
Love, Fear and Obedience

By David Wilkerson

August 17, 1992 "... By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil." (Proverbs 16:6) "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil..." (Proverbs 8:13) "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me..." (John 14:21) "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments..." (2 John 1:6)

Love, fear and obedience - when it comes to walking with God, they all mean the same thing. In the past I have preached on love for God, the fear of God and obedience to God, as if they were three different aspects of our relationship to the Lord. But I am learning now that these three are inseparable that you cannot practice one without the other two:

You cannot love God without having the fear of God in you. You cannot love Him without obeying His Word. And you do not truly fear God unless you love and obey Him.

Ask yourself: What is your motivation for gaining victory over lusts, passions and besetting sins? For obtaining holiness, godliness and purity of heart?

Some teach that only the fear of God provokes believers to flee lusts. They quote these biblical passages: "Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:16-18). "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7). "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (Proverbs 14:27).

Scripture says the early church was edified by "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:31) And Jeremiah said sinful Israel didn't follow God with all their heart because they didn't fear Him: "My fear is not in thee" (Jeremiah 2:19).

But other ministers teach that the only proper motivation against sin is love. I heard a Baptist pastor thundering on the radio recently: "Fear is not for the Christian - it has torment! You can't walk with God if you fear Him. Love is the only response to grace you'll ever need. If you love God, you'll obey Him."

This pastor absolutely ruled out the fear of God as any motivation for obedience to the Lord! The very idea of teaching people the holy fear of God seemed abhorrent to him.

Indeed, from pulpits everywhere today you hear mostly messages on love. There is little preaching about the fear of God - almost no powerful prophetic sermons that bring conviction of sin and compromise. Instead, pastors teach: "Just love Jesus with all your heart, and everything will be all right. We're not under the law - we're called to liberty! We all fail, but love covers all sin. So just learn to love. Love Jesus and the brethren, and you'll be guaranteed heaven."

That sounds good - but it's not what the Word of God says! You may answer, "But didn't Jesus say the two most important commandments hinge on love - that we're to love God and love our neighbor?"

Yes, He did! I have no argument with those who teach that love ought to be our primary motivation as believers. My problem is the difference between the modern-day church's definition of what Jesus calls love!

Love is not merely an emotion or an affection for Christ. It cannot be fully shown just through worship

or preaching. And it can't be measured by emotions. Many Christians can sit in church and feel great emotion, crying out to God and weeping and then walk straight out of the church and disobey God. Jesus says that's not loving Him!

Nothing Could Be Clearer in God's Word: Love Means Obeying the Commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus said the only kind of love acceptable to Him is obedience to His every command - obeying His Word in all things and at all times!

"If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15) "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Christ could not have made it plainer: Loving Him means obeying His every command!

But what produces a consistent, lasting obedience? I am convinced that godly, loving obedience springs from one source: the fear of the living God! Obedience birthed by a true and pious fear of God is love perfected. I offer the following Scriptures as proof:

"And hereby do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:3-5).

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

You don't hear these Scriptures preached from many pulpits today. Instead, Jesus is portrayed as a doting grandfather who overlooks sin! Of course, He knows we're all weak, and that at times we're going to fail. But Scripture is saying something different here: It's saying that obedience to His commands is love perfected - and the fear of God is what motivates us to obey!

Simply put it all boils down to this: If you truly have the fear of God in you, then you will obey His every word and by doing that, you will be loving Him in the way He says is acceptable to Him.

If you fear the Lord and obey His Word in all things, you won't have to keep examining your heart to see if you truly love Him. You won't keep trying to measure your love by your tears or lack of tears. You can simply rest in His Word - Christ's very own Word - that your obedience to Him is love!

Yet, on the other side of the coin are all the ways we think we express love for Jesus. For example, we can sit in His holy presence and sing tearfully: "Oh, how I love Jesus ..." "You're the love of my life..." "Jesus, you're the center of my joy..." But if we are not obeying God's Word in our daily life, then all our talking, preaching and singing about loving Jesus are nothing but sentimental soulfulness. It is all a sham!

God has commanded you to forsake the world, separate yourself from evil companions, and crucify your flesh with all its lusts and passions. Are you obeying Him in these things? If not - if you continually disobey the Word He has given you - then your worship is totally unacceptable to Him, it is as sounding brass, tinkling cymbals - meaningless noise!

Many Christians Do Not Take God's Word Seriously - They Don't Believe God Means What He Says! Did

Jesus really mean what He said to His own dear friends? He told the disciples, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell: yea. I say unto you Fear Him" (Luke 12:4-5).

Does God really mean it when He says, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15)? Or, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death?" (James 1:15).

I heard one preacher say recently, "You can't obey all the commandments in the Bible. And even if you did obey them all, it still wouldn't save you. That would be legalism!"

No! On the contrary we have tried to destroy Christ's commands by calling them the law! The wonderful commandments He gave us were for our good, to save us from ourselves and from our sins! He commanded us to repent. He commanded us to believe in Him and in the heavenly Father. And He commanded us to love our brother as ourselves to forgive others, and He in turn would forgive us.

