

Deuteronomy (Part 4)

Love and the Fear of God

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During the sermonette, I mentioned to Evelyn this is a wonderful introduction for my subject today, and I think you will agree as we go along. I do not think that there is anybody like the ministry who is reminded so often of Who is actually behind these things, guiding and directing the subject, and who speaks on what. I think that the sermonette yesterday knocked the props right out from under any idea that any of us is unimportant in Christ's body, or that any form of leadership on our part is unnecessary. But how can we exercise our leadership seeing that God is not requiring that any of us lead hundreds of people into battle?

You are probably unaware that only two forms of the word "faith" appear in the entire book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 7:9 "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God."

The one form is faithful. In this particular place it refers to God as being faithful.

Deuteronomy 32:20 And He said, 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation [meaning the Israelites], children in whom is no faith.'

This is right in the midst of the Song of Moses, and Israel is being called perverse. That is pretty bad.

Verse 20 ought to tell us something, especially since the author of Hebrews said Israel failed because they were in the wilderness and were not able to enter the land because of *faithlessness*. What they heard, it says there, was not mixed with faith. By turning that statement completely around, it becomes a lesson for us in how to succeed, that is, be faithful like God is faithful.

I am going to change the terminology here just a little bit from faithfulness to loyalty, because they are synonymous with one another. A person who is faithful—full of faith—is going to be loyal. God wants us to show our leadership by being faithful or by being loyal, as in a marriage. A covenant is an agreement. It is a compact, as in a marriage compact, and we know very well that is what God did. He entered into a marriage with Israel as the bride, and intended that she be loyal to Him. But she was not loyal to Him, but rather committed idolatry all over the place, thus breaking her marriage vows.

It does not matter for us where one is placed in the Body. God is nonetheless looking for leadership wherever we happen to be in every situation in life, because everywhere and in every situation, brethren, we are in the battle. Even though we are not being shot at, as the word might be, we are in the battle.

I am going to remind you of something I said the very first night I began this series:

Deuteronomy is uncompromisingly, almost ruthlessly, monotheistic. It almost throws in our face that Yahweh alone is God and there is no other. But more important than that is there is perhaps no other book in the Bible that defines the character of God so completely.

I gave you an example:

The first commandment in Deuteronomy is not merely, 'You shall believe in no other gods.' But rather, Deuteronomy presents Him as 'I am Yahweh, the God of redemptive power and action demonstrated in the Exodus liberation. You shall have no other gods to *rival Me.*' God is God as revealed in the Yahweh of the Bible. Deuteronomy is particularly filled with what it means to be the people of God, to be entrusted with the knowledge of God, and to be challenged to not merely believe that knowledge, but by faith to live out that knowledge in the sight of those around you. The book is directly aimed at God's witnesses.

Much of life is devoted to making choices, but those of us in the church are the only ones who truly have the opportunity of a lifetime to make right, spiritual, moral, and ethical choices that are in line with the purpose of the Creator. We are the only ones who can truly be faithful.

Are you aware that it is much easier to be faithful, to be loyal to someone, including God, when you truly love that someone? Now turn with me to these very well known scriptures in the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 30. As we read these, I want you to understand that in a major way this series of verses can be said to be the summary, the conclusion, of the entire book. Even though a couple of chapters follow, those chapters are nothing more than Moses' Song, which is a prophecy of where Israel was headed, and events surrounding the death of Moses.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

It is through all the points touched on here that we are given a charge, with a sense of urgency, to get on with these things before we move into the land.

Hold your finger there because we are going to come right back. But I want us to go back into the book of Numbers. This ought to be in your memory banks. It is one of those scriptures always to remember. It is easy to remember because there is a hook here you can hang it on—Numbers three

two, verse two three. The numbers are just reversed. Sometimes I think God did that on purpose for scriptures that He especially wanted us to remember, and this is a good one.

Numbers 32:23 But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD ; and be sure your sin will find you out.

Choices have consequences. The more immature a person is, the more likely, the more willing they are to gamble on the consequences. Let me give you an example that the consequences of sin will eventually be revealed. This is a very simple example. Adam and Eve sinned, and the consequences of that sin is that through them sin entered into the world. Everybody has died and faces death as the consequence of their allowing sin into the world. What a consequence! I know I am speaking the truth because it says that very thing in Romans 5:12.

