The Fear of the Lord

Peace, and may the Lord bless you. In the previous message we talked about what it means to be born again and about the importance of the seed, which is the seed of God. We discovered that this seed is in fact the Word. In the Word we learned that whoever receives the seed with joy begins to bear fruit, as Luke tells us, and that this happens with patience.

Yet we did not talk about one essential thing that helps the seed to sprout. This vital element in the process of spiritual growth may not be obvious at first. Let us turn to the book of Proverbs to understand this life-giving element better. In chapter 9, verse 10, we find these words: *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."*

Clearly, receiving the Word with joy is not the only thing needed to be born again. There are people who receive the Word, but because of the cares of this life and other things, the seed that had begun to sprout is choked and no longer bears fruit. We need this beginning of wisdom so that wisdom can begin to make room for itself in us. Let us read Proverbs chapter 8, from verse 22 to verse 31. This passage is headed *"The Origin of Wisdom"*, and it says: *"The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth*, *while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men."*

We remember John 1, where the Word of God says that all things were made by Him and for Him. This is the Lord Jesus; He is Wisdom. The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of knowing the Lord Jesus, is the fear of the Lord. It brings forth life, as it is written in chapter 14, verse 27: *"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death"*: a fountain of life. In John 7 we are told that whoever believes in Him, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water, and that is a fountain of life. But what is that faith worth without the fear of the Lord? Does wisdom begin, or does it not? We must be very careful here.

Let us also read verse 26: *"In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge."* Amen. *"In the fear of the LORD."* We will read a few verses from Proverbs and then try to look closely at this fear of the Lord that is a fountain of life. Because many people deceive themselves, thinking they have the fear of the Lord, when their fear is only one taught by the traditions of the world, as Corinthians tells us.

In Isaiah, chapter 15, verse 33, God teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the school of wisdom. We are called into the school of Christ, the school of wisdom, where the fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and humility, or denying ourselves, is essential. What we can underline here is that humility and submission go before glory. Let us also read chapter 22, verse 4: *"By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life."*

The reward of the fear of the Lord and the reward of humility are bound together. Humility goes hand in hand with the fear of the Lord. We are lowly, humble and submissive, and we live in the fear of the Lord. Let us go to Isaiah, chapter 11, and read about the Lord Jesus. In our spiritual life it is essential not only to receive the Word with joy but also to keep our faith in times of trial. Whoever receives the Word with joy but has no solid foundation in the fear of the Lord will fall away when trouble comes because of the Word. In Isaiah, chapter 11, verse 1, we are given a prophetic picture of the Lord Jesus: *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."* This Branch is the Lord Jesus, *"and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD"*, an understanding that does not rest on surface judgments but on true knowledge of God.

The fear of the Lord is central to our relationship with God, as Isaiah 29:13 also shows us, where the Lord says: *"Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men."* This verse brings out the difference between a shallow fear, based on human traditions, and the true fear of God, which involves a deep and sincere relationship with Him.

In society you can come across the idea that only serious wrongdoing shows a lack of the fear of God, and this too is a teaching handed down by men. It is important to understand that the fear of the Lord is not limited to avoiding big sins; it is a principle that must guide us in every area of life.

To live in God's presence, we must learn what it means to have the fear of the Lord. Without it we cannot begin a genuine spiritual life, because the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. The word *"fountain"* can mean different things to each of us, especially when we think of life here on earth. In a spiritual sense, the *"fountain"* can be linked to the beginning, or the source, of life. According to Scripture, *"the fear of the LORD is a fountain of life"*, which suggests that respect and reverence toward God are fundamental if we are to have life. Still, we must be careful not to confuse human fear, which is a natural emotion, with the fear of the Lord, which is a spiritual principle. In Psalm 34, verse 11, we are told: *"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD."* This verse urges us to seek a right understanding of this idea, because the fear of the Lord goes together with wisdom and knowledge.