If you are obeying these commands alone - to repent from your sins, to believe that the Father sent Jesus, and to love and forgive your brother - then you are saved! You're walking in the light as you have received it.

When Jesus says we're not saved by the law, He's talking about something altogether different. He's talking about our efforts to "earn" salvation - the way the Jewish leaders tried to by observing all the religious customs: the washing of pots and pans, the carefully calculated tithes, and all the rest of the 660 works of the flesh.

No one can ever be saved by works. But I ask you: Which of the Ten Commandments can you break and go to heaven? Adultery? Lying? The New Testament itself says, "Adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4), and "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:5).

Beloved, we don't have the right to break any of these commandments! Jesus said He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it - and that if any man taught otherwise, he should have a millstone tied around his neck and be cast into the sea!

I'm going to make a very bold statement: I believe it is impossible to consistently walk in obedience and holiness unless you have the fear of God in your heart!

If you don't have the fear of God, you will eventually believe that God is easy on sin. You'll think that since He's your loving Father, He'll never reject you - that you can sin all you want and keep getting up. You'll get on a merry-go-round of "sin, confess, sin, confess" - and you'll say to yourself, "I can do whatever I want, I'll just run back to Jesus and make it right. He'll forgive me at any moment!"

No! It is true the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus was saved in his dying hour - but true repentance had already taken place in him! Many today think they can cry out to God just before they die - but the truth is, they will be too hardened by their sin!

Right now, you may be asking, "How can I obtain the fear of God? If the fear of the Lord is the very

foundation of obedience, and obedience is love perfected - then show me how to lay hold of a holy fear."

You Obtain the Fear of God Just as Israel Did: You Learn It! The Lord is ready to teach His fear to all who desire it: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm 34:11)

God teaches us the fear of Him through His Word! He used Moses to give us two examples of how we are to learn to fear Him:

1. Before he died, Moses prescribed for Israel's kings how to walk in obedience. Moses could see prophetically that the children of Israel were going to make kings after their own lust. So he prophesied to these future kings:

"And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book...and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deuteronomy 17:15-19).

Every king was to constantly feed his soul and mind on God's record of past dealings with Israel. He would learn to fear God by seeing how the Lord Jehovah blessed the obedient - and how he utterly destroyed and cursed all who disobeyed His Word.

Beloved, that is how I have learned the fear of God! I've searched again and again throughout First and Second Samuel, Kings and Chronicles and each time God's dealings have been clear: "And the king did that which was right before the Lord, as did his father, and he walked in the fear of God. And the Lord was with him, and blessed him and prospered him, and put the dread of Him in all of their enemies...."

Yet, over and over, the same biblical record says of other kings: "And the king did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the ways of God, and walked according to his own mind. And the Lord departed from him, and there was famine and ruin and destruction..."

It was very simple: The ones who did what was right. God blessed. And those who did what was evil, God forsook.

God says through His record, "I have never winked at sin, and I never will. And if you continue to compromise and flirt with sin, I will deal with you just as I dealt with David! I have no favorites. Do you think I will somehow overlook your wicked deeds, when I've judged him - a man after My own heart?"

2. Moses also commanded Israel to read anew the commandments of the Lord to every generation. The people were to call a special assembly every seven years, to recount all of God's righteous dealings with their fathers. Moses prophesied to them: "That they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it" (Deuteronomy 31:12-13).

Moses was prophesying, "New generations of children will rise up who know nothing about the fear of God! They will have no motivation whatsoever to obey Him and to walk in holiness. Men and women of God must teach them the record of God's ways in His Word - how He blessed everyone who obeyed

Him and cursed all who disobeyed!"

Beloved, Moses was speaking of our day! Isn't this what is happening in our country right now? A new generation of youth has risen up, and they know nothing about responsibility and morality. Listen to the talk of any teenager on the street - you'll hear the vilest, most filthy language on the face of the earth! It's right out of hell - and our children have been baptized in it through music, movies and television!

This generation is lost - they know nothing about God! And if churches and Sunday schools won't cry out and provoke young people about their sins, who's going to do it?

It won't be the educators! Schoolchildren are now learning about "AIDS education" - meaning, how to use condoms and perform sexual acts! Right now a tract is being circulated among New York City's seventh graders, called "Your Rights." It says, "You have a right to have sex with anybody of any gender, anytime you please." The tract is sponsored by school-related organizations - and their goal is to distribute one-half million of the booklets in every school in the city!

God is saying to the church, "Your children aren't going to know anything about Me or about My holiness. You must teach them the fear of God - teach them the record of My dealings!"

If you are unwilling to search out God's Word to learn how He deals with sin and disobedience, then simply consider how He has judged sin in His house over the past five years:

He brought down the entire PTL ministry. The world saw a minister of the gospel chained like a common street criminal - and hauled off to prison for many years!

