

Russell Kelfer

Fear as a Motive for Obedience

519-A

Series: Obedience



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Fear as a Motive for Obedience

We have been dealing in this series with principles of obedience. The first was the principle of the knowledge of God and its relationship to being obedient. The second principle concerned rewards and the Bema Seat in heaven. The third principle was how God illustrates obedience through demons and through the elements and other things of this world. The fourth principle concerned our having the will to obey but lacking the power to obey. The fifth principle described right and wrong counsel and its effect on our obedience. The sixth principle was one of remembrances and how God uses the spirit of remembrance to make us obedient.

In this lesson on the principles of obedience, we come to principle seven, the final principle in this series. In the last lesson, I asked if you would ponder in your hearts whether or not you felt fear was an acceptable motive for obedience. I think the answer is the fear of God, rightly understood, is an acceptable motive for obedience. It is not only acceptable; it is necessary. Before you disagree, I encourage you to relax and see what the Scripture has to say about the fear of God. In fact, I want to stress that there are some times of our lives when it is a necessary motive for obedience.

Have you ever realized that you don't obey for the same reasons all of your life? I know I didn't, and I still don't. Some of you would have to admit the same thing. Many of you have children or grandchildren. All of you can relate to the fact that when you first come into the world you obey through guilelessness. Guilelessness is total trust based on the absence of questioning. Dogs tend to obey this way sometimes. Children tend to obey this way for a short period of time in their lives. In other words, they obey because of total trust based on the absence of questioning. When you ask them to do something or come to you, they obey because there is no question in their mind that you could be wrong.

Notice that as sin becomes ever present and ever progressing

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in the life, the motivation for obedience, unfortunately, changes. Remember, the voice behind you gets weaker, the risk of defeat gets greater and the way back is longer. However, obedience to the will of God makes life exciting.

OBEDIENCE THROUGH GUILTESSNESS

This is the reason that Jesus said, “Except you become as little children you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” We come in as little babes trusting completely. It is an interesting study to go back and look at the attributes of a small baby and transfer those into the spiritual realm. We can see what Jesus meant when He said we needed to become like little children. He didn’t say childish. That is the way many interpret it. He said childlike, and there is a lot of difference.

OBEDIENCE THROUGH RESPECT

The second step seems to be obedience through respect. We seem to lose some of the guilelessness as sin enters into our lives, but we still obey out of a deep respect for the authority. This is true of children as they begin to grow.

Guilelessness seems to fit brand-new Christians as well. Have you ever noticed that when you first became a Christian it never dawned on you to disobey? It is a shame that we outgrow that, isn’t it? At first, it never dawned on us not to obey.

At this second stage, because of who God is and the freshness of what God has done, we obey through respect. Obedience through respect means following after another because of admiration or awe. In other words, we do what God asks us to do because we have such an awesome respect for who He is.

OBEDIENCE THROUGH HEALTHY FEAR

Unfortunately, there enters into the life of children and young Christians an ever-increasing confrontation with sin. We will yield on occasions. We do tend to change our standards on occasions. Before long, our motivation for obedience is no longer guilelessness, nor is it always respect. *There come into our lives occasions where, as further separation through sin occurs, we need to obey through, healthy fear.*

Have you ever feared God? When you are out of fellowship with God or when there is sin in your life and you know that you are disobeying the will of God, do you ever fear the consequences?

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This fear causes us to follow instruction because we are afraid of consequences. As our children grow older, they don't always follow instruction on the basis of respect. We have to turn to our children and say, "No!" There seem to enter into our lives situations where you must say, "No!" more than once, and still the child disobeys. Then comes the moment of truth. This moment usually involves some contact between the parent and the child. As a result of that contact, there is a certain, subtle element of fear or a subtle element of rebuke. This element of rebuke says, "Next time I say, 'No!' I want you to understand that it can be followed by, 'Oh!'" You begin a process of gradual discipline that leads to the stage of obedience motivated by fear.

