

The Influence of Fear

—Fear encourages faithfulness

Since the two previous lessons have been about faith and hope, you probably expected this lesson to be about love, for "faith, hope, and love, these three..." certainly belong together (1Corinthians 13:13). However, I am keeping love for our seventh and last influence, and looking now at an influence that is linked to faith, hope, and love, namely fear (Hebrews 12:28-29 1Peter 1:17).

1 *Fear of God Encourages Us to Obey Him*

- **Fear encourages faithfulness.** The Hebrew writer contrasts "full assurance of faith" with "a certain terrifying expectation". Because Christians have full assurance, they no longer have a terrifying expectation. But they still have a healthy fear of falling back into that terrifying expectation, and losing the assurance of faith. The Hebrew writer uses this fear to motivate Christians to keep obeying God (Hebrews 10:22, 26-31).
- **Fear moderates liberty.** Fear of offending God helps us to properly restrict our liberty as Christians. Christians should never use their "freedom as a covering for evil" for liberty does not permit sin (1Peter 2:16-17).
- **Fear promotes care for others.** Paul says, "You were called to freedom, brethren—only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." This involves being careful about the liberties we take (Galatians 5:13, 1Corinthians 8:9).
- **Fear perfects holiness** and help us work out our own salvation. (2Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 2:12).

2 *Fear Can Fail*

- **Fear can degenerate into terror.** The fear that motivates us to love and obey God can degenerate into a morbid terror, that "certain terrifying expectation" that we mentioned earlier (Hebrews 10:22,27).
- **Fear can also degenerate into legalism and guilt.** Fear can deteriorate from a motive to obey God, into a desire to add oppressive rules to the law of Christ. Paul frowned on this kind of false religion (Colossians 2:16-23). Note that Paul makes a distinction between a person restricting his own personal liberty for the sake of others, and a person binding or following man-made religious laws.
- **Fear can come from the wrong source.** The right fear comes from the Holy Spirit. If we are led by the Spirit, we will have a life-giving and liberating fear of God, not "a spirit of slavery leading to fear again" (Romans 8:12-17, 2Timothy 1:7).

3 *Having a Right Fear of God*

- **Unite fear with faith.** The Hebrew writer says, "Let us fear..." but he exhorts us to have a profitable fear. He speaks of those who heard the message of salvation from the wrath of God. "The word they heard did not profit them not being mixed with faith in those who heard" (Hebrews 4:1-16). Fear must be mixed with faith to be beneficial.
- **Unite fear with hope.** As Peter describes the fiery destruction at the end of the world, he also reminds us of our hope saying, "We look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Peter 3:8-18).
- **Unite fear with love.** Peter exhorts us to live our lives soberly, mindful of the judgment to come, he also exhorts us to "keep fervent in your love..." (1Pet 4:1-8).

Note:— **No Fear in Love.** When John says "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1John 4:17-18), he is talking about the wrong kind of fear which we have discussed. The right kind of fear supports love, and we need the influence of that fear along with the influence of love.

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