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THE FEAR OF GOD

#182

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Fearing God in His Sovereign Majesty

by A.W. Pink

Why is it that, today, the masses are so utterly unconcerned about spiritual and eternal things, and that they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Why is it that even on the battlefields multitudes were so indifferent to their soul's welfare? Why is it that defiance of heaven is becoming more open, more blatant, more daring? The answer is, Because "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:18). Again; why is it that the authority of the Scriptures has been lowered so sadly of late? Why is it that even among those who profess to be the Lord's people there is so little real subjection to His Word, and that its precepts are so lightly esteemed and so readily set aside? Ah! what needs to be stressed to-day is that God is a God to be feared. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Pro 1:7). Happy the soul that has been awed by a view of God's majesty, that has had a

vision of God’s awful greatness, His ineffable holiness, His perfect righteousness, His irresistible power, His sovereign grace. Does someone say, “But it is only the unsaved, those outside of Christ, who need to fear God”? Then the sufficient answer is that the saved, those who are in Christ, are admonished to work out their own salvation with “fear and trembling.” Time was, when it was the general custom to speak of a believer as a “God-fearing man” — that such an appellation has become nearly extinct only serves to show whither we have drifted. Nevertheless, it still stands written, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (Psa 103:13)!

When we speak of godly fear, of course, we do not mean a servile fear, such as prevails among the heathen in connection with their gods. No; we mean that spirit which Jehovah is pledged to bless, that spirit to which the prophet referred when he said, “To this man will I (the Lord) look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word” (Isa 66:2). It was this the apostle had in view when he wrote, “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1Pe 2:17). And nothing will foster this godly fear like a recognition of the sovereign majesty of God.

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The Beginning of Wisdom

by Charles Bridges

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge:
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”—Proverbs 1:7*

What is this *fear of the Lord*? It is that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law. His wrath is so bitter, and his love so sweet: that hence springs an earnest desire to please him, and because of the danger of coming short from his own weakness and temptations—a holy watchfulness and fear, “that he might not sin against him.” (Heb 12:28, 29.) This enters into every exercise of the mind, every object of life. (Chap. 23:17.) The oldest proficient in the Divine school seeks a more complete moulding into its spirit. The godly parent trains up his family under its influence. (Gen 18:19; Eph 6:4.) The Christian scholar honours it as *the beginning*, the head, *of all his knowledge*; at once sanctifying its end, and preserving him from its most subtle temptations.

Why then do multitudes around us *despise wisdom and instruction*? Because *the beginning of wisdom* — “*the fear of God* — is not before their eyes.” (Psa 36:1.) They know not its value. They scorn its obligation. Wise they

may be in their own sight. But surely God here gives them their right name. For *fools* they must be, to *despise* such a blessing (Jer 8:9); to rush into wilful ruin (Verses 22, 24-32. Comp. 1Sa 2:25; 1Ki 12:13; Jer 36:22-32); to treasure up work for despairing repentance. (Chap. 5:12; 13; 29:1.) Good Lord! May thy childlike *fear* be my *wisdom*, my security, my happiness!

—Taken from: *Proverbs* by Charles Bridges

Charles Bridges: (1794-1869) a leader of the Evangelical party in the Church of England. Best known for *The Christian Ministry*, *Proverbs*, and *Psalm 119*.

The Fear of God

by Wilhelmus A'Brakel

The Word Fear Defined

Fear is either expressive of reverence or terror. Fear as terror is generally expressed by the Hebrew words *magor*, and *pacadh*, and by the Greek word *phobos*. Fear as being reverence is denominated in Hebrew as *yirah*, and in Greek as *eulabeia*. However, these words are occasionally also used without this distinction.

Fear issues forth from love—either for ourselves or for God. Self-love engenders fear when something occurs which could deprive us of something good or whereby some evil could befall us. We fear deprivation, or the evil itself, and whatever or whoever would deprive us of that which is good or whereby evil could be inflicted upon us. God has created self-love in man and wills that we make use of it. The law requires that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Mat 22:39). It is therefore not sinful to fear deprivation and evil. This fear was inherent in Adam's nature prior to the fall, even though there was no occasion for this fear to arise in him. The Lord Jesus also had such fear (cf. Mat 26:37; Heb 5:7). One may indeed be fearful of death and other discomforts, and thus also of wild animals and evil men. This fear becomes evil, however, if it begets the use of evil means—either to preserve or acquire that which is good, or to avoid evil. This is true if we fear man more than God and, in neglecting both the fear of God and obedience toward His commandments, we seek to get man on our side in sinful ways. We then give no heed as to whether we displease God; as long as we can please men in order that they will do us no evil, but good. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat 10:28).

Since we must have love for ourselves, and fear issues forth there from, we must have more fear for evil which relates to the soul than to the body. Since, the soul's well or woe is dependent upon God, we must be fearful out of love

for our own salvation, and must fear God's judgments. "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; and I am afraid of Thy judgments" (Psa 119:120). An unconverted person must also, by fear for the eternal wrath of God, be persuaded to believe (2Co 5:11). A converted person must, for fear of spiritual harm, stir himself up to be earnest. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb 4:1).

The Definition and Nature of Filial Fear

Filial fear is a holy inclination of the heart, generated by God in the hearts of His children, whereby they, out of reverence for God, take careful pains not to displease God, and earnestly endeavor to please Him in all things.

It is a motion of the heart. The noble soul is gifted with emotions, and dependent upon what the objects are, is moved to either joy or sorrow, love or hatred, fear or fearlessness. As far as the fear of God is concerned, man is insensitive, hard, and without emotion. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:18). In regeneration, however, the heart of stone is removed and a heart of flesh is received which is soft and pliable, and is very readily moved upon beholding God, dependent upon the measure in which God reveals Himself to the soul. If God is perceived as being majestic, a motion immediately arises within their soul—a motion which is becoming to the creature in respect to God.

It is a holy motion. Since an unconverted person is in essence nothing but sin, also all that proceeds from him is distorted. The ability to fear is directed toward an erroneous object and is exercised in a disorderly fashion. Believers, however, having been sanctified in principle, are also sanctified as far as their inner motions are concerned. Their fear has a proper object and consequently functions in a holy manner, that is, in faith and love. They are devout and fear God (Act 10:2).

God generates this holy motion. By nature man is totally unfit for any good work. He finds no delight in God and has no desire to fear the Lord. He may be terrified of God, but he cannot fear Him rightly. However, God enables His own to fear Him. "...but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer 32:40).

The Holy Spirit is therefore called "the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:2).

