

The Christian's Preservative

~Other Speakers S-Z: James Smith:

It is a melancholy truth, which every day's experience corroborates, that the seed of every evil still lurks in our fallen nature, and is ready to break out into action if an opportunity presents itself; and, notwithstanding the promises made in the good word of God, and the privileges to which free grace introduces us, we shall certainly turn aside and sow the seeds of darkness, distress, and desertion, without constant watchfulness and holy fear.

God has promised to put his fear in our hearts as a preservative against apostasy, Jeremiah 32:40; and believers in every age have found, that it is a choice preventative to many sins. When Joseph had imprisoned his brethren as spies, and kept them there for three days, he at length comes to liberate nine of them, and gives this as a reason, "I fear God." Genesis 43:18. And when Nehemiah speaks of the conduct of former governors, and opposes his own to theirs, the reason he assigns for the difference is the same, "But because I feared God--I did not act that way!" Nehemiah 5:15

The fear of God is the watchman upon the walls, the sentinel at our gates, and the crier in our streets! Its place is to watch against temptations, to guard us against being surprised into sin, and to sound an alarm when any evil approaches! Therefore the Holy Spirit by Solomon exhorts, "By the fear of the Lord--men depart from evil." Proverbs 16:6. "A wise man fears--and departs from evil." Proverbs 14:16.

A filial fear of God springs from a spiritual knowledge of God as our Father; from the love of God shed abroad in the heart. When we take in gospel views of Jehovah's covenant character, believe his precious promises as made to us in Christ Jesus, and enjoy his love as the fountain of true happiness--we find liberty and are at peace; we love our God with ardor, and desire to please him in all things. Nothing appears so distressing as the loss of his presence or a sense of his love; and the soul, like the spouse, is ready to give charge to everything, to be careful not to disturb or cause the Lord to depart. As the Lord rests in his love to his people, so the favored believer desires to rest with God in the same.

But we have often found that we have been betrayed by some foe, or led away by some temptation, and have lost this blessedness for a time; we have seen that our departures from the Lord have been grievous in his sight, and exceedingly injurious to us. The Holy Spirit has made use of this to produce self-loathing, penitence, and caution; and a greater measure of fear has been experienced and exercised. The young Christian knows but little of commended carefulness, 2 Corinthians 7:11; or of that hesitation which is often felt and manifested by more advanced believers.

But the experienced follower of Christ not only fears and departs from evil, on account of the effects which sin has on himself and his comforts--but also because he would not dishonor his good and gracious God; he sees that every act of transgression, or every departure from his God, dishonors the dear name by which he is called. It is his glory his happiness, his constant aim to honor it in all things; but it always distresses him if he is the cause of its being spoken against, or in any way dishonored. He desires to walk after the Lord, and imitate him in all his imitable excellences, that so he may glorify his Father in heaven. He fears to offend God, or in anything to displease him; he knows on the one hand that nothing will go well if God manifests his displeasure; and, on the other, that if his Father refuses him comfort no one else can bestow it, however ready they may be.

Carnal-minded professors often rush forward with but little consideration of what they are about to do, or but little concern whether they shall glorify God or not; but the right-minded Christian fears, hesitates, and prays; he examines his motives, distrusts his own heart from a knowledge of its deceitfulness, waits on the Lord, watches the motions of Divine Providence, looks for intimations from heaven, and prays, "Teach me to do your will; for you are my God; your Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." Psalm 143:10. He waits, watches, hopes, fears, and begs that he may not be allowed to walk contrary to his God.

O! he thinks, if I should proceed without the pillar and the cloud; if I should be left to myself in this dreary desert; if I should have my desire, and leanness in my soul--how distressed, how miserable, how wretched I should be! If your presence goes not with me--do not let me proceed, or turn to the right hand or the left.

None but a believer can tell the painful cogitations, distressing exercises, and multifarious thoughts which often agitate the Christian, under the sovereign dispensations of his God. He fears doing wrong; he wishes, he longs, for an alteration; his flesh, his connections, all seem to say, "Proceed," but he knows not the mind of his God; he fears lest he should draw false conclusions, and proceed when the Lord would have him Stand Still; or

stand still, when the Lord would have him Go Forward. He searches his Bible and his heart, and often feels at a standstill; concludes, and then changes his mind; thinks he sees his way, then he is in a labyrinth; takes a step or two, and is obliged to recede with sorrow, if not with shame.

All this time fear preserves him, his patience is exercised, his faith is tried, his jealousy appears, and he is kept from the paths of the destroyer. By these things Christians live, and by these things are they kept from presumption, lukewarmness, and a worldly state. Isaiah 38:16. Thus often the Lord proceeds with man, to keep him back from folly, and lead him into truth and peace. Job 33:12-33.

Godly fear always produces and preserves a tender conscience, and a tender conscience preserves from many follies and sins. When conscience is enlightened by divine truth, and penetrated by sanctifying grace--a concern for God's glory, and a fear of grieving his Holy Spirit, are always predominant. Lust may work, and corruptions roar, and the Christian may for a time be led captive; but back he must come with heartfelt confession and prayer, before he can find peace or enjoy any of his privileges or mercies.

A clear view of truth, a tender conscience, a godly fear, and a humble mind, are blessings of incalculable value: they will garrison the heart, and keep the mind in a holy, Christ-like, lovely frame.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom; the evidence of real holiness, and a proof that we are the Lord's.

As a grace--it flows from divine love, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus, and is produced by the power and presence of the Holy Comforter.

As a duty--it is required by our heavenly Father and gracious Savior, for the illustration and proof of gospel principles, for our own welfare, and his eternal praise. It is promised as a grace, to be sought as a blessing, to be practiced as a duty, and all to the glory of our God.

My brother, have you the fear of God ruling in you, reigning over you, and preventing you from falling in with temptation, or into sin? If so, bless your God: some of the exercises connected with it may be truly painful and cross to your nature--but its operations upon the mind are beneficial and sanctifying.