

Text: Heb. 10:26-31

Title: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"

Time: 2/7/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – When you see a police car parked next to the road, and you know that you are traveling over the speed limit, what happens? Well, if you are like me, you suddenly feel the urge to test your brakes. I slow down, go by as though I did not notice the police car, and then look in my rearview mirrors to see if his lights come on and whether he is going to follow me. For me, putting a police car on the side of the road is a powerful way to get me to do the speed limit.

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. As the author of the book of Proverbs, he defines the beginning of wisdom in terms that remind me of that police car at the side of the road. He says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). Seeing and fearing the police car makes me a wiser driver. Seeing and not fearing the police car demonstrates that I am a fool, and that I am going to pay the price of a fool.

It is no less true for the New Testament believer that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. The author of Hebrews, in the previous passage, issued some commands that are essential for the people of God to obey: let *us draw near* into the presence of God in worship (v. 22); let *us hold fast the profession of our hope* and live for things promised and not this present world (v. 23); and *let us consider one another*, provoking each other to love and good works by not forsaking our assembly times (v. 24).

The Bible teaches that we live in a world that can be described accurately as having no fear of God before their eyes (Rom. 3:18). It also teaches that the sins of those who are God's children are especially troubling to the Lord, our Father (Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities").

It is my conviction that the *we* of the Hebrews passage before us refers to true believers, that as believers we are to have the fear of the Lord before us in a way that unbelievers cannot. Note some other indications of this: (1) "For" (v. 26) indicates that this warning is intended for the same group of people for whom the commands of the previous passage were intended, i.e. true believers; (2) "after we have received the knowledge of the truth" (v. 26) describes a post-conversion existence; (3) "fiery indignation" (v. 27) is a theme that the author of Hebrews is not afraid to apply to the experience of believers elsewhere in the book (Heb. 12:28-29); "wherewith he was sanctified" (v. 29) describes a saved man; "the Lord shall judge His people" (v. 30) indicates that God is dealing here with His people; and the Scripture tells us that David as a believer "fell into the hands of the living God" (v. 31; 2 Sam. 24:14).

So our author is very forceful about the fact that the fear of the Lord must help us as true believers obey God's commands. The beginning of the wisdom of this obedience is the fear of the Lord. Do you fear the Lord? Are you fearful of not obeying His commands? Our message this morning is "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and I want us to see three things about what it means to fear the Lord as obedient believers from the passage this morning.

I. To fear the Lord is to recognize the inevitability of judgment for disobedience (vv. 26-27).

Ill: The sin of my kids seems especially troubling to me for some reason. It is one thing if, during a basketball practice for instance, one of my players disobeys a command and mouths off to me instead. Honestly, I do not care about that situation the way I care about it should my son Kent be the perpetrator of such a response during practice. I feel compelled to correct, admonish, nurture, and discipline Kent in a way I do not feel compelled to do for my other players. Should he disobey and mouth off, his error would seem particularly troubling to me.

Appl: So it is we believers who need to understand that to fear the Lord is to recognize the inevitability and seriousness of God's judgment on disobedience, especially when we refuse to draw near, to hold fast, and to consider one another. This is true because our sinful disobedience in these areas is more troubling to the Lord than the sin of unbelievers in three important ways:

1. The disobedience of a believer is especially voluntary (v. 26a). The adverb translated *willingly* is used only one other time in the NT, in 1 Pet. 5:2, where the ministry of pastors must be performed willingly, not under compulsion or for the sake of money. A related adjective is used to describe Philemon, whom Paul hoped would forgive his runaway slave voluntarily and not because he was compelled to by Paul. So what this word says about the disobedience of believers in our passage is that our disobedience against the Lord's will is especially voluntary and therefore especially inexcusable. As the redeemed people of God, we are no longer in bondage to sin. We are no longer compelled by that bondage to serve sin. When we do serve sin, we do so

voluntarily, in spite of the freedom of our redemption from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:18-19). When we understand that about our disobedience as believers, we begin to understand what it means to fear the Lord.

2. The disobedience of a believer is especially inexcusable (v. 26b). Our author says that, in regard to the believer who voluntarily continues in disobedience, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." I think the key to understanding what that phrase means is to understand something he said about the Sabbath in chapter 4 (Heb. 4:1, 4, 6). For the believer, there remains a yet a present and future Sabbath. But in our passage, the author says, for the believer who voluntarily continues in sin, there does not remain a yet present and future sacrifice for sins. The sacrifice he is referring to is the animal sacrifice he began the chapter describing (vv. 1-4). In other words, it is far more serious for a believer to sin voluntarily that was assumed under the old Jewish system of animal sacrifice. With our greater light and opportunity for obedience, we are held to a higher standard than the Jews under that system who could bring an animal sacrifice (see v. 28).

