

## Moving from Fear to Fear

Sermon, Exodus 20:18-21

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### What's Shakin'?

We have a small dog. Her name is Basil. Basil is a Shih-Tzu. On June 30<sup>th</sup> I was concentrating on sermon prep and had just read *about* thunder in Exodus 20:18 when an early afternoon *storm* crept up and notified me with a deep, distant, basso profundo rumbling. Now, although I couldn't hear Basil and I couldn't see Basil, nevertheless I knew with certainty that Basil was at the other end of the house hiding behind the couch and trembling uncontrollably. You see, Basil is terrified of thunder... and gun shots... and fireworks. Fourth of July is not a holiday that Basil *celebrates*. And thunder is her *ultimate* terror.

What do you fear? What makes you weak, quake, lose your appetite, feel an awful angst - almost pain - about an inch behind your breast bone? Are you afraid of the dark, heights, terrorists, public speaking? I have always had a thing about locomotives up close. That's right, trains! The size, the tonnage, the unrelenting, unstoppable, overwhelming power, the clamor, and the shockwaves transmitted through the platform give me a queasy, physical, uneasy wariness that sometimes brings about a brief, involuntary shudder. I realize that the word locomotive comes from Latin, but as far as my body is concerned locomotive comes from Spanish – it gives me a motive to be loco! I go a bit crazy around locomotives. They kind of scare me. Is there a “locomotive” in your life that makes you afraid?

And what about psychological fear? What scares us most? What makes the hair stand up on the back of *your* neck? The unknown, the different, the Other with a capital “O”. Do you remember the “Others” on the TV series “Lost”? The mystery surrounding them was what unsettled us. We fear the *imagined* threat, the *potential* disaster, the inexplicable, the incomprehensible, the uncomfortably mysterious, the sensing of an unpredictable, other-worldly presence, the eerie sense of lurking danger. What fears burden you? What keeps you awake at night? What fears grate on your soul? It’s said that *chronic* fear weakens our health, memory, brain functions, and mental health, causing effects such as cardiovascular damage, irritable bowel syndrome, accelerated aging, poor decision-making, inappropriate emotions and impulsive reactions, fatigue, clinical depression, and PTSD. But while *chronic* fear is damaging, fear has a God-given purpose. Fear is a human emotion triggered by a perceived threat. It is a basic survival mechanism that signals our bodies to respond to danger with a fight or flight response. As such, it is an essential part of keeping us safe.<sup>1</sup>

But what does the Bible teach us about fear? Today’s *passage*, which comes immediately after the *listing* of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, provides a unique perspective on fear, and in particular, the fear of the Lord. Today’s *sermon* is the last in our summer sermon series on The Ten Commandments – *The Movement of Grace*. Today we’ll see the Israelites’ response to meeting with God – *fear* – fear that would put Basil’s shaking to shame. We’ll see a different facet of fear in each of four verses: we’ll see a fearsome God, fear of punishment, what it

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<sup>1</sup> *Impact of Fear and Anxiety*, [www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu)

means to fear not but fear, and how a mediator transforms our fear. Then we'll wrap up with suggestions for a God-fearing response.

So, let's go to our text for today from Exodus, Chapter 20, verses 18-21. That's Exodus 20:18-21. Please stand, listen carefully, and follow along in your Bibles or your bulletin as this is the Word of God.

*Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.*

[Let's pray. Lord God, thank you for your word. Help us to understand your scriptures today. Please change our hearts with your word that we may truly fear you and love you with all our heart, and soul and mind and strength. In Jesus name. Amen.]

### **Fear: A Fearsome God (Verse 18)**

The first thing we see in verse 18 is that we have a fearsome God. This is an amazing passage! God Himself, the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of the vast universe, meets with his chosen people by coming *down* to Mount Sinai. Let's remind ourselves of the setting. As one commentator puts it, "Israel is at Mount Sinai after her merciful deliverance from slavery in Egypt and God's initial guidance

of her across the wilderness. God has told Moses of his desire to enter into **covenant** with his people, in order that they may be his 'kingdom of Priests' and his 'holy nation'. The Ten Commandments will form the content of that *covenant*, setting forth Israel's covenant obligations to this God who has redeemed her. But before the covenant is 'cut' in Exodus 24 [this passage serves] to validate the presence of God *with* the people and the appointment of Moses as the *mediator* between God and the people."<sup>2</sup>