The consequences of their sin have been borne. It has spread out like leaven through all of mankind on every person who has ever lived. The immature think that somehow they can sin in a corner. "Nobody knows." "Nobody finds out." Do you think God was standing there, visible, before Adam and Eve? I think not. He was there, but He was not visible before them. So the immature think they can do something and nobody will know, there is no consequence, except it might be to me and I am willing to bear that consequence. Oh no! This is why leaven is used as a symbol of sin. It gets in through one person, maybe, but it spreads out to everybody.

I want you to understand that God is *not* a gambler. He does not gamble on the consequences of things. He wants His children not to gamble on the consequences of things, thinking that somehow or another it does not matter and somehow or another they are going to get away with it. Do you understand that the church exists for the very purpose of guiding the children of God, their choices, so there is no gambling with their future? He wants them to live.

If you parents understand this, this is your responsibility before your children and before God. You are to protect them and guide them from the consequences of their foolishness. They cannot see the consequences the way you can because you have had the experience. It is the responsibility of parents to protect them, and sometimes punish them in order to protect them, so they realize they need to fear the consequences of doing the wrong thing. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from them."

Those are simple principles. God follows His childrearing instructions. He wants us to understand we are going to pay for the consequences of our sin, and as the sermonette showed, they disobeyed the angel God gave them. One time after another they paid the consequences of their sin.

Back to Deuteronomy 30. We will consider all of it now, because what we have here from verse 15 through verse 20 is a very simply stated but stirring call to commitment—the commitment of being faithful, the commitment of being loyal. It reminds me of that section in Luke 14:33, the "count the cost" section we give to people before they are baptized. Jesus said you have got to love Me more than father, mother, sister, brother, and in verse 33 He says that if a person is not willing to sacrifice, denying himself all that he has, he is not worthy of being My disciple. Our commitment has to be to being as loyal as we possibly can.

There are a number of concepts within this section which are very helpful to fulfilling our responsibility. Notice how life and entering into the land are joined together. "See I have set before you this day life and good." He goes on to say, that if we make the right choices we will enter into

the land. To us that means into the Kingdom of God. Unless we are willing to submit to God's way and be loyal to Him, there will be no life for us as God intends.

There is another connection to be made that makes getting there, into the Kingdom of God, vividly practical. This one has to do with submission. In the book of Deuteronomy, it is treated in a very broad way. But, we are going to step back to Matthew 19 where the young man came to Jesus and said, "What must I do to have life?" Jesus said, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments." Where do you think Jesus got that idea? He got it right out of the book of Deuteronomy, in chapter 30. He also got it out of Deuteronomy 4, because it says the same thing there. "If you want to enter into life, obey My commandments, My statutes, My judgments, and My laws."

There is another concept here that is very important. I wonder if you noticed that twice God mentioned love. In verse 16, "In that I command you this day to *love* the LORD your God." And, tied to that, is to walk in His ways.

In verse 19 it says, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live; that you may *love* the LORD your God, and that you may obey His voice." I want you to hang on to this thought for a little while. I want you to remember, notice, regard, pay attention to where love fits in and what follows love, in terms of when it is mentioned first. Love is mentioned first and we will get to the importance of that in a little bit.

God wants loyalty—loyalty as in a marriage. He wants loyalty with a deep and abiding affection. Because we know His character, and we see the beauty of holiness displayed in His Word and in His creation, we enjoy being with Him and we love Him with all of our heart. We would no more turn away from Him than we would a deeply loved spouse and the children we can see and touch.

I want you to consider something else here, and that is, brethren, that we do not drift into love. You do not fall into love. You do not look across the room and suddenly love zaps you and say, "I love that person." It is far more likely that the hormones are operating and we are lusting after that person. There is a good feeling there, but that is not love. Real human love takes place in marriage and in our relationship with God. That is where real love takes place and that is why God portrayed it in the Bible, that is, the making of the covenant, as a marriage covenant. All the hormones do, young people, is get you started toward love, so there will be an opportunity to really express love as God intends that it be expressed.

We are going to go back to the New Testament, to John 21. Now again, these are familiar scriptures and there are familiar concepts contained within these scriptures, but this particular group of scriptures is important to the point I am trying to make here. This is after Christ's resurrection and Jesus wants to know a few things about those who are following Him. He singles out Peter for this lesson for all of us.

