

Hearts that Fear God – *Deuteronomy 5:23-33*

Introduction – The delivery of the Ten Commandments this time, 40 years later, is quite calm compared to the first time. And many who are present now were too young to remember or were not even born when it was given on “*the mountain burning with fire.*” No fire, no darkness, no thunder; just the words of the old preacher, Moses. The difference, however, in the two events, would not be measured by the outward manifestations of God’s presence and glory, but by hearts that feared God and feared Him rightly.

Fear at the Mountain – Moses recalls that when the people heard the voice from the fire of the burning mountain, they were terrified and asked him to be their mediator (vv 23-27, 30-31). Not only was this fear real, it was right and good (v28).

Fear with No Heart – At the same time, the LORD laments that they did not continue with such fear (v29). Think about it. They sent Moses away as their mediator, but while he tarried on the mountain, they made a golden calf and fell into idolatrous revelry (Ex 32). The fear did not work itself out in growing closer to the LORD (Phil 2:12-13). It turned out only to be a fear of condemnation or consequence and not towards obedient zeal (2 Cor 7:8-11). It is fruitless in the long run, as was seen by that generation’s refusal to obey God and enter into the Promised Land.

Fear from the Heart – There is a fearful expectation of judgment for those in covenant with God when they disobey or refuse to walk by faith (Heb 10:27). But for those walking by faith, there is no fear of judgment (1 John 4:17-19). And this is what stirred the heart of God to say, “*Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!*” (Deut 5:29). It is worth pausing and considering the character and effects of godly fear.

The Character of Godly Fear – Godly fear is evidence of the grace of God (Heb 12:28) and is the fruit of God’s covenantal love upon us (Jer 32:38-40). It does not drive us away from God; it drives us away from sin (Prov 16:6). This fear creates confidence and is a “*fountain of life*” (Prov 14:26-27). This kind of fear is not in opposition to your assurance; it strengthens your assurance.

The Effects of Godly Fear – Godly fear produces right worship (Psalm 89:7 – “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints...*”), emphasizing devotion and sincerity, not entertainment and triteness. It keeps us from bending to worldly pressures and persecutions (Psalm 119:161, Matt 10:28). It promotes faithful ethics like honesty, hard work, and lawful treatment of others in the workplace (Neh 5:15). Godly fear produces humility (Rom 11:20) as well as much rejoicing (Psalm 2:11, 147:11).

Fear that Stirs the Heart of Faith – The giving of the Law did not give faith to the first generation and yet Moses again gives the Law. This is because there was no fault in the Law. The fault was in the people. Therefore, he preaches to this next generation the same message (vv32-33), a message that God uses to instill godly fear in the faithful (Deut 6:1-2). This gift of fear stirs our hearts to keep all of God’s commandments, not from fear of condemnation, but because of liberty and love for God (6:5). Paul argues the same way: sin no longer has dominion over you for you are not under law but under grace (Rom 6:14). That liberty does not free you to sin, but to obey (Rom 6:15ff). Sin bore a wage and that wage was death. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23). In Him, by Him, and through Him, we have this life which produces obedience to the faith (Rom 16:26). Grace does not mean that we don’t pay attention to what God’s standards of righteousness is; grace empowers us to live according to the law, loving it and loving the One who gave it. And all of this is done by faith in the One who faithfully keeps covenant with us, even the Lord Jesus Christ.