

We know love for God produces obedience. In other words, if you love God you'll obey Him. Jesus famously said...

In **John 14:15**, Jesus said, **“If you love Me, keep my commandments.”**

But I think there's something similarly true, but taught less often is:

- Fear of God produces obedience.
- Disobedience is produced by a lack of fear of God.

Fear of God and obedience to God go together.

GOD TAUGHT ISRAEL TO FEAR HIM SO THEY WOULD OBEY.

Listen to what it was like when Israel reached the base of Sinai...

Exodus 20:18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off **19** and said to Moses, **“You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”**

God put on a display that so terrified the Israelites they thought His voice would kill them. He brought Israel to the base of Sinai because His presence resided on the mountain. Considering everything He did to get them to this point—including delivering them from Egypt and parting the Red Sea—we would expect Him to be friendly and welcoming. Instead it was terrifying. Why?

Moses explained God's motivation in **Exodus 20:20**...

Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, **“Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that THE FEAR OF HIM MAY BE BEFORE YOU, THAT YOU MAY NOT SIN.”**

Moses told Israel their terror was good! Yes, God wanted to keep them away from the mountain so they would not be killed if they touched it, but He also wanted to build fear into them so they **“may not sin.”**

THE LAW TAUGHT THE OLD GENERATION FEAR OF GOD PRODUCES OBEDIENCE

While Israel was at the base of Sinai, God also gave them the law. The law itself communicated that fear of God would prevent disobedience:

Lev 19:14 You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, **BUT YOU SHALL FEAR YOUR GOD: I am the Lord.**

If Israel feared God, they would obey in many ways such as treating people well.

THE LAW TAUGHT THE NEW GENERATION FEAR OF GOD PRODUCES OBEDIENCE.

After the twelve spies returned from scouting out the Promised Land, they led the nation to rebel against God. Ten of the spies convinced the people God wanted to murder them. Numbers 14:3 records the people's accusation:

Num 14:3 Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

Look at God's response in verses **14:28–31**...

Num 14:28 Say to them, 'As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, 30 not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected.

God caused them to wander so the adults who accused Him of murder could die in the wilderness, and the children—whom they accused God of wanting to murder—could enter.

Although, the younger generation had not received the law their parents received at Sinai; therefore, God gave it to the new generation too, and it's recorded in Deuteronomy. Again, the relationship between fear of God and obedience was established...

Deut 8:6 So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

Again, **[walking] in His ways** is synonymous with obedience, and it is produced by **fearing Him**.

The psalmist said something similar...

Psa 128:1 Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!

"Walking in His God's ways" is synonymous with obedience,

Toward the end of Deuteronomy...

Deut 31:12 Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law,

The entire nation had to be gathered so they would learn to fear God, because this would lead to their obedience.

FEAR OF GOD KEEPS US NEAR HIM

Let's look at the negative first. Toward the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, God said Israel abandoned Him because they did not fear Him...

**Jer 2:19 Your evil will chastise you,
and your apostasy will reprove you.
Know and see that it is evil and bitter
for you to FORSAKE THE LORD YOUR GOD;
THE FEAR OF ME IS NOT IN YOU,
declares the Lord God of hosts.**

Later God said He would give them a fear of Him so that they would not turn from Him...

Jer 32:40 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

While love might keep God's people near Him, fear keeps them from **[turning] from [Him]**.

Fear of God is like a protective wall that keeps us close to Him.

FEAR OF GOD PURIFIES.

2 Cor 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

It seems to me, Paul is saying, we will pursue holiness if we fear God.

Three Proverbs make the point we'll turn from sin if we fear God:

- **Pro 8:13 THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS HATRED OF EVIL.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.**
- **Pro 16:6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for,
and BY THE FEAR OF THE LORD ONE TURNS AWAY FROM EVIL.**
- **Pro 3:7 Be not wise in your own eyes;
FEAR THE LORD, AND TURN AWAY FROM EVIL.**

If we fear God, we will purify ourselves from whatever defiles us. Fear of God has a cleansing effect. Wickedness naturally becomes loathsome to those who fear God.

HEBREWS TEACHES FEAR OF GOD PRODUCES OBEDIENCE AND SERVICE.

The author of Hebrews motivated his readers to service and obedience w/ some of the most terrifying imagery of God in all of Scripture...

Heb 12:28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Although this verse doesn't mention the fear of God, the description of God is so terrifying it would cause everyone to fear God except the most foolish people.

Let's look at some examples of this in action...

ABRAHAM OBEYED GOD B/C HE FEARED HIM.

First, please look at **Gen 22:2**...

Genesis 22:2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Now skip down to **Gen 22:12**...

Genesis 22:12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

The verse is not worded the way I would expect. Since God commanded Abraham to sacrifice "[his] only son, whom [he loved]," we would expect the Angel to say, "...now I know that you *love* God."

But instead we're told Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac b/c he feared God.

HEBREW MIDWIVES OBEYED GOD B/C THEY FEARED HIM MORE THAN PHARAOH.

When the nation of Israel multiplied greatly in Egypt, Pharaoh became afraid of them. He commanded the Hebrew midwives:

Exo 1:16 "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

The Hebrew midwives feared God more than they feared man, even the most powerful man in the world who had power to murder them for disobeying.

PHARAOH DISOBEYED GOD B/C HE DIDN'T FEAR GOD.

Let's look at another example. Please turn to **Exo 9**...

The context is seven of the plagues have been sent against Egypt; the seventh being hail. Pharaoh is watching his nation be destroyed, so he calls for Moses to bring the hail to an end. Look at **verse 27**...

Exo 9:27 Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." 29 Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. 30 But as for you and your servants, I KNOW THAT YOU DO NOT YET FEAR THE LORD GOD."

Moses said he would bring the seventh plague – hail - to an end, but he also knew Pharaoh would return to his old ways—he would repent of his repentance.

As a result, three more plagues would follow. Pharaoh would continue to disobey because he did **"not yet fear the LORD God."**

SAUL DISOBEYED GOD B/C HE FEARED MAN MORE THAN GOD.

Let's look at another example. Please turn to **1 Sam 15**. The context is Saul is supposed to exterminate the Amalekites. Look at **verse 3**...

1 Sam 15:3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

Saul disobeyed. Look at **verse 9**...

1 Sam 15:9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

Saul was willing to destroy everything he did not want, but he kept what he wanted.

God sent the prophet Samuel to rebuke Saul. Look how Saul responded to the first rebuke...

1 Sam 15:24 Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.”

It was common to keep the spoil following victories. I’m not making excuses for Saul, but more than likely the people wanted to keep everything they thought was valuable. Saul still should’ve commanded the people to destroy it, and as king he could’ve done that.

Samuel rebuked Saul a second time. Look how Saul responded the second time...

1 Sam 15:24 Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, **BECAUSE I FEARED THE PEOPLE AND OBEYED THEIR VOICE.**

Unlike the Hebrew midwives, Saul feared man more than he feared God. If he feared God more than the people he would’ve destroyed everything.

The examples w/ the Hebrew midwives and w/ Saul – when put together – show us that whatever we fear has power over us:

- If we fear God, we will obey God.
- If we fear man, we will obey man.

Can we think of some examples of this in our lives?

- When pastors are afraid to teach hard truths in God’s Word b/c they’re afraid people will leave their churches
- When we’re afraid to confront people b/c they might get upset w/ us
- When we’re afraid to tell people what we believe b/c we’re afraid they’ll be upset w/ us or mock us