

am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry. MATTHEW 11:28-30 NET

The term “yoke” probably alludes to that which lay across the necks of oxen. In saying that the “yoke” and “load” of following him is “easy” and “not hard to carry” (v. 30), Jesus may be referring to the fact that as he is “gentle and humble in heart” (v. 29) he will not require anything that is beyond us.

Follow Jesus Christ

Follow Jesus Christ

[JESUS, TO PETER AND ANDREW:] *“Follow me, and I will turn you into fishers of people.”* ²⁰They left their nets immediately and followed him.

MATTHEW 4:19B-20 NET

To follow Jesus Christ involves not just simply following his commands, but also following him and his example. In doing so, we follow Christ not only as our leader, but also in companionship with him. This concept is an important aspect of discipleship.

Be a disciple of Jesus Christ

Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *“If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples ...”* JOHN 8:31 NET

8:31 NET

A disciple is one who seeks to learn and follow the teachings of another, even to the extent of becoming like the teacher (as reflected in the following subsection).

Follow Jesus Christ’s example

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *For I have given you an example – you should do just as I have done for you.* JOHN 13:15 NET

Make Jesus Christ your Lord

But *set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts* and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. 1 PETER 3:15 NET

3:15 NET

CHAPTER 23

Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

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I. Loving and Fearing God

Love and fear are two emotions or attitudes that we should have towards God, and arguably they stand alone as such. The Bible states that loving God is of the utmost importance. Fearing God is also shown to be critical. Like loving God, understanding and having the fear of God that the Bible teaches, benefits us in many ways.

Note that both love and fear of God are closely associated with obeying him (the theme of the second half of this chapter). They are very strong, compelling emotions and provide the primary emotional stimuli for obeying God (cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-13) – supplementing intellectual stimuli arising out of such things as faith. Moreover, the Bible indicates that our love and fear of God are actually expressed primarily in obeying him.

Love God

Love God and Jesus Christ

Love the LORD, all you faithful followers of his! [PSALMS 31:23A](#) NET

Grace be with all of those who *love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.* [EPHESIANS 6:24](#) NET

Love for God and Jesus Christ is shown by obeying them

We show our love for God by obeying his commandments, and they are not hard to follow. [1 JOHN 5:3](#) CEV

Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him. [JOHN 14:23](#) NET

Love for God is linked with loving other Christians

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God’s child, and *whoever loves the Father also loves the Father’s children.* [1 JOHN 5:1](#) NCV™

Everyone who loves God will naturally love his children as well.

How to Obey God

Persistently read God’s commands

It [a copy of God’s law] must be with him constantly and he must read it as long as he lives, so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and observe all the words of this law and these statutes and carry them out. [DEUTERONOMY 17:19](#) NET

This instruction is given for the king, but is relevant to all people.

Do what you learn of God’s law and word

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. [EZRA 7:10](#) ESV

[JESUS:] *Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock.* [MATTHEW 7:24](#) NET

Ask God to help you follow his commands

Teach me, O LORD, the lifestyle prescribed by your statutes, so that I might observe it continually. ³⁴*Give me understanding so that I might observe your law, and keep it with all my heart.* ³⁵*Guide me in the path of your commands, for I delight to walk in it.* ³⁶*Give me a desire for your rules, rather than for wealth gained unjustly.* [PSALMS 119:33-36](#) NET

Submit yourself to God

So submit to God. [JAMES 4:7A](#) NET

To persistently obey God, we need to first submit to him.

Obey God wholeheartedly

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Arrogant people smear my reputation with lies, but I observe your precepts with all my heart.* [PSALMS 119:69](#) NET

Note: God’s and Jesus Christ’s commands are not too difficult

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *This commandment I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it too remote.* [DEUTERONOMY 30:11](#) NET

[JESUS:] *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹*Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I*

II. Obeying God

The concept of obeying God permeates the whole Bible – the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. It is fundamental to a functional and healthy relationship with God. A related concept is that of following Jesus Christ, which likewise is relevant to all aspects of the Christian's life.

Note that the second half of 21. *Being Right with God – II. Staying Right with God* – begins with key teaching underlining the need to obey God.