Verse 18 opens with the terrifying manifestation of God's **presence** – thunder, lightning, trumpet, smoke. Perhaps you can imagine yourself there at the foot of Mt. Sinai in the midst of the people. Repeated shock waves of booming thunder rock your frame, your eyes blink at flash after flash of 63,000-degree bolts of lightning blanching the smoke-darkened sky and creating ozone, x-rays, gamma rays, and even anti-matter. Your nostrils burn with the acrid smell of smoke billowing from the blazing mountain and the taste of Sulphur in the air sours your mouth. But beyond this overload of the *five* senses is the eerie, other-worldly wail of a trumpet blown by no human mouth, causing your alarmed heart to pound within your chest. You had been prepared for this meeting – three *days* of consecration, ritual cleansing, abstinence from marital relations, and limits set to keep you from going up the mount. A mere touch of Mt. Sinai is punishable by stoning. You had prepared, but you were not really prepared for *this* spectacle. Then just when you thought your anxiety had climaxed, Yahweh, The Living God, The Lord of Hosts, The Most Holy God himself actually **speaks** in **thunder**! You are

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<sup>2</sup> Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament pp 31-37

overwhelmed. You are in **awe**! The mountain quakes and your body shakes uncontrollably. It is right to fear. The Lord God is overwhelming you with his raw power, but he is also making a point. What he says at Sinai is important! And what did he say?

We've just spent the last three months recounting week by week the words God actually spoke from the mountain in thunder: First the Preamble to the Ten Commandments and then the Ten Commandments themselves. But, we were **not** there. I think that in 21<sup>st</sup> century America it's hard to imagine God speaking with actual thunderous words. Our culture does its best to minimize and suppress the knowledge of our fearsome God. But, God still **does** speak through *creation* and his glory is **proclaimed** through *Scripture*.

As I imagine the Mt. Sinai scene epitomizing God's fabulous, terrifying, awe-inspiring glory I can't help but think of the first four verses from Psalm 19:

The *heavens* declare the glory of God;  
     the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
     night after night they reveal knowledge.  
 They have no speech, they use no words;  
     no sound is heard from them.  
 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
     their words to the ends of the world...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> New International Version

God always *has* and still *does* speak to us through His creation. His glory is evident and speaks to every one of us. It is right and true to be awed by God's vast, systematic, intricate, and stunningly beautiful universe. Theologians call this general revelation. God's eternal power and divine nature is so plain to us that, as the apostle Paul says, those who try to suppress the truth about God are "without excuse."

But Psalm 19 continues with "part two". We pick up in Psalm 19:7-11. The same awesome God also speaks to us with *special revelation* in the Scriptures. Here the psalmist refers to the Scriptures using the words law, statutes, precepts, commands, and decrees:

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.

They are more precious than gold,

than much pure gold;  
 they are sweeter than honey,  
 than honey from the honeycomb.

By them your servant is warned;  
 in keeping them there is great reward.<sup>4</sup>

So God's *special* revelation of the *law* refreshes, makes wise, gives joy, enlightens, and warns. And in keeping the precepts of the law there is great reward. This says to me that the Ten Commandments are ***infinitely*** more precious than gold!

So, we may ***not*** have been an Israelite at Mount Sinai but God's glory is available to all of us just by looking at the heavens. And, God *still* speaks to us through His perfect law – the *written* Word of God, the Bible. It occurs to me that we *miss out* when we let our busy lives crowd out marveling and thanking him for His glory in creation. And we are the poorer when, rushing about, we neglect hearing his voice through systematic, quality time with *him* reading, memorizing, and meditating on the Scriptures! Do I sometimes let the busyness of my life suppress the truth and my awe of God? Yes. Do you let the pace of life obscure the reality of the awe of God? I think a little trembling in the presence of the Lord is in order for us all.

Now, so far we've focused on the obviously daunting manifestations of God's power in Exodus 20 – jarring thunder, blinding lightning, smoky darkness, and even other-worldly trumpets, and then, God's thunderous voice from the mountaintop. Moses captures the people's natural response in the latter half of verse 18: "*the*

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<sup>4</sup> New International Version

*people were afraid and trembled and they stood far off...*” With such a fearsome display of God’s power being afraid is understandable. If I had been there, I’m sure I would have ended up behind the couch trembling with Basil.