John 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

Is that not interesting? That is very similar to what He says to every one of us in Luke 14, in the "count the cost" section. "You've got to love Me more than these things—father, mother, sister, brother, and all the other relationships that we have in life." And He says, "You've got to love Me more than yourself." Oh boy, that is hard

He is laying down the terms. So He is asking Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?" Now what are the 'these' in this particular situation? I think it is only one of two things, or maybe both of them together. The 'these' may be his fellow disciples. They were there too. The 'these' may have been his fishing equipment and his job. Jesus had caught them in the act of fishing. "I go fishing," Peter said. It sort of sounds like he had given up on things, so he naturally turned to that which he was familiar with and which he also apparently loved to do. He loved his work. There are an awful lot of men who love their work. Unfortunately, they love their work more than they love their wife. The work gets their attention, when a great deal of that attention should go to their wife and children.

We have to set priorities. We have to make choices and there are consequences to those choices. The marriage deteriorates, or does not reach anywhere near the heights it could if the man had his priorities straight. He has to put God on top, then his family second, and the church in the third place after that.

Jesus wanted to know, "Where do I fit in the scheme of things, Peter? Do you love Me more than these?" Let us go on.

John 21:15-17 He said to him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to Him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again the second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to Him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

I am not going to play around with the definition of those words, though they may be important, because there are some changes in the use of the word love. I just want to get the concept out of here. I do believe that all three times when Peter responded, he used the word *phileo*, which means family affection. You know what? I think that is what Jesus wanted to hear—family affection.

Let us consider something else, and that is, who Peter was. Peter is one who was singled out in the Bible for what he did during the crucifixion and that period of time just before it. He proclaimed, publicly, so that others heard him, "I don't care what everybody else is going to do. I will *never* deny you! I will *never* be disloyal to you!" And sure enough, what did he do? He was the one who denied Christ. The others all fled, but at least they had not made a public proclamation that they would never do it. I am sure this is the major reason why he was singled out here, because he was the one who said he would never deny Him. Then three times, he denied Christ during those events.

We do not drift into love. Peter was forced, in this instance, to make choices, publicly, once again, right before his Savior. Jesus had to be sure of the reality of Peter's love before he was given his commission.

I want you to notice Jesus did not ask Peter, "Are you going to be loyal?" Do you understand why? If you love somebody, you are going to be loyal! You will be loyal to God first, and if there is a human being that you love, God is going to be included in your loyalty to your spouse.

Love precedes loyalty. Did you notice how the wording was in Deuteronomy 30? Love is mentioned first and the other things follow, which I am going to show you in just a bit.

Go back to Deuteronomy. What I am going to tell you here does not come through in the English the way it comes through in the Hebrew, but it is there nonetheless.

Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

That verse is dripping with emotion. It is God who is saying it. It is not said in a cold way, in an unconcerned way. "Here's the way it is, brethren." It was not that kind of a way. It is put in the terms of an *appeal*, that is dripping with tenderness, that we will make the right choices.

What this shows to you and me is that our decisions are not a matter of indifference to Him. He greatly desires that we make right choices. But because of human nature, brethren, the right choice so frequently, maybe almost invariably, is going to be the more difficult road to travel.

I want you to go to another place now, to John 14.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

I think there is something here that few in the church of God seem to notice. We say that love is the keeping of the commandments. When we say that, it is true. I John 5:3 says that same thing. The keeping of the commandments, obedience, is an expression of love.

What this verse does, it put things in their proper order. Jesus is clearly showing that love precedes commandment keeping. He says, "If you *love* Me." That comes first. Then that love will be *expressed* by keeping the commandments. Love is always present to some degree, small or great. It might be intense. It might be shallow. But when we keep the commandments of God, it is love that is actually the driving force there.

There is another segment of this that I do not know whether we are going to get to toward the end of the sermon, but it is important. It is not as important as love, but it is still important in regard to commandment keeping, in regard to making the right choices.

Throughout Deuteronomy, the appeal is always that we keep His commandments. This does not mean only the keeping of His Ten Commandments. It means keeping all of His commandments regarding other factors that are a part of our life.

It includes things like the command to pray, study, fast, marriage, child-rearing, business dealing, living by faith, of being very, very willing to quickly forgive. It includes commandments that deal with being merciful, kind, patient, overcoming, tithing, and on and on. The alternatives become clear enough as He reveals them throughout our pilgrimage.

God Himself is of such sterling character that making the right choice seems to be the only choice, but nonetheless, all too frequently, it seems to difficult for us. Interesting, is it not, that Jesus said that the great commandment of the law is not to keep the commandments, but to love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your being. That sums it up, because if the love is there, the commandment keeping will follow. It may not be perfect commandment keeping, but it will be commandment keeping.

