

**Sermon on the Commemoration of the Royal Martyrdom  
Preached at the Festival of the Tennessee Society  
of King Charles the Martyr, Clarksville, Tennessee  
by The Rev'd Roger Senechal, Chaplain  
27 January 2018**

Let's turn to our Epistle reading for today from First Peter 2:17. In this verse The Apostle's readers are told without any elaboration at all to "fear God."

What, theologically, is meant in the Bible by the term "The Fear of the Lord"? This expression has caused some confusion because we are told more than once in the Bible we had better fear the Lord – and then many times we are encouraged not to fear Him. E.G. in Exodus 20:20 we are told to do both in the same sentence: "Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that you may have enough fear of Him to keep you from sinning." Wishing to clarify the matter, Reformer Martin Luther distinguished between what he called a servile fear of God and a filial fear. "Servile" refers to a posture of a slave toward one's malevolent, cruel owner.

Luther contrasts that to a child who has tremendous respect and love for his [grand] father/mother and who dearly wants to please them. Such a child has a fear of or an anxiety about offending the one he loves, not because he's afraid of a beating or other punishment, but rather because he's afraid of displeasing a beloved parent. That type of fear is related to having a sense of awe and respect for the majesty of God. However, Luther taught, we still should have in us an understanding that God's power CAN be frightening. We should fear His righteous discipline, and therefore seek to live our lives in such a way that pleases Him. In the words of Ex 20:20 we should pray that we may have enough of the fear of God in us to keep us from sinning. That is a good kind of fear . . . So are we to fear God's divine wrath and His terrible swift sword? Absolutely! But it's even more important to be in a right Father/son/daughter relationship with Him so that my deepest longing is to please Him in all things because I love Him above all else and do not want in any way to hurt or offend Him or to grieve His heart in any way. This is the kind of relationship of reverential awe we are to have with God.

Someone wrote "“This way of fearing the Lord is never to be feared. For this type of fear is not a barrier to relationship with God, but a breakthrough to growth and eternal [blessedness].” It does include fear of God's discipline for sin, so that we live our lives in such a way that pleases Him. “And this type of fear is really wisdom, because understanding what (dis)pleases - God, is clearly **the** most important thing in all the world to be wise about.”

In about 2 and a half weeks Lent will have just begun. May I suggest that one way to observe Lent is to do a relationship inventory by asking our self questions like: Lord, am I growing in my love-relationship with You? Is the deepest desire of my heart to please

You, living much more out of love of You than of fear of You? May my greatest fear be -- not Your punishment -- but the fear of displeasing You in the slightest way, or of setting up any barrier in our relationship – which I treasure above all else. Help me, Lord, to always remember these wise words from St. Francis de Sales: “we ought to fear God out of love, not love God out of fear.”

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