

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Learning to Reverence God

by Dan Trygg

“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 17:18-20

“...when all Israel comes to appear before Yahweh your God..., you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people-- men, women, children, and foreigners living within your gates-- so that they may listen and learn to fear Yahweh your God and be careful to follow all the words of this law.”

Deuteronomy 31:11,12

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”

Acts 9:31

“Establish Your word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You.”

Psalms 119:38

In II Kings 22, Josiah the king commissioned the priests to make repairs to the Temple in Jerusalem. His father and grandfather had been among the most evil kings of Judah. During their reigns, the Temple had not been properly maintained, and had even been vandalized. **The young king had chosen to depart from the sins of his fathers, and to follow Yahweh.** As the workmen, Levites and priests worked to remove the refuse, repair the damages, and cleanse the sanctuary for holy use, once again, **they found a copy of the book of the Law (probably Deuteronomy) among the articles being removed from the building. This was reported to the king, who asked that it be read to him.** *As he listened, a growing conviction and mounting horror developed, as he realized how deeply the nation had departed from God's ways, broken His covenant, and had stored up judgment against themselves!* **He stood up, tore his robes in grief and repentance, and asked the priests to inquire of Yahweh on his behalf, and on the behalf of the people,** since it was obvious that *God's wrath against them was great,* because of the nation's many sins. Interestingly, the priests themselves were not equipped to do this. They, themselves, did not have a relationship with Yahweh that was deep enough to know how to consult God, and receive His counsel. **They sought out a woman who was known as a prophetess, named Huldah.** She was the wife of a Levite in charge of caring for the Temple wardrobe, the garments worn by the priests, and possibly uniforms worn by the gatekeepers. Only two other women in the OT are called prophetesses, Miriam, the sister of Moses (Ex. 15:20), and Deborah, who judged Israel in the book of Judges (4:4). Even though Jeremiah the prophet had been ministering for five years, the reputation of Huldah as one who could hear from God was well established. **She was highly respected, and lived right in the second quarter of the city, a suburb of the old city of David.** Her return message was, “Thus says Yahweh God of Israel, ‘*Regarding the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before Yahweh* when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, *and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,*’ declares Yahweh. ‘Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and *you shall be gathered to your grave in peace,* neither shall your eyes see all the evil which I will bring on this place’” (vss. 18-20). **Because Josiah heard and believed the word of God, he developed a healthy fear and respect that were pleasing to Yahweh.**

Note that **God had prescribed that the king was to write out a copy of the Law by hand,** in the presence of the Levitical priests (to make sure he copied it *accurately,* and possibly to *answer any questions* he may have). **He was to keep this handwritten copy with him, and read from it every day.** The purpose for this discipline was so that “**he might learn to fear God**”. The word “fear” is jarring to our ears. We do not like to think that God is someone we need to be afraid of. **There are different words for “fear” in Hebrew. This word does not mean to “be terrified of”. It does mean a healthy fear, reverence and respect, however.** *We need to know that God is dangerous, if we disregard or mock Him.* Jesus Himself said, “I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But *I will warn you whom to fear:* fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear *Him!*” (Lk. 12:4-5) Some people laugh at the belief of existence after physical death, and the possibility of eternal punishment. Jesus, however, said it was true. Aside from that, however, **there are consequences and judgments that God will bring upon us in this life, and upon our families and our nation, if we disregard and mock His revealed will.** In His clear description of who He is, God told Moses that He was “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps faithful-love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet *He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished,* visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Ex. 34:6-7).

God is the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25). **God can be wonderfully kind and gracious to those who will respect Him, but He can be equally harsh and severe with those who disobey and resist His will** (Rom. 11:22). In the delightful children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis captures the balance between fear, love and respect. When one of the children, Susan, is to meet Aslan, the Lion, who is the King of Narnia (a Christ figure in the book), her guide, Mr. Beaver, tells her, "'Aslan is a lion - *the* Lion, the *great* Lion.' 'Ooh' said Susan. 'I'd thought he was a man. Is he ... quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion'. ... 'Safe?' said Mr. Beaver ... 'Who said anything about *safe*? Course he *isn't* safe. But he's *good*. He's the *King*, I tell you.'" **God is not safe, to those who are evil, or who disregard Him. He will judge the wickedness of people, and of societies.** Just read the OT, and you will see how this works out in real-life history. **Respect, reverence, even healthy fear are appropriate responses to a holy God. Love, delight and praise are also appropriate to Him who has shown grace, offers love, forgiveness and daily care.** God is *not* to be trifled with, ...and He *is* the Judge, both in this life and for eternity.