This filial fear is found in the hearts of God's children. The heart is the seat of all motions—evil as well as good. God has enclosed this precious gift in the hearts of His children, and all the motions relative to fear proceed from the heart. Their fear neither consists in talk, refraining from evil and doing good, nor in the appearance of fear, but rather in truth. The heart, intellect, will, and affections are involved here and the heart brings forth various deeds which manifest the fear of God. Only God's children fear the Lord, and therefore those who have this virtue are called *God-fearing* people. "...the same man was just and devout" (Luke 2:25); "...devout men" (Acts 2:5); "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial" (Act 8:2).

Filial fear is engendered by reverence for God. God is the object of this fear. “O fear the LORD, ye His saints” (Psa 34:9). God is eminent, glorious, and majestic within Himself—even if there were no creatures. “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty” (1Ch 29:11). Hereby God is awe-inspiring in and of Himself. With the advent of intelligent creatures which observe the brilliance of His glory, it cannot but be that they have reverence for Him who is both infinite and majestic. A natural man does not know God. Therefore he may be fearful of His judgments, for calamities, and sometimes may acknowledge God to be terrible (although he generally does not progress this far), but he cannot have reverence for Him. That is the privilege and blessedness of believers. A sinful person cannot tolerate God’s majesty. He would flee in terror from God, for He is to him a consuming fire. However, in Christ God is a reconciled Father to His children, and therefore they simultaneously love and revere Him. “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psa 2:11).

The Serious Consequences of Being Void of the Fear of God

(1) Be assured that God will give you a fearful and trembling heart as long as you do not fear Him, so that you will find neither rest nor safety anywhere — rather, your own heart and conscience will be continually tormented. The wish of David will come upon you. “Put them in fear, O LORD” (Psa 9:20). Be assured that the curse which the Lord threatens will come upon you. “The LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear” (Deu 28:65-67); “I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth” (Lev 26:36); “And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth” (Isa 2:19).

(2) Be assured that if you continue on without fear for the Lord—even though you may peacefully approach your end—the terror of the Lord will at last come upon you. When you will be forsaken by everything, the Lord will be a terror to you and strike terror into you. Oh, how many are there who breathe their last breath with consternation and full of terror! Remember Belshazzar, and consider that you will also experience this. “Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another” (Dan 5:6). In that condition he departed from life.

(3) And even if no terror were to come upon you in this life and at death, you will nevertheless be overcome with fear on every side after your death. Then wrath and anger, oppression and consternation will eternally be upon you. Then you will know what it is to fall into the hands of God. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). Give heed to what is expressed in Psalm 76:7: “Thou, even Thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in Thy sight when once Thou art angry?” It is in this manner that

the prophet presents this terror: “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us will dwell with the devouring fire? who among us will dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14). Oh, that you would quietly reflect upon, and apply all this to yourself—and that you would believe it!

The Fear of God in Believers

We shall now turn to you, believers. You will indeed observe your deficiency in this, but you will also be able to perceive that the Lord has put the principle of His fear within you.

(1) Do you not desire that disposition of the fear of God as we have described it in the foregoing? You do not only acquiesce in this, judging it to be good and becoming, but you grieve that you have so little of it and are desirous for a greater measure of it. This is an indication that you are already a partaker of it, for the servants of God are described as such. “...Thy servants, who desire to fear Thy name” (Neh 1:11).

(2) Do you not perceive heartfelt intentions and initiatives to walk in the fear of the Lord? Can you find any delight in having subdued a sin and in having done some good, unless this has been done in the fear of God? And perceiving your deficiency and impotence toward that which you love, is it not frequently your earnest prayer to God that He would fulfil His promise to you in giving His fear in your heart? Behold, there you have evidence that you have the nature of those that fear God. This was David’s prayer: “Unite my heart to fear Thy name” (Psa 86:11).

(3) Is your desire for the fear of God entirely impotent and your prayer entirely fruitless, or do you perceive the principles of it in your actions? Does not God reveal Himself to you in His majesty? Does not your heart say that the Lord is indeed worthy to be served? Are not reverential motions stirred up within you toward God? Do you not at times bow in reverence before Him? Has it not been your experience that, due to a sense of His majesty, you have cast your eyes downward, closed your eyes, and covered your face with your hands? Did not a holy trembling come upon you at times, and was it not your delight if these motions became more sensitive—yes, did it not cause you to rejoice when thinking upon this afterwards, wishing it to recur and that it would always be thus? Would you not have committed many sins, and neglected many good things if the fear of the Lord had not prevented you? Does not the fear of God nip many sins in the bud, and does not this motivate you to perform your duty? If these things are within you, you must be convinced of the truth, even though the measure is yet small. You will observe your disposition in Job: “For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of His highness I could not endure” (Job 31:23). Such was also true for Nehemiah: “...but so did not I, because of the fear of God” (Neh 5:15). Acknowledge therefore this received grace, and it will render you capable to read the following rebuke and exhortation with fruit.

Believers Rebuked

The more clearly you will be convinced of the principles of the fear of God

within you, the more you must grieve over your deficiency in the fear of God. These manifest themselves in the disposition of the heart, the penetration of sinful thoughts, words, and deeds contrary to the revelation of God's presence, and in the fear of man whereby the fear of God must consequently yield.

First, we are to be severely reprimanded, if, knowing that God is majestic, having experienced how good it is to humbly walk with the Majestic One, and knowing how invigorating it is to walk in the way of uprightness, we nevertheless neglect to thus focus upon the Lord and fear Him continually. This makes us vulnerable to all manner of sin. When the doorkeeper sleeps with the door wide open, every lust can then enter and exit without any impediment—and even if we are aware of this, there is nevertheless no strength to oppose it and we are overcome before realizing it. If then, with Samson, we wish to offer resistance, we shall have lost our strength.

Secondly, this is followed by a disposition which is yet more evil, namely, when we even proceed to satisfy this lust, doing so not only when our conscience points out its evil and counsels us not to begin; and upon having begun, counseled us to desist from and subdue the lust, to be silent in the midst of an evil discourse, and to refrain from the sin which we are currently committing; but also when our conscience causes us to reflect upon God and His majesty. Indeed, this is especially true (which is most abominable) when God manifests Himself to the soul, sensibly discourages the soul, and, so to speak, shakes the finger and says, "I am here, and I certainly see what you are doing. Cease, or else I shall cause you to feel My displeasure." It is a setting aside of the fear of God, a grieving of the Holy Spirit, and the inflicting of a deadly wound upon the soul when, due to the agitation of sin, we are driven onward and seek to hide ourselves from the presence of God in order to be able to proceed, and then actually prevail in carrying out the sin which is at hand. If God were not infinitely longsuffering and immutable, He would cast away such impertinent souls.