### **Fear of Punishment: Sin, Shame, and Hiding (Verse 19)**

We could stop here, but wait! Fear of punishment for sin, shame, and hiding come into play in the next verse of our passage. Verse 19 signals a deeper, more existential fear: *and [they] said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”* What’s *that* all about? Yes, they had just witnessed the awesome power of God and it was terrifying, enough to make them quake and tremble, but what’s this about “don’t let **God** speak to us, lest we die?” There’s something more going on here. Although Moses does not state this explicitly, the reaction of the people is the common denominator of all those in Scripture who are confronted with God’s other-worldly **holiness**. In God’s *presence*, they experienced *God’s* holiness and *their* wretched sinfulness at the same time. And that realization is way more terrifying than any physical threat. In God’s **Holy** presence, they were *doomed!*

Dr. J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church, puts it this way: “...in God’s giving of the law, the people are confronted with the holiness of God; and in the lightning and thunder and the earthquake they see his awesome size; and suddenly in the light of that revelation they see themselves as God sees them...they see how big God is and how small they are; they see God as perfectly holy and themselves as entirely sinful... and in the light of that revelation they feel completely exposed... when the Bible talks about what we feel like in the presence of God, it uses the



analogy of nakedness. So what do we do when we feel naked? We try and hide, we cover ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

We are *ashamed* of our spiritual nakedness. This shame is evident in the Garden, where we see Adam and Eve foolishly try to hide from God in a “fruitless” attempt to cover their sin of the forbidden fruit. We see a form of hiding in the Prodigal Son who goes to “a far country” to do his “riotous” living away from the eyes of family and friends. And as an elder for over 25 years now I’ve noticed that when a member of the “visible church” uncharacteristically withdraws from the body of believers, all too often, it is the result of some sin driving him into hiding. Facing brothers and sisters in Christ, God’s representatives on earth, seems too much to bear. Hiding is the natural response when confronted with our sin.

But in addition to our sense of shame and hiding, the sin in us causes us to dread. In Scripture, when even the heroes of the faith come face to face with God deep dread and feelings of ruin overwhelm them. Isaiah sees God and his response is, “Woe is me, for I am ruined and undone!” Peter finally understands who Jesus is and cries, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!” And even the beloved apostle John, “the disciple who Jesus loved,” when he comes before the glorified Jesus in Revelation 1 falls on his face at Jesus’ feet as though *dead*.<sup>6</sup> It is right and true and appropriate to feel as Isaiah, and Peter, and John did. With Paul, those confronted with God’s holiness, lament, “...Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

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<sup>5</sup> “Holiness: Exodus 20:18-26”, The J.D. Greear Sermon Archive, Logos Bible Software 7.7

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

That's right, somehow, we all sense that punishment and death is what we *rightfully* deserve. If we see God clearly, we understand this deep and awful truth, and, confronted with our corruption and the all-powerful, holy, and righteous judge, we despair. So the Israelites said, "Do not let God speak to us lest we die."

### **Fear Not, But Fear (Verse 20)**

"But God, who is rich in mercy..." has better plans for *us*. We see this in Moses' enigmatic statement in verse 20. *Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."* Whaaaaaaat? Let me repeat that: *Moses said to the people, "**Do not fear**, for God has come to test you, that the **fear of him may be before you**, that you may not sin."* Moses seems to be saying, "Fear not, but fear." Let's dissect verse 20.

First, Moses reassures them, "Do not fear..." We see reassurance again and again when God appears to his people in the Bible. "*Fear not!*" is his message to Abraham and Jacob and Daniel and Mary and Joseph. God's *presence* is a cause for fear, but God's *purpose* is not to make them afraid. They need not fear the disaster they deserve. God has **good** intent in his appearing. And God has a **purpose** in **all** his interactions with us. Unlike our world where so many live without meaning or purpose, the God of the universe is purposeful in all he does. And in verse 20 Moses provides a telling aspect of God's **intent** in the revelation of the Ten Commandments. You may remember that the law of God has three primary purposes. "One is to restrain our sin by threatening us with punishment" – an important need in human society. "Another use of the law is to reveal our sin by proving we cannot live up to God's perfect standard, and [third], after we have