Now consider the historical example in 2 Kings, chapter 17, verse 24: *"And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they

possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof."* This passage describes how God allowed the people of Israel to be replaced by other nations as a consequence of the rebellion of the ten tribes. The new inhabitants of Samaria did not fear the Lord, and so God sent lions among them as punishment for their lack of the fear of the Lord. In the end the king of Assyria ordered that one of the priests be sent back to teach the new inhabitants how to serve the God of the land.

It is important to understand that the fear of the Lord is not about terror but about deep respect and an acknowledgment of God's authority. This principle guides us in life and helps us live in harmony with His teachings. So choosing to cultivate the fear of the Lord is essential if we are to gain wisdom and live a life that reflects God's values and principles. That priest was brought to Samaria, and he began to teach the people how to fear the Lord. In our own setting, most of us were born into the Orthodox Church, Romania's traditional church, and we did not know the fear of the Lord. Now it is vital that we learn this fear, that we understand how to fear the Lord. We will look at the story of a man who had a human fear of the Lord, and we will pick out his mistakes so that we do not repeat them. Let us open the book of 1 Samuel to learn more.

We can often find ourselves in situations like his, when, even though we are God's children and have received His Word, there is a risk that we lose the fear of the Lord and turn away from the Word, or from God Himself. Let us read 1 Samuel 13:5: *"And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven."* In this hard situation the men of Israel found themselves in a tight spot and hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in high places and in pits. To understand the background better, let us read verse 19: *"Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears."* So the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to sharpen their tools.

In 1 Samuel 13:22 we learn that on the day of battle not one man among the people with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or a spear, except Saul and his son Jonathan. In this time of distress the men of Israel hid, and some of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was at Gilgal, and all the people with him were trembling, not with the fear of the Lord, but with human fear. Saul waited seven days, as Samuel had instructed, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people began to scatter. So Saul gave the order: *"Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings,"* and he went ahead and offered the burnt offering. Just as he had finished offering it, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to meet him and greet him. Samuel asked him: *"What hast thou done?"* Saul explained that, seeing the people scattering, seeing that Samuel had not come at the appointed time and that the Philistines had gathered at Michmash, he had thought: *"The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD."* So, under the pressure of these circumstances, he decided to offer the burnt offering.

Saul did not commit obvious sins such as stealing, lying, cheating or adultery. Even so, the big problem was that he had not prayed to God before the battle. *"Thou camest not within the days appointed... and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore."* This act of presumption raises the question of whether or not Saul had lost the fear of the Lord. Even

though he offered the burnt offering and the sacrifices, Samuel rebuked Saul for acting without wisdom and for not keeping the commandment God had given him, saying: *"Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee."* This is an example showing that when we do not keep God's commandments, we act without wisdom and we do not show the fear of the Lord.

Next we will look at another episode in Saul's life, reading from chapter 15, starting at verse 1. Samuel passed on the Lord's message to Saul, saying: *"The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, 'I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'"* This was the clear command God gave Saul through Samuel.

Saul received the Lord's command and gathered the army, numbering them in Telaim: two hundred thousand footmen and ten thousand men of Judah. He came to the city of Amalek and laid an ambush in the valley. According to verse 7, *"Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt."* He took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive and wiped out all the people with the edge of the sword. Yet Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs and everything of value, destroying only what was worthless. The Lord told Samuel that He regretted having made Saul king, because Saul had not kept the Lord's words, which proved that he did not fear Him. Samuel spent the night crying out to the Lord.

In the morning Samuel set out to meet Saul. He was told that Saul had gone to Carmel, where he had set up a monument for himself, and had then gone on down to Gilgal. When they met, Saul said to Samuel: *"Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD."* Amen. Saul considered himself to be in line with the Lord's will, but had he really kept God's Word? *"Blessed be thou of the LORD."* To what extent had Saul kept the command? What percentage of the Lord's word had Saul kept? Had he kept something, or nothing at all?