Obey God

Obey God always – forever

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I am determined to obey your statutes at all times, to the very end.* PSALMS 119:112 NET

We should obey God because of what he has done for us

[A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD'S DEEDS FOR ISRAEL:] *When he led his people out, they rejoiced; his chosen ones shouted with joy. 44He handed the territory of nations over to them, and they took possession of what other peoples had produced, 45so that they might keep his commands and obey his laws. Praise the LORD!* PSALMS 105:43-45 NET

We should obey God because of all that he has done for us and moreover because our obedience is in fact one of the chief objectives of all his deeds for us (v. 45a). A corollary of this is that if we do not obey we will forfeit God's blessings which are a key part of all the things he does for us.

We should obey God because he is our God . . .

[GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *I am the LORD your God; follow my statutes, observe my regulations, and carry them out.* EZEKIEL 20:19 NET

. . . It is no good expressing commitment without obeying

[JESUS, TO THOSE WHO MERELY PROFESSED HIM AS THEIR LORD:] *Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do what I tell you?* LUKE 6:46 NET

The Importance of Loving God

Loving God is of the utmost importance

Jesus said to him, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* 38*This is the first and greatest commandment.* 39The second is like it: *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* 40*All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."* MATTHEW 22:37-40 NET

God and Jesus Christ love those who love them

[JESUS:] *The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him.* JOHN 14:21B NET

Note that the last clause refers to Jesus Christ revealing himself to those who love him, along with loving them.

Fear God

Fearing God is more than just having reverence for him. A sound appreciation of God's holiness and wrath, along with his supreme power, produces a genuine fear of incurring his displeasure. But this does not involve anxiety or terror for those who seek to please him and who understand his grace.

Clearly, fearing God moves us to obey him. It also evokes and supplements such things as worship and service, and even trust. When we grasp the concepts involved and willingly do fear God, we learn to gladly do so, even treasuring verses that call us to fear God.

Fear God to the extent that you tremble before him

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *My flesh trembles out of fear of you, and I am in awe of your judgments.* PSALMS 119:120A ISV

Worship the LORD in holy attire! *Tremble before him, all the earth!* PSALMS 96:9 NET

Do not fear anything but God

[GOD, TO ISAIAH:] *People are saying that others make plans against them, but you should not believe them. Don't be afraid of what they*

fear; do not dread those things. ¹³But remember that the LORD All-Powerful is holy. He is the one you should fear; he is the one you should dread. [ISAIAH 8:12-13](#) NCV™

Note that if a person truly fears God, they are practically unable to fear anyone or anything else.

God's people should not live in fear of his punishment

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them. ¹⁷Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on Judgment Day; and we will have it because our life in this world is the same as Christ's. ¹⁸There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment. [1 JOHN 4:16B-18](#) GNT

In v. 18 "love" appears to be referring to the love of God that is manifested in the Christian – the love that God has for them and they in turn show to others (v. 16), revealing themselves to be like God or Christ (v. 17b). Knowing and expressing such love drives out anxious fear of punishment from God (v. 18) – particularly as those who live in love live in God, and God in them (v. 16b). Knowledge of such love cannot coexist with anxious fear of God's punishment; they are incompatible, both logically and experientially. As such we can look towards Judgment Day with courage and confidence (v. 17).

Having a godly fear of God's punishment is a good thing, as it leads us to spurn sin and to not turn away from God. However, living with God's love – and under his grace – believers ought not live in anxious fear of God's punishment.

Why God Should Be Feared

God's surpassing greatness and sovereignty

There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. ⁷Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you. [JEREMIAH 10:6-7](#) ESV

God's anger and judgment

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? ⁸From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still, ⁹when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. [PSALMS 76:7-9](#) ESV

God's holiness

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name, because you alone are holy? [REVELATION 15:4A](#) NET

God's holiness involves his separateness from and intolerance of that which is morally impure, with the latter leading to his judgment. Thus God's holiness – awesome in itself – and its grave implications give good reason to fear him.

The Importance of Fearing God

Fearing God is closely associated with obeying him . . .

[A WISE TEACHER:] *Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man.* [ECCLESIASTES 12:13B](#) NET

. . . Fearing God compels one to avoid sin

Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, *so the fear of him may be present with you in order that you don't sin.*" [EXODUS 20:20](#) ISV

Fear of God leads to life

Fearing the LORD leads to life, and one who does so will live satisfied; he will not be afflicted by calamity. [PROVERBS 19:23](#) NET

OT verses (such as this one) which speak of fearing God leading to "life", generally have in view: life as opposed to premature death; and/or a fullness of life.

Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever! [PSALMS 111:10](#) ISV