The **third** sin committed is **to fear man**—a sin to which the godly are still vulnerable. If we have not yet fully denied ourselves in regard to honor, love, advantage, and pleasure, nor are much inclined to acknowledge the insignificance of man (that is, that man can neither stir nor move, can do neither good nor evil to us), and we have not accustomed ourselves to see the hand of the Lord in all things, thus perceiving that God alone does everything, and that all men are but instruments in His hand, being used either to do good or evil unto us—this will engender a looking unto man. In time of war we consider the multitude and courage of the soldiers and we stand upon our sword (Eze 33:26). "Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?" (Jer 21:13). If, however, we perceive that the might of the enemy supersedes ours, we are fearful and the heart is moved "as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind" (Isa 7:2). We fear man when in sickness, legal cases, business transactions, in the plying of our trade, in pursuing our desire which must be attained to by the instrumentality of men, etc.; we look to men and, in our thoughts end in them—as if it had to come from them. We vehemently seek to have them on our side, and we are fearful of losing their favor. In our association with men we fear the one *for his wisdom* (which is no match for ours), the other *for his status and imposing personality*, the *third for his wickedness*, and the *fourth for his benevolence which we would not*

like to lose. Now if such a person has no desire for godliness and would become angry if you were to manifest the image of God and perform your duty, and if, out of fear for him, you were to hold back and accommodate him in the commission of sin, behold, then the fear of God is rendered inferior and must yield. There God is on the one side, and man on the other side. There the fear of God is on the one hand and the fear of man on the other hand. If, however, the fear of man motivates us to do something which is contrary to the fear of God, then we reject the fear of God because of the fear of man.

This is a dreadful sin, for **first** of all God has forbidden it. “Fear not them which kill the body” (Mat 10:28); “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?” (Isa 51:12). **Secondly**, it is the greatest act of contempt toward God if He must yield to man for you. It is idolatry and a sin of the heathen. “Who...worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom 1:25). **Thirdly**, it is a denial of the providence of God—as if God did not reign; as if the creature could function independently. **Fourthly**, it affects and troubles you continually. **Fifthly**, it causes you to fall from one sin into the next, and you ought therefore to be ashamed of your previous fear of man. Be warned and give heed to the exhortation of the Lord: “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?” (Isa 2:22). Follow David in his noble courage. “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (Psa 118:6).

Incentives for the Fear of God

It is not sufficient to be on guard against the sins which are contrary to the fear of God; rather, it is our great duty to conquer them all by the fear of God. The livelier the fear of God is, the less sin will have any effect. Therefore in the future commit yourself fully to tenderly fear the Lord your God in order that the fear of God may guard you and direct your thoughts, words, and deeds. Oh, if only I could make you more lively in this! Give careful attention to the following incentives; may you be tender and pliable.

First, does not God have all the perfections within Himself which are able to engender reverence? He is majestic, glorious, omnipotent, holy, good, and awe-inspiring; that is His nature. How can anyone therefore be in the presence of God without fear and reverence? Consider what has been expressed in the Word of God: “Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exo 15:11); “That thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD” (Deu 28:58); “For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: He also is to be feared above all gods” (1Ch 16:25); “O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God” (Neh 1:5). His wrath upon the sinner is dreadful. “Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath” (Psa 90:11). His goodness begets reverence in order that He may thus be feared in love. “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” (Psa 130:4). Is it not proper, becoming, and requisite that you, having been created by God and having received grace from God, fear this majestic God and tremble before Him?

Secondly, the root of the matter is indeed in you. You desire it and you cannot hear the fear of God mentioned, or your heart is inclined to it and

your desires are stirred up. Why would you subdue this desire? All that has a principle of life is desirous for growth and perfection—which is thus also true for you in this respect. It is indeed natural if a servant fears his master and a child his father. You have chosen the Lord to be your Lord, and has not He given you the Spirit of the adoption of children and set you among the children? Have you not entered into covenant with Him that He would be a God unto you and that you would be the recipient of His favor? This must stir you up to fear your Lord and your Father. “If then I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear?” (Mal 1:6). Acknowledge this relationship and it will beget filial fear in you.

Thirdly, the fear of God is the fountain of all the holiness which delights you. Sinful lusts will lose their potency, corruptions which surface will readily be subdued, you will be stopped in the middle of sinning, and you will find yourself inclined toward the practice of all manner of virtues. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Pro 9:10); “The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom” (Pro 15:33); “The fear of the LORD is clean” (Psa 19:9); “The fear of the LORD tendeth to life:” (Pro 19:23); “...perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1).

Fourthly, the Lord has pleasure in those that fear Him. It ought to be a very precious matter to us that God is pleased with us. It ought to be our great desire and earnest endeavor to be pleasing to the Lord. God is, however, pleased with the fear of God, for therein the acknowledgement and the glorification of His perfections coalesce. “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear Him” (Psa 147:11). How lovely it is when man delights himself in God and when God finds pleasure in man!

—Taken from: *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* by Wilhemus A’Brakel

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The Fear of God: Its Manifestations, Causes, and Enjoyments

by John Gill

Wherein the Fear of God Appears, and by What It Is Manifested

1. In an hatred of sin. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil,” (Pro 8:13) as nothing is more opposite to good than evil, nothing is more to be abhorred; it is to be hated with as gloomy a hatred as hell itself “Abhor that which is evil,” (Rom 12:9). And a man that fears God, who has a reverential affection for him, will hate it as being contrary to him, “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil,” (Psa 97:10) every thing that is evil is hated by such a man; as evil thoughts,

which are only evil and that continually; the heart is full of evil thoughts, and out of it they daily proceed, and these are the object of a good man's hatred, "I hate vain thoughts," says David, (Psa 119:113) and now as no one but a man himself is conscious of them and privy to them, to hate them shows that the fear of God is in his heart. Evil words are also hated by him; not only cursing, swearing, blasphemy, and all obscene and filthy language, but every vain and idle word, foolish and frothy expression, which comes out of his mouth when not on his guard, gives him uneasiness, as being displeasing to God, grieving to his Spirit, and what must be accounted for in the day of judgment; as "in many words" there are "divers vanities," the wise man opposes the "fear of" God unto them, (Ecc 5:7) and if evil thoughts and evil words are hated by such, then most certainly evil actions; and not only those of others, as the deeds of the Nicolaitans, the garment, the outward conversation garment spotted with the flesh, the filthy conversation of the wicked, but his own actions springing from corrupt nature, done by him contrary to the law of his mind; "What I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that I do," (Rom 7:15) evil men and their company are abhorrent to those that fear the Lord, and are shunned and avoided by them; they choose not to have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and the workers of them; society with them is a grief and burden to them, as it was to Lot, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, nay hateful to them: "Do not I hate them that hate thee? I hate them with perfect hatred," (Psa 139:21,22; Pro 4:14,15). All evil and false ways, not only of immorality, but of superstition and will worship, are rejected with abhorrence by men that fear the Lord, and make his word the rule of their faith and practice. Wisdom herself, or Christ, has set an example, proving the truth of the assertion in (Pro 8:13). "Pride and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate"; and wisdom is justified of her children; says David, who was one of them, "I hate every false way," (Psa 119:128) yea all evil doctrines, which reflect on the divine persons in the Godhead, on the free grace of God in man's salvation, on the person and offices of Christ, and the operations of the Spirit, are the object of the hatred and aversion of one that fears God; he cannot bear them that are evil, neither receive them into his house, nor wish them God speed. In short, everything that is evil in its nature, as sin is in every shape exceeding sinful, a breach of the law of God, contrary to his nature, that abominable thing his righteous soul hates, is also hateful to a good man, to a man that fears the Lord, and hereby the fear of the Lord is manifested by him.