been saved by grace, the law shows us how to live in a way that brings glory to God.”<sup>7</sup> So what’s at play here in verse 20? Moses says, “...God has come to test you...” Here he is talking about testing to reveal the nature of his people. They had **agreed** to the terms of the covenant in Exodus 19:8: “All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” But they **failed** the test. God’s thunderous words had barely ceased echoing in the mountains surrounding Mt. Sinai before they were worshipping a golden calf. These were God’s chosen people. But these were sinful people. And their sin didn’t *stop* with the golden calf. Some of you remember Rich Coffeen a former assistant pastor at Potomac Hills. In his Sunday School class, we read Numbers 14:22 where God refers to the men of Israel “...who [had] seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these *ten* times and have not obeyed my voice.” Rich had us open our Bibles and, starting with Exodus 14 and working through to Numbers 14, had us number from one to ten, each of those ten testings in the margins of our Bibles. Those numbers are still in my Bible. Israel did not pass the test. Ever. In fact, as Numbers 14 points out it was really God’s *patience* that was *tested* in the wilderness. The Israelites were abject test failers. And when I see those marks in my Bible it’s a reminder that, when it comes to following God’s law, I too am an epic failure. We all are. If you doubt me on that point, I’ve included a “Do You Keep the Ten Commandments”<sup>8</sup> checklist in the bulletin for us to consider. It is both humorous and convicting. Take a look at it after the service.

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<sup>7</sup> “Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory”, Philip Graham Ryken, Chapter 59.

<sup>8</sup> Adapted by J.D. Greear from Will Metzger, “Tell the Truth”, Appendix A.IV

Was God surprised when Israel failed the tests? No. And, as I alluded to before, he has something better in mind for us. Let's talk some more about fear that we see in verse 20. If the theme of verse 20 is "fear not, but fear," it's the last part of the verse that needs explanation. Here Moses says, "*...that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.*" This must be a *different* kind of fear. This is the *fear of the Lord* in the sense that it is used throughout the Bible. We see, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* in Proverbs, *servants who **delight** to fear your name* in Nehemiah 1, and *churches walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit* in Acts 9. Fear and wisdom, fear and delight, fear and comfort. They bespeak a different kind of fear.

My brother-in-law, who is not yet a believer, one time mentioned that he did not much like "the fear of God." I found RC Sproul's discussion of the fear of God helpful in talking with him. I'll quote RC's explanation here:

We need to make some important distinctions about the biblical meaning of "fearing" God. These distinctions can be helpful, but they can also be a little *dangerous*. When Luther struggled with *that*, he made this distinction, which has since become somewhat famous: He distinguished between what he called a *servile* fear and a *filial* fear.

The servile fear is a kind of fear that a prisoner in a torture chamber has for his tormentor, the jailer, or the executioner. It's that kind of dreadful anxiety in which someone is frightened by the clear and present danger that is represented by another person. Or it's the kind of fear that a slave would have at the hands of a malicious master who would come with the whip and

torment the slave. Servile refers to a posture of servitude toward a *malevolent* owner.

Luther distinguished between that and what he called filial fear, drawing from the Latin concept from which we get the idea of family. It refers to the fear that a child has for his father. In this regard, Luther is thinking of a child who has tremendous respect and love for his father or mother and who dearly wants to please them. He has a fear or an anxiety of offending the one he loves, not because he's afraid of torture or even of punishment, but rather because he's afraid of displeasing the one who is, in that child's world, the source of security and love.<sup>9</sup>

With this perspective, my paraphrase of verse 20 “fear not, but fear” makes sense. As his covenant people, we need not be afraid. It is not God's intent to destroy his beloved people or burden them with a nit-picking set of laws. Rather the giving of the law that reflects God's character is, as one commentator<sup>10</sup> says, a “call to become like God, that man and God might walk together more intimately. The lover desires the fellowship of the loved one. This can be meaningful only as they share one another's concerns.” This is in essence God saying, “‘Since I am who I am, you must be like *me*; else we can have no fellowship.’ This admittedly is not the communion of two equals, but the condescension of a king who desires to lift his subjects to his own level, a sovereign who prefers the fellowship of his people to their *remote* awe and reverence.”

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. RC Sproul, <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-fear-god/>

<sup>10</sup> “Expository Themes in the Book of Exodus,” Clyde T. Francisco

This King is worthy of our reverence and awe. The true fear of the Lord is ***freedom from fear*** and ***fear of the Lord*** side by side in perfect harmony. We can fear not, but fear!

