

# **The Blending of Fear and Love**

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Is God a being of wrath to be feared or is he a benevolent person to be loved? What is the proper response of man to Jehovah: fear or love? Or is it possible that both manners of response are appropriate?

## **The Faithful Fear God**

It can hardly be denied that fear is upheld in the Bible as an honorable motive for obedience and service to God. Nehemiah charged his fellow-countrymen:

Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the nations our enemies? (Neh. 5:9).

Many of the Psalms extol the wisdom of fearing the Lord:

- “Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling” (Psa. 2:11).
- “In Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple” (Psa. 5:7).
- “The fear of Jehovah is clean, enduring forever” (19:9).
- “The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom” (111:10).

Solomon concluded that the whole duty of man is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecc.12:13).

## **The Apostles used Fear as a Motive for Obedience**

The New Testament preachers did not hesitate to urge obedience to God out of fear. Luke records the use of it by Peter in Acts 2:40:

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them saying. Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria walked “in the fear of the Lord” and “was multiplied” (Acts 9:31). Paul reasoned with Felix about “righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come and “Felix was terrified” (Acts 24:25). Paul, “knowing therefore the fear of the Lord,” persuaded men to prepare for Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10-11). This same apostle urged Christians to perfect holiness “in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1) and to work out their own salvation “in fear and trembling” (Phi. 2:12). It is evident from these and kindred Scriptures that inspired preachers used the motive of fear in more than a small way to induce both primary conversion and spiritual growth in the saints during the first century.

## **The First Commandment**

It is a well-known fact by even casual readers of the Bible that its pages often exhort men to love God. No clearer statement of this truth is found than in Jesus' words:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.  
(Mat. 22:37).

Jesus pronounced this to be "the great and first commandment" (Mat. 22:38).

## **Both Love and Fear are Essential**

Now, the question arises again, are the principles of fear and love incompatible, mutually exclusive? Some have concluded based on 1 John 4:18 that they are:

There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment: and he that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Indeed, there is a type of fear that is completely expunged by a mature love for God. The cringing dread, such as the terror that a slave harbors toward a cruel master, does not exist in the heart of one who loves God to the extent that he has entrusted his whole being to Him and His gracious promises. However, there is another quality of fear that true love for God does not expel – the quality of reverence, awe, and respect that causes a constant recognition of our unworthiness before our God. Such a fear is necessary to the trait of humility. Indeed, such a fear is assumed in a true love of God.

Some seem to feel that to really love God means to assume sort of a dreamy, mystical, better-felt-than-told attitude toward Him that frees them from obeying His commands. Such could hardly be further from the truth. True love of God cannot be expressed apart from absolute respect and obedience to the Word of God. Jesus said: "If ye love me ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The same apostle who wrote 1 John 4:18 earlier quoted, also declared: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

In summary, while fear of punishment and Judgment may not be the supreme motive, it is still a valid motive for urging obedience of God. The type of fear that stands in awe of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is one to be treasured and nurtured. Love, of course, is the supreme motive of all of our worship and service of God, but it is not always possible or necessary to exactly determine where godly fear ends, and love begins. They blend into one harmonious whole as we express our fear and love of God by obedience of his written Word.

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