Let me illustrate this in another way. How would you feel, ladies, if you were eligible for marriage and your life was saved by the man of your dreams, who, it turns out, is also eligible for marriage? How would you feel, young men, if your life was saved by the woman of your dreams, who also turned out to be eligible for marriage? Would you not at first be grateful? Because you knew they were eligible for marriage, would you not want to get to know them better, so that the relationship might grow? Would you not want to spend time with them, asking about their interest and meditating about their characteristics, and discovering their hopes and dreams? As the interest grew, would you not begin by making adjustments to conform to their likes and dislikes and be quick to follow any suggestion they might make to improve the relationship? You better believe you would or you have got no hormones!

That is almost exactly what has happened to us in our relationship with Christ. He is looking for a *bride*! He has saved our lives! There is a definite pattern. It is love for someone that produces conformity and submission in the form of conduct. God tells us to submit to one another in the fear of God. We will not do it unless there is an atmosphere of love that precedes submission.

Brethren, we have no excuse, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. But it is pride and the greater the love of the self, that hinders us from loving and being loyal to one another and to God as we should.

Why should this be so? Part of the answer lies in the matter of faith. We are so oriented to the material world that God is nowhere near as real as He needs to be.

I want us to go back a few verses in Deuteronomy 30, and add a little bit more to this picture as he leads into this paragraph on choosing, that we have just read.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 "For this commandment which I command you today, is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

Do you understand what He is saying here? God is saying to you and to me that the level of total commitment He is calling for is *achievable*! He is saying that He is not confronting us with impossible targets or standards, or that His message is out beyond the ordinary person's intellectual grasp. We do not have to be a rocket scientist. We do not have to be able to comprehend the universe before being able to use it. What we are looking at here are a number of Hebrew idioms that we are not familiar with, but each of them is saying essentially the same thing.

As He is giving us these idioms, He is both chiding, very gently, and encouraging us at somewhat the same time. He is saying that understanding and keeping His commandments is not impossible. He is not saying that obedience is always going to be easy. He is also saying that He does not expect absolute perfection. He is saying that it can be lived and kept in a manner and to a degree that is acceptable to Him. And, brethren, *others have done it!*

I want you to think about Abraham. Does it not say of him in Genesis 26:5 that Abraham obeyed God's voice, kept His charge, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws? Did Abraham do it perfectly? You know that he did not. *But by grace*, it was acceptable.

David was a man after God's own heart. Was he perfect in his obedience? You all know the answer to that. He was not.

Certainly, we should strive for perfection, but God is not going to let us skip by with the excuse that it is too hard.

Turn with me to Matthew 25.

Matthew 25:24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man. . . .'

Notice this. Guess where he is shifting the blame? Guess what excuse, what justification, he is coming up with. "God, you made things too hard for me."

Matthew 25:24-30 '. . . reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' His lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. [He did not agree that He was hard.] So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast you the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

He did not let the guy get by with the excuse that He was too hard. That flies in the face of God's grace. That flies in the face of what God said right here. That approach makes God out to be some kind of an ogre and puts us into the role of being His victims. Brethren, that is a satanic justification and it is totally unacceptable.

I have already mentioned that weakness of faith is one major reason for disobedience and makes obedience so difficult. A second reason is because of sin itself—yours and others. Sin has so estranged our heart from God that keeping His commandments becomes far more difficult than it should be. The way of sin has so ingrained itself into our thinking that this self-centered drive tends to dominate our thinking process.

For the most part, until God calls us, we are unaware of sin's dominance. It is this factor that Paul addresses in Romans 7—another familiar set of scriptures, but I want to read it because it pertains to this sermon.

Romans 7:15-20, 24 [Paul is admitting he has struggled with this.] For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that do I not practice; but what I hate, that do I. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells

in me. [Just like Paul, we all are faced with this problem.]. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

There is the answer! Sin that dwells in us can be conquered. It can be met, not on our own power, but through the relationship with Christ. If we are developing that relationship, His power, as it were, is transferred to us by means of His Spirit, and we begin to have the resolve and the desire to fight against sin and make the sacrifices necessary to do it. *It can be done*, just as surely as God says in Deuteronomy 30:11.

Israel failed because of weak leadership. Not because of Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, or Caleb, but from a failure of the entire generation that failed in their exercise of faith, who lost their nerve right on the very edge of the Promised Land.

God clearly ties the leadership qualities that He is looking for to faithful loyalty in keeping His commandments. Loyalty and the keeping of the commandments is directly tied to love for Him as the fruit of love, the effect of love. God clearly ties leadership to spiritual, moral, ethical issues. He shows us time and again that nations and institutions rise and fall on the quality of leadership. The quality that is most missing in most leaders are the very things God wants in us—moral, ethical, and spiritual leadership. That is what missing.

