

Serve God with Fear and Reverence

Aim: To encourage us to have a fear and respect for God and His Word.

Reading: Exodus 19:1-6, 10-13; 20:18-20

Introduction:

The children of Israel who left Egypt had an amazing blessing. They got to see first-hand, tangible evidence, of God's power in action. Here at Mount Sinai, the presence of God was so over-powering that they were afraid. It was too much for them.

Prior to their departure from Egypt, they had been under the yoke of slavery from the Egyptians for many years. Life was pretty tough for them (**Exodus 1:11-14**). In fact, it got to the point where they were under the very real threat of genocide. The Egyptians had commanded that the mid-wives kill all the baby boys as soon as they were born (**Exodus 1:15-22**).

Yet God, through Moses, told them that they would soon be able to leave Egypt, and that they would go to a land that was flowing with milk and honey (**Exodus 3:8, 17**). Not only that, but when they leave, they would not leave empty handed. They would be able to plunder the Egyptians in the process and take their silver and gold (**Exodus 3:21-22**). I guess we could understand a Hebrew in those days being a little bit sceptical about the whole thing.

But we know the story. God sent the plagues on Egypt. These plagues were inflicted on the Egyptians, but not on the Hebrews, even though they lived in the area. (**Exodus 9:4-6, 23-26; 10: 13-15, 22-23; 11:4-7**). Finally, Pharaoh agreed to let them go (**Exodus 12:31-32**), but first, just as God had said, the Hebrews plundered the Egyptians of their silver and gold – the Egyptians freely handed it over when the Hebrews asked for it (**Exodus 12:35-36**).

The Hebrews also saw other demonstrations of God's power before they reached Mount Sinai. As they left Egypt and approached the Red Sea, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued them with his army – 600 choice chariots, and all the other chariots at his disposal, plus horsemen and his army (**Exodus 14:6-9**). The Hebrews appeared trapped – they had the Red Sea on one side, and Pharaoh's mighty army on the other. What were they to do?

But God delivered them again. He provided the means for the Hebrews to cross the Red Sea by parting the waters (**Exodus 14:16-22**). And He destroyed the entire Egyptian army by drowning them (**Exodus 14:23-28**).

After they crossed the Red Sea, God performed other mighty works for them (*e.g.* **Exodus 17:1-13**), And so, as we saw from our reading, they finally arrived at Mount Sinai where once again they saw the power of God.

1) God's awesome power and knowledge

When we read both the Old and the New Testament, it doesn't take us long to see that God is an awesome and powerful God. Consider His power in the following examples;

- His power over His creation.

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- He just had to speak the word, and the planets and the solar system came into existence. He just had to speak the word, and all the intricate life forms that exist on this planet came into being (**Genesis 1:1-28**)
- God was able to change the entire face of the Earth by completely flooding it with water, killing all air-breathing life-forms in the process, and yet at the same time, keep Noah and his family and the creatures in the ark safe and well (**Genesis 6:13 – 8:19**).
- He just has to speak, and the winds obey His voice (**Mark 4:36-41**).
- God is able to raise up nations (**Genesis 12:2**), and is able to tear them down (**2 Kings 17:18**). He raised up the Hebrew nation starting out with a 100 year old man (**Genesis 21:5**), and the mans wife who was well past the normal child-bearing age (**Genesis 18:11**) - in fact, she had never been able to have children when she was younger (**Genesis 11:30**).
- God has control over the movements of the planets
 - God made the sun stand still for a day in order to give Joshua more time to defeat his enemies (**Joshua 10:12-13**).
 - He made the sun move backwards 10 degrees as a sign to Hezekiah that he would not die just yet (**2 Kings 20:8-11**).
- God has the power to protect His people when He chooses to do so.
 - He saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego from the fiery furnace (**Daniel 3:19-27**) This furnace was so hot that the guards who threw them in were burned to death. Yet when Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego came out of the furnace, not a hair on their head was singed, and there was not a mark on their clothes.
 - God was able to spare the city of Samaria when it as under siege from the Syrian army (**2 Kings 6:24 – 7:16**). Things were pretty grim in the city – even the King was wearing sackcloth (**6:30**) In fact, things were so grim that a woman had resorted to boiling her own child for food (**6:28-29**). Yet God caused the Syrian army to hear a noise like the sound of an approaching army (**7:6**). This noise so frightened the Syrians that they left everything behind and fled. They fled so fast that they threw off any clothes or weapons that would slow them down.
 - When Jerusalem was under siege from the Assyrians, God sent out an angel one night and struck down 185,000 of the Assyrians in one blow (**2 Kings 19:35**).
- Not only can God preserve life, He can also make the dead rise to live again, as He did with Lazarus (**John 1:1-44**) and Jesus (**Matthew 28:1-6**).

