Biblical Fear: What Does It Really Mean?

Key Idea

Scripture uses the word **fear** in two very different ways. One kind of fear—anxiety, panic, and cowardice—is something God repeatedly tells us not to live under. The other—the fear of the Lord—is a deep reverence, awe, worship, and trust that God commands and blesses.

Original Words

Yare' (Hebrew): fear, reverence, awe, honor.
Pachad (Hebrew): terror, dread, panic.
Phobos (Greek): fear, alarm, awe, reverence.
Deilia (Greek): cowardice or timidity (2 Timothy 1:7).

Two Kinds of Fear

Ungodly fear focuses on circumstances and produces anxiety, worry, avoidance, and unbelief.

Godly fear focuses on God's holiness and produces wisdom, humility, worship, obedience, confidence, and trust.

Key Scriptures

Proverbs 9:10 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
Proverbs 14:26 – In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence.
Isaiah 41:10 – Fear not, for I am with you.
2 Timothy 1:7 – God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.

Biblical Definition

Biblically, fear has two meanings. Ungodly fear is anxiety, dread, or cowardice that shifts our focus away from God's promises. Godly fear is reverence, awe, and humble trust that recognizes God's holiness and leads us to worship and obey Him.

5 Key Points to Remember

1. Not all fear is sinful; the Bible distinguishes between ungodly fear and the fear of the Lord.

2. The fear of the Lord leads to wisdom, confidence, and life.

3. God does not promise a life without frightening moments, but He promises His presence.

4. Courage is obeying God even when you feel afraid.

5. The more you stand in awe of God, the less you are controlled by fear of people or circumstances.

Check Your Knowledge

1. What is the difference between ungodly fear and the fear of the Lord?

2. Which original Greek word in 2 Timothy 1:7 means cowardice or timidity?

3. According to Proverbs 9:10, what is the beginning of wisdom?

4. Why does God so often say, 'Do not fear' throughout Scripture?

5. Name one practical way you can replace ungodly fear with faith this week.