

Fear and Disobedience
Sunday School Lesson 7
The Fearful Christian
Acts 5:29
5/31/2020

Introduction: As we continue in our lesson series, we are going to look at the relationship between fear and disobedience. As Christians, we know how important it is to obey God. Our obedience to the Lord shows Him how much we love Him. Our obedience to the Lord shows our faith in Him. Our obedience to the Lord shows Him that we recognize what He did for us. Our obedience to the Lord shows that we respect Him as our authority. Needless to say, we are to be obedient Christians. Ungodly fears can be an obstacle in our obedience to the Lord. This is because Satan uses those fears as a way to cast doubt on God's plan, and he uses the fears as direct competition to the fear of God. The fear of God is a healthy motivator that drives our obedience. If Satan can destroy or replace that fear, then he succeeds in causing a Christian to disobey God. He knows that we will fail when we disobey God, and he wants to make us an easy prey. Sadly, there are many Christians who have fallen for Satan's devices, and they disobeyed God, even though they never set out to intentionally disobey Him. They simply allowed their ungodly fears to take them down a path of disobedience. Let's look at some principles from the Word of God concerning ungodly fear and disobedience to the Lord.

I. BOTH UNGODLY FEAR AND GODLY FEAR LEAD TO OBEDIENCE OF THE OBJECT OF THAT FEAR. (DEUT. 5:29, 13:4; ISAIAH 51:10; ECCLES. 12:13; 1 SAMUEL 15:24; JOHN 7:13)

- A. Notice that ungodly fear makes us submissive to the object of that fear (1 Samuel 15:24; John 7:13).** The natural result of fear is obedience or submission. This speaks to what we previously identified about fear. It comes as a result of recognizing something that we perceive as dangerous to us. We are afraid of what is bigger than us. Naturally, then, we find ourselves submissive to the objects of our fears. During the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, the people submitted to the Jewish leaders. They would not speak openly about Jesus. Why did the people agree to this request even though some of them certainly knew that Jesus was special? The Bible tells us that the reason was fear. The people were afraid of the authority that these Jewish leaders had. They were also afraid of being considered an outcast among the Jews. They saw firsthand the miracles that Jesus did, yet they still submitted to the Jewish leaders. They were overcome with ungodly fear, and that fear gave the Jewish leaders control over them. Satan gets men to obey him by causing them to be afraid. While he does not present himself as the object to fear, he does present objects or people who stand in his place and do his bidding. When we fear them, we may not even realize that we are submitting ourselves to the Devil himself!
- B. Notice that Godly fear makes us submissive to the commands of the Lord (Deuteronomy 5:29; 13:14; Isaiah 51:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13).** There are over a dozen verses in the Word of God that link the fear of God with obeying or keeping His commandments. If you do not fear God, you will not obey Him. The fear of the Lord is a healthy fear. It is a reverential fear that develops differently than ungodly fear. Ultimately, the Lord wants us to grow to a place where our obedience is based primarily on love (1 John 4:18). This is the same relationship that a parent has with his child. That child is first taught to fear the parent. As the child grows, his obedience ought to become more based in love than fear. If the child only ever obeys out of fear, then his obedience will fade once the object of the fear is no longer there (see the story of King Joash as an example). Unlike a parent or other authority, we know that the Lord will always be there to be feared. There also never comes a point where we outgrow a need to have a healthy fear of the Lord. This ensures that even when our love fails, our fear still motivates us to continue obeying Him.

II. UNGODLY FEAR CAUSES DISOBEDIENCE BECAUSE IT MAKES THE WRONG CHOICE BETWEEN GOD AND MAMMON. (2 COR. 4:18; MATT. 6:24; JOSH. 24:15; JUDGES 6:10)

- A. Notice that there is a conflict between earthly, temporal things and the eternal things of God (2 Corinthians 4:18; Matthew 6:24).** Mankind struggles with seeing the eternal instead of the temporal. Ungodly fear is a fear of the temporal. Godly fear is a fear of the eternal. These two items are at war with each other. The temporal, earthly things resist the eternal things. As Christians, we must make a choice between God and mammon. Which one are we going to serve? We cannot serve both. The Bible makes that very plain. Eventually, we will love the one and hate the other. They are on opposite sides, so you cannot love both. Certainly, we know what decision we ought to make. It ought to be an easy decision. Unfortunately, ungodly fear plays a major part in the decision making. It isn't as simple as just saying that we will serve and obey God. We have to actually put that into practice.

