

No More Lip Service

*Praise the Lord!
Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,
Who delights greatly in His commandments.*

The above verse from **Psalm 112:1**, boasts of an attitude that develops with people who learn to truly fear the Lord. More and more as I read God's Word, I come across statements, promises and phrases that all include the admonition to fear the Lord, along with the results of doing so. It is an oft-repeated invitation and even command within Scripture.

The Psalmist says that the person who fears the Lord is *blessed* and explains how in the remainder of the Psalm. Then he notes the same concept in a different way; delighting in His commandments. These two concepts appear to be inextricably connected and I'm beginning to see why. As we fear the Lord - and once again, this is *not* fear of God's judgment or wrath poured out onto the saved, but this fear is one of profound, deep, reverential awe because of who God is and the power that He wields - we become empowered to not only obey His commandments, but we come to a point where we are actually *delighted* to live in such a way of obedience!

There are two ways to be obedient to God's commands. One way is to simply grit our teeth and do what we are supposed to do because we feel we have to do those things. In this case, we are not doing them with the correct motivation. We do them out of a fear of judgment, because we must (but don't necessarily want to), or a combination of both. The other way is to do the right things because we truly *want* to do those things, which provides the correct motivation for doing them. We want to do them because we come to a place in our life where we actually *want* to please the LORD.

We know the Israelites often did the *right* thing with the *wrong* heart. Too many places throughout the Old Testament show God complaining that the people came to Him with their lips (lip service), but their hearts were far from Him. A good example is in **Isaiah 29:13**. It is a sad day when God has to tell people that what they are doing may *look* correct but the fact that their hearts were not in it nullifies their actions. Jesus echoed the words of the prophet Isaiah by reminding the people then that they were just as hypocritical as their forefathers (**Matthew 15:8**), had been.

Let's look at two examples to shed more light.

Couple A: This couple clearly looks like they care about one another. Being around them is relaxing. They're gentle with each other. They hold hands and display loving affection. They obviously enjoy being around each other and they do many things together. They often do for the other without being asked out of love, not duty. Even though you may never hear them utter the words "I love you" to each other there is no doubt their love for the other is real.

Couple B: There is a tension between this couple that can be felt. Sometimes a sharp word is uttered. Displays of affection are rare or non-existent. They may do things for the other, but they simply don't seem like they enjoy doing. You get the sense that they do things out of duty.

Out of both couples, couple A shows more unforced gentleness and love than couple B. It's clear couple A enjoys being around each other while the same can't be said for couple B.

Please forgive the simplicity of this analogy, but it serves to get the obvious point across. We've probably all been around both types of couples and the difference is stark. Doing things from a correct attitude is the only way God says our "works" are acceptable. We do *not* work for salvation of course, but once we *have* salvation, our works should glorify God and bring us nearer to Him, which only occurs when our heart is in the right place. They should also be a testimony to others that our love for God (as evidenced by our heartfelt obedience to His commands), is the type of thing that impacts other people, especially the lost.

What made the difference between someone like Job, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah or others in Scripture? What made these people stand out so that their worship of God was acceptable and pleasing in God's sight? Their sincerity promulgated by their inner desire of their hearts. They truly desired to obey God from the heart and their lives proved it.

*Delight yourself also in the Lord,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

Psalm 37:4 above, is a very familiar verse to many. It is often used within Word of Faith/Charismatic circles wrongly to teach that God is our Celestial Genie. Apparently, He delights in giving us whatever our hearts desire. This is absurdly wrong. It is *not* about us. It is about changing our desires so that they reflect God's desires!

His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears.

Isaiah 11:3 is one we've gone over briefly before. But notice, this verse speaks of the coming Messiah from Isaiah's perspective. The prophet saw that the coming Messiah would literally *delight* in the fear of the LORD. He would *love* it!

Because of it, He would not judge by what He saw outwardly in others, but He would be able to judge their *intentions* and *motivations*. This is something we will never be able to do in this life. Jesus was and remains God so His deity came into play here when He was dealing with people. He saw their hearts mainly because in His humanity, fear of the Lord was perfected to the point that He was One with God the Father and these things were revealed to Him by the Father.

But this also requires us to ask, *if Jesus delighted in the fear of the LORD, how much more should we do the same?* As we grow in true fear of the LORD, I believe the Bible clearly tells us that our desires will be transformed into His desires. We will become more like Him because of it.

Often, when we talk about becoming more like Jesus, the great passage on the concept of love (**1 Corinthians 13**), comes to mind. Certainly and obviously, this is part of it, but I believe Christians do a major disservice if all we ever talk about is "love." That is one side of the issue. But clearly for God to love certain things means He also hates other things. We too are supposed to hate the things God hates as from just one example of **Proverbs 8:13** below.

*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.*

God does not want us to hate *people* who are evil. He wants us to hate the deeds or words that come from that person. Admittedly that is difficult to do, to separate the person from the sin. Jesus did this. Consider Judas as just one example.

I believe that the more we grow in our fear of the LORD, the more natural it will be for us to exemplify the character of Jesus. We will hate sin, yet continue to love the sinner, just as Jesus did. We cannot do this with our own "self-effort." The fear of the LORD welling up within us provides the motivation to do the Lord's will.

Just as Joseph in **Genesis 39** hated the temptation to sin sexually (referring to it as "wickedness" before God), there is no evidence that Joseph hated the woman herself. We never read a word after this situation of any ill will or hatred Joseph may have felt toward her so we can rightly assume that he did not harbor any resentment at all, just as it is abundantly clear that he held no grudge against his own brothers who tried to kill him, but decided instead to simply sell him into slavery. He acted like Jesus.

This is the attitude God wants to develop within us and I have come to believe this can only be fully achieved through the growth of fear of the LORD within us. Without this fear, we are simply going to go through life using our own native intelligence and energy to do the things that God wants us to do. We will often feel defeated even if we manage to show outward signs of obedience to Him and His will. The reason we will feel defeated is because the motivation to do God's purposes will be something we put on from the *outside*, leaving us energy depleted because it has been our effort that has done these things.

The fear of the LORD is the true basis for living the Christian life where the rubber meets the road and in a way that pleases God. That, I believe, is how we are "filled" with the Spirit and empowered to live a life that brings Him much glory. It is *not* some ethereal, mystical "infilling" that we are to look for, but a real understanding and growth of the fear of the LORD that transforms us from *within* so that our lives become more naturally filled with His character and likeness. Because the changes come from *within* us, living the Christian life becomes far more natural to us.

The more we surrender ourselves to the fear of the LORD, the greater our infilling of the Holy Spirit will be. It seems that simple, at least in understanding it, but of course, the actual process of learning to fear the LORD and growing in that area is incumbent upon US. This is exactly what Paul means in **Philippians 1:12** when he says that we should work out our salvation with

fear and trembling. There is no other way that I am aware. It requires a cooperation with God, a willingness to apply ourselves to the study of His Word, the memorization and meditation of it, and prayer that God will apply the truths of His Word to our hearts. Once we do what God expects of us, He will then be pleased to enrich our lives with a growing understanding of the fear of the LORD.

I have more info on CV-19 and a few others things that I'll try to include in the next article. For today, I wish you all a wonderful Memorial Day as we remember those who gave their lives in defense of freedom! But above all things, learn to fear the LORD so that it may be well with your soul.