

## UNGODLY FEAR vs GODLY FEAR

Psalm 111:10

May 7, 2023

We have just spent the last few months looking at the Ten Commandments, and today I want us to continue the story of these exiles who left Egypt and consider what took place right after God gave the nation of Israel His Law for living in the Promised Land. As we read the accounts of the people that left slavery in Egypt through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we read how they have been rebellious and constant grumblers and complainers during their entire journey to the Promised Land. God had given Moses the impossible challenge of leading these obstinate people who constantly tested his patience and faith in God, and it took the humblest man that every lived to carry out this onerous task. These people tested God and Moses over-and-over again to the point where God was so frustrated with them that He wanted to wipe them out and start over again with Moses during the Golden Calf incident, but Moses pleaded with God and He relented. However, there was one event that was the last straw for God, during which He made a decree that they will spend the next forty years wandering the desert before they would be able to enter the Promised Land!

That event is recorded for us in **Numbers 13-14**. Once they had journeyed right to the entrance to the Promised Land, Moses is instructed to send out twelve men (one man from every tribe of Israel) to explore the land of Canaan before they would enter in. They spent 40 days travelling throughout the land of Canaan. When they return, ten of these men give a bad report – **Numbers 13:27-28**, while only two (Joshua and Caleb) give a good report – **Numbers 13:30**. The people end up listening to the “*bad spies’ network*” and the people rebel. Once again, the Lord wants to strike them all down and start over with Moses, making him into a great nation; however, Moses once again intercedes, and God once again relents and forgives them. However, there are serious consequences – listen God’s reply to Moses in **Numbers 14:20-35**. In **verse 20** God first says, “*I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless,*” – there are consequences and God instructs Moses to tell them the consequences of their disobedience and lack of faith. What Moses is instructed to tell these rebellious people starting is recorded in **verse 28 to 35**. Of that generation that crossed the Red Sea, aged twenty or more, everyone will die in the desert wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb who gave a good report, who trusted God, and were ready to enter the Promised Land, despite the giants who lived there!

So, what was the root issue of those Israelites who left Egypt and never entered the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb? The answer is found back in **Exodus 20:18-21**. Right after they were given the Ten Commandments, we read this, *“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled in fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.”* The issue here is the difference between the ungodly fear of the people, versus the Godly fear of Moses. YES, the people definitely had a mortal fear of Almighty God as they stood at the foot of that mountain, and rightfully so, but unlike Moses they didn’t have a holy, reverent fear of Almighty God. The people’s ungodly fear of God drove them away from God, while Moses’ Godly fear drove him towards God, right into His holy presence at the top of Mt Sinai, right into the midst of the thunder, the lightning, the smoke, and the thick darkness where God resided in all His glory and power. Moses went right into the holy presence of God and was allowed to see God’s back as His glory passed by, while the rest of the people remained at a distance, not wanting to encounter God their deliverer; thereby, missing out on intimacy with God and seeing His glory!

Once we get to the book of Deuteronomy, forty years have passed in the wilderness, and the next generation now stands before Moses as they are about to enter the Promised Land. They have travelled the desert wilderness for one year for every day the twelve spies spent in the land of Canaan. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses final message to the people before his death. In **Deuteronomy 5**, Moses reminds them about God giving their departed ancestors the Ten Commandments, and how disappointed he was that they were afraid of the Lord and did not want to go up the mountain to meet God as he did. In his frustration Moses must have asked God, *“Why can’t they come into Your presence and get to know you as I do?”* God’s answer is heartbreaking, *“Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!”* (Deuteronomy 5:29). After 40 years of God’s provisions (manna every day, clothes and shoes that never wore out, led by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night) they still didn’t develop Godly fear, but remained with ungodly fear!

God grieves over His chosen people for not having the same Godly fear that Moses had. If they had also walked in holy fear, they would have been able to come into His holy presence and have the same intimate relationship with God as Moses had. So, God dismisses them, telling Moses, ***“Go tell them to return to their tents. But you stay here with me so that I can give you all the commands, decrees, and laws you are to teach them to follow in the land I am giving them to possess”*** (Deuteronomy 5:30). It’s like telling an unruly child to their room. This was Israel’s darkest hour. God brought them out of Egypt, which represents the ungodly world, for the purpose of bringing them to Himself, so they could know Him intimately, as a wife knows her husband, but they wanted no part of it, in fact they wanted to return to Egypt, to slavery. They passed on knowing God their redeemer due to their lack of holy fear, so God sent them back to their tents, while Moses spoke to God face-to-face. It’s the same for us today, we can also easily create a deity with the name JESUS that we bow down to and worship, yet not know the real Jesus of the Gospels, who walked this earth and currently sits at the right hand of God!