Saul killed every person except one. If we take a hypothetical number of twelve thousand people, and he spared only one, then just 0.001% was the cause of his departing from the command. He kept the valuable animals and gave a reason for it, but in his heart he believed he had kept God's word. Did Saul fear the Lord or not? *"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life"*, it is *"the beginning of wisdom."* Samuel said to Saul: *"What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"* Saul answered: *"They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."* Here Saul draws a clear line: the people spared the animals, not God. It is important to notice this distinction: "Not him. The people."

Then Samuel says to Saul: *"Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night."* Saul answers: *"Say on."* Samuel goes on: *"When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou

not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.'"* Samuel reminds Saul of the mission God had given him and asks him: *"Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?"*

Saul answers Samuel: *"Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me."* Saul stands by what he did, convinced that he had not done wrong and had acted according to God's will. He explains: *"And have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal."* Saul mentions the purpose for which the people spared the animals: to sacrifice them to the Lord.

Samuel answers Saul by stating God's principle: *"Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?"* Here Samuel stresses that obeying God matters more than sacrifices. Saul and the people thought that by sacrificing the animals they would win God's favour, believing He would appreciate their good intentions and overlook their disobedience. Or perhaps they even thought they would please God with these sacrifices. But because they had not obeyed, God did not value their sacrifices; He looked at their disobedience. God asks: *"Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings, in sacrifices, in the gifts that were brought, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?"* The point is that to obey is better than sacrifice, and that keeping His Word matters more than the fat of rams. Here we can add, figuratively, the fear of the Lord: it is above sacrifices, and keeping His Word out of deep respect for God matters more than the fat of rams. Disobedience, even partial or small, is no less serious just because it was not open, flagrant disobedience. The people destroyed everything, showing mercy to no one, keeping God's Word.

Disobedience is as bad as witchcraft, and stubbornness is no less wicked than worshipping idols and household gods. *"Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king."* We remember the parable of the sower, especially the seed that falls on stony ground: that is the person who receives God's Word with joy but quickly gives it up when trouble comes. Saul, for example, faced trouble and gave up God's Word, fearing people more than God, because the trouble came from people. Saul confessed to Samuel: *"I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."* Here we see two sides of Saul's fear: he feared the people, and he obeyed their voice instead of obeying God.

Thinking about the situation, we see there were two hundred thousand footmen and ten thousand men of Judah, two hundred and ten thousand men in all. These wanted to keep the animals, while Saul alone wanted to keep God's command. If Saul says he feared the people, we can infer that the people threatened him. Fear of people can be a common concern, but why should we be afraid of anyone? What can a man do? Yes, he can hurt us or threaten us, but *"I feared the people, and obeyed their voice"* shows us that fear can lead to actions we should never take.

These examples are very clear and vivid, and they help us understand how we should relate to God and to His Word. Let us go further into Proverbs and read from chapter 1, paying close attention to the role the fear of the Lord plays in our lives as Christians, as God's children, and in the lives of those who have received His Word with joy. We read from verse 28: *"Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."* Amen. This is the outcome for those who did not choose the fear of the Lord: they will bear the consequences of their choices.

We continue reading in chapter 2 about wisdom and the fear of the Lord, starting at verse 1: *"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."* This teaches us that by seeking wisdom and understanding with all our heart, we will come to understand the fear of the Lord and gain the knowledge of Him.

Finally, in chapter 3, verse 13, we find: *"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding."* This underlines the happiness and blessing that come with gaining wisdom and understanding. Let us look especially at chapter 19 to understand the fear of the Lord better and how to apply it in our lives. We begin with verse 16: *"He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul."* This teaches us that watching over our way can save our life. It is important to keep the commandment, or in other words, to let ourselves be led by God's Word. Let us think of Saul and his mistakes. What did Saul fail to keep? God's command. He claimed he had kept the Lord's word, but in the end he admitted: *"I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD... because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."* The fear of man is a snare, as God's Word tells us. Verse 23 of Proverbs 19 says: *"The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."* Amen.