As believers, think with me for a moment and see if there are not five things we ought to fear in our relationship with God when we get out of fellowship and harmony with His purposes.

1- The Fear of Punishment. You may think this is old-fashioned, but I don't think so. God is a god of perfect grace and great mercy. However, as we will see further on in this study, even His long-suffering has limits. These limits are not toward us but toward the sin. There are several things most of us, as believers, fear as we get out of fellowship with God and out of the will of God. One is the umbrella principle. We fear that others will suffer because of our sin. Second, we fear the cause and effect principle. As we do things, we will reap what we have sown. Except for the grace of God, we always will reap, every time. Thirdly, we fear divine discipline. This is the point when we continue in sin directly by an act of our will long enough, God intervenes to get our attention. So we fear punishment.

2- The Fear of the Loss of Fellowship with God. This same type of fear is evident in little children when parents get angry with them. A child will quietly enter a room after an angry incident to see if the parent's eye still has the look of hurt or anger or if they have once again been restored into fellowship with the family. They don't think they have been tossed out of the family; they know better than that. However, they feel that the fellowship has been broken. The sweetness of communication is gone. Do you ever feel that? This is the subtle way that Satan eases us out of a fullness of our walk with Christ. He does it so subtly. We tend to be satisfied to think, "Well, I'll get back into fellowship this afternoon or tomorrow." We then operate outside of the fullness of a relationship with Christ.

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I was in a Bible study with some friends. The question was asked, "What do you fear the most?" A friend of mine who had really developed a deep walk with God within the past few months and he really glowed when you talked to him responded, "The one thing I fear is to lose the joy of the sweet fellowship with Christ." This is the second thing that believers should have a healthy fear of when they become and remain disobedient to the will of God.

3- Fear of the Loss of Reward. In a previous lesson, we dealt with the concept of rewards. The Bema Seat of Christ will be in heaven, and He will share with us the rewards according to the things we have done in the Spirit. We are laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt. We were instructed by God to pay attention to that. As believers, we ought to be sensitive to the fact that these moments or days or periods of time lived out of the will of God are laying up rewards on this earth and not in heaven.

4- The Fear of the Loss of our Testimony. We should have a healthy fear of this. Has it ever occurred to you that the sin in your life could jeopardize your testimony? Have you ever thought of what it would be like if someone could take your thought-life, photochart it and sell it for profit? Some of us would be sick millionaires. The point is that you and I tend to think that as long as our sin is inside of us, nobody knows, and it can't harm anybody. There ought to be a healthy fear that the sins on the inside will eventually effect our lives on the outside. Our sins will find us out. More than that, the absence of joy and power and fellowship in our lives will have an affect on those who follow after. For all of us, there is someone watching and looking for Jesus.

5- Fear of the Loss of Power. Some of you can relate to this more than the rest. If you have ever done any teaching or witnessing or ministering or simply been available to people during the day, haven't you noticed that when sin has entered into your life and is allowed to remain there, that you go through a play-acting game? You walk around pretending to do the things and say the things you have done before, but the power is gone. You may stand up to teach, grin and go through the motions; but the power is gone. You open the Word to share it with other people, but the power is gone. The reason the power is gone is because corrosion has built up between the terminals where our life is plugged into God. That corrosion is called unconfessed sin. There is no loss of power

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from God’s transformer. It never runs short on power, but there is a corroded connecting link that is at our end. Sin builds up on this link, and the power cannot be released into our lives.

We ought to have a healthy fear of these five things. Guilelessness leads to respect. Respect should lead to obedience through healthy fear.

OBEDIENCE THROUGH LOVE

Even healthy fear isn’t the ultimate goal of God. The ultimate goal of God is found in I John.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (I John 4:18 NKJV)

God’s perfect motive is obeying and following to please or serve another as a means of expressing love. This is God’s ultimate goal. Paul said that the real motivation should be that the love of Christ constrains us. Obedience takes these steps. Unfortunately, throughout our Christian life there will be many times when we will not obey through love. Therefore, there needs to be a healthy understanding of the fear of the Lord, and we will examine it further.

THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR

THE FEAR OF THE LORD Dread of terror	THE FEAR OF THE LORD Awesome reverence
OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD	
PACHAD II Chronicles 19:7; 20:29	YIRAH Job 28:28
PHODOS (New Testament)	
Romans 3:18 Philippians 2:12	Luke 5:26 Acts 2:43

Draw a horizontal straight line on a piece of paper. In the very middle put a line vertically. On that line write Obedience to

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the Will of God. On the left side of that line write “The Fear of the Lord.” On the right side of that line write “The Fear of the Lord.” If we look into the Scripture to find the phrase “fear of the Lord”, we find two Hebrew words. There is a difference in their usage.

The first one is “*pachad*.” This word seems to always carry with it the connotation of dread or terror. Put that on the left hand side of your line. This applies to unbelievers. This is the kind of fear they should have of God. They ought to live in terror because their lives are not found in Christ. Therefore, when God looks at them He can see nothing but their sin, and they are found outside of Him. They ought to have a dreadful fear. They ought to be fearful of His wrath. This is also true of believers who are not walking with God. Because there is not obedience to the will of God, they tend to fear God in an unhealthy sense for the reasons we mentioned previously.

Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

(II Chronicles 19:7 NKJV)

And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel.

(II Chronicles 20:29 NKJV)

The enemies learned what God could do and there was a dread or terror of coming in contact with the Lord.

The other Hebrew word used for fear is “*yirah*.” Write this on the right side of the line. This word means awesome reverence. You will find this usage in Job.

“And to man He said,
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
And to depart from evil is understanding.”

(Job 28:28 NKJV)

The same passage is found in Proverbs 1:7. You can cross-reference Proverbs 2:5 and Proverbs 15:16.

Two basic Hebrew words are used in Scripture for fear. Both of these words are used from the spectrum of this chart. This chart is called the Spectrum of Fear in Scripture. On the one hand, to those who are outside of the fellowship with God there is a fear of God that has to do with dread or terror. The difference is that those inside fellowship with God, those who are rightly related to God, have a reverence in contact with God. They both

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have the fear of the Lord.

In the New Testament, there is only one word used for fear. It is the Greek word, “phobos”. This same word is used in both contexts of our chart. On the left side you can write Romans 3:18 and Philippians 2:12. Both of these passages have to do with the fear of the Lord. One passage tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. This means we need to carefully be aware of who God is.

On the other side of the spectrum under reverence, you can write Luke 5:25,26 and Acts 2:43. In Luke 5:26 the same word is used. This passage describes the healing of the paralytic.

Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today!

(Luke 5:25,26 NKJV)

The people present were awed at who God was. They weren't afraid of Him, but at this point they were in awe of Him.

The same word is used in all of these passages. What is the difference? The difference is *unconfessed sin*. Romans 13:1-5 can be written in the middle of your chart under the word obedience. This is an illustration of the difference between the two kinds of fear. This passage talks about subjection to authority. It says,

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. (Romans 13:1-5 NKJV)

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So the key difference between those two kinds of fear has to do with whether or not you are in harmony with the will and purposes of God. In other words, I John 1:9 should translate you from the sphere of dread to the sphere of respect. But the fear of the Lord ought to always be there. It all depends on your position relative to unconfessed sin.

There are some things that we ought to fear. We ought to fear God in a healthy way for the reasons we have mentioned. We are to fear His anger in a healthy way. What is the anger of God? The anger of God is the end of His decisive patience with sin. The word decisive needs to be in there because God does not throw temper tantrums. He doesn't all of a sudden say, "That's all I can take from this person!" There is a decisive point in each of our lives where God, never rejecting us in His grace on our behalf and that grace never running out, will finally reach a place where sin in our lives must be judged. We can't be judged. We were judged at the cross. Jesus Christ paid the penalty. His blood cleansed us. Our judgment is passed. However, our sins can be condemned, and we can be punished for them. There comes a point in time in our lives, if we continue by an act of the will to disobey the known will of God, that He sends at first a gentle and then later not so gentle, divine discipline. It is the end of His decisive patience with sin in our lives. Some verses that apply to this principle are Psalm 78:38; Psalm 106:23 and Proverbs 14:35.

