

The Fear of the Lord – Part 4

In parts 1 to 3 of this series, we've seen that if you realise God is here and He is holy, it will cause sanctification. You'll understand that you are a sinner who needs cleansing and help to obey. Then, if you realise God is here and He is Strong, it causes strengthening. You realise God is the source of your life, you are the creature; He is the Creator; so you trust Him, and grow in strength.

The last aspect of what the fear of the Lord brings is servanthood. As a Christian, you are three things. You are creature, you're a saved sinner, and you're a servant. Realising you're a creature, and God is the Creator causes dependence and trust. Realising you're a sinner and He is the Holy Saviour causes repentance, confession and consecration. Realising you're a servant and He is the Master will cause you to see that you are meant to be a servant.

All along, you realise those things because you compare yourself to God. You say – God is here. Who is God, and then who am I? If you spend your time comparing yourself to other humans, you will not have the fear of the Lord. But if like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the apostles – you see who God is, and compare it with yourself, you will have the correct reaction. That's the fear of the Lord.

The final element of the fear of the Lord has to do with another aspect of God's character. This is the fact – that God is Lord. He is the Master. He is the Sovereign Ruler. He is not merely the King; He is the King of Kings. He is the Lord that lords must submit to. He is Ruler of all. The greatest king of the ancient world, Nebuchadnezzar said the following of God:

I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

Daniel 4:34-35

How do people react in the presence of someone of great authority? How do you react if you see the one who is in charge of your work, or your city, or even your country? You compare yourself to them, and know that you are not in authority, they are – you are the subject, they are the leaders.

Exodus 20 helps us realise we are in the presence of a great Master. How does one end up as a slave? Sometimes, if one was a prisoner of war. This applied to the heathen around Israel, not to their kinsmen, but it was nevertheless the source of some slaves in Israel (**Numbers 31:7-9**).

Sometimes it was when someone got so seriously into debt that they could no longer pay. They were completely bankrupt. Then, having no other option, they'd offer themselves as a slave for another to buy. The buyer would essentially be making a trade: they'd take the debt upon themselves, but at the same time take over the life of another. Abandoned children and babies were also collected by slave-traders and raised as slaves in Roman times.

Now, doesn't that sound remarkably like us before we were saved? We were enemies of God – warring against His lordship – and it was His power and love that conquered us, and led us away as His slaves. Likewise, our sin had incurred such a debt over our heads, we could never have paid it. So, like these people of old, there we stood in the slave market of sin, on a pedestal, ashamed, hoping that someone or something could rescue us out of the destruction our sin had brought us – and God did just that.

This is the root meaning of the word 'redemption' – God buying us out of sin through the blood of His Son. Likewise, we were born as slaves to sin, raised as slaves to our own evil, till God bought us out of that slave-market of sin. By birth, by debt, by warfare, we are slaves to God.

Submission

Now a slave practiced absolute submission to their master. A slave no longer practiced their own will. They did not get up in the morning and follow their own schedule, or do their own thing. Though they still had a will, they submitted their will to the will of their master. They did everything their master told them to do. Slaves did not pick or choose their assignments. They did not debate with their master if they should obey – they obeyed everything, without question.

The very idea of a slave is not a hired labourer. A slave was the property of their master. So they did everything as the master wanted it. In effect, their master's will became their own. They just forgot about their own will, since it was senseless to focus on their own will as a slave. Their master's will swallowed up their own.

Although a slave had to obey everything, just think how much more they obeyed when the master was watching. That's why Paul said slaves should not only obey with eyeservice. It proves the point that our Master is always watching. He owns us, and has every right to expect that as His slaves we will not do anything but His will. Where do we find our Master's instructions?

In the Bible. Obeying God's Word implicitly is part of the fear of the Lord. I don't obey God's Word because of the pastor, because of other Christians, because of family, because of tradition, because of mere duty. I obey it because I am in His presence – He is my Master, I am the servant, I must do His will. As Jesus says in **Luke 22:42**, *"Not my will, but Thine be done."*

Obedience is when you follow the instructions of God. You only need to do two things to obey: hear, and do. Listen to the instructions, and then live it. Believe His Word, and behave it. God's authority is also found in other human structures. In the home, in the church, in civil government, in society, in the workplace. If we are submissive to God's authority – we will submit to them as well, to the degree that they obey God.

Submission and obedience is not moralism. Mere morality is simply a list of rules that we keep because we figure life works better that way. Submission and obedience is personal – it is directed to a person. 'I do this because He told me to. He is my Master, I belong to Him, I want to please Him.' If you can't link a commandment to the Person of God, the chances are you are just moralising, and even being legalistic. Legalism is trying to produce righteousness through rules apart from relating to God.