The most important institutions to us, now that God has called us, are the Kingdom of God, our families, and the church. Your leadership does not have to be over multitudes of people, but simply to be *strong and able*, as Jethro put it to Moses—strong in character qualities that God takes pleasure in.

Leadership is not just something those in higher positions are to possess and exercise. It should be exercised by all of us, but it is not the ordering of other people around. It is simply doing what is right. That is all. That is not hard to understand. That is leadership in God's eyes. That is what is missing in this world. Leaders do not do things right. If they did, there would not be any sin on the streets. People would follow them.

The first leaders were Adam and Eve. Look what they did. The second Adam is Jesus Christ. Look what He did! Adam and Eve, by their leadership, consigned us to death. Jesus Christ, by His leadership, is giving us the opportunity for life. Which will you choose? If you love Him, you will choose the good part and you will submit.

We are going to go back to where we began all of this a sermon and a half ago, to Exodus 18. That is what Moses is drawing upon here in Deuteronomy 1.

Exodus 18:21 "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God."

Here we go on the fear of God. We are going to turn from here to II Chronicles 19, where we have moved in time to the reign of Jehoshaphat, who was one of Judah's better kings, by far.

II Chronicles 19:4-7 So Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim [notice what he did], and brought them back to the LORD God of their fathers. Then he set judges [just like Moses]

in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges [notice these instructions to the judges], "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you."

The first qualification under those who are able, under those who are strong, is to fear God.

II Chronicles 19:9 And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully [loyally], and with a loyal heart."

Be loyal to God. Remember I said a little bit earlier there is one other thing besides love that precedes being loyal, that precedes being faithful. We are beginning to see it. It is to *fear God* !

Do you know what? You will not love somebody you do not respect. That is what we are talking about here—respecting God. If you respect somebody, you take *them* into consideration in everything that you do that might in any way, even if it is only slightly, touch on them, or rebound or impact on them.

Here is some really wise advise from David, in his last words, like his last will and testament.

II Samuel 23:2-3 "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, 'He who rules over men [he that leads] must be just, ruling in the fear of God.'"

The first quality of a strong person is respecting God.

Back to Deuteronomy again. We are going to look at some scriptures that touch on the fear of God.

Deuteronomy 14:23 "And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks [Why are you here?], that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always."

We are going to begin to pay attention to the word 'learn.' We are all familiar with this command to us to attend the Feast that we might learn to fear God. In fact, the Feast seems to be largely dedicated to that purpose. Fearing Him is the only character quality (or virtue) that is directly mentioned in reference to the feast.

Deuteronomy 31:12 "Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law."

Now again, notice the order here—hear, learn, fear, do. There is a progression here.

Deuteronomy 31:13 "And that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess."

Twice, fearing God is directly mentioned as a reason for going through Deuteronomy every seven years. The word fear appears twenty-eight times in Deuteronomy, and mostly in context regarding fearing God.

We are going to leave the book of Deuteronomy and go to the book of Psalms, chapter 34. In a psalm of David it says:

Psalm 34:11 Come, you children, listen to me [there is hear]; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

The word "teach" literally means "chastise," but its softer forms include "discipline, accustom to, train, or teach." It depends upon the context in which it appears as to how the translators were going to translate it. Regardless of which one is used, the word makes clear that the fear of the Lord is not something that we have by nature.

I specifically turned to this verse because of that word "teach." It is exactly the same word as the word "learn" in Deuteronomy 31:12-13. The only difference is that the approach is turned around. In one place the teacher says, "I will discipline, train, or teach you." In the other, the teacher says, "I want you to hear so you can be trained, disciplined, or taught to fear me."

Perhaps if we could see God, we would probably be in terror of Him, because the Bible says that no one can look upon God and live. But we are people-oriented in our thinking and what we cannot see, we have a very difficult time respecting.

Turn with me to Ecclesiastes 8. These are other familiar scriptures, but there is an important principle here.

Ecclesiastes 8:11-13 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. [Fear will probably drive the person away from doing something that would require punishment.] But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he does not fear before God.

Just remember the word *shadow*. Moses said in Psalm 90 that *all* of the days of man are but a shadow. Those who do not fear God may live out a full life, but compared to God's life and compared to the potential length of your life because of God's calling, their days are but a shadow. Do not be *fooled*, young people especially. People can smoke. They can do drugs. They can have horrible diets. They can be sexually loose. But because they do not always see the end result, they have trouble respecting what in all probability is going to happen to them.

