

LESSON 4 - THE HOLY SPIRITS GIFT OF FEAR OF THE LORD

What has the spiritual gift of “Fear of the Lord” meant to you?

What is the difference between servile fear and filial fear?

Why do you think Fear of the Lord is considered the most important of all Gifts?

What observations can you make about the gift of Fear of the Lord?

How can the Holy Spirit help you to experience the gift of Fear of the Lord more fully?

How can the gift of Fear of the Lord make your life different?

Lesson Objective: To develop a deeper love and fuller sense of awe and wonder for the Creator of the Universe so that we can follow his command and example of Love

The **seven gifts of the Holy Spirit** are gifts that Anglicans, Catholics and Lutherans believe the Holy Spirit gives to people to further their sanctification and help "complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them."

Some Christians take these to be a definitive list of specific attributes, while other Christians take them to be merely examples of God's work through Christians by the Holy Spirit. Roman Catholics believe that you receive these seven gifts once you receive Baptism, and at Confirmation they are strengthened so that one is able to proclaim the truths of the faith and be ready to die for them if need be. "The reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace." For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."(Catechism of the Catholic Church #1285)

Catechism

1831

The seven *gifts* of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.

Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God . . . If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

The Final listed Gift of the Holy Spirit may be the most important:

Fear of the Lord is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit enumerated in Isaiah 11:2-3. Present in their fullness in Jesus Christ, they are available to all Christians who are in a state of grace. We receive the seven gifts when we are infused with sanctifying grace, the life of God within us—as, for example, when we receive a sacrament worthily. As the current Catechism of the Catholic Church notes, "They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them." When we are infused with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit the way that Christ Himself would.

Fear of the Lord

The seventh and final gift of the Holy Spirit is the fear of the Lord, and perhaps no other gift of the Holy Spirit is so misunderstood. We think of fear and hope as opposites, but the fear of the Lord confirms the theological virtue of hope. This gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the desire not to offend God, as well as the certainty that God will supply us the grace that we need in order to keep from offending Him. Our desire not to offend God is more than simply a sense of duty; like piety, the fear of the Lord arises out of love.

Here is a description of the Gift by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*:

- **Fear the Lord (Wonder and Awe):** With the gift of fear of the Lord we are aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire: perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love. This gift is described by Aquinas as a fear of separating oneself from God. He describes the gift as a "filial fear," like a child's fear of offending his father, rather than a "servile fear," that is, a fear of punishment. Also known as knowing God is all powerful. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7) because it puts our mindset in its correct location with respect to God: we are the finite, dependent creatures, and He is the infinite, all-powerful Creator.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that four of the Holy Spirit's gifts (wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel) direct the intellect, while the other three gifts (fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord) direct the will toward God.

In some respects, the gifts are similar to the virtues, but a key distinction is that the virtues operate under the impetus of **human** reason (prompted by grace), whereas the **gifts** operate under the **impetus of the Holy Spirit**; the former can be used when one wishes, but the latter operate only when the Holy Spirit wishes. In *Summa Theologica* II.II, Thomas Aquinas asserts the following correspondence between the Capital Virtue and this Gift the Holy Spirit

- The gift of fear of the Lord corresponds to the virtue of temperance.

Confirming the Virtue of Hope:

The gift of the fear of the Lord, noted in the *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, confirms the virtue of hope. We often think of hope and fear as mutually exclusive, but the fear of the Lord is the desire not to offend Him, and the certainty that He will give us the grace necessary to keep from doing so. It is that certainty that gives us hope.

The fear of the Lord is like the respect we have for our parents. We do not wish to offend them, but we also do not live in fear of them, in the sense of being frightened.

What the Fear of the Lord Is Not:

In the same way, "The fear of the Lord is not servile but filial." In other words, it is not a fear of punishment, but a desire not to offend God that parallels our desire not to offend our parents.

Even so, many people misunderstand the fear of the Lord. Recalling the verse that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," they think that the fear of the Lord is something that is good to have when you first start out as a Christian, but that you should grow beyond it. That is not the case; rather, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because it is one of the foundations of our religious life, just as the desire to do what our parents wish us to do should remain with us our entire lives.

All wisdom has its source in God, who lavishes it on his friends. Sirach 1:1, 12 tells us that "fear of the Lord" is the beginning and the end of human wisdom.

Reverence for the God revealed in Scripture is not a servile fear. Servile fear can not lead to "glory and splendor, gladness and a festive crown" nor can it "warm the heart, giving gladness and joy". (Sirach 1; 9, 10)

In Scripture "to fear God" is to be in awe of his power and knowledge. To fear Him is to bow before mysteries we can never comprehend, like our freedom to choose, even though our free choices often have dire consequences. To fear God is to dare to believe that He created each one of us to know, love and serve Him in this life and be happy with him forever.

This is a God to love, a God to reverence, and a God to honor with our whole lives!

We should never lose our sense of Awe and Wonder (Fear of the Lord) when drawing closer to our Loving Creator and Savior.

Fear is a word that we typically interpret as referring to a state of emotional distress in the face of some danger to our personal safety. The term "fear of the Lord" appears over 100 times in the Old Testament. For example:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord, your God ask of you but to fear the Lord, your God, and follow his ways exactly, to love and serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul (Deuteronomy 10:12)

However, in the New Testament, the term is only mentioned two times. After the coming of Christ, the "fear of the Lord" has transformed into a sense of awe that is joyful rather than horrified. The gift of fear of the Lord gives us a greater sense of the greatness of God that should spark in our hearts a sense of amazement and awe that could bring us down to our knees. When we realize how wondrous God is, we start to grasp his overwhelming otherness, and it helps us to understand how God is so much closer to us than we are to ourselves. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

God makes himself known by recalling his all-powerful loving, and liberating action in the history of the one he addresses: "I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The first word contains the first commandment of the Law: "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him. . . . You shall not go after other gods." God's first call and just demand is that man accept him and worship him (2084).

