

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

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"There is no fear in love; but perfect (Divine) love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." I John 4:18

Fear is a direct result of the fall of Adam, and is a tremendous scourge to both believer and unbeliever. It is greatly detrimental, and three major facts concerning it are recorded in our text. (1). Fear and love will not dwell in the same heart, meaning that we cannot love someone and fear him at the same time. (2). Fear is a tormentor, and God has gone to great lengths to design and execute redemption that we might be free from it. (3). If one is fearful, love has not been perfected in his experience.

We can apply all of these facts to the multitude of fears which we face in the world today. But, do they apply to the Fear of the Lord? Many believers insist that the Fear of the Lord means that we must fear Him to the point that we will abstain from all evil activity. Someone has declared: "If you put enough of the fear of God in people, they will cease from evil." One quotation used in support of this argument is found in Proverbs 16:6: "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." However, Jesus said: "If ye love me keep my commandments."

Many Scriptures emphatically tell us that we are to fear the Lord. It is written that Job feared God and hated evil (Chapter One). Solomon summed up the entire book of Ecclesiastes by declaring: "Fear God and keep His commandments, that is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). It is expressed as a command in Deuteronomy 6:13: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God." Just what do these verses mean? We are not to be afraid of God, because that would violate the statements of fear and love in the text. There are also some examples in Scripture which testify that such fear hinders spiritual growth.

King David desired very much to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem (II Samuel 6). He had the ark placed on a cart and drawn by oxen. This idea was borrowed from the Philistines who had stolen it earlier. When the oxen shook the cart, Uzzah, fearful that the ark was going to fall, put out his hand to steady it, and he was smitten by the Lord for his error. David was displeased because of it and "was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?"

God had given explicit directions how to transport the ark, and evidently someone read those instructions, for we read later that "when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he (David) sacrificed oxen and fatlings. And David danced before the Lord" (II Samuel 6:13-14). **IT WAS NOT A HAPPY OCCASION WHEN DAVID WAS AFRAID OF THE LORD.** He did not have the answers he longed for. He did not call on the Name of the Lord in prayer, nor did he worship Him at that point, neither did he experience a joy and intimacy with the Lord until that fear was removed. Men are experiencing the same fear today, when they do not understand nor rightly divide the Word of Truth. They are in great straits and fearful, because they do not have a revelation of Who God is. What a change takes place when God's love is revealed to them!

Another example of fear as a detriment to the believer is found in Hebrews 12,

concerning the covenants of law and grace. "For ye are not come to the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest . . . and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more . . . And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned . . . And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (12:18-21). IF FEAR CAN CAUSE PEOPLE TO DEPART FROM EVIL, THEN THIS DEMONSTRATION SHOULD HAVE PRODUCED AN ENTIRE SPIRITUAL GENERATION OF ISRAELITES!

There is an interesting paradox in II Kings 17:33, where we read that the people "feared the Lord and served their own gods." This seems to be an impossible statement, but it is a part of the Word of God. In Hebrews 12, Paul declares that we have not been called to the mountain of fear, and indeed, history proves that their fear did not deter Israel from bowing down to the golden calf almost immediately afterwards. Throughout their journeys, though they were often afraid of God, they did not depart from evil, neither did they have the intimacy that God has provided through grace. They requested of Moses, "You speak to Him and bring us word again, but do not make us talk to this fearful God."

The day the law was to be given, bounds were set which pushed the people back from the mount. Such is the ministry of law even today. Those who make their place under such a covenant, also find themselves in a place of bondage and fear. We have not been called to Mount Sinai, but Paul clearly declares: "Ye are come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22). The blessings are bountiful to those dwelling around this mountain.

The Apostle Peter gives an insight to fear when he exhorts: "Servants, be subject to your master with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (perverse)" (I Peter 2:18). Tests and studies have proved conclusively that employees who are in literal fear of their employers do not perform well. Their creativity and productivity are diminished if they are laboring under fears of certain ultimatums.

Peter continues this same line of exhortation as he says: "Likewise ye wives be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation coupled with fear" (I Peter 3:1-2). Peter cannot mean that wives should be afraid of their husbands. There are many tragic situations of wives who are terrified of their husbands because of severe physical and mental abuse. Such fear does not produce a good and productive relationship. Requirements or demands may be met out of fear, and in some cases, guilt, but the relationship is not a healthy one. There is no love and trust present.

The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. If one is afraid of God, there cannot be a pre-eminent love for Him. Whether he will admit it or not, such a person is tormented by the fear of what this great God of judgment and punishment is about to do. For this reason, he cannot grow to spiritual maturity, because he cannot be made perfect in love. If fear rather than love dominates his life, this attitude is directed toward others also.

