

“Fear of the Lord”

How do we live well? The Bible connects living well to “fearing the Lord.” But what does it mean? Negatively, it means to “hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13). It is to turn away from man’s cherished independence, from that way that seems “right to a man” (Proverbs 14:12). Embracing evil and independence are two hallmarks of the present foolish age. Daniel Mahoney argues in his book, *The Idol of Our Age*, that our current age has made man the measure of all things. We no longer need “transcendental reference points.” Humanity is the measure of everything. As a result, “free choice, autonomous rights, trumps any respect for the directedness of human freedom toward natural ends or purposes.” In a similar vein, others have labeled our current culture as expressive individualism. We live in a time of expressive individualism where the right to express yourselves in whatever way of your preference.

Positively, to fear the Lord means to turn to God’s instruction and walk in His ways (Proverbs 9:4-6). To fear the Lord does not mean to be in terror of God. And it is a fundamental response of a believer to God. It is associated with serving God (Deut. 6:13) and obeying His commands (Deut. 31:12-13). But it is not reduced to actions. To fear God is to be in awe and reverence (Ps. 33:8).

To fear the Lord can be described in a picture. I adored my grandfather. I loved him dearly. I wanted to please him, and it hurt when I disappointed him. When I was 7 years old, my parents instructed me to walk home with my older sister after school. I was tired of her bossing me around, so I refused. I walked far ahead of her. Of course, she told my parents what I did. All afternoon I waited for my parents to confront me. They did, but it was in the presence of my grandfather. I still remember my grandpa standing in the corner, shaking his head, saying, “I’m disappointed, Jud.” That crushed me. That is fear.

And fear, Solomon says, is directed toward the Lord God. It is lived in such a way that you desire to please him and you hurt when you disappoint him. And such fear is unending. “Beginning” does not mean that there is an end to fearing the Lord. It means the controlling or right relation.

You see, our culture foolishly moves toward such expressive individualism with no limits because man is his own god. This way will not produce the well-being of any political nation because it is directed away from God. But man is not God. Instead, God reveals that wisdom comes when we fear Him, turning with faith to embrace Him and His ways. This is the only way to living well.

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