By the way, the Bible makes it pretty simple to sum up all that you have to obey. It says all the commands can be summed up like this: vertically, with 'love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind' and horizontally, with 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Every single commandment that God has given man can be traced back here. So make God your highest treasure and pleasure, and seek for your fellow man what you would want for yourself.

Sharing the Gospel is also summed up in Christ's command to "*love your neighbour as you love yourself*" (**Matthew 22:39**). The fear of the Lord will clearly bring about obedience. **Ecclesiastes 12:13** says "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*"

But there is something else to consider about a slave. Not only does a servant live in submission to His Master, they also live in surrender to their master.

Surrender and stewardship

Surrender means to give up fighting for your own. You give control over to someone else. A slave was not a hired labourer. They were their master's property. Their very bodies belonged to the master. They owned nothing. Everything they had was actually the master's. They were just stewards of it – caretakers. They handled and managed what belonged to the master – but they never regarded it as their own.

Imagine a servant, trying to fill their pockets with the master's money, and suddenly seeing the master has been standing behind them. The master would say, 'Why are you filling my clothes with my money? Why are you wasting my time, trying to take what is mine, and put it into what is mine? Since you will always be mine – why are you trying to get money as if I do not take care of you?'

See, a servant gives up all right of ownership. The master was now the one who took care of the slave. For a slave to try and make it apart from the master was foolish. The

arrangement was simple – the slave gives up his entire being to the master, the master takes care of the entire being of the slave.

We need to see that as slaves, we don't have our own time, our own money, our own possessions, our own clothes, our own name, our own directions, our own plans – they are His. When God is here – and we realise it – so how can we try and fill our pockets (His pockets) with our own affairs? Why do we strike out for a life apart from God, when we belong to Him?

1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us we were bought with a price; we are not our own anymore. In light of that, **Romans 12:1** says we are to be always before God as a sacrifice. A sacrifice has surrendered all – its own life. But in this case, we are to be a living sacrifice. Notice that the Bible says to live this completely surrendered way is not super-spiritual. It is reasonable – it's logical. Why? Because of the kind of God He is. And when we realise He is here – it is logical to react by being a surrendered servant.

I want you to notice the rest of the passage. Unlike the Hebrew servant, we do not serve a fixed term with God. We are always His. But there is a parallel here. The Hebrew servant would serve for six years and in the seventh would be set free. However, there was what you could call a voluntary slavery clause.

In it, the slave who had been submissive and surrendered to his master for six years now had every right to walk away. But instead, an allowance was made for someone who didn't want to do that. Imagine if, in the course of those six years, that slave had found the master to be an extremely wise man, the kind of man you feel secure around, because he is so skilled at life itself.

Imagine that slave had found the master to be extremely fair – he never punished more than was right, he never let things slip – he wasn't biased or partial. He assessed things correctly, and made correct judgements. Imagine this slave had observed the master being generous, extremely kind, merciful and gracious to the poor, to strangers, to his own household.

What if he had observed the master being a righteous, holy man – pure in motives, speech, attitudes, honest in business, pure at home, full of love for others? Do you know what that slave would begin to reason? 'Why should I entrust my future to anyone else, except someone like this? Where could I be happier, and more fulfilled, but under the guidance of such a good master?'

The slave may think, 'This master has been so good to me – I cannot imagine life on my own again. Nothing would make me happier than to serve him, to bring him honour and glory and happiness. Nothing would fulfil me more than to be his lifelong, willing slave.' In other words, servanthood to such a great master brought the third result, and that is satisfaction.

Satisfaction

Call it what you want – joy, happiness, delight, pleasure, love – the Bible uses them all interchangeably. The presence of such a great master produces perhaps the most important result of all – satisfaction. The servant states to all: I love my master; I will not go out free. Slavery to a good man is preferable to freedom where you destroy yourself. Servanthood is not a drudgery. It's not grievous. It's not unwilling bondage. Serving a Master as good as God is satisfying. It delights the soul.

This is so important that God wants everyone to know about it. That's the symbolism behind the ear-piercing. See, when people saw slaves doing their six-year term, they didn't glorify the master. It was just duty. But when they saw a slave there in the seventh, eighth, ninth, fifteenth, 34th year – serving that same master – they'd wonder what was going on. They might even think that that master had forced them to stay.

And so, there was a ceremony where the ear was bawled through as a sign that this slave voluntarily wanted to serve the master. Now, what do you think others would say of a master if he had an army of ageing, ear-pierced servants? They'd say, what a great master he must be! People who start out as bond-slaves there never want to leave. It is their satisfaction in him, their fulfilment and lack of desire to leave that would glorify the master as good.

God is making it clear: fearing Him is not a ball and chain, it brings great delight, joy and happiness. Fearing God brings you to where you under the care and guidance of the best, wisest, most generous, most fair, loving Master of all. To come under His care, to get to know Him in any way, is to say, "I Love my Master! Even if I could go out free, I would not want to! Who would want to live life apart from so great a Master?"