As God brought Israel out of idolatry in Egypt, God brings us out of the world when we come to believe in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. But then, God doesn’t want us to remain there, but to grow in wisdom and knowledge, getting to know Him intimately, so that we would not fall back into idolatry, back to following the ways of the world. So, *“How can I know for sure I believe in the actual Jesus of the Bible, instead of a knockoff Jesus, a false Jesus of my own making?”* *“How can I protect myself from being misled and deceived?”* The answer is Godly fear. The Bible says a great deal about Godly fear, and the basis of that fear is this, ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”*** (Proverbs 1:7), and that’s not just any kind of wisdom, but that’s having God’s wisdom, knowing what we are to fear and what we are not to fear. Having the fear of the Lord means that we can handle anything that life throws at us, the fear of mankind, the fear sickness, the fear of evil and demons, and especially the fear of death. In the words of the British Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, *“The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it.”*

Let’s look at another example from the Old Testament. Solomon took over as king of Israel from his father David, and he began his reign well. God gave Solomon wisdom, great insight and understanding, but he didn’t follow in his father David’s footsteps as a worshipper and follower of God’s law. Solomon began well but He didn’t finish well, because he didn’t fear God, he made up his own laws that went

against God's Laws, he worshipped many other god alongside of Yahweh, and yielded to his numerous addictions: affluence, privilege, wealth, pride, and was the lover of horses and lover of women. Solomon became wise in his own eyes, which led to his downfall, having ten tribes ripped out of the hands of his son Rehoboam, who followed him as king. As the result of ungodly fear, the nation of Israel was divided between south and north, never to be reunited again into one nation. All because Solomon lost his way and became a bitter cynic, which resulted in the writing the book of Ecclesiastes, in which describes the meaningless of life – vanity, vanity, all is vanity, a chasing after the wind – we live and die and what do we have to show for our brief time on this earth. However, before his death, Solomon did finally come to his senses as he penned the final words of that dismal book, ***“Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Unfortunately, Godly fear wasn't King Solomon's treasure or focus as he reigned over Israel so he fell into many temptations that separated him from God, but thankfully he comes to the realization that the prized virtue of every person is the fear of God, which is the only virtue that will give us the abundant life we all seek. Godly fear is what keeps us on the right path of life that leads to holiness and righteousness so that we would finish the race well. That's what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, so they wouldn't make the same tragic mistake as King Solomon. Paul tells them that he has run the race of his life in such a way to get the prize that last forever, eternal life. Because of Godly fear Paul ran a disciplined life. Paul writes, ***“For that reason, I don't run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified from the prize”*** (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Godly fear was Paul's prize possession, and it should be our prize possession as we run the race of life!

Ungodly fear causes a person to hide from God, like Adam and Eve hid in the Garden of Eden once they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Someone who's scared of God has something to hide; however, the person who has Godly fear, has nothing to hide; instead, they are terrified of being away from God, and they run towards God, not away from God. Again, this was illustrated back in the book of Exodus at Mt Sinai, while the people drew away

from God, Moses drew near to God. That's to be our desire, to know our Lord intimately, and that's our Lord's desire as well, to be close and intimate with His followers, as David writes in **Psalm 25:14**, ***“The Lord confides in those who fear him, he makes his covenant known to them.”*** The Lord is a close friend to those who fear Him, confiding in them His deepest thoughts!

Holy fear is a truth we find throughout the entire New Testament – here are a few examples:

- The apostle Paul writes, ***“My dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”*** (Philippians 2:12 NIV).
- Paul also calls us to this, ***“Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit’ perfecting holiness in the fear of God”*** (2 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV).
- The writer of Hebrews reminds us, ***“Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship our God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire”*** (Hebrews 12:28-29 NIV).
- The apostle Peter tells us how we are to live, ***“Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time in reverent fear”*** (1 Peter 1:17 NIV).
- Jesus’ brother Jude declares, ***“Snatch others out of the fire to save them. Be merciful over and over to them, but always couple your mercy with the fear of God”*** (Jude 23 The Passion Translation).
- And Jesus urges us, ***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell”*** (Matthew 10:28 NIV).

You can easily see how holy fear is a gift of love and protection from a Heavenly Father, who wants to draw us close to Him, not away from Him. So, how do we define holy fear:

- The fear of God is a call to reverence, to be in complete awe of Him.
- To fear God is to esteem, respect, honour, and adore Him above anyone or anything.

- When we fear God, we take on His heart – we love what He loves, and we hate what He hates. What is important to God becomes important to us. And then, what is not important to God is not important to us.
- To fear God is to hate sin, injustice, and evil in every way – in thought, word, and action.
- To fear God is to walk in humility before God and others.
- To fear God is to give Him all of the praise, the adoration, and the worship He deserves.
- To fear God is to be thankful, and refrain from any complaining, or whining, or grumbling.
- To fear God is to obey Him, wanting to carry out His will, regardless of the cost, or whether it makes sense or not, as we die to ourselves and willingly carry our cross.

In closing, we cannot speak about Holy fear without focusing on the glory of God, because without Godly fear, no one will be able to see the goodness of God. Back in **Exodus 33:18**, Moses asks this of God, ***“Now show me your glory.”*** And God answered Moses, ***“I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you...but you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live”*** (Exodus 33:19-20). So, God placed Moses in a cleft in the rock and passed by and God covered Him with His hand until He passed by. During Old Testament times, no one could see the glory of God and live, but today we can see the glory of God in Christ the Son of God, for the glory of the Lord is now revealed in Jesus Christ, so we can know God. We can know the One who loved the world so deeply that He was willing to suffer and die on a cruel Roman cross to pay the terrible judgment for our sins, so we could become part of the family of God. And we as the church, we remember that sacrificial act every time we take Communion, as we partake in the bread that represents His broken body and partake in the cup that represents His shed blood. This is a sacred sacrament for all those who fear the Lord, and we are not to take it in an unworthy manner. And according to the apostle Paul this is the church’s celebration and proclamation to the both the seen and unseen world of Christ’s victory over sin and death, and we are to continue to celebrate until Christ returns in glory, ***“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”*** (1 Corinthians 11:26).