2. It shows itself by departing from evil; "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil," (Pro 16:6; 3:7) not only from open and public sins, but from private and secret ones; Job was a man that feared God and eschewed evil, avoided and departed from it, as every wise man does; yea to depart from evil is understanding, this shows a man both to be a wise man and one that fears the Lord, (Job 1:12; 8:28; Pro 14:16) yea such an one will abstain from all appearance of evil, from everything that looks like it or leads unto it; will shun every avenue, every bypath, that has a tendency to ensnare into it, taking the wiseman's advice, "Enter not into the path of the wicked," etc. (Pro 4:14,15).

3. The fear of God appears in men in not allowing themselves to do what others do, and what they themselves formerly did; so Nehemiah, speaking of some ill things done by former governors, says, "So did not I, because of the fear of God," (Neh 5:15). Not that such who fear God are without sin; Job

feared God, but was not free from sin; he was sensible of it, acknowledged it, and implored the pardon of it; but they cannot give themselves that liberty to sin that others do, and walk as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, and in a sinful course of life; they have not so learned Christ, and the grace of God teaches them other things.

4. The fear of God manifests itself by a carefulness not to offend God nor man; such study to exercise a conscience void of offence to both, and would willingly give no offence to Jew nor Gentile, nor to the church of God; and next to God they are careful that they offend not against the generation of his children, either by word or deed, and even to put no stumbling block before any, but fear the Lord their God, for to do otherwise would be contrary to it (Lev 19:14). Nay, such are not only on their guard to avoid sin and give no offence by it, but they are in an opposition to it; the spiritual part in them lusteth against the carnal part; there are as it were a company of two armies in them fighting one against another; they strive against sin, acting the part of an antagonist to it, take to themselves the whole armour of God, and make use of it against it.

5. The fear of God in men is seen by a constant attendance on the worship of God, and by a strict regard to his will and the observation of it; the fear of God has so great a share and concern in divine worship, as has been observed, that it is sometimes put for the whole of it, both internal and external; such who fear the Lord cannot be easy in the neglect of the worship of God, but as they desire to be filled with the knowledge of his will, so to be found in the practice of it; and, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, to walk in all the ordinances and commands of the Lord blameless; and to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole required of man; and such who make a custom of it to forsake the assembling of themselves together to worship God, do interpretatively cast off the fear of God.

6 . The fear of God is seen and known in men by their withholding nothing from God, though ever so dear unto them, whenever he requires of them; so Abraham, when he so readily offered up his son at the command of God, received this testimony from him, "Now know I," saith the Lord, "that thou fearest God," (Gen 22:12); on the contrary, when men keep back a part from God of what he expects from them, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, it is a proof that the fear of God is not before their eyes and in their hearts.

The Springs and Causes of the Fear of God, or from Whence It Flows.

1 . It is not from nature, nor is it in natural men; the want of it is a part of the description of corrupt nature, and of men in a natural state; "There is no fear of God before their eyes," (Rom 3:18) it may be said of the heart of every natural man, what Abraham said of Gerar, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place," (Gen 20:11) and which may be concluded from the wickedness that is in it, and that by what comes out of it; "The transgression of the wicked," discovered by his words and works, his life and actions, "saith within my heart," suggests this to my mind, speaks as plainly as well can be, it is an observation of David, "that there is no fear of God before his eyes," (Psa 36:1).

2. It arises from the grace of God, it is a gift and grant of grace; “O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me,” or “who will give such an heart?” (Deu 5:29) none but God can give it, and he has promised it in covenant; it is a blessing of his grace, which he has provided in it; “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever. I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me,” (Jer 32:39, 40). In consequence of which promise and covenant,

3 . It is implanted in the heart in regeneration; it is put there by the Spirit of God, where it was not before, and where it never could have been, had he not put it there, and it appears as soon in a regenerate man as any grace whatever; upon first conversion there is quickly found a tenderness of conscience with respect to sin, and a carefulness not to offend God; and indeed “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” (Psa 111:10; Pro 9:10). No man is truly wise until he fears God, and as soon as he fears the Lord he begins to be wise, and not before; yea the fear of the Lord is wisdom itself; it is that wisdom and truth which God desires and puts into the inward and hidden parts of the heart, (Job 28:28; Psa 51:6).

4. The word and prayer are the means of attaining it; the fear of the Lord, as it is a duty, and expressive of worship, is to be learned; “Come ye children, hearken unto me,” says David, “I will teach you the fear of the Lord,” (Psa 34:11). The law of God, and especially the whole of doctrine both legal and evangelical, is the means of learning it, (Deu 4:10; 17:19) and therefore is called the fear of the Lord, (Psa 19:7, 9) but as a grace it is diligently sought after and earnestly importuned of God; the heart must not only be instructed but united to fear the Lord, and which is to be prayed for, (Psa 86:11; Pro 2:3-5).

5. It is encouraged, promoted, and increased by fresh discoveries of the grace and goodness of God, “They shall fear the Lord and his goodness”; the goodness of God made known, bestowed, and applied, greatly influences the fear of him, (Hos 3:5) especially an application of his pardoning grace and mercy, “There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared,” (Psa 130:4).

The Happiness of Those That Fear the Lord

There is scarcely anyone character by which the people of God are described, under which more promises of good things are made unto them, than this.

1. **First**, with respect to things temporal. Godliness in general, and this part of it, the fear of the Lord, in particular, has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come.

(1.) It is promised they shall have no want, not of temporal good things, “O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him,” (Psa 34:9,10) not of any good thing; that is, which is suitable and convenient for them, and God in his wisdom sees fit and proper for them; and rather than they shall want, he will do wonders for them, and open sources of relief they never thought of (Isa 41:17, 18; 43:19, 20).