What are we not to fear? The Scripture is very plain on this subject also.

1- We are not to fear other people as we see in Proverbs. We are not to be afraid of what man can do.

The fear of man brings a snare,
But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.

(Proverbs 29:25 NKJV)

Another passage is John 12:42.

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him,
but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest
they should be put out of the synagogue; (NKJV)

2- We are not to fear the enemy as we see in II Chronicles,

You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves,
stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you,
O Judah and Jerusalem! ' Do not fear or be dismayed;

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tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you.”

(II Chronicles 20:17 NKJV)

There is no reason to fear the enemy. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

So we shouldn't fear others, and we shouldn't fear the enemy.

3- We are not to fear circumstances. We see this in Matthew 14:29-30 and Matthew 26:56-58.

We are not to fear others. We are not to fear the enemy. We are not to fear circumstances. Strangely enough, these are the three things God uses to discipline the believer when and if He decides to do so. He may discipline you through other people. He may discipline you through the enemy. He may discipline you through circumstances. He does this always by His divine allowance.

The key, once again, is that the agents God uses to cause us to fear Him are the same agents we are not to fear if we are rightly related to Him. Never fear them, but we are to have a healthy fear of God who may use those same things in our lives to discipline us.

The Fear of the Lord

The third part of our study is five things that lead to the fear of the Lord. Ask yourself this question, “Do I have a healthy fear of the Lord, or do I treat Him with disrespect and treat His commandments loosely and lightly? Is there no longer a sense of awe in His presence? Even when I am out of fellowship or harmony with Him, is there really no sensitivity to the potential of divine discipline?” If so, perhaps we need to learn the fear of the Lord.

I took a concordance and cross-referenced “fear of the Lord.” I came up with five things in Scripture that I believe show us what it means.

1- Unconfessed sin. This one is internal.

“Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone.

And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.

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Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life.

(Deuteronomy 28:64-66 NKJV)

This is a very negative picture. We need to recognize that this is the kind of feeling we have when we are out of fellowship with God. Sometimes when we live outside of the will of God long enough, unconfessed sin develops within itself a fear of the Lord. In fact, it is such a fear that when we get outside of the will of God knowingly, we don't want to be around Christian people. We don't want to go to church. We don't want to get involved with people we know are excited and joyful about the Lord. We tend to run and hide. The reason is that there is a fear of the Lord. That fear of the Lord comes from unconfessed sin.

Another illustration is found in Genesis 2:8. Adam and Eve had unconfessed sin in their life. In fact, they had doomed all of mankind through their sin. God came walking in the garden, and they were scared to death. This is the first time fear was really known on earth. They were afraid, and they hid from God. They ran from Him. As always, God came and found them just the way He always comes to find us in love. But the unconfessed sin brought with it, fear. Some of us need to ask God to give us a healthy fear when unconfessed sin is in our lives.

2- The miracles of God bring about the fear of the Lord. We see this in Joshua 4:24. Have you ever noticed that the times in your life when you were in fellowship, were the times in your life when you have stood the most in awe of God. And you were also the most in fear of God if you weren't in fellowship, is when you had just seen the hand of God do great things? Let's look at this passage in Joshua 4,

“for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over,

that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.”

(Joshua 4:23,24 NKJV)

Other passages with a similar teaching are found in Mark 16:8 and Mark 5:15-16.

3- An evidence of the wrath of God leads us to a fear of the Lord. We see this in Joshua 2. This is an example of seeing the miracles

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of God and seeing the anger of God, when we have unconfessed sin in our lives.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Joshua 2:10,11 NKJV)

Another passage with this same principle is found in I Samuel 12:17 and 18.