Realising that God is here, and He is so great, means I find satisfaction – I find joy. As **Psalms 16:11** says, *"In thy presence is fullness of joy."* See, the Bible teaches that God does not just want submission and surrender. He wants us to be satisfied in Him as well. Merely submissive servants don't glorify their Lord as great. That's expected. Merely surrendered servants don't glorify their Master as great – that's expected. But satisfied, happy, contented, delighted, loving servants – they glorify their Master as great.

Consider that merely submissive servants *accept* the will of their Master. Satisfied servants *seek* the will of their Master. Submissive servants will do what they are told because it's expected and to avoid trouble. Satisfied servants do what they are told and more because they love their Master and want to please Him. You can bet those ear-pierced servants not only did what their master told them to do – but they found extra ways to please their master. They had become his friends.

And even though they would never become familiar, and slap him on the back – there was real love. This is the fear of the Lord. God is not our equal. He will always be our Master. But we love Him intensely, and it grows. The fact that He is on the one hand our

Master, but on the other hand our best Friend, causes this awe, this amazement, this reverence. The reaction is the satisfaction of the fear of the Lord.

Why do you think the procedure had to be ear-piercing? I think to illustrate that there will be pain in loving God like this. Those who serve God out of plain, cold-hearted duty don't experience much pain. They may experience boredom, but not much pain. But if you want to truly fulfil the great commandment to love God with all your heart, soul and mind – there'll be pain.

Just ask Abraham. God touched him down to the quick with Isaac. But if you had met Abraham coming down from Mount Moriah and asked him, Abraham, is it painless to love God? He would have looked at you askance. He might have said, 'Of course it's not painless. It includes much pain. But it satisfies the soul.' *"The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil,"* (**Proverbs 19:23**).

If God my Master walks in the room, I immediately compare Him with me. I see that He is the Master, and that makes me the servant, the slave. A slave submits completely to their master. I obey God's Word implicitly. I realise that everything I am, have or use belongs to Him. I completely surrender to Him. But then He is the best Master one could want. He provides for me. He protects me. He guides me and teaches me. He strengthens me. He sanctifies me. He died to save me. He sanctifies me so I can enjoy the happiness of holiness. So I can taste fullness of joy.

Here's the amazing thing about serving God. He wants us to serve Him not because He needs the labour. **Acts 17:25** says, *"Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."* God is the source of all strength. It makes no sense then to think that you are giving your strength in God direction because He needs it.

No, all that you could do for God in a lifetime, He could speak into existence in one second. To act as if you are giving to God insults Him. It makes out that you are the benefactor and God is the beneficiary. But we know it is the other way around. Why then does God want me to serve Him? Because like this Hebrew servant, as I serve Him, I get to know Him. I know God in the midst of trusting and obeying.

As my knowledge of God deepens, I love Him more. I value Him more. I enjoy Him more. I treasure Him more. In other words, I worship Him. And this is the purpose of your life. God gives you the opportunity to serve in His house, not because there is so much to do and God lacks the manpower, but because God, as an infinitely happy and satisfied God, smiles down upon you, and says, 'I'm going to give you the opportunity to know Me. I'm going to invite you to do some things in My house.'

'The things you do are not the main thing. It's the person you'll become as you do those things. It's as you spend time doing things for Me that you'll learn more about Me. Then you'll find the deepest need of your heart satisfied – to know and love me. To reflect My

image back to Me. I am giving you some things to do – but don't focus on the things – focus on Me as you do them. Don't focus on doing, focus on being. Who you are, Who I am.'

The fear of the Lord is when a human realises, they are in the presence of God. They realise then who they, the human, are, in comparison to God. When they believe and accept this – that awesome contrast causes a mix of emotions in Him called the fear of the Lord. But more than just emotions – there is a reaction. They realise God is here – He is holy. I am not, I am a sinner. But God is merciful, I need that. I repent and trust God for cleansing and for obedience. That's sanctification.

Then they realise God is here and He is the Creator. I am not – I am a creature. He made me, He must maintain me for me to go on living. I depend on Him, I trust Him. From that we gain strengthening.

Then we realise God is here – and He is the Master, the Lord, the Sovereign King. I am not – am the servant, the slave. I react with submission to His will, with surrender of all to Him, and with satisfaction in who He is. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man,"* says **Ecclesiastes 12:13**. This is your fulfilment. This is the ultimate. This is the means to the end.

The end is to love God, the means is to fear God. It's another term for humility. It's another term for faith. It's another term for filled with the Spirit. It's the foundation. Seeing God, and reacting correctly to Him. See God by being sensitive to the Spirit, and by being saturated with the Word. As you behold Him, and realise He is here – let it change your behaviour.