

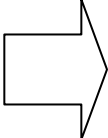
**A Mind That Fears**  
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***This is the second in a series of five about the mindset that God desires in his people.***

The divine intent for “such a heart as this always” (last week) is coupled with the conjunction “that”: “that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!” There are about 45 other occurrences of “that” in Deuteronomy indicating the Lord’s purpose. Many indicate the Lord’s intent to prosper the nation: to “live” and “prolong days” and for blessing in the land.

Six times, however, God’s intent for Israel (indicated by “that”) focused on acquiring the fear of the Lord (5:29; 6:2, 2x, and “learn to fear the Lord” in 14:23; 17:20; 31:12). In addition, the particle “that” appears in 4:10 with this significance: “Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.”

Similarly, Deuteronomy 10:12—13 expresses God’s didactic purpose. Moses asked, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you?” The answer includes five verbs that provide a context for understanding reverence for God and his motive for dealing with Israel. In fact, the answer positions four verbs in apposition with fear that associate it with the Lord’s overall purpose for Israel thematically akin to Deuteronomy 5:29:

fear the Lord your God	
walk in all his ways	
love him	
serve (with all your heart and with all your soul)	
keep the commandments and statutes	
	
	for your good

In Deuteronomy, God-fearers were typified by an intellectual acknowledgment of God’s voice: “my words” (4:10), “commandments” (5:29), “statutes” (6:2, 24), and “all the words of this law written in this book” (28:58). Behaviorally, those who possessed a heart that fears “serve” and “swear” by the Lord’s name (6:13), “walk in his ways” (8:6), “hold fast to him” (10:20, “obey his voice” (13:4), “read” God’s word (17:19), and “purge evil” from their midst (21:21). These intellectual and behavioral criteria amplify the idiomatic expression cited by Moses in Exodus 20:20, “that the fear of him may be ‘upon your faces’” (“be before you”). John I. Durham renders the expression as, “be always before you, on your mind.” The phrase indicates that the fear of the Lord should “always be before them as a constant preoccupation of mind.” To state the idea colloquially: godly fear functioned as a gyroscope balancing their mind amidst disorienting messages from the other nations or as an internal GPS device that guided their spiritual pilgrimage.

Similarly, throughout the Old Testament, godly fear signified intellectual humility and ethical rectitude typified by Proverbs 3:7: “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.” Thus, Abram did not withhold Isaac from sacrifice, even though it was inconceivable (Gen 22:12); Joseph rejected Potiphar’s wife’s enticement as a “great wickedness” (39:9); Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh to protect the baby Moses (Exod 1:17); Yahweh-fearing servants of Pharaoh sheltered their livestock during the plagues (Exod 9:20); leaders would not accept bribes (Exod 18:21); kings ruled justly (2 Sam 23:3); and “turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Obadiah feared the Lord and hid the prophets from Ahab (1 Kings 18:4). Jonah “offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows” (Jonah 1:16). The righteous remnant accepted God’s “correction” (Zeph 3:7). Zerubbabel and Joshua “obeyed the voice of the Lord” (Haggai 1:12).

And those who still “feared the Lord” after the exile “esteemed his name” (Mal 3:16).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, when Israel saw God’s great deeds, they “believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses” (Exod 14:31) and when Samuel called upon the Lord, the “people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel” (1 Sam 12:18).

Today, are we also guided by the fear of God? Can you and I point to decisions or actions we *did not* take because we knew they would dishonor the Lord? Or can you and I point to decisions or actions we *did* take which did, in fact, dishonor the Lord?

When do sin in this way, we should remember the prayer of confession from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer:

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> It is useful to compare the outlook and behavior of those who do “not fear” the Lord (2 Kings 17:25, 34; Isa 57:11; Jer 5:22; 26:19; Hos 10:3; Ps 55:19).