Let us also look at Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 26, which speaks of strong confidence for those who fear the Lord. We will talk about that confidence shortly, but let us first read Proverbs 13, verse 3, on the fear of the Lord: *"He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."* And verse 13: *"Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment* (or the Word of God) *shall be rewarded."* In chapter 14, verse 2, we learn that *"He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him."*

In Psalm 25, David shows us through a prayer how essential the fear of the Lord is. We read verses 4 and 5: *"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation."* This is the prayer of David, a man reaching for spiritual heights. And in verse 9 we come to humility, to how the reward of humility and the fear of the Lord is riches, honour and life. *"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek

will he teach his way."* So we see there is a close link between humility and the fear of the Lord, and that God works with the humble. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. *"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."* According to Scripture, all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to those who keep His covenant and His commandments, and to those who fear Him.

Verses 12 to 14 say: *"What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose."* This rhetorical question highlights how important it is to fear the Lord. In Acts, chapter 10, we are told that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, whoever works righteousness and fears Him is accepted by Him. This shows that God accepts everyone, from any nation, who lives righteously and fears Him. Such a man's soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the land. The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and the covenant He makes with them gives them instruction. Amen.

The fear of the Lord is essential in God's plan of salvation. There is a difference between human fear and the fear of the Lord; the second leads us to life and is a fountain of life. The Lord shows the way to those who fear Him, and His friendship is for them. The covenant made with Him gives instruction. In the New Testament we see that this fear of the Lord, which we find in the Old Testament, is also handed on by the Lord Jesus. Some may think that in our day there is only grace, and that the fear of the Lord belonged to former times, under the Law. But grace is God's mercy, not an excuse to sin. Saul, who was under the Law and not under grace, was punished because he did not have the fear of the Lord. We who are under grace, if we do not have the fear of the Lord, must ask ourselves whether we will be forgiven, and whether God loves us and accepts us just as we are.

Let us look at what the Lord Jesus says about the fear of the Lord in Matthew, chapter 10, verse 28. It is important to understand whether New Testament believers had this fear of the Lord too. The Lord Jesus Himself had the fear of the Lord, and His delight was in that fear. According to Matthew 10:28: *"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* Amen. What we should fear is not physical punishment but the consequences of ignoring God's Word. *"I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."* This shows that keeping the Word was not Saul's priority. It is essential that we keep His Word, as He teaches us: *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"*, keep my Word.

In Acts, chapter 2, from verse 37, we read about a crowd of people who were deeply moved after hearing Peter's sermon. *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* they asked. Peter answered them: *"Repent,"* and urged them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, promising that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Verses 41 to 43 show us that those who received the message were baptized and joined the believers, and about three thousand souls were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, and they were all filled with deep reverence for the Lord. Amen.

This fear was one of reverence, a longing to follow the example of the Lord Jesus in keeping God's Word. In Philippians, chapter 2, verse 12, the apostle Paul urges: *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* Paul stresses that it is God who works in us, urging us to follow His will with reverence and humility, whether he himself is present or not. It is important to understand why we must submit and work according to God's will. God is the One who works in us, and our obedience is essential so that He can complete the work He has begun in each of us.

Time is short, and in our discussion we have also included examples of people who showed a reverent fear of the Lord and faithfully followed His commands. Among them are Noah and Abraham. In Abraham's case, when he was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac, God said to him: *"Now I know that thou fearest God."* This shows that the Lord tests each one of us to see whether we fear Him or not. It is also an opportunity for us to examine where we stand spiritually. Of Noah it is said that, *"moved with fear,"* he did all that the Lord had commanded him. Let us ask the Lord to help us take this lesson to heart.

The Epistle to the Romans says that some have no fear of God before their eyes. That is why it is essential for us to cultivate a fear of God that guides us and brings us joy in following Him. Let us remember that the Lord Jesus loved the Father and kept His Word. Amen.

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