

STUDY 9

Exodus 20:20

And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.”

Read the context: Exodus 19:1-20:21

What an interesting verse!

What does Moses tell them first in this verse? Do _____ .

What had made them afraid? (Exodus 19:16, 18-19; 20:18)

They were so afraid that what did they think would happen to them? (Exodus 20:19) What did they not want God to do anymore (same verse)? How did they want to receive messages from God?

So Moses tells them not to fear. And yet, what did God want to always be before the people?

How do you explain this? 2 fears. One we're not to have; one we are to have. How are they different? How are they the same?

What effect was the fear that God wanted to be before them always to have on their lives?

It's interesting to note that the fear the people had, that made them not want to hear God personally but to have God's messages relayed through an intermediary, did not keep them from sin even though they had all pledged their obedience (Exodus 24:3, 7); but the fear that God wanted them to have would have kept them from sin.

Could it be that one fear is a soul-ish response to God (i.e. an emotional, mental fear that led to a physical response of fear) and the other a spiritual response (i.e. a response of our heart generated by the Spirit)? Go back to the meditation from the study of the first verse on the fear of the Lord (Genesis 20:11). Think through again the difference between the fear of man/fear of evil and the fear of God, and the difference in the inner response. Perhaps in today's verse the Israelites were having a “fear of man/fear of evil” response to God rather than a true “fear of God” response.

Remember, too, the meditation about Pharaoh and the essential character quality that was missing in his life (Exodus 10:3). The fear of the Lord requires a humbleness of heart. Does the fear of man require that? Do you think the people in today's story had a humble heart toward God? It seems from their responses in Exodus 24 (vss. 3 & 7) that they thought they could commit themselves to obedience and follow through on their own: sincere, but self-reliant; and it led to miserable failure.

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Review what you've learned about the fear of the Lord. Start two lists with two columns on each list: the first 2 columns, what the fear of the Lord is and what it does or what its effect in our lives will be; and the 2nd 2 columns, what the fear of the Lord isn't and what the effects of not having it will be.

Pray over these lists and let the Lord use them to examine your own heart. What kind of fear do you have? What are the effects in your life? Is your fear of God leading you to humble dependence and greater obedience? If not, maybe you need to hear God say as Moses said to the people at the beginning of this verse: "Do not fear," and then ask God to replace improper fears with a proper fear of the Lord.