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Fear, the Beginning of Wisdom—Part 3

“There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18).

Scripture decries people who have no fear of God, often detailing their acts of wickedness that harm everyone around them. This leads to the wise recommendation that everyone should “*fear the Lord and turn away from evil*” (Pro. 3:7b). Here, we see a juxtaposition. Those who fear God, turn away from evil (harm). The reverse is also true—those that do not fear God, do not turn away from evil.

Many people today argue that no one should fear harm to themselves. But there is such a thing as a “healthy” fear—those that commit evil should fear judgment and punishment for their actions. This is justice. Good government is tasked with protecting the innocent and harming the harmful. Fear of justice is a deterrent to evil behavior. Paul explained the proper role of earthly government was to instill fear of judgement in the wicked: “*Rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority?...if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*” (Rom. 13:3-4).

God is the ultimate avenger: “*Leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord*” (Rom. 12:19b), because no true justice can be delivered by man. And so, the ultimate fear of judgement comes from the righteous judgement of God Himself. This is the proper fear of God that the evil should know.

From a practical standpoint, the “Fear of God” is the foundation of a free society. It is the idea of an ultimate, objective authority that every individual is accountable to—one which can’t be avoided, bought, or done away with, which sees and knows all and exists out of our reach—yet we are all within His reach and will have to give an account of our behavior to Him

one day when the accounts are called in. No one can change His mind, and what He says is as it is. It is etched in unalterable stone. Many of our early lawmakers understood this and held the Ten Commandments as God’s objective, unalterable law. However, the growing cultural ignorance of God’s nature and the emerging agnostic and atheist attitudes of our culture certainly don’t inspire a healthy fear of God. And after all, if you don’t acknowledge God, why should you care what He says to do and not to do?

Eliminate that ultimate authority from the minds and hearts of people, and there is no justice, because there is no objective standard that all people are measured by. Instead, “important” people are given a pass and “unimportant” people are hounded with injustice. One needs only to pay the right people, gain power or authority, or be sneaky in order to commit evil and get away with it. This is remarkably easy to do, and so corruption rises as freedom subsides.

The world’s injustice is why Scripture often states that the evil do not fear God. If you go unpunished for the evil that you do, why should you fear justice? Or if the earthly punishment is light for the evil you have practiced, why should you fear continuing in your wickedness? They mistake the world’s lack of justice as a birthright to commit evil, and the patience of God for a lack of interest in their works. God is patient and merciful, but He is storing up wrath for the evil for a day of judgement when they will be held accountable.

As a society today, we have entirely lost the fear of God—the fear of justice. There is an undercurrent in our society that disrespects the civil authorities that maintain justice. They feel entitled to do evil. Without a fear of God or a respect for law-abiding man, every man becomes a law unto themselves and will justify their evil deeds, even calling them “good.” As this rises, our free society crumbles into pagan tyranny and anarchy—the fear and worship of man, rather than of God. Amen.