(2.) Though they may have but little of the good things of this world, yet “better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasures and trouble therewith,” (Pro 15:16) this with the fear of God and with righteousness is better than great revenues without right, and better than the riches of many wicked (Pro 16:8; Psa 37:16).

(3.) Yea wealth and riches are promised to be in the house of that man that fears the Lord, and that by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life, (Psa 112:1, 3; Pro 22:4), which can only be understood of some, not of all that fear the Lord; unless spiritual wealth, riches, honor, and life, are intended, since the fear of the Lord itself is the good man’s treasure, it is a treasure of itself (Isa 33:6).

(4.) It is said that the man that fears the Lord shall eat of the labour of his hands, and he shall not only be happy, and it shall be well with him in his person, but in his family; his wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of his house, and his children shall be as olive plants round about his table, (Psa 128:1-4).

(5.) They that fear the Lord are in the utmost safety; in his fear is strong confidence, and they have no reason to be afraid of anything; they shall not be visited with evil, yea the angel of the Lord encamps round about them and protects, defends, and delivers them from all dangers and from all enemies, (Pro 14:26; 19:23; Psa 34:7).

(6.) The fear of the Lord prolongeth days, or adds unto them, (Pro 10:27) which was always reckoned a great temporal blessing; the wise man says of a sinner, “though his days be prolonged,” as they may be, and he not happy, “yet surely,” says he, “I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him,” (Ecc 8:12) be their days more or fewer.

2. **Secondly**, with respect to things spiritual, much is promised to them that fear the Lord, and they are spoken of as most happy persons.

(1.) The Lord is said to take pleasure in them that fear him, as having the utmost complacency and delight in them, being his special and peculiar people, his Hephzibah in whom he delights, his Beulah to whom he is married, (Psa 147:11).

(2.) They are accepted of him, and are acceptable to him; “Of a truth,” says Peter, “I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him,” (Acts 10:34, 35) his person is accepted with him in Christ the beloved, and his sacrifices of prayer and praise are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ.

(3.) The heart of God is towards them; he has a sympathy and fellow feeling with them in all their distresses, trials, and exercises; in all their afflictions he is afflicted, and he comforts and supports them; “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,” (Psa 103:13).

(4.) The eye of the Lord is upon them for good; “the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him,” (Psa 33:18) not only his eye of providence, which runs to and fro throughout the earth to show himself strong on their behalf,

to protect and defend them, and to avenge himself on their enemies; but his eye of special love, grace, and mercy, is upon them, and is never withdrawn from them, but is ever delighting in them and caring for them, (Psa 103:11,17; Luk 1:50).

(5.) His hand is open and ready to communicate to them; he “gives meat to them that fear him,” spiritual food, the blessings of his covenant, of which he is ever mindful; the comforts of his Spirit in which they walk who walk in the fear of the Lord; he gives them grace, fresh and rich supplies of it, and at last gives them glory; and in the meanwhile withholds no good thing from them, to support their faith, encourage their hope, and engage their trust in him and dependence on him.

(6.) “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him”; the secrets of his heart’s love to them, and of his gracious designs towards them, are disclosed unto them, by which he uses them as his most intimate and bosom friends; and he will show them his covenant, the blessings and promises of it, and their interest in them, (Psa 25:14) what is said of Christ the head of the covenant, is true of all the covenant ones in their measure, (Mal 2:5) to which may be added, that the Lord grants the requests and fulfils the desires of them that fear him, hears their cries and saves them, (Psa 145:19).

(7.) They are remembered by him with the favour he bears to his own people, with his tender mercies and loving kindness, which have been ever of old; he remembers them when in a low estate, and brings them out of it; he remembers his promises to them, and fulfils them; “a book of remembrance is” said to be “written before him, for them that feared the Lord,” (Mal 3:16).

(8.) It is promised to them “that fear the name” of the Lord, that “unto” them “the Son of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings,” (Mal 4:2). Christ the Saviour shall come and show himself with a discovery and application of pardoning grace and mercy; nay, one that “fears the Lord,” though he “walks in darkness and hath no light,” yet he is encouraged to “trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God,” (Isa 50:10).

(9.) “Salvation,” a fresh view of interest in it, a renewed application of it, as well as the full enjoyment of it, “is nigh them that fear” the Lord, (Psa 85:9) for that is nearer to them than when they first believed, and had the fear of God first implanted in them, and were set a seeking after it, and had first hope of interest in it.

(10.) Great and good things are laid up for such persons in the heart of God, in the covenant of grace, and in the hands of Christ, and in heaven; even a blessed hope, a crown of righteousness, and things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard of, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive of; “O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!” (Psa 31:19).

—Taken from: *A Body of Divinity* by John Gill

John Gill: (1697-1771) Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Body of Divinity*, *The Cause of God and Truth*, and his nine-volume *Expositions of*

An Ungodly Fear of God

by John Bunyan

“Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord.”—Psalm 128:1

“Fear God.”—Revelation 14:7

Man being a reasonable creature, and having even by nature a certain

knowledge of God, hath also naturally something of some kind of fear of God at times, which, although it be not that which is intended in the text, yet ought to be spoken to, that that which is not right may be distinguished from that that is.

There is a fear of God that flows from some of his dispensations* to men, which yet is neither universal nor saving.

This fear, when opposed to that which is saving, may be called an ungodly fear of God. I shall describe it by these several particulars that follow—

First. There is a fear of God that causeth a continual grudging, discontent, and heart-risings against God under the hand of God; and that is, when the dread of God in his coming upon men, to deal with them for their sins, is apprehended by them, and yet by this dispensation they have no change of heart to submit to God thereunder. The sinners under this dispensation cannot shake God out of their mind, nor yet graciously tremble before him; but through the unsanctified frame that they now are in, they are afraid with ungodly fear, and so in their minds let fly against him. This fear oftentimes took hold of the children of Israel when they were in the wilderness in their journey to the promised land; still they feared that God in this place would destroy them, but not with that fear that made them willing to submit, for their sins, to the judgment which they fear, but with that fear that made them let fly against God†. This fear showed itself in them, even at the beginning of their voyage, and was rebuked by Moses at the Red Sea, but it was not there, nor yet at any other place, so subdued, but that it would rise again in them at times to the dishonour of God, and the anew making of them guilty of sin before him (Exo 14:11-13; Num 14:1-9). This fear is that which God said he would send before them, in the day of Joshua, even a fear that should possess

*Dispensations – the dealing of God to His creatures; the distribution of Good and evil, natural or moral, in the divine government

†Let fly against –to discharge; to throw or drive with violence

the inhabitants of the land, to wit, a fear that should arise for that faintness of

heart that they should be swallowed up of, at their apprehending of Joshua in his approaches towards them to destroy them. “I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee” (Exo 23:27). “This day,” says God, “will I begin to put the dread of thee, and the fear of thee upon the nations *that are* under the whole heaven who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee” (Deu 2:25, 11:25).