### **Fear Transformed: Jesus our Mediator (Verse 21)**

This brings us to verse 21 where we see fear transformed through Jesus our mediator. At this point we have one loose end to tie up. An important loose end! What about God's righteousness? In short, God's holy nature and character reflected in the Ten Commandments also precludes him from excusing sin and, as we've noted, we are hopeless failures when it comes to that. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ who knew no sin, has *become* sin for us. God has imputed or counted our myriad sins to his beloved son's account and, in turn, credited the perfectly righteous works of Jesus to us when we trust in Him! We see this foreshadowed in the last verse of our passage, Exodus 20:21. *The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.* What an awesome picture of what Christ has done for us. The people have stood far off, in a sense hiding from God, the holy, all-consuming ***fire***, while Moses, the mediator, did not "run *from* the fire" but drew *near* to the thick darkness, the very place where the thrice holy, perfectly righteous, all-consuming fire and judge of all creation ***was***. And while Moses was *spared* God's righteous wrath, Jesus our Savior was ***not***. Instead he bore *all, all, all* the wrath stored up for us, willingly setting his face like flint to accomplish the purpose of redeeming his people. And God the Father turned his back on his Son beloved from all eternity while pouring out that furious wrath on the one with whom he had the most intimate

relationship in all the universe and beyond. Now that is *truly* a fearsome sacrifice. Christ our mediator has transformed our fear. Praise be to God from whom all blessings flow!

### **A God-Fearing Response**

OK, let's say I'm convinced. I want to "**delight** in the fear of the Lord" as Nehemiah put it. Where do I start? What is a God-fearing response?

To answer those questions, let's leap forward from Exodus more than a thousand years to the writings of the book of Hebrews. In chapter 12 the writer of Hebrews *recounts* the drama of the covenant with God at Mt. Sinai. And then, he goes on to compare Mt. Sinai with Mt. Zion, the symbol of the city of the living God, the **heavenly** Jerusalem. He says this:

*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

What a picture! It's kind of like Dave Silvernail at Fenway Park amid tens of thousands of grimy fans all cheering for the Sox after winning the Series, or John Palme with myriads of screaming rowdies at Yankee Stadium after a grand slam homer, or Dorst at the Super Bowl amid a sleazy sea of black and gold after the Steelers *actually* win! However, not only are they all cheering joyfully together

with their compatriots, but also all the grime and rowdiness and sleaze are transformed into perfect purity. And the Sox fans and the Yankee fans will dwell together in perfect unity! Amen. Now **that's** a miracle!!

But seriously, in light of this joyous assembly of perfected believers with God in heaven, Hebrews 12 closes with a conclusion derived after all the “Jesus is better” teaching of that book:

***Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.***

So, what does this “acceptable worship” look like? There are many places in the Bible that describe Godly living but, Hebrews 13 follows with a description of actions that flow out of this reverence and awe. Once again, remembering that we are saved by the *gift* of grace, not by works, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, our response is now very *natural*. Ephesians 2:10 says: “For we are his *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus **for** good works, which **God prepared beforehand**, that we should walk in them.” God has even prepared the good works we’ll fulfill with joy. So what does acceptable worship look like?? I’ve included some ideas from Hebrews 13 that God may cause to resonate with you. After all, God has *designed* you for walking in these good works. I’d suggest that you pick just one or two from this list as a way to offer acceptable worship, with reverence and awe:

**Verse 1:** *Let brotherly love continue.* Is there someone in the church you need to treat as a long-lost brother rather than an antagonist or pariah?



**Verse 2:** *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...* Is there a visitor in church you could ask to lunch or invite over for a visit?

**Verse 3:** *Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.* Is God calling you to minister to someone in prison? Do you have time and interest in praying for the persecuted church? (If you do, see Ann Marie Davis.)

**Verse 4:** *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.* Is there sexual sin in your life that needs to stop?

**Verse 5:** *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Are you content with what God has provided for you? Commit to stop griping. And, is there something you can cheerfully give away?

**Verse 7:** *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.* Is there someone at Potomac Hills who is setting a godly example that is bearing fruit that you could emulate?

**Verse 8:** *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace...* There are plenty of strange twistings of the truth in our world today, but Jesus **is** the way and the truth and the life. Have you ever put your faith in Jesus as savior? Is God calling you to do that today? If

so, don't wait any longer for your heart to be strengthened by grace! Ask Christ to be your savior. And talk to one of the elders or pastors after church about putting your faith in Christ.

**Verse 15:** *Through [Christ] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.* How can you cheerfully and winsomely bring your heartfelt praise of God into conversation with your family and friends in a way that refreshes those around you?