It is imperative that we possess a fear of the Lord, but what is it? The word literally means "to frighten, be afraid, and dread," both in the Old and New Testaments. In

addition, however, it also means "to reverence." The Hebrew word is translated many times as "terrible." The citations quoted from Peter are translated by Weymouth and others to mean "utmost respect, or reverence." The word "reverence," according to Webster's Dictionary means "profound respect mingled with love and awe." It was undoubtedly this meaning which motivated the authors in Scripture when they wrote about the fear of the Lord.

To an unbeliever, God is a God of judgment, as we read about the one who rejects Christ, who can expect "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:27). God's Word must be rightly divided. A search through the book of Job reveals that his "Comforters" spoke many truths, but they did not apply to Job. Likewise, the fear of the Lord is found in many places, and some citations do refer to God as a terrifying Judge. Other texts do not indicate this, however, as Job 37:22 proclaims: "With God is terrible (fearful) majesty, men do therefore fear Him."

Other Scriptures: "Come and see the works of God, He is terrible in His doings toward the children of men" (Psalm 66:5). "He is thy praise, He is thy God that hath done for thee great and terrible things: (Deuteronomy 10:21). These great and terrible things were not acts of judgment and punishment, but mighty works of deliverance, such as the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters made sweet at Marah, the manna falling from heaven, and water pouring from the Rock in the wilderness. It is THIS MAJESTY that causes us to stand in awe of Him. It is not a fear or dread that He will turn His sword of destruction toward us, but a tremendous respect and love for Him.

Job couples God's majesty with our respect as he answers his tormentors: "Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. For He looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and He weigheth the waters by measure. When He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: Then did He see it, and declare it; He prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man He said, "BEHOLD, THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THAT IS WISDOM; AND TO DEPART FROM EVIL IS UNDERSTANDING" (Job 28:20-28).

The fear of the Lord is a result of knowing His great majesty and power, and it is declared to be wisdom. Paul interprets this: "Christ is made unto us wisdom, even righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30). Christ is made wisdom in our lives only as we submit to Him in reverence and awe, bowing before His majesty with the greatest respect and love. In the beginning of Job's story, it was said that he feared the Lord. He understood some of God's majesty and glory, but Job had much more to learn about the fear of the Lord. It was only through his great suffering that this man learned God's wisdom by experience. He learned wisdom as he submitted to the decisions which God made in his behalf.

In I Corinthians 1:30, we learn that there is a threefold expression of Wisdom. First, Christ is made unto us righteousness. When a sinner repents and accepts Christ as his

Savior, he is given the very righteousness of Jesus. This particular verse speaks of something more advanced than initial salvation. Christ is "made unto us" righteousness, that is, as we completely submit to Him, He produces practical works of righteousness in our daily experiences. Second, He is made unto us sanctification. Proverbs 16:6 is beautifully fulfilled here: "By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil." It is only as we have reverential fear of total submission and commitment to Him, do we depart from evil. Sanctification is more than a separation from; it is separation to the will of the Father, even as Jesus manifested in His life. Third, He is made unto us redemption. This statement especially speaks of our bodies which have been redeemed unto Him. Once again, it is only as we present that body to Him, that we experience Christ living in through it.

Jesus Himself experienced the same fear of which we have been considering. Hebrews 5:7 declares that He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears and "WAS HEARD IN THAT HE FEARED." Jesus was not afraid of His Father. The scene described took place in Gethsemane, where He surrendered Himself totally to God, uttering these immortal words, "Not my will but Thine be done." It is this same spirit that God would have in our lives, as Christ is made unto us Wisdom, which is the fear of the Lord.

In conclusion, we see a beautiful application of these truths in I John 4:17: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world." Love produces BOLDNESS, not fear, as being afraid of God in this day of judgment. This day is not referring to the judgment bar after this life is over. It expresses rather our attitude of the judgments and decisions that God makes in our lives right now. When we have this wisdom, or fear of the Lord, a perfect submission to the will of God, we are absolutely confident of His dealings with us. In our boldness, we can shout with Job: "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil" (Job 2:10). The reason is that "as He is, so are we in this world," meaning that the same spirit of love and confidence which Jesus manifested can be found in us also.

GOD' S BEST

God has His best things for the few who dare to stand the test.
God has His second choice for those who will not have His best.
It is not always open ill that risks the promised Rest;
The better often is the foe that keeps us from God' s best.
Some seek the highest choice, but, when by trials pressed,
They shrink, they yield, they shun the cross and so they lose God' s best.
Give me, O Lord, Thy highest choice, let others take the rest;
Their good things have no charm for me, I want Thy very best.
I want in this short life of mine, as much as can be pressed
Of service true for God and man; make me to be Thy best.

--A.B. Simpson

