

**September 2005—Questions and Answers**  
**Love or Fear Him?**

Franklin Church of Christ Edwin Crozier September 11, 2005 PM Worship
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**Introduction:**

In 1513, 490 years ago, Nicolo Machievelli wrote his famous work, **The Prince**, in which he tried to explain the best way for a ruler to govern. Machievelli wrote, "Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, [it] is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with." Machievelli brings up this month's question, with which, I am sure, many Christians struggle. When it comes to serving God, our King, are we supposed to be motivated by fear, by love or by both somehow? Some view love and fear as opposites. Some suggest people become Christians out of fear, but as they mature become governed by love. Some suggest you should never encourage anyone to serve God out of fear. Some believe that is the only way to motivate people. Some suggest that love is an ushy-mushy approach. Others believe it is the only approach. And just about everyone struggles with whether or not their motivation is too much fear and not enough love or vice versa. Examine the scriptures and learn God's comforting answer to this.

**Discussion:**

- I. Love and fear are not opposites, they are two sides of the same coin.
  - A. While we often view love and fear as contrasts, **Deuteronomy** actually presents a completely different approach. In fact, these two chapters present love and fear as practically synonymous. Notice how Moses defines these two concepts in exactly the same terms.
    1. In **Deuteronomy 10:12**, Moses said that Israel ought to fear God, walking in His ways. In **Deuteronomy 11:22**, Moses said that they should love God, walking in His ways.
    2. **Deuteronomy 13:4** said fearing God means keeping His commandments. **Deuteronomy 11:1** said loving God also means to keep His commandments.
    3. In **Deuteronomy 10:20**, Moses demonstrated that fearing God meant serving Him. In **Deuteronomy 10:12**, he said that that is also what it means to love God.
    4. In **Deuteronomy 10:20**, Moses also linked clinging or holding fast to God with fearing Him. Once again, we find that loving God means the exact same thing in **Deuteronomy 11:22**.
  - B. The biblical view of love and fear is different from our common view. We view both of these concepts from an emotional or motivational standpoint, and, therefore, see them as opposites. The Bible views them from a behavior standpoint, and, therefore, sees them as almost the same.
  - C. The Bible demonstrates love and fear are not opposites. It also says they both have the opposite—hatred. We are not surprised to see hatred as the opposite of love as **Matthew 6:24**. But notice also that **Proverbs 13:13** demonstrates the same thing about fear.
  - D. Do not be concerned about whether or not your motivation is love or fear because both produce obedience and conformity to God's will. And to the extent that you are obeying and conforming to God's will you clearly, by your actions, both fear and love God.
  
- II. The Bible's fine line between love and fear.
  - A. Is there a difference at all between the two? Both love and fear have to do with thinking about God, His promises and His power. The difference has to do with which direction we are looking.
  - B. Loving God is obeying Him because we are so impressed with what He has done for us. In **Deuteronomy 11**, the command to love God was based on the great things God had done for them. Read especially **vss. 1-8**. **I John 4:19** says, "We love, because He first loved us." **I John 4:10** shows His love for us. When you focus on this gift, you will grow in love for God. You will want to do whatever you can to show your thanks and, therefore, you will obey.
  - C. While loving God is obeying because of what God has done for us, fearing Him is obeying because we are so impressed with what He can do to us. In **Deuteronomy 11:16-17**, Moses instills the fear of God in Israel by pointing out the great punishment God could bring upon them if they did not obey Him. Jesus taught this in **Matthew 10:28**. Fearing God means obeying Him because we know He can kill our bodies and destroy our souls in hell. When you think about this horrific eternal torment, you will grow in fear of God. You will want to do whatever you can to stay out of there and, therefore, you will obey.

III. Growing in both love and fear is the balance of mature Christianity.

- A. While I have said in the past that fear seems to be the more immature motivation for obedience that is replaced by love as the Christian grows, that simply is not what the Bible presents. God is equally clear that we are both to love and fear Him at the same time. Mature Christianity does not mean you love more and fear less. Rather, it means that we love God more (**II Peter 1:7-8**) and fear God more (**I Peter 1:17**).
- B. Perhaps it would be better to say that having both love and fear is the balance that produces mature Christianity. Loving God reminds us of what God has done for us already. Having that helps us continue serving the Lord when our fear might overwhelm us and cause us to give up when we goof up. When I love God I am reminded that He wants me to be saved and is not looking for the opportunity to blast me into hell. As Paul said in **Romans 5:9-11**, if God would send His Son to die while we are still sinners, how much more will He do to save us from wrath now that we have entered Christ? Loving God and remembering what He has done for us balances our fear so that we pick up and get back on track when we have failed God again.
- C. Fearing God reminds us of what God can and will do to us if we stop obeying Him. Having that will push us to keep obeying when we might be tempted to believe that because God loves us, He doesn't care if we fudge on His laws. As Paul wrote in **Romans 6:1**, we must not sin that grace may increase and this chapter concludes with the very frightening reason why. **Romans 6:23** says grace does not increase if we turn back to sin, rather the end of our sin is death.
- D. Love and fear provide a balance that produces maturity and growing in both is the balance of mature Christianity. Thus, we see these two concepts do not war with one another but actually go hand in hand with one another in our lives.

IV. But what about **I John 4:17-18**?

- A. Someone may say, "That is all well and good Edwin and it makes some sense except for **I John 4:17-18**. I know that verse says love rules out fear." So we need to ask, if what I have presented is true, how do these verses fit in the bigger picture of love and fear?
- B. What we find as we compile these verses is a biblical paradox. That is, we find what seems to be a contradiction that causes us to dig deeper and figure out what is the deeper meaning. For instance, when Jesus in **Matthew 5:4** said, "Blessed are those who mourn..." How can they be blessed, that is, happy, and mourn at the same time? This is a paradox. We dig deeper and figure out that the ones who are happy are the ones who realize what a mournful situation their sins have gotten them in. They are happy, because only they will submit and be forgiven.
- C. Our question though is about love and fear. The paradox is that we are told to love and fear God and then are told that if we love God we won't fear. Look at another passage that demonstrates a similar paradox. In **Romans 13:3-4**, the scripture says when we do what is good we do not have to fear government. However, in **Romans 13:7**, we are told to give fear to whom fear is do. Another passage that says we must fear something, but we won't fear something. But this passage we can understand more readily. The fact is, if I fear the possible punishment the government will inflict on evildoers, I will do what is good. If I do what is good, I do not have to fear receiving punishment from that same government. This is the same message we have regarding God. If I obey God, I demonstrate that I love and fear Him. Because of that love and fear, I obey Him. Because I obey Him, I do not have to fear the judgment and torment of God. A clear way of expressing the truth on this is if we fear what God can do to punish us and therefore obey, we do not have to fear that He will punish us. That was certainly important for early Christians who came out of paganism to understand. Because the fact is, you could love and fear the Greek and Roman gods and they may still blast you. But not our God.

**Conclusion:**

So, the conclusion of the matter is this—love and fear God, keeping His commandments. Do not get bogged down in wondering which one you do more or ought to do more. They go together. They balance each other. As long as you are doing what God says, you have both and you can face the judgment with confidence and not fear going to hell. Do you love and fear God?