Introduction

In the NASB, the phrases “fear the Lord” and “fear God” appear at least 82 times. There are other variants, to be sure. The meaning of “fear” in this biblical context ironically comes down to the fact that the answer to man’s fears for this life is fear of God—responding to Him out of reverence and respect to serve Him only. “You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.” (Deuteronomy 6:13) It’s the simultaneous act of living a life committed to what we worship. In this Psalm David provides insight into how his own fear of the Lord works and how we can tell if it’s sufficiently present in our own walk and behavior.

Read verses 1-3

Q: Based on these verses, what would you say the fear of the Lord begins with?
A: Praise; giving Him the credit.

Q: Yes, but examine the activities David describes. Is this one-time or occasional praise?
A: “...at all times...” and “...continually...” sort of jump out at you. Notice that it’s not just with the mouth but from the soul, something that is not only sincere but constantly with us—something we might term “a continual attitude of praise”.

Q: Is this a solo or exclusively private activity?
A: In v.3 David’s praise is infectious, spreading to everyone around him. His praise is not just visible but promoting participation.

Application: Praise is the most visible sign of our respect and fear of the Lord.

- Can you give something due respect—even exalted respect—without lauding it for its superior qualities?
- Would you characterize your praise of God to be indwelling and always active, or just something that comes up once a week during church service?
- Do you see that praise is the most visible sign of our respect and fear for the One True God?
Read verses 4-7

Q: What do each of these characterizations have in common? Of what do they collectively speak?
A: We should know from both our own personal experience and from the testimony of others that we are always in the center of His protection.

Application: We are always in the center of His protection.

- How can you not respect and revere He Who answers, delivers, hears, saves, and rescues us?
- Shouldn’t that give a healthy boost to our godly fear of Him?

Read verses 8-14

Q: According to v.8, is our fear of the Lord something accomplished from afar?
A: It specifically describes our position as taking “refuge in Him”; that is, to dwell continually in his presence and protection.

Q: Do v.9-10 promise anything and everything desired by the heart of those who fear the Lord?
A: Absolutely not. First, to take refuge in Him will certainly have an effect on what you want—your desires change from your own to His; and second, we “shall not be in want of any good thing”, a personal judgment which is almost certainly to also come into alignment with God’s view of what is good and not our own. Our wants and desires come under His influence and subjection.

Q: So how are the actions described in v.11-13 an extension of our taking refuge in Him and bringing our wants and desires in alignment with His?
A: They’re all the actions of personal obedience. If we’re in the right place (taken refuge in Him), of the same mind (brought our wants and desires in alignment with His), our life’s actions and choices are brought into obedience to complete us.

- “...keep your tongue from evil...”
- “...keep...your lips from speaking deceit...:
- “...depart from evil and do good...”
- “...seek peace and pursue it.”

Application: To fear the Lord first begins with an attitude of praise, reinforced by living according to the knowledge of always being in His protection, and bringing one’s place, attitude, and heart into obedience to Him.
Read verses 15-18

Q: Does the Lord ever sleep? Then for how long are His eyes, ears, and face so fixed as described?
   A: Always. The point is that the Lord is always present, whether we are righteous or evildoers.

Point: Certainly everyone should fear God Who never sleeps, who is always near, and Whom we know will respond in kind to the deeds of each person. It’s important to note that God does not say the righteous will not experience trouble, a broken heart, or even a crushed spirit, but that He is faithful to respond, to deliver, and save from these conditions.

Application: Biblical fear understands that the Lord is always present regardless of how we are living.
   • Do you fool yourself into thinking that God is not always watching, not always listening, or not always near?
   • How would the quality of your fear of the Lord change if you began to live like you believed this to be true?

Read verses 19-22

Q: Does a right relationship with God guarantee that one will never have any problems in this life?
   A: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous”. There will definitely be problems in this life. “But the LORD delivers him out of them all”. This is the difference between those who fear the Lord and those who don’t.

Q: What does the Lord do on behalf of the righteous—the one that biblically fears Him?
   • “delivers” (v.19)
   • “keeps” (v.20)
   • “redeems” (v.22)

Q: What happens to the wicked—those that don’t fear Him?
   • “slay” (v.21)
   • “condemned” (v.21)

Point: Here is the summary of God’s work in life, whether or not a person chooses to respect, revere, and regard Him as Lord of their life. Having this knowledge that in the end He lifts up those who choose Him and brings down those who don’t, we have the motivation to fear Him for knowing that He follows His Word through with His actions.

Application: In the end, God lifts up those who choose Him and brings down those who do not.
Overall Application

- Biblical “fear” begins with a heart that continually praises Him both in the inner man and visibly by encouraging others to do the same.
- Biblical “fear” is built out of our commitment to seek and remain in His protection, to take up refuge in Him rather than the world.
- Biblical “fear” is the result of following through with personal obedience.
- Biblical “fear” is borne out by what the Lord does, how differently He treats those who follow Him completely and those who do not.

Is our respect and reverence for God a part-time or full-time activity? Ever notice that the people who are the greatest examples of Christian maturity never cease to praise Him, never cease to talk about Him? Going forward, how are we going to properly fear the Lord?