

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

69. ON GODLY FEAR

Fear is a most powerful passion in the human breast. Its natural effect is painful; hence we instinctively fly from every thing which excites its agitating influence. Our minds are easily wrought upon by sensible objects, or imaginary evils; while those which are remote or unapprehended give us little concern.

If we receive the alarm of some approaching danger, how readily do we magnify the dreaded calamity beyond its real extent. Some people, indeed, are so bold and daring, that they seem to rise above the influence of every fear, and to face danger and even death in all its forms, with a coolness and intrepidity which are truly astonishing. Yet, in general, this natural passion operates in almost every case of serious apprehension but one, which of all others should awaken its sensibility.

We can fear almost any thing more than the wrath of God; and any event more than approaching death and judgment. Strange infatuation and obduracy! An unregenerate man will sit unmoved and unawed under the most awful displays of divine vengeance as exhibited in the preached word; while a slight shock of an earthquake, or the falling of a steeple, would cause him to start from his seat, and fly with fearful steps to some place of safety. Unbelief lies at the bottom of our indifference to eternal things; and is the true cause of that stupid unconcern, that fearless state of heart, which we manifest towards the infinitely important realities of a future world. There are, indeed, checks of natural conscience; but these are transient and seldom felt, except when our misconduct has sensibly affected our worldly prospects, our health, our reputation, or something of an earthly nature.

The immediate apprehension of death and judgment may appall the sinner, and awaken all his solitudes. Like Felix, the proud worldling sometimes feels an involuntary tremor, an inward misgiving of heart; but, like him, he labors to overcome the painful sensation, by removing, if possible, the cause of his uneasiness; "go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you." Thus he goes on until death strikes the blow, and hurries him into the abyss of endless horrors.

Lord, deliver me from this most awful state. How distressing that my foolish heart should be so little affected by those rich displays of divine grace, and those tremendous exhibitions of divine wrath, which are revealed in the word of God. Blessed Lord! give me a stronger faith, that I may continually realize to my mind those great things which you have done, and still promise to do, for your believing people; and more solemn fear of those awful threatenings which you have denounced against thins enemies.

There is a fear, of which excellent things are spoken, and to which many precious promises are made. This holy fruit of the Spirit is peculiar to the children of God. It is one of the blessings of the new covenant, (Jer. xxxii, 49.) It is the beginning of wisdom, (Ps. iii, 10.) It tends to life, (Prov xix, 23.) In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, (Prov. xiv, 26.) "Happy, then, is the man who fears aways;" who is in "the fear of the Lord all the day long." "The Lord's delight is in those who fear him." He has promised to look with peculiar favor to him who trembles at his word.

This heavenly grace is quite different from that slavish fear which tends to bondage. The fear which grace implants in the heart, harmonizes with love and joy. The first Christians, on whom the Spirit was poured in such rich effusion, walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. To such renewed souls the apostolic command is, "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." The admonition of the Savior is most impressive; "I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him, which, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say unto you, fear him." The Scriptures abound with exhortations to this duty. The most solemn appeals are there made to the heart and conscience; while promises of the most delightful nature are given to those who walk humbly with their God.

It is characteristic of the wicked, that "there is no fear of God before his eyes." If; then, I would form a part of the assembly of the saints, I must daily seek by fervent prayer a reverential fear of God. "Let us have grace (says the apostle) whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire."

John saw a multitude of the heavenly host, "having the harps of God; and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying; Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, Oh king of saints. Who shall not fear you, Oh Lord, and glorify your name? for you are holy; for all nations shall come and worship before you."

I must cultivate a cautionary fear. "Let us fear," says Paul, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." "Do not be high-minded, but fear."

I must possess a filial fear, which, combined with love and obedience, forms that spirit of adoption, which is the sweetest evidence of admission into the family of God. For perfect love, while it casts out that servile fear which has torment, cherishes a holy fear of grieving the Spirit, wounding the Savior, and displeasing the Father of mercies.

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Oh blessed Lord, give me this holy preservative against falling into sin; that, fearing you from a principle of filial, reverential love, I may go on steadily in the narrow way of faith and holiness, until I reach with joy and gladness the holy hill of Zion.

How happy is the humble soul,
Who lives in holy fear;
While troubles in succession roll,
He feels the Savior near.

While others climb the dangerous steep,
And build their Babels high;
He loves that lowly path to keep,
Which leads him to the sky.

Content with all his God bestows,
He needs not wealth nor power;
Perpetual blessing round him flows,
Increasing every hour.

Rich with the riches of his grace
Who saved him by his blood;
He views by faith the Savior's face,
And knows that God is good.

Through life's uneven path upheld,
Preserved from every ill;
He views at length the heavenly field,
And reaches Zion's hill.

Oh may I thus be sweetly blest,
With humble souls below;
Then enter the eternal rest,
Where endless pleasures flow.