Numbers 32:23 says your sins *will* find you out. Solomon is saying the same thing in different words. The execution of the punishment does not have to come from a public figure, like a policeman or a judge. The punishment is going to come from God and the operation of His laws because He sees everything. He does not miss a trick! He who even sees sparrows fall—what is He going to especially see in regard to His children?

You see little forms of this all over the place. You are driving down the highway and keeping the speed limit, but maybe everybody around you is not. Instead of going 65, they are going 70 or 75. They zip right by you *until* they see something—Smokey Bear. Suddenly you see red taillights flashing on. Why? Because the fear is there because of something that they *see*. They fear the execution of justice that may come upon them.

What we have to do is get beyond this, brethren, because of what has happened to us in our calling. If the Christian does not comprehend that God sees and notes the Christians' approach to law—we will use the speed law as an example. He too is speeding along at 75 mph when the law says 65, and he says to himself, "I am safe." Well, he may be reasonably safe, but the person who does not respect God is not thinking about God, and God is aware of that person's attitude toward law. He is getting a glimpse into the heart of that person who He knows is going to step out of line when he thinks nobody is watching. How can God trust him?

God has to be part of our thinking all the time. We obey. We submit to every ordinance of man not because we love that law. We may not like it and we may think we are safe going 75 mph, and we may be safe going 75 mph. But it is because of God that we do not, because we want to show Him that we respect His commandment that says to be respectful to all the ordinances of man. We want to show Him that we know He is there and, out of respect for Him then, we do not break the law.

I just happened to think of this this morning. It is a little bit off, but it really does fit into the subject material here. I know there are people who look at the schedule and see that so and so is speaking. Because so and so is speaking or not speaking, they will not come to services because they do not like that person or they do not like the way that person speaks.

Who do you think is the loser here? There is a tendency to think, "Well, we can learn from anybody." That may be true, but that is not the real issue, because the person is not taking *GOD* into consideration! *GOD is going to be where he orders His people to be!* He wants them to be together with all the other people of God when they are meeting before Him to receive His message. These people are executing the punishment against themselves through the attitude of failing to take God into consideration.

It is the lack of the fear of God that is the real problem. Those who have the fear of God and respect Him, they will go regardless, because God wishes them to be there. The real blessing may not come from the message at all. The real blessing may be that God sees that you love Him.

The word "fear" in the Bible can encompass anything from sheer terror all the way down to the mildest degree of respect. It includes reverence, awe, admiration, veneration, and worship, but also dread, apprehension, horror, fright, alarm, and trepidation.

We are fairly well acquainted with those meanings from human experience, but the Bible clearly states that the fear of the Lord is something that must be learned. This is because until God called us, we had never met anybody like Him and because He requires that we use faith in our relationship with Him. We cannot see Him! Faith is an absolute requirement of the relationship.

Nobody we have ever met has anywhere near the combination of power, intelligence, character, wisdom, judgment, understanding, insight, foresight, love, kindness, mercy, and any other noble virtue or quality we might think of. This is why the fear of the Lord contains a dimension that must be learned! We have to have experience with Him to really learn what He is like. This is a brand new

experience. How do we handle this relationship? What do we make of it? How should we apply it in practical situations in life?

We know the Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and that is certainly true, but it does not define it. But there is a definition in the Bible and it is quite simple. This is typical of the way the Bible defines things. I am not saying it is the only way the Bible defines things, but I am saying it is typical and it is a good way.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil . . .

Is that not simple? It is to hate evil. It is not said, but the other side of it is that we hate evil *because we love* GOD and we fear Him, we respect Him. What the Bible is doing is showing what the fear of the Lord *produces*. It produces a hatred of evil. Not only that, but it produces a hatred of:

Proverbs 8:13 . . . pride and arrogance [which is a form of pride] and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

In one sense, it does not matter what the intensity of the respect is—whether it is terror, or dread, or reverential awe, or veneration. What matters to God is how we *react*. If we react in rejecting the evil, God has won a spot in our hearts, even if He did it out of sheer terror. It gives Him time, then, to adjust the fear to the proper level, to the proper degree, and to the proper intensity in all kinds of different situations.

The right reaction, the one that shows Him that we do respect Him in every situation though, is that we will depart, we will run away from, we will reject evil. The hatred of evil and the fear of evil produces departure from evil.

We have reached a good place to stop. Hang onto that definition—the fear of the Lord is to depart from evil.