebrating success in furthering our own viewpoint? Should we not rather be glad for what appears to be unanswered prayer because that means we can have faith that he is doing it his way? Faith is good! Tremble if the answer to your prayer is a faith-robbing miracle that meets your specification—especially if you forgot to say, “Thy will be done!”

When asked about prayer, Jesus gave them an outline:

- a. Recognize the supremacy and holiness of God.
- b. Express longing for his promised kingdom on earth.
- c. Ask for what is routinely needful, to affirm dependence on him.
- d. Ask for leading far from Satan and deliverance from foolishness.
- e. Express faith that he will extend his eternal kingdom on earth.

## 2. Do not make God conform to your own image.

We must study Scripture if we really want to know God and understand his ways and what he expects of us. Fearing the Lord God means trusting him, not trusting our image of him. There might be a big difference. Let Scripture pour understanding into your soul.

**Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.** Prov. 2:5

You will not find the God of the Bible anywhere else. All other sources of knowledge about him are incomplete and therefore unreliable. The purpose of songs and sermons and snippets of Scripture is to make him more approachable, more attractive, and more comfortable. The impression one can get from these is that it is okay to have your own image of God, painted in your favorite pastel shades.

We tend to ignore what we do not understand as if it were not important. Jesus said some things that are hard to understand, as did all the prophets. If you do not read the Bible over and over and meditate upon it until you absorb the difficult things and become friends with them, you have an inadequate picture of God. If you cannot fully reconcile Jehovah of the Old Testament with Jesus Christ of the New Testament, you have missed or misunderstood something.

Popular culture has fully embraced the ancient lore, which Satan invented, in which you become your own god. Starting from that viewpoint, if you make the decision to become a Christian believer, it may seem quite sufficient to acknowledge a deity higher than yourself without any pressing need to go on to learn about him. Consequently he is seen as a perfectly benign, petition-fulfilling governor who is reasonable and proper according to prevalent human standards—in which there is absolutely no fear of God.

### 3. Obey.

Not only do we design our own version of God and tell him what to do and how to do it, we like to make up our own rules about obedience. We find the apostle Paul's instructions overly idealistic, anachronistic, and ideosyncratic. So we make up our own.

Skewed obedience does not count. Our gut feelings apart from knowledge of the precepts of Scripture are worse than worthless. Pray to be led away from the temptation to take shortcuts that keep you from direct contact with the Word of God and reverence for it.

**If you Love me, keep my commandments.** Jn. 14:15

The phrase "keep my commandments" occurs 92 times in the Bible.

Human inclination is to overlay the natural fear of God with idol worship: dedication to doctrines, preachers, songs, celebrities, etc., all of them serving to mitigate the uneasy fear that we are not rightly approaching Almighty God. But this is proper fear and should not be avoided. We must meet him on the terms he specifies in the written instructions he presents to us through his prophets and apostles.

History is strewn with strife caused by Christians defending territory that they staked out for God. When closely examined, their convictions are simply human or based on interpretations of Scripture that protect ungodly powers and disrespect the clear designs of God.

Against this, which not everyone is called to understand fully, is the command to love—to love in a way that is humanly impossible without the Spirit of God within us. If we avoid that command, we do not fear God. Love is the fear of God in the Spirit of Jesus.

**Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.** Eccl. 12:13