It is righteousness that exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people (Prov. 14:34). "Loyalty and truth preserve a ruler, and he upholds his position of authority by righteousness" (Prov. 20:28). God's law reveals the spiritual/moral principles and practices that will bring His *blessing*, ...or His *opposition and judgments* (e.g., Deut. 4:6; 27:1-28:68). **God commanded that His people read the scriptural account of His dealings with humankind, His laws and His commandments, so that we would learn to reverence Him,** ...that we would obtain a healthy fear and appreciation of Him. Note that **true respect and reverence will translate into actions of obedience.** We "learn to fear Yahweh ...by carefully keeping all the words His law and His statutes". A true reverence for God cannot be cavalier toward Him, or His commands or statutes. **A healthy respect and fear of God will want to come to know who He is, how He operates, and what He expects of us. How can you say that you reverence God, if you don't invest the time to read His word, or if you do not adjust your life to His expectations? God prescribed set times when the Scriptures were to be read aloud to all His people,** ...men, women, children and foreigners living among them..., **so that they would learn to fear Him and keep His directives.** This is important. *We must be people of the Book!* God gave us His word *for our good*, to teach us His ways, ...*so that we could experience the blessings and benefits that come with following His counsel, and avoid the pain and hardships that follow disobedience.* **This is not just a religious book, it is a manual for life.** If we will read it, and follow its teachings, we will develop a healthy respect for God, an appreciation for His care and wisdom. If we ignore it, and live in violation of its teachings, we will bring disaster and judgment upon ourselves. **We ignore it to our own peril.** Not only *individuals*, but *nations*, will rise or fall, ...be blessed and established, or be cursed and suffer ruin..., based upon whether or not they respect God and abide by His teachings, or go their own way. God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6).

What can we do? It is God's word that produces reverence for Him. **The Spirit uses the word of God to convict people of sin, and to show them their need.** As we see in the example of Josiah, if we really listen to God's word, we will come to see our need, and be brought to our knees. **We need to get into God's word for ourselves, first. Then, we need to do all we can to get other people to read or listen to God's word,** praying that their eyes will be opened, their hearts will be changed, and they will learn to fear and reverence the Creator. It is so important that we communicate that this not "old people's religion", or "American religion", or the "white man's religion", or the "religion of the establishment", ...**this is the truth of who God is, what He expects, and how He works in the lives of people, regardless of age, race, gender, class or nationality. You cannot escape Him,** any more than you can escape the law of gravity, or the need to breathe oxygen. **You live in the world He made.** He designed it, ...and you. If you respect and listen to Him, He can teach you how to live *well*, and help you find life that is *abundant and fruitful*. If you disregard Him, you may find some temporary pleasures, but you will sow seeds of *pain, ruin and destruction*. He may allow you to go your way for a time, but **in the end you will have to answer to Him, and you will be judged by His standards and values. God is not asking for your approval.** He is not running for reelection. He is not trying to win a popularity contest. He is the one and only God. There are *no* other real gods (Isa. 45:5,6,21,22). There were none before Him, and there will be none after Him (Isa. 43:10,11). He is who He is, and He is unchangeable (Ex. 3:14; Mal. 3:6). **We either learn to reverence and fear Him, or we will be thrust away from Him forever. He is giving us a chance. He is giving us an opportunity to escape pain and self-destruction, and find Life and fulfillment in Him.** "The fear of Yahweh is *the beginning of knowledge*; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). "And God said to humankind, 'Behold, the fear of Yahweh, *that is wisdom*; and *to depart from evil is understanding*'" (Job 28:28). "The fear of Yahweh *leads to life*, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil" (Prov. 19:23). "The fear of Yahweh is a *wellspring of life*, that one may avoid the snares of death" (Prov. 14:27). "By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for, and *by the fear of Yahweh one keeps away from evil*" (Prov. 16:6). "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!" (Psa. 111:10)