3. The disobedience of a believer is especially tragic (v. 27). Because there is no sacrifice remaining that can change the life of this disobedient believer, there is only one thing left that can – the judgment of a holy God who is a consuming fire in his hatred for sinful disobedience.

III: We all remember the pain of reports from the battle field that describe the death of soldiers from "friendly fire." Men on our side get into the wrong place at the wrong time, and they suffer the same consequence as the enemy, though they are in reality our men and on our side. That is the tragic circumstance of a believer who has committed himself to a life of voluntary disobedience against the commands of

the Lord. He will suffer judgment intended for the enemy, rather than the blessings designed for the hosts of the Lord. We read about this kind of suffering in the lives of true believers in our New Testament (1 Cor. 11:30).

Transition: To fear the Lord is to recognize the inevitability of God's judgment for disobedience. Do you live with this fear of the Lord, or has it become your conviction that believers somehow get away with their disobedience?

II. To fear the Lord is to recognize the reasonableness of judgment for disobedience (vv. 28-29).

III: One of the consequences of the world's having no fear of God before their eyes is that they have a hard time accepting the reasonableness of judgment for sin. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who believes in the New Testament God of love but not in the Old Testament God of judgment? If so, you know what it is to speak to someone who does not know their Bible very well. The Bible teaches in both the Old and New Testaments that the wages of sin is death. It also taught regarding the nation of Israel that capital punishment should be executed on God's people who disobeyed the Mosaic Law (v. 28).

Appl: But what does that law of Moses say about a truly saved believer who voluntarily continues in his disobedience against the commands of the Lord today? It means we are worthy of a worse punishment than the Israelite, because we have rejected so much more than the Law of Moses by committing ourselves to our sin. When a believer disobeys, he treads underfoot the Son of God. When a believer disobeys, he calls the blood of Christ that made him holy "unholy." When a believer disobeys, he insults the Spirit of grace that indwells him and works to sanctify him. We fear the Lord when we understand these things about

our disobedience. To fear Him is to recognize the reasonableness of the judgment we incur because we understand the true horror of our disobedience.

III. To fear the Lord is to recognize the living God of judgment for disobedience (vv. 30-31).

Ill: Let me return to the police car illustration I began with, if I may. What if I had concluded incorrectly that every police car on the side of the road has a manikin in it rather than a real live police officer? Well, in that case, the sight of the police car would not make me slow down much, would it?

Appl: To fear the Lord is to recognize that He is living and that His hands do intervene in our lives in a personal and real way. God is real. God is living. God takes things personally. And God is not mocked. We reap what we sow. Vengeance belongs to Him, and He will repay. He will judge His people. When we fear the Lord as the living God, we obey Him. When we disobey Him, we live as though He is just a manikin in the skies. Our disobedience notwithstanding, we shall find that He is not.

Conclusion: As we close our time together, I want to give an important scriptural context for what we have learned about the fear of the Lord this morning. First, the Bible is clear that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). We are justified and can need never fear the full force of God's judgment the way His adversaries must. And it is equally clear that our primary motivation for obeying the Lord should not be a spirit of fear, but a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry out, "Abba Father!" (Rom. 8:15). David was right when he said, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are

great" (2 Sam. 24:14). But still, the next verse tells us that the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel, and 70,000 Israelites died that day.

Ill: Again, I think our situation with law enforcement officials is helpful to my understanding of living in the fear of the Lord as a believer (Rom. 13:3-4, 7, 1 Pet. 2:7). We should honor the police, count them our allies and friends, and support their work in our community. But fearing them is still the beginning of wisdom when it comes to doing the speed limit and obeying the other laws of our land. It is when the assurance of our justification and adoption excuses our voluntary continuance in sinful disobedience that we have forgotten to understand that justification and adoption in the fear the Lord. God will judge His people.

Do you fear the Lord enough to obey Him? Do we experience times of sickness and hardship for a lack of obedience in the fear of the Lord? These are Scriptural questions for our hearts this morning in light of this passage. Where are you refusing to obey for a lack of the fear of the Lord? Is it the command to worship? Is it the command to not live for the world? Is it the command to care well for your church? Is it the initial command for a believer, i.e. to be baptized? I will close this morning with a challenge to our hearts from one of the translators of the KJV Bible, Miles Smith, who made reference to verse 31 of our passage (*Translators to the Readers*): "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; but a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God speaketh unto us, to hearken; when he setteth his word before us, to read it; when he stretcheth out his hand and calleth, to answer, 'Here am I, here we are to do thy will, O God.' The Lord work a care and conscience in us to know him and serve him that we may be acknowledged of him at the appearing

of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost be all praise and thanksgiving. Amen.”

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*