Now this fear is also, as you here see, called anguish, and in another place, an hornet; for it, and the soul that it falls upon, do greet each other, as boys and bees do. The hornet puts men in fear, not so as to bring the heart into a sweet compliance with his terror, but so as to stir up the spirit into acts of opposition and resistance, yet withal they flee before it. “I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite,” &c. (Exo 23:28). Now this fear, whether it be wrought by misapprehending of the judgments of God, as in the Israelites, or otherwise as in the Canaanites, yet ungodliness is the effect thereof, and therefore I call it an ungodly fear of God, for it stirreth up murmurings, discontents, and heart-risings against God, while he with his dispensations is dealing with them.

Second. There is a fear of God that driveth a man away from God—I speak not now of the atheist, nor of the pleasurable sinner, nor yet of these, and that fear that I spoke of just now—I speak now of such who through a sense of sin and of God’s justice fly from him of a slavish ungodly fear. This ungodly fear was that which possessed Adam’s heart in the day that he did eat of the tree concerning which the Lord has said unto him, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” For then was he possessed with such a fear of God as made him seek to hide himself from his presence. “I heard,” said he, “thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked; and I hid myself” (Gen 3:10). Mind it, he had a fear of God, but it was not godly. It was not that that made him afterwards submit himself unto him; for that would have kept him from not departing from him, or else have brought him to him again, with bowed, broken, and contrite spirit. But this fear, as the rest of his sin, managed his departing from his God, and pursued him to provoke him still so to do; by it he kept himself from God, by it his whole man was carried away from him. I call it ungodly fear, because it begat in him ungodly apprehensions of his Maker; because it confined Adam’s conscience to the sense of justice only, and consequently to despair.

The same fear also possessed the children of Israel when they heard the law delivered to them on Mount Sinai; as is evident, for it made them that they could neither abide his presence nor hear his word. It drove them back from the mountain. It made them, saith the apostle to the Hebrews, that “they could not endure that which was commanded” (Heb 12:20). Wherefore this fear Moses rebukes, and forbids their giving way thereto. “Fear not,” said he; but had that fear been godly, he would have encouraged it, and not forbid and rebuke it as he did. “Fear not,” said he, “for God is come to prove you”; they thought otherwise. “God,” saith he, “is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces.” Therefore that fear that already had taken possession of them, was not the fear of God, but a fear that was of Satan, of their own misjudging hearts, and so a fear that was ungodly (Exo 20:18-20). Mark you, here is a fear and a fear, a fear forbidden, and a fear commended; a fear

forbidden, because it engendered their hearts to bondage, and to ungodly thoughts of God and of his word; it made them that they could not desire to hear God speak to them any more (vv 19-21).

Many also at this day are possessed with this ungodly fear; and you may know them by this,—they cannot abide conviction for sin, and if at any time the word of the law, by the preaching of the word, comes near them, they will not abide that preacher, nor such kind of sermons any more. They are, as they deem, best at ease, when furthest off of God, and of the power of his word. The word preached brings God nearer to them than they desire he should come, because whenever God comes near, their sins by him are manifest, and so is the judgment too that to them is due. Now these not having faith in the mercy of God through Christ, nor that grace that tendeth to bring them to him, they cannot but think of God amiss, and their so thinking of him makes them say unto him, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14). Wherefore their wrong thoughts of God beget in them this ungodly fear; and again, this ungodly fear doth maintain in them the continuance of these wrong and unworthy thoughts of God, and therefore, through that devilish service wherewith they strengthen one another, the sinner, without a miracle of grace prevents* him, is drowned in destruction and perdition.

*Prevents – to go before

It was this ungodly fear of God that carried Cain from the presence of God into the land of Nod, and that put him there upon any carnal worldly business, if perhaps he might by so doing stifle convictions of the majesty and justice of God against his sin, and so live the rest of his vain life in the more sinful security and fleshly ease. This ungodly fear is that also which Samuel perceived at the people’s apprehension of their sin, to begin to get hold of their hearts; wherefore he, as Moses before him, quickly forbids their entertaining of it. “Fear not,” said he, “ye have done all this wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the Lord.” For to turn them aside from following of him, was the natural tendency of this fear. “But fear not,” said he, that is, with that fear that tendeth to turn you aside. Now, I say, the matter that this fear worketh upon, as in Adam, and the Israelites mentioned before, was their sin. You have sinned, says he, that is true, yet turn not aside, yet fear not with that fear that would make you so do (1Sa 12:20). Note by the way, sinner, that when the greatness of thy sins, being apprehended by thee, shall work in thee that fear of God, as shall incline thy heart to fly from him, thou art possessed with a fear of God that is ungodly, yea, so ungodly, that not any of thy sins for heinousness may be compared therewith, as might be made manifest in many particulars, but Samuel having rebuked this fear, presently sets before the people another, to wit, the true fear of God; “fear the Lord,” says he, “serve him with all your heart” (v 24). And he giveth them this encouragement so to do, “for the Lord will not forsake his people.” This ungodly fear is that which you read of in Isaiah 2, and in many other places, and God’s people should shun it, as they would shun the devil, because its natural tendency is to forward the destruction of the soul in which it has taken possession.

Third. There is a fear of God, which, although it hath not in it that power as to make men flee from God’s presence, yet it is ungodly, because, even while they are in the outward way of God’s ordinances, their hearts are by it