When we learn to "fear the Lord", we begin to gain a deeper intimacy with Him. True worship has profound respect and awe. We should come to a point in our faith where we have a fear that is reluctant to act in ways that are contrary to the spirit of God's will out of love, rather than out of fear. When we truly respect and are astonished by our Lord, we can love Him even more. Through a healthy, balanced faith life that is rooted in prayerful solitude we can begin to place all things in the context of God's divine love.

Isaiah 11:1-3

1 But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
2 The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of **fear of the LORD**,
3 and his delight shall be the **fear of the LORD**.

Sirach 17:1-9

1 The LORD from the earth created man, and in his own image he made him.
2 Limited days of life he gives him and makes him return to earth again.
3 He endows man with a strength of his own, and with power over all things else on earth.
4 He puts the **fear of him** in all flesh, and gives him rule over beasts and birds.
5 He forms men's tongues and eyes and ears, and imparts to them an understanding heart.
6 With wisdom and knowledge he fills them; good and evil he shows them.
7 He looks with favor upon their hearts, and shows them his glorious works,
8 That they may describe the wonders of his deeds and praise his holy name.
9 He has set before them knowledge, a law of life as their inheritance;

Palm 128:1-6

1 A song of ascents. Happy are all who **fear the LORD**, who walk in the ways of God.
2 What your hands provide you will enjoy; you will be happy and prosper:
3 Like a fruitful vine your wife within your home, Like olive plants your children around your table.
4 **Just so will they be blessed who fear the LORD.**
5 May the LORD bless you from Zion, all the days of your life That you may share Jerusalem's joy
6 and live to see your children's children. Peace upon Israel!

Sirach 1:1-29

1 All wisdom comes from the LORD and with him it remains forever.
2 The sand of the seashore, the drops of rain, the days of eternity: who can number these?
3 Heaven's height, earth's breadth, the depths of the abyss: who can explore these?
4 Before all things else wisdom was created; and prudent understanding, from eternity.
5 To whom has wisdom's root been revealed? Who knows her subtleties?
6 There is but one, wise and truly awe-inspiring, seated upon his throne:
7 It is the LORD; he created her, has seen her and taken note of her.
8 He has poured her forth upon all his works, upon every living thing according to his bounty; he has lavished her upon his friends.
9 **Fear of the LORD** is glory and splendor, gladness and a festive crown.
10 **Fear of the LORD** warms the heart, giving gladness and joy and length of days.
11 **He who fears the LORD** will have a happy end; even on the day of his death he will be blessed.
12 **The beginning of wisdom is fear of the LORD, which is formed with the faithful in the womb.**
13 With devoted men was she created from of old, and with their children her beneficence abides.
14 **Fullness of wisdom is fear of the LORD**; she inebriates men with her fruits.
15 Her entire house she fills with choice foods, her granaries with her harvest.
16 **Wisdom's garland is fear of the LORD**, with blossoms of peace and perfect health.

17 Knowledge and full understanding she showers down; she heightens the glory of those who possess her.

18 **The root of wisdom is fear of the LORD;** her branches are length of days.

19 One cannot justify unjust anger; anger plunges a man to his downfall.

20 A patient man need stand firm but for a time, and then contentment comes back to him.

21 For a while he holds back his words, then the lips of many herald his wisdom.

22 Among wisdom's treasures is the paragon of prudence; **but fear of the LORD is an abomination to the sinner.**

23 **If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments,** and the LORD will bestow her upon you;

24 **For fear of the LORD is wisdom and culture; loyal humility is his delight.**

25 **Be not faithless to the fear of the LORD, nor approach it with duplicity of heart.**

26 Play not the hypocrite before men; over your lips keep watch.

27 Exalt not yourself lest you fall and bring upon you dishonor;

28 For then the LORD will reveal your secrets and publicly cast you down,

29 **Because you approached the fear of the LORD with your heart full of guile.**

Sirach 2:1- 18

1 ¹ My son, when you come to serve the LORD, prepare yourself for trials.

2 Be sincere of heart and steadfast, undisturbed in time of adversity.

3 Cling to him, forsake him not; thus will your future be great.

4 Accept whatever befalls you, in crushing misfortune be patient;

5 For in fire gold is tested and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation.

6 Trust God and he will help you; make straight your ways and hope in him.

7 **You who fear the LORD, wait for his mercy, turn not away lest you fall.**

8 **You who fear the LORD, trust him, and your reward will not be lost.**

9 **You who fear the LORD, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy.**

10 Study the generations long past and understand; has anyone hoped in the LORD and been disappointed? Has anyone persevered in his fear and been forsaken? has anyone called upon him and been rebuffed?

11 Compassionate and merciful is the LORD; he forgives sins, he saves in time of trouble.

12 Woe to craven hearts and drooping hands, to the sinner who treads a double path!

13 Woe to the faint of heart who trust not, who therefore will have no shelter!

14 Woe to you who have lost hope! what will you do at the visitation of the LORD?

15 **Those who fear the LORD disobey not his words; those who love him keep his ways.**

16 **Those who fear the LORD seek to please him, those who love him are filled with his law.**

17 **Those who fear the LORD prepare their hearts and humble themselves before him.**

18 **Let us fall into the hands of the LORD and not into the hands of men, For equal to his majesty is the mercy that he shows.**