

The fear of God seems, to many, like an antiquated concept unsuited for modern sermons. Today this idea is a tough sell, but it is still very relevant and important. The Bible brings up the issue of fearing God more than a hundred times. Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 say there is no true wisdom without the fear of God. Genesis 20:11 shows that absence of the fear of God is associated with a lack of morality and respect for others. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says that fearing God is the duty of all mankind, and that to fear is to obey. Exodus 20:18-20 shows us that if we fear God, we have nothing to fear. Jeremiah 5:21-24 teaches that to know God is to fear Him. If we see Him as He is, we can't help but to fear. John has the same response in Revelation 1:17-18, but God tells him not to fear. These passages should impress you with the importance of the issue. Fearing God is still crucial today.

Genesis 22 is the last major episode from the life of Abraham. You may recall that God called Abram when he was living in a pagan land. Abram recognized the voice of God, packed up, and left for Canaan. In his old age Abram had no offspring, but God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Through Abram's offspring, all nations would be blessed. God then established the covenant of circumcision and changed Abram's name to Abraham. God said that the child of promise would be born from Sarah, and eventually that son proved to be Isaac. In chapter 22 Isaac is referred to twice as "your son, your only son." Isaac was the only son through whom the nation of Israel would spring.

So we know by now Abraham has had many discussions with God. He recognizes God's voice. In Genesis 22:1, God tests Abraham. We know it was a test, but Abraham does not. In this chapter, Abraham's name is called by God, Isaac, and the angel. Each time he answers, "Here I am." Throughout the story, Abraham behaves in a very matter-of-fact way, as if this request to sacrifice his only son was ordinary. There isn't a hint of hesitation on Abraham's part. The passage doesn't mention what is going on in his mind. But every verb in the narrative demonstrates his obedience. He got up early, saddled his donkey, took his servants and son, cut wood, and set out for the place God had told him about. Abraham recognized the voice of God and knew what he had to do. But by now he also knows that God keeps His promises. He says in v. 5, "**We** will worship and then **we** will come back to you." He didn't know how God would

keep His promise, but he knew He would. This knowledge is also reflected when he tells Isaac that God will provide the lamb. And once again from v. 8 all the verbs point to Abraham's complete obedience without hesitation, even to the point of raising the knife to slay his son. In the narrative so far there are 18 verbs describing Abraham's actions, each of which is a step in the direction of obedience. And Abraham doesn't even flinch. We might think that in this passage Abraham displays great faith and obedience. Hebrews 11 and James 2 both use this story to show Abraham as a model of ideal faith. But in v. 12 we see that what Abraham actually showed was that he feared God. The demand to sacrifice one's son would be outrageous if it came from anyone but the one true God. When God makes a demand, there are no questions. Abraham isn't the hero here. This is about the almighty God, who calls, demands, promises, and provides. In fact, faith and the fear of God are the same. The importance of faith isn't in its quantity or quality, but in the object of the faith. It's all about the true God, who is awesome and fearsome. Abraham knew he heard from the true all-powerful God. That's what made Abraham obey. One only needs true knowledge of God to fear Him. The most important truth about God is that He is the King of all. Even the earth trembles in His presence. To know Him is to fear Him. He holds our bodies and our souls in His hands. He is to be feared because He is fearsome, not because we are so holy and pious. We fear God because of who He is. We often fear man more than God. Whose disapproval do you most fear? To those you fear, you give power over you. If you fear man, you don't fear God. Confess and ask for God to break you free of the fear of man. See God for who He is and fear Him. Those who fear Him have nothing to fear; those who don't fear Him have everything to fear. Cultivate the fear of God. Know, fixate on, meditate on, dwell on, and obsess over God. We can never think too highly or know too much about God.