God shook up His church by allowing all the filthy details to be exposed. I saw the front-page photo and said, "Lord, if nothing else You've said in history has put Your fear into every preacher in America, this had better do it!"

God brought down the most-watched TV ministry on the face of the earth! Shame and reproach crashed down on America's best-known preacher, a man seen on television more than any other in history. And it all fell because of sin!

God showed His church that a man can stand in the pulpit and preach about loving Jesus - but if he's not living those words, he's not loving Christ. He can cry and plead all he wants!

I love both of these men - and I'm not setting myself above either of them, or above anyone else. But I do know that if I don't walk in the fear of God, I will fall too!

Are you someone so special or important that God will overlook your sin, your secret lust, your disobedience? No - you can be sure your sin will find you out! If you have witnessed all of these public dealings of God against hidden sin in His church, and yet you still have not learned to fear God - then you are bound by your iniquity and headed for the same end!

Dear saint, you have to want the fear of God - you have to seek it with all your heart! God does not give His fear to those who are slothful or spiritually lazy: "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:4-5)

Yet obtaining the fear of God is actually very simple: It begins by your obedience to Him in what you already know.

Now, when I talk about obeying God, I don't mean memorizing every red-letter word in the gospels in order to do them all. Rather, if you are simply faithful to obey the light you already have - to obey the commandments you know - God will lead you, step by step, in further obedience and into His holy fear. You won't have to figure out some legalistic way to obey Him. Obedience will come to you in a very loving, natural way!

Let Me Share With You the Glorious Benefits of Obedience! Jesus has promised incredible blessings to all who are "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). There are many such benefits, but I will list only three:

1. You'll be blessed with a manifestation of Jesus Himself in your inner man. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21).

This is one of the most powerful promises in the Word of God! First, Jesus says: "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father." In other words, "God will have a special love for you because you obey Me!"

We know God has a corporate love for the whole world. But Jesus is talking about something else. He's saying the Father has a special love in His heart for you when you walk in obedience to His Son. He begins to love you in a very special way!

And I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). Jesus also says that if you obey Him, He will manifest Himself to you! That is so incredible, I can't comprehend it. As I prepared this message, I spent an entire week on this one subject: "Lord, what do you mean - if I obey You, You'll 'manifest' Yourself to me?"

I still don't know how He'll do it. But I can go to Him in prayer and say, "Jesus, you made me believe I can hang onto this promise. You've told me I don't just know a historical Jesus - but that every day of my life, no matter how old I get, You will become more real to me until my last day!"

Finally, Jesus said, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23).

Imagine it: Jesus has given you His personal promise. If you simply love Him through your obedience to Him, He will take upon Himself the obligation to do all these things for you! He will show you the special love that the Father has for you; He will manifest Himself to you; and He and the Father will actually come and dwell within you - possessing you entirely, opening up your understanding to who God is, and filling your body, soul and spirit with the glory of His presence!

2. You'll be blessed with a special unction and anointing to hear and know His voice. "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man to teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him" (1 John 2:27).

When the fear of God floods your soul - when you've obeyed Him, resisting the devil, fleeing lust,

putting away the sin that so easily besets you - you begin to receive the unction of hearing and knowing His voice. You'll have spiritual ears to hear! You won't need some prophet or teacher to "give you a word" from God. You will be taught by the abiding Spirit of God!

Yet any Christian who lives in sin - who walks in lust, fornication, covetousness or disobedience of any kind - cannot hear the true voice of God. In fact, nothing he hears is of God - but is either of the flesh or the devil!

I have known Christians, including ministers, who were living in sin - lust-filled, sensual, bound by some wicked stronghold. They began hearing still, small voices.- lovely voices, directing them and promising them good things. These voices said, "My dear, beloved child - God is with you! You will behold wonders, miracles and blessings on all sides,"

But these things never came to pass - because the voices were not of God! It was either their own fleshly desires or the powers of darkness, coming to deceive them!

Oh, the blinding power of lust! Jesus said to the Jews who followed Him: "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:43-44). Jesus was saying to them, "I speak plainly to you, yet you don't hear what I say. It is because your heart is filled with lust, and you're unable to hear the truth!"

Do you want to hear from God? Then get honest with Him about your sin! Lay down your lust, let God deal with you and the soundproof wall that keeps you from hearing His voice will come down.

3. You'll be blessed with answered prayers and fullness of joy! "if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.... These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:7,11). Beloved, fullness of joy comes from hearing His voice clearly!

Nothing gives me joy more than knowing the Lord has truly spoken to me. When I have obeyed, and done all that He has asked of me, I come into the secret place to commune with Him - and He begins to speak. And that is as close to heaven on earth as possible!

If you will but say to Jesus, "Lord, I want to walk in Your righteousness, to truly love You through obedience," God promises:

"And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer,' and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29). "The prayer of the upright is his delight" (Proverbs 15:8).

Ask God to put a holy fear in your heart; begin to walk fully in obedience to all you know of His commands - and you will be perfected in your love for Jesus!

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