- B. Notice that ungodly fear makes the decision for us in our choice between God and mammon (Joshua 24:15; Judges 6:10).** Joshua had a challenge for the people of Israel. Would they serve God, or would they serve the gods of the Amorites? This was a choice between earthly gods and the one true God. They dwelled in the land of the Amorites, so there was imminent pressure to serve these gods. However, the Israelites recognized that God had the true power. They remembered what He had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt. They feared Him more than they feared any man-made gods. Consequently, there was really no choice to make. The choice was already made for them. They were going to serve God. Unfortunately, Judges 6:10 tells us that another generation came along in Israel that did not fear God. Instead, they feared the gods of the Amorites. As a result of their fear, their choice was equally decided. They were not going to serve God. Sometimes, we are guilty of making certain spiritual things complicated. This matter of ungodly fear and disobedience is simple. If we fear mammon, we will obey mammon. You cannot obey God and mammon. Therefore, the end product is a disobedience of what God wants and instructs us to do.

III. UNGODLY FEAR CAUSES DISOBEDIENCE BECAUSE IT PRIORITIZES THE OPINION OF MAN. (MATT. 10:28; ACTS 5:29; 1 SAMUEL 15:24; PROVERBS 29:25; PSALM 118:6; HEB. 13:6)

- A. Notice that man's ways and opinions may regularly differ from God's ways and thoughts (1 Samuel 15:24; Proverbs 29:25, 21:8; Isaiah 55:8-9).** During this present situation, I've heard much about the authority and opinion of man. There have been some who have even suggested that we are to accept the opinions of man because God is the one who gave that person wisdom or intelligence. Such a view is not supported by Scripture. As Christians, we know that man's opinion and way is routinely different than God's way. Submitting to authority does not involve a blind following of everything that man instructs a Christian to do. We know that the Bible makes it clear at every level of authority that there may be times where God's way differs from the way of the authority or of the majority. The disciples experienced this with the authority of their day. The Israelites experienced this with some of the kings who reigned in Israel. They also experienced this when they were carried away in captivity.
- B. Notice that ungodly fear chooses to listen to man over God (Acts 5:29; Matthew 10:28; Psalm 118:6; Hebrews 13:6).** What are we to do when God's way differs from man's way? We have to obey God. That's the bottom line. There are no exceptions. This is true at every level of authority. A child obeys his parents in the Lord. A wife submits to her husband under the leadership of Christ. A Christian submits to his pastor, as his pastor follows Christ. A citizen submits to his governmental leadership to the extent that he can do it peacefully without conflicting with God's commands. Choosing God over man can be intimidating because we only see the immediate and visible person confronting us. God's Word challenges us not to be afraid of man when confronted with the choice between who to obey. Ungodly fear fails the test. It chooses to prioritize obedience to man. Blind obedience to man will almost certainly lead to disobedience of God at some point. Of course, it may also be that we obey man sometimes because we really just don't want to obey God. That was likely the case with King Saul. He obeyed the people over God, but he did it because he wanted to! The irony is that he disobeyed a man (Samuel) at the same time. It's interesting that he conveniently chose to obey one but not the other.

IV. UNGODLY FEAR CAUSES FURTHER DISOBEDIENCE BECAUSE IT IS DISOBEDIENCE. (LUKE 8:50, 12:32; JOSHUA 1:9; 2 KINGS 6:16; GENESIS 15:1; EXODUS 20:20; JER. 17:23)

- A. Notice how often the Lord tells us not to be afraid (Luke 8:50, 12:32; Joshua 1:9; 2 Kings 6:16; Genesis 15:1; Exodus 20:20).** We are told over 100 times in the Bible not to be afraid. I'd have to study this further, but I believe that this is one of the most common instructions given throughout the entire Bible. This tells us that the very act of being afraid (not accounting for Scriptural fear) is disobedience against the Word of God. David understood this, which is why he confessed his fear to God. He came to God and trusted in Him. The last few points in this lesson have shown how ungodly fear leads to disobedience, but we must not forget the simple truth that ungodly fear is disobedience. If God tells us not to do it, then we shouldn't do it.
- B. Notice that disobedience leads to further disobedience (Jeremiah 17:23; Romans 5:19).** Jeremiah 17 is just one example of how disobedience spawned in the hearts of the nation of Israel. Of course, we can also see how the disobedience of one man produced an abundance of disobedience in this world. Each time that we disobey God we harden our hearts and stiffen our necks toward His authority. Disobedience, if not dealt with, eventually leads to open rebellion against God. This is why God punishes disobedience by His children. He seeks to restore a healthy reverential fear of Him. As believers, we must examine ourselves to see if we are obeying His Word. If not, let's be swift to the altar. Let's confess the sin of disobedience. He is faithful and just to forgive us.