**Verse 16:** *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.* Can you pick someone who is struggling in some way, pray and then thoughtfully design something good you can do for them, and then bless them in this way?

**Verse 17:** *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Are you critical of your pastors? Bless them instead with a word of encouragement or pray about their counsel and seek to take their advice.

**Verse 18:** *Pray for us...earnestly...* Is there a time in the day that you have 3 minutes completely to yourself? When you first get up? In the shower? On your drive to work? In bed falling asleep? Commit to pray earnestly for what God is putting on your heart each day at that time.

With reverence and awe may God awaken in us all his call to walk in the good works that **he** has prepared for us.

## **Gamla**

Earlier I recounted RC Sproul's explanation of the fear of the Lord. In closing, let me illustrate this filial or family fear from my own family. When our kids were born, my dad named himself "Gamla" instead Grandpa. Gamla is a humorously corrupted version of the Norwegian words meaning "Ancient One". Throughout his days Gamla was always larger than life. At 6'4", 250 he was an imposing figure. He had big bones, a ruddy complexion like the Biblical David, steely blue eyes, and determination set in his jaw that told the world he meant business. He was raised by Norwegian immigrants in Queens New York, and at 21 went off to World War II as a B-17 pilot. He saved his entire squadron by taking the lead and reforming his unit when the squadron commander was shot down over Germany. I still have the front page of the Long Island Daily Press with the bold headline "St. Albans Warbird", an imposing picture of my dad in his flak jacket in front of his bomber, and the story of his war-hero exploit that won him the Distinguished Flying Cross. After the war, he attended Princeton, founded and ran a construction business, built a summer house at the beach with his own hands, became a driving force in his church as a ruling elder, and powerfully and self-sacrificially took the lead in whatever situation the Lord called him to. He was a tough, hard-headed business leader, boss, husband, and father. He was *both* an irresistible force *and* an immovable object. You did not mess with my Dad. One night at the dinner table when my little brother Chuck was 4 or 5 Chuck suddenly burst into tears. I was

vaguely aware that Chuck had been acting up, but didn't know what brought on his flood of tears. Instantly my mother began to comfort him, "Chuck, what's wrong. What's the matter?" The tearful response, "Daddy, **looked** at me!" Even a look from my father was devastating.

But as strong, and powerful, and tough as he was, Gamla was even more generous, tender, good-natured, cheerful, and loving. Like Dr. Dave my father **really** loved to eat, but more so he loved to share his favorite morsel of lobster or prime rib with us and watch us enjoy it. Though no one doubted who was in charge in the Faroe home, he gently served my 5'2' mom day in and day out. He was considerate, and self-sacrificing for his family, his friends, his neighbors, and those in need. I remember taking a battered mom into our home while he worked behind the scenes to fix the situation – something that just was not done in our culture in the 1950s. He had a good word for all and held no grudges despite some in business who failed him. He was by no means naïve, but could see the good in every situation and find a reason to be cheerful in any circumstance. And he loved with a warmth that charmed our souls – he loved his wife, his parents, his children and grandchildren, his friends and neighbors, his fellow believers, and his Lord. He was gracious when his kids screwed up – and we did - and loved us unconditionally. We always knew it. Though Gamla was by no means perfect, God showed me through my dad in so many ways what God Himself is like.

So, getting back to filial fear, I would no more have crossed Gamla than I would run out in front of a barreling locomotive. If he wanted to, my dad could crush me with a mere *look*. In that sense Gamla was to be feared. But more, because I

loved him so much because of his character and his love for me, I would never dream of displeasing him. Especially as I matured, my only desire was to love him, honor him, obey him, enjoy the fatherly blessings lavished on me, and deepen my relationship with a Dad who loved me so much.

Sound familiar? My dad was only a faint shadow of God-the-Father's *substance*. Our awesome, gracious God and Father is truly the one who is to be feared and loved with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

As we conclude our sermon series, let's remember that ten commandment living is not a matter of keeping a list but rather of cheerfully reflecting God's character which is embodied in these gracious and beneficial commands provided for *our* good. Let us worship Him with our lives, for "from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

You need to pray. Please spend a few moments doing that and then I'll close.

[Awesome and gracious God our Father, may we truly fear and love you with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We praise you for giving us the Ten Commandments. Keep us mindful that Ten Commandment living is not keeping a list but cheerfully reflecting your character. Help us to do that and may our lives bring glory to you now and forevermore. In Jesus name, Amen.]