4- Being aware of the silence of God makes us aware or creates in us the fear of the Lord. We see this in John 19:7-9. This is Pilate's experience when Jesus remained silent. Pilate became fearful. The Psalmist had the same experience. He said, "Lord, I'm afraid. I can't hear from you anymore. Where are you?" This is a loose translation. Job had the same experience. Sometimes, God, in His mercy, loses His voice to get our attention. Have you ever noticed times of silence in your life when you seem to pray and you know He was there and you know He was answering, but you couldn't hear Him? Yet, it developed a healthy fear of the Lord in you. It returned you to the place you needed to be.

5- Being in the presence of God Himself develops a fear of the Lord. I think this is the one we should be most excited about. Exodus 20 says,

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.

Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." (Exodus 20:18-20 NKJV)

Now let's turn to Matthew 17,

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well

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pleased. Hear Him!”

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

But Jesus came and touched them and said, “ Arise, and do not be afraid. (Matthew 17:5-7 NKJV)

In Luke 2 we read,

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” (Luke 2:9,10 NKJV)

Some other verses you might cross-reference are Luke 1:29-30; Matthew 28:3 and Judges 13:20-22.

In summary, there are at least five things that bring about an awareness of the fear of God in our lives. These are unconfessed sin, the miracles of God, the wrath of God, the silence of God and time in the presence of God.

The conclusion is that, first of all, the fear of God is a healthy motivation for obedience. Secondly, the fear of God is not the ultimate motivation for obedience, the love of God is. Thirdly, fear has two personalities relating to God. On the one hand, there is terror or flight. The word in the Greek literally means that which tends to flight or causes us to be removed. We don't like that. The exciting thing is that Psalm 139 teaches us that there is no cause to flee. A paraphrase might read like this: If I ascend into the heavens, guess who is there? If I descend into the deep, guess who is there.? If I run to the east or run to the west, God is still there waiting and loving.

You and I have to realize that all that is required is repentance. This is to turn from the position we are into a position of obedience. The fear of the Lord then ceases to be terror or dread. It then becomes respect, reverence and worship. The difference is obedience and having your sins confessed.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 gives us a summation of it all. We read,

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all.

(NKJV)

Let me ask four questions in closing.

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1- How much do you personally fear God? Has society and even apathy within the confines of the body of Christ caused you to lose a healthy fear of God? What happens inside of you when someone says the word “Jesus”? Do you want to fall to your knees in admiration and adoration and worship? Or, do you say, “Oh, yeah, the Lord.” How healthy, how real is your fear of the Lord? It is one thing to cease to fear Him as the judge and come to respect Him as the King, but to lose the respect and the fear is a terrible thought.

2- On which end of the spectrum does your fear generally end up? Do you live in dread and terror most of the time that you will be disciplined? Do you fear because you are continually out of fellowship? Or, is most of the time your fear a healthy awareness of how exciting it is to be in the presence of the King?

3- Are you willing to humble yourselves right now in any area of disobedience that is continually besetting you, continually keeping you from having that joy and that freedom and that fellowship that you know God wants you to have?

4- These fears often don't motivate you, as they often don't motivate me. The loss of rewards—we become insensitive to that. The loss of fellowship—we become blinded to that. The loss of power—we become unaware of that. The loss of testimony—we become apathetic and we don't care about it. When you are in that position, has it ever dawned upon you to ask God for divine discipline? If those last four fears don't work, has it entered your mind to ask God for divine discipline? God does not need us to ask, but He responds when we do. It is not something we do lightly. Many times there are besetting sins in our lives that we just don't want to deal with. Because of this, the fear of the Lord ought to be a wholesome adoration that becomes dread and terror when we have unconfessed sin, (and we don't want to live our lives in that condition). I wonder if we ought not to be brave enough to ask the Lord for divine discipline to get our lives in order? We will then have the freedom again to have a healthy and exciting fear of the Lord.

God is so patient. He loves us so much. He waits so long. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is a vital key to obedience both in your life and in mine.

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