Not only does God have all power, but He has all knowledge.

- He knows the future. He was able to tell Abraham about what would happen to his descendants hundreds of years into the future – how they would spend some time in Egypt under affliction (**Genesis 15:12-14**).
- God foretold centuries before-hand about the coming Messiah – where He would be born (**Micah 5:2**), and how He would die (**Isaiah 53**).
- God knows what you are going to say even before the words are on your tongue (**Psalms 139:1-4**). In fact, God knows what is in your hearts and in your thoughts (**1 Chronicles 28:9**). He knows exactly what is going

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through your mind right now. He knows exactly what you were thinking of 5 minutes ago. And He knows exactly what your next thought will be. (Kinda scary, isn't it.) Nothing is hidden from His sight (**1 Corinthians 4:5**). God knows what goes on inside people. We may be able to hide things from our fellow man, but we can't hide things from God.

And what can we say about God's love and mercy. God, the one who has so much power and authority, so desperately doesn't want us to die in our sins (**2 Peter 3:9**). He sacrificed Himself so that we could have forgiveness of our sins (**John 3:16; Romans 5:6-9; Ephesians 1:7**).

2) God requires Fear and Reverence from His people

a) The terms "Fear" and "Reverence".

When you read the word "*fear*" in the scriptures, you need to look at the context in order to know what type of fear it is talking about.

- In some contexts, it is the fear that we can have because of the harm that someone else might do to us (**John 7:13**)
- In other contexts, it can be the fear we have when we are concerned about the welfare of others (**2 Corinthians 11:3**)

The term "*fear*" in the context of this lesson means to acknowledge the power and authority that God has over us, and that includes the knowledge that if we disobey Him, if we rebel against Him, then we will have to bear the terrible consequences (**Romans 2:8-9**).

The child of God who lives a faithful and obedient life does not have to fear God in the sense of being terrified of the coming judgement. But the faithful child of God also has a fear and respect for God based on who God is.

The term "*reverence*" means to have a deep respect, to hold with awe and affection, to honour as sacred. Surely that is how we should see God.

b) God's people are required to "fear Him".

Under the Old Testament, the Hebrews (or Israelites) were God's people. This is what He required of them. In **Deuteronomy 10:12** we read;

*"...to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul"*¹

A similar thing is said a couple of chapters over in chapter **13:4** ;

"You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice..."

To put it quite succinctly, **Ecclesiastes 12:13** says;

"...Fear God, and keep His commandments..."

Notice in these verses (and in other passages, such as **Deuteronomy 17:19**) how having a fear and respect for God goes hand in hand with obedience. You cannot claim to have a proper fear and respect for God, and at the same time disregard and disobey His Word.

¹ All Bible quotes are from the New King James Version Bible

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Now let us look at the New Testament. In **1 Peter 1:17-19** we read,

“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold,but with the precious blood of Christ.....”

In **1 Peter 2:17b**, it says; “....Fear God....”

In **Hebrews 12:28-29** we read;

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”

These were letters written to Christians. Notice the similarities between what was said in the Old Testament and what is said in the New. God doesn’t change (**Malachi 3:6a; Hebrews 13:8**), and the need for God’s people to fear, respect and obey Him doesn’t change. It is a consistent principle from one end of the Bible to the other.

If we ever have any doubts about that, we need to consider the following examples of those who failed to give God and His Word the respect that He deserves.

- c) What happened to those who did not show proper fear and respect for God and His Word.
 - When Lot and his family were about to flee Sodom, they were told not to look back (**Genesis 19:17**). But when they had reached the safety of Zoar, Lot’s wife looked back, and paid for it with her life (**Genesis 19:23-26**)
 - Moses was denied the opportunity to live in the Promised Land because he did not follow God’s instruction at Kadesh about speaking to the rock in order to make the water appear (**Numbers 20:1-12**). In fact, of all the adults that left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb got to enter the promised Land, because the rest showed disrespect to God all the way though the wilderness wanderings (**Numbers 32:11-13**)
 - these were the people who saw God’s power first-hand.
 - Saul lost his kingdom because he did not respect and obey the Lord’s instruction about attacking Amalek (**1 Samuel 15:1-28**).
 - When the nation of Israel split after the days of Solomon, God made Jeroboam king of the northern kingdom (**1 Kings 11:31-38**) God also promised him that if he remained faithful to the Lord, then God would preserve his lineage. But in spite of God’s promises, he feared that the people might leave him if they continued to worship at Jerusalem as per God’s will. So he changed things to suit himself, and had Israel worship idols (**1 Kings 12:26-33**). His fear of not being wanted was stronger than his fear and respect for God, and so God destroyed him (**1 Kings 14:7-11**).