quite discouraged from attempting to exercise themselves in the power of religion. Of this sort are they which dare not cast off the hearing, reading, and discourse of the word as others; no, nor the assembly of God's children for the exercise of other religious duties, for their conscience is convinced this is the way and worship of God. But yet their heart, as I said, by this ungodly fear, is kept from a powerful gracious falling in with God. This fear takes away their heart from all holy and godly prayer in private, and from all holy and godly zeal for his name in public, and there be many professors whose hearts are possessed with this ungodly fear of God; and they are intended by the slothful one. He was a servant, a servant among the servants of God, and had gifts and abilities given him, therewith to serve Christ, as well as his fellows, yea, and was commanded too, as well as the rest, to occupy till his master came. But what does he? Why, he takes his talent, the gift that he was to lay out for his master's profit, and puts it in a napkin, digs a hole in the earth, and hides his lord's money, and lies in a lazy manner at to-elbow* all his days, not out of, but in his lord's vineyard; for he came among the servants also at last. By which it is manifest that he had not cast off his profession, but was slothful and negligent while he was in it. But what was it that made him thus slothful? What was it that took away his heart, while he was in the way, and that discouraged him from falling in with the power and holy practice of religion according to the talent he received? Why, it was this, he gave way to an ungodly fear of God, and that took away his heart from the power of religious duties. "Lord," said he, "behold, *here is* thy pound, which I have kept, laid up in a napkin, for I feared thee." Why, man, doth the fear of God make a man idle and slothful? No, no; that is, if it be right and godly. This fear was therefore evil fear; it was that ungodly fear of God which I have here been speaking of. For I feared thee, or as Matthew hath it, "for I was afraid." Afraid of what? Of Christ, "that he was an hard man, reaping where he sowed not, and gathering where he had not strawed." This his fear, being ungodly, made him apprehend of Christ contrary to the goodness of his nature, and so took away his heart from all endeavours to be doing of that which was pleasing in his sight (Luk 19:20; Matt 25:24, 25). And thus do all those that retain the name and show of religion, but are neglecters as to the power and godly practice of it. These will live like dogs and swine in the house; they pray not, they watch not their hearts, they pull not their hands out of their bosoms to work, they do not strive against their lusts, nor will they ever resist unto blood, striving against sin; they cannot take up their cross, or improve what they have to God's glory. Let all men therefore take heed of this ungodly fear, and shun it as they shun the devil, for it will make them afraid where no fear is. It will tell them that there is a lion in the street, the unlikeliest place in the world for such a beast to be in; it will put a vizard** upon the face of God, most dreadful and fearful to behold, and then quite discourage the soul as to his service; so it served the slothful servant, and so it will serve thee, poor sinner, if thou entertainest it, and givest way thereto. But,

*To el-bow all his days –to sit or stand idly resting upon his elbows instead of laboring in the vineyard

**Vizard – a mask

Fourth. This ungodly fear of God shows itself also in this. It will not suffer the soul that is governed thereby to trust only to Christ for justification of life, but will bend the powers of the soul to trust partly to the works of the

law. Many of the Jews were, in the time of Christ and his apostles, possessed with this ungodly fear of God, for they were not as the former, to wit, as the slothful servant, to receive a talent and hide it in the earth in a napkin, but they were an industrious people, they followed after the law of righteousness, they had a zeal of God and of the religion of their fathers; but how then did they come to miscarry? Why, their fear of God was ungodly; it would not suffer them wholly to trust to the righteousness of faith, which is the imputed righteousness of Christ. They followed after the law of righteousness, but attained not to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. But what was it that made them join their works of the law with Christ, but their unbelief, whose foundation was ignorance and fear? They were afraid to venture all in one bottom, they thought two strings to one bow would be best, and thus betwixt two stools they came to the ground. And hence, to fear and to doubt, are put together as being the cause one of another; yea, they are put oftentimes the one for the other; thus ungodly fear for unbelief: “Be not afraid, only believe,” and therefore he that is overruled and carried away with this fear, is coupled with the unbeliever that is thrust out from the holy city among the dogs. But the fearful and unbelievers, and murderers are without (Rev 21:8). “The fearful and unbelieving,” you see, are put together; for indeed fear, that is, this ungodly fear, is the ground of unbelief, or, if you will, unbelief is the ground of fear, this fear: but I stand not upon nice* distinctions. This ungodly fear hath a great hand in keeping of the soul from trusting only to Christ’s righteousness for justification of life.

*Nice – accurate, precise

Fifth. This ungodly fear of God is that which will put men upon adding to the revealed will of God their own inventions, and their own performances of them, as a means to pacify the anger of God. For the truth is, where this ungodly fear reigneth, there is no end of law and duty. When those that you read of in the book of Kings were destroyed by the lions, because they had set up idolatry in the land of Israel, they sent for a priest from Babylon that might teach them the manner of the God of the land; but behold when they knew it, being taught it by the priest, yet their fear would not suffer them to be content with that worship only. “They feared the Lord,” saith the text, “and served their own gods.” And again, “So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images” (2Ki 17). It was this fear also that put the Pharisees upon inventing so many traditions, as the washing of cups, and beds, and tables, and basins, with abundance of such other like gear, none knows the many dangers that an ungodly fear of God will drive a man into (Mar 7). How has it racked and tortured the Papists for hundreds of years together! for what else is the cause but this ungodly fear, at least in the most simple and harmless of them, of their penances, as creeping to the cross, going barefoot on pilgrimage, whipping themselves, wearing of sackcloth, saying so many Pater-nosters†, so many Ave-marias•, making so many confessions to the priest, giving so much money for pardons, and abundance of other the like, but this ungodly fear of God? For could they be brought to believe this doctrine, that Christ was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, and to apply it by faith with godly boldness to their own souls, this fear would vanish, and so consequently all those things with which they so needlessly and unprofitably afflicted themselves, offend God, and grieve his

people. Therefore, gentle reader, although my text doth bid that indeed thou shouldest fear God, yet it includeth not, nor accepteth of any fear; no, not of any [or every] fear of God. For there is, as you see, a fear of God that is ungodly, and that is to be shunned as their sin. Wherefore thy wisdom and thy care should be, to see and prove thy fear to be godly, which shall be the next thing that I shall take in hand.

†Pater-nosters – Our fathers

•Ave-marias – hail Mary’s; a form of devotion in Roman Catholicism. Their chaplets and rosaries are divided into a certain number of Ave-Maria’s and Pater-noster’s.

There is a fear of God in the heart of some men that is good and godly, but yet doth not for ever abide so. Or you may take it thus—There is a fear of God that is godly but for a time.

In my speaking to, and opening of this to you, I shall observe this method. *First*. I shall show you what this fear is. *Second*. I shall show you by whom or what this fear is wrought in the heart. *Third*. I shall show you what this fear doth in the soul. And, *Fourth*, I shall show you when this fear is to have an end.

First. For the first, this fear is an effect of sound awakenings by the word of wrath which begetteth in the soul a sense of its right to eternal damnation; for this fear is not in every sinner; he that is blinded by the devil, and that is not able to see that his state is damnable, he hath not this fear in his heart, but he that is under the powerful workings of the word of wrath, as God’s elect are at first conversion, he hath this godly fear in his heart; that is, he fears that that damnation will come upon him, which by the justice of God is due unto him, because he hath broken his holy law. This is the fear that made the three thousand cry out, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” and that made the jailer cry out, and that with great trembling of soul, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Act 2, 16). The method of God is to kill and make alive, to smite and then heal; when the commandment came to Paul, sin revived, and he died, and that law which was ordained to life, he found to be unto death; that is, it passed a sentence of death upon him for his sins, and slew his conscience with that sentence. Therefore from that time that he heard that word, “Why persecutest thou me?” which is all one as if he had said, Why dost thou commit murder? he lay under the sentence of condemnation by the law, and under this fear of that sentence in his conscience. He lay, I say, under it, until that Ananias came to him to comfort him, and to preach unto him the forgiveness of sin (Act 9). The fear therefore that now I call godly, it is that fear which is properly called the fear of eternal damnation for sin, and this fear, at first awakening, is good and godly, because it ariseth in the soul from a true sense of its very state. Its state by nature is damnable, because it is sinful, and because he is not one that as yet believeth in Christ for remission of sins: “He that believeth not shall be damned.”—“He that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him” (Mar 16:16; Joh 3:18,36). The which when the sinner at first begins to see, he justly fears it; I say, he fears it justly, and therefore godly, because by this fear he subscribes to the sentence that is gone out against him for sin.

