



"Joy is the serious business of heaven."
—C.S. Lewis

08-Sep-17

Fearing God at the Feast (Part Three)

In Part Two, we considered the first two of the four elements found in God's instructions on the Feast of Tabernacles, particularly in [Leviticus 23:40-43](#). Those two initial elements, we found, are 1) the second tithe, in conjunction with the fact that the Feast is a harvest festival, and 2) temporary dwellings, which point back to Israel's wilderness journey. A factor unifying all four of these festival components is God's faithfulness, which steers us toward a proper fear of [God](#).

The third element in the command to keep the Feast is God's insistence that we rejoice. From what we have seen, we realize that the Feast is not a celebration just for the sake of having a good time. Our festivities should focus significantly on God's faithfulness, rejoicing over all that He has done throughout the prior year. Our [joy](#) should do much more than just lift our spirits.

Just before their captivity, ancient Israel was quite skilled at having a good time at the Feast—but it was all in vain. It failed to accomplish what God intended, as [Amos 5:21-24](#) shows:

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor [KJV, *smell* ; a reference to the incense, which represents prayer] your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened [peace](#) offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

In terms of the Feast, among many other matters, Israel was falling far short of God's expectations. Even though they were rejoicing, sacrificing, and making a joyful noise, all of which God commands, they were missing the mark so severely in their celebration of the Feast that God utterly rejected it! The ensuing verses reveal that idolatry played a significant part in the problem, particularly the worship of Molech. Despite their rejoicing at the Feast, their worship, in general, was idolatrous. Their merriment had the wrong focus.

Verse 22 mentions the offerings that they were making, providing more insight into Israel's condition. By giving burnt offerings, the people were signifying that they were wholeheartedly devoted to God, even while being guilty of gross idolatry. In giving meal offerings, they were indicating that they were likewise dedicated to the well-being of their fellow man, even though God implies that justice toward their fellow man was badly lacking, if not entirely absent (verse 24). Through the peace offering, they were suggesting that they were in communion and fellowship with both God and man, which cannot be correct if they were worshipping Molech, a false god best known for the child sacrifices used in his worship. Molech worship destroyed relationships all the way around, so their giving of peace offerings was sheer hypocrisy.

Perhaps most telling, however, are the offerings that are *not* mentioned. God says nothing of the drink offering, which was supposed to accompany the [meal offering](#). He may be lumping the two together in His mention of the meal offering, but it is also possible He deliberately omitted it from the record. The drink offering goes beyond a general "dedication" to fellow man (as the meal offering represents), symbolizing life-expending service (see

[Philippians 2:17](#); [II Timothy 4:6](#)). This detail fits the sordid picture of ancient Israel's corrupted worship perfectly because when a man is intent on attending the Feast merely to have a self-centered good time, he will not be interested in serving brethren with whom he is supposedly in peaceful fellowship!

Even more striking is that God says nothing about the [sin offering](#), the sacrifice that paved the way for the individual to be accepted before God and even to be allowed to make the other offerings. By omitting this, they were indicating that they had no need for forgiveness—that they did not have any sin! They had no conception of their standing before God and no recognition of the immense gulf between them and their Creator. They were completely unaware of their spiritual poverty.

They were indeed rejoicing at the Feast, but the focus of their joy was not God's faithfulness. Nor was it governed by their fear of God, because they did not have any! They simply showed up to have fun, putting on a show of piety.

The Israelites left the Feast unchanged, returning to their homes to continue their idolatry, injustice, and unrighteousness. Their pretense at communing with God was futile because if they really had fellowship with Him, they would have returned from the Feast with a greater appreciation of His faithfulness and a greater fear of God that would have produced changes in their lives. As [Proverbs 8:13](#) says, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil," and a person demonstrates his hatred of evil by turning from it!

This leads to the fourth element, the fear of God. Consider that we learn to fear God *because* He is faithful. This principle contains both a positive and a negative reinforcement.

The negative aspect is that, because God is so faithful and dependable, He will chastise, avenge, and judge. The consequences of sin are fixed and unchanging, which should strike terror in our hearts if we are contemplating sinning. *God is just as faithful in executing the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 as He is in giving out the blessings.* He is faithful to His purpose, meaning that He is committed to providing what is needed for eternal life to become a reality for us. If calamity is necessary to provide a

course correction, God is faithful to provide it. Israel disobeyed Him and learned firsthand that He was faithful to send them into captivity. We learn to fear God because of how faithful He is in doing what is righteous.

The positive aspect of learning to fear God because He is faithful is that, as we see more and more of God's faithfulness, as we see Him provide everything we need, and as we see Him working out His purpose on the earth, our regard, reverence, and deep respect for Him cannot help but grow. Our fear of Him intensifies as we understand Him more deeply.

A consistent theme runs through the instructions regarding the Feast of Tabernacles. It is not the only theme, but it is a powerful one: The Feast is a celebration of God's faithfulness. This year, if we go to the Feast and rejoice in God's faithfulness in providing for us, protecting us, and guiding us on this pilgrimage—along with everything else that He does—we will, in fact, be learning to *fear God always*, as [Deuteronomy 14:23](#) commands.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Fear of God \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We must have established some relationship with God before we can rightly fear Him. Fear, faith, hope, and love serve as the four cornerstones upon which the whole superstructure of Christianity rests. A holy fear of the Lord is the key to unlocking the treasures of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. Paradoxically the fear of God, because it unlocks knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual growth, should draw us toward God. Conversely, if we do not respect God, reciprocally God will not respect us. In order to reverence God, we must know Him. Christianity is experiential; we must live it to understand it. Our concept of God (and our fear of God) needs to come from observing His creation and absorbing His revealed word rather than the precepts of men.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Hating Evil, Fearing God](#)

by David C. Grabbe

II Corinthians 6:14-16 contains a warning that good and evil do not mix, so as Christians, we must be careful to avoid having anything to do with what is wrong. Highlighting Proverbs 8:13, David Grabbe reveals that the fear of God plays a significant role in ridding evil from our lives.

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