Lesson for us: Any change we make in the church that is designed to please men and moves us away from what God requires of us, is a change that is going in the wrong direction.

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- Many years later the nation of Israel was destroyed because of its unfaithfulness (**2 Kings 17:5-23**). Its people were scattered to the four winds.
- Judah, the nation that carried the messianic seed line, did not learn the lesson from Israel's destruction. It too showed a lack of respect for God, and about a 100 years later, it was taken captive by the Babylonians (**2 Chronicles 36:15-21**).
- Those mentioned in Malachi had become complacent, sloppy and lazy in doing what God wanted with regard to sacrifices. To them, the whole thing had become a bit of a bore. And so God rejected their worship because of their disrespectful attitude (**Malachi 1:6-14**).

Now you might say, "Yes, but that was the Old Testament. Things are a bit different now." Well, consider the following two accounts from the New Testament;

- In **Acts 12:20-23** we read about King Herod giving a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon. The people responded "*The voice of a god*". Now I suspect that Herod let the people's praise go to his head. He thought that he was being elevated to the status of God, but in reality, by accepting this praise from men, what he was really doing was dragging God down to his level. Therefore, for showing this disrespect towards God, God struck him down, and he was eaten by worms.
Note: We see the opposite reaction by Paul in **Acts 14:8-18** when the people at Lystra tried to consider Paul and Barnabas as gods.
- In **Acts 5:1-11** we read of Ananias and Sapphira. From the context, most likely there were members of the church. But they showed their disrespect for God by choosing to lie to the Holy Spirit, thinking that they could hide something from God. But as we saw earlier, nothing is hidden from God. And so God struck them dead, right there on the spot. The passage then goes on to say that "...*great fear came upon all the church.....*" Any doubts that people back then may have had about the need to take God and His Word seriously would have been swept away instantly.

3) How do we apply all this to our daily lives ?

We saw earlier that there is a link between having fear and respect for God, and obedience. Jesus Himself said "*Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?*" – **Luke 6:46**.

God's Word contains teachings and principles that affect every part of our lives, be it at home, at work, at worship, or in society in general. (**2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-3**)

- In the home, christian husbands show fear and respect for God when we love our wives (**Ephesians 5:33**).
The christian wife shows her fear and respect for God when she respects her husband (**Ephesians 5:33**).

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Christian children show their fear and respect for God by obeying their parents (**Ephesians 6:1-2**).

- At work, we show our fear and respect to God when we do our job diligently for our employers (**Ephesians 6:5-7**).
If we have subordinate staff, we show our fear and respect to God when we treat them fairly (**Ephesians 6:9**).
- When we meet together to worship God, we show Him our fear and respect when we do things His way, and do it with sincerity of heart (**John 4:24**).
Consider this for a moment. If God were to sit here out the front, visible to everybody, would we do things any differently? – regardless as to whether we are leading, or just participating.
In **Matthew 18:20** we read, “..where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am also...”. We may not see Him, but God *is* here, and He knows exactly what is going on.
- In society, we show our fear and respect to God when we live our lives as lights to the world (**Matthew 5:14-16**)

Conclusion:

The Bible clearly shows that not everybody who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (**Matthew 7:21-23**). We read in **Matthew 13:24-30** that at the end of time, there is going to be a “weeding out” process when we stand before God in judgement. Paul said “*Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men....*” (**2 Corinthians 5:10-11a**)

Brethren, we need to have a healthy fear and respect for the Lord. You may say, “*But doesn't 1 John 4:18 tell us that “perfect love casts out fear?”*”. Yes it does, and the same book also shows the close relationship between love and obedience; “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*” – **1 John 5:3**
- see also **John 14:15**

So if we had perfect love, we would also have perfect obedience. But who is going to say that they have perfect love? Who is going to say that they have perfect obedience?

Having a fear of the Lord does not stifle our Christian growth – rather, it enhances it. In **Acts 9:31**, where it is talking about the churches in Judea and Samaria, the scripture says “*....And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*”

Having a fear of God did not slow these Christians down. Quite the opposite. It was a contributing factor in the growth of the early church.

The things that I have said in this lesson were not said to cause you to have doubts about your faith. God says that we *can* know the Truth (**John 8:32**), and with the right knowledge, the right attitudes, and the right actions, we can be confident of our salvation (**1 John 5:13**).

What I have said this morning I say in order to exhort you to “*be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble*” (**2 Peter 1:10**).