Second. By whom or by what is this fear wrought in the heart? To this I shall answer in brief. It is wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God, working

there at first as a spirit of bondage, on purpose to put us in fear. This Paul insinuateth, saying, “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom 8:15). He doth not say, Ye have not received the spirit of bondage; for that they had received, and that to put them in fear, which was at their first conversion, as by the instances made mention of before is manifest; all that he says is, that they had not received it again, that is, after the Spirit, as a spirit of adoption, is come; for then, as a spirit of bondage, it cometh no more. It is then the Spirit of God, even the Holy Ghost, that convinceth us of sin, and so of our damnable state because of sin (Joh 16:8,9). For it cannot be that the Spirit of God should convince us of sin, but it must also show us our state to be damnable because of it, especially if it so convinceth us, before we believe, and that is the intent of our Lord in that place, “of sin,” and so of their damnable state by sin, because they believe not on me. Therefore the Spirit of God, when he worketh in the heart as a spirit of bondage, he doth it by working in us by the law, “for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). And he, in this his working, is properly called a spirit of bondage.

1. Because by the law he shows us that indeed we are in bondage to the law, the devil, and death and damnation; for this is our proper state by nature, though we see it not until the Spirit of God shall come to reveal this our state of bondage unto our own senses by revealing to us our sins by the law.

2. He is called, in this his working, “the spirit of bondage,” because he here also holds us; to wit, in this sight and sense of our bondage-state, so long as is meet we should be so held, which to some of the saints is a longer, and to some a shorter time. Paul was held in it three days and three nights, but the jailer and the three thousand, so far as can be gathered, not above an hour; but some in these later times are so held for days and months, if not years. But, I say, let the time be longer or shorter, it is the Spirit of God that holdeth him under this yoke; and it is good that a man should be in HIS time held under it, as is that saying of the lamentation, “*It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth*” (Lam 3:27). That is, at his first awakening; so long as seems good to this Holy Spirit to work in this manner by the law. Now, as I said, the sinner at first is by the Spirit of God held in this bondage, that is, hath such a discovery of his sin and of his damnation for sin made to him, and also is held so fast under the sense thereof, that it is not in the power of any man, nor yet of the very angels in heaven, to release him or set him free, until the Holy Spirit changeth his ministration, and comes in the sweet and peaceable tidings of salvation by Christ in the gospel to his poor, dejected, and afflicted conscience.

Third. I now come to show you what this fear doth in the soul. Now, although this godly fear is not to last always with us, as I shall further show you anon*, yet it greatly differs from that which is wholly ungodly of itself, both because of the author, and also of the effects of it. Of the author I have told you before; I now shall tell you what it doth.

*Anon – quickly; immediately

1. This fear makes a man judge himself for sin, and to fall down before God with a broken mind under this judgment; the which is pleasing to God, because the sinner by so doing justifies God in his saying, and clears him in

his judgment (Psa 51:1-4).

2. As this fear makes a man judge himself, and cast himself down at God's foot, so it makes him condole* and bewail his misery before him, which is also well-pleasing in his sight: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself," saying, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," &c. (Jer 31:18,19).

*Condole – to feel pain or to grieve

3. This fear makes a man lie at God's foot, and puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. This also is well-pleasing to God, because now is the sinner as nothing, and in his own eyes less than nothing, as to any good or desert: "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence," because he hath now this yoke upon him; "he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope" (Lam 3:28, 29).

4. This fear puts a man upon crying to God for mercy, and that in most humble manner; now he sensibly cries, now he dejectedly cries, now he feels and cries, now he smarts and criest out, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luk 18:13).

5. This fear makes a man that he cannot accept of that for support and succour which others that are destitute thereof will take up, and be contented with. This man must be washed by God himself, and cleansed from his sin by God himself (Psa 51).

6. Therefore this fear goes not away until the Spirit of God doth change his ministration as to this particular, in leaving off to work now by the law, as afore, and coming to the soul with the sweet word of promise of life and salvation by Jesus Christ. Thus far this fear is godly, that is, until Christ by the Spirit in the gospel is revealed and made over unto us, and no longer.

Thus far this fear is godly, and the reason why it is godly is because the groundwork of it is good. I told you before what this fear is; namely, it is the fear of damnation. Now the ground for this fear is good, as is manifest by these particulars. 1. The soul feareth damnation, and that rightly, because it is in its sins. 2. The soul feareth damnation rightly, because it hath not faith in Christ, but is at present under the law. 3. The soul feareth damnation rightly now, because by sin, the law, and for want of faith, the wrath of God abideth on it. But now, although thus far this fear of God is good and godly, yet after Christ by the Spirit in the word of the gospel is revealed to us, and we made to accept of him as so revealed and offered to us by a true and living faith; this fear, to wit, of damnation, is no longer good, but ungodly. Nor doth the Spirit of God ever work it in us again. Now we do not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, that is to say, to fear damnation, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Father, Father. But I would not be mistaken, when I say, that this fear is no longer godly. I do not mean with reference to the essence and habit of it, for I believe it is the same in the seed which shall afterwards grow up to a higher degree, and into a more sweet and gospel current and manner of working, but I mean reference to this act of fearing damnation, I say it shall never by the Spirit be managed to that work;

it shall never bring forth that fruit more. And my reasons are,

Reasons why the Spirit of God cannot work this ungodly fear.

1. Because that the soul by closing through the promise, by the Spirit, with Jesus Christ, is removed off of that foundation upon which it stood when it justly feared damnation. It hath received now forgiveness of sin, it is now no more under the law, but in Jesus Christ by faith; there *is* “therefore now no condemnation to it” (Act 26:18; Rom 6:14, 8:1). The groundwork, therefore, being now taken away, the Spirit worketh that fear no more.

2. He cannot, after he hath come to the soul as a spirit of adoption, come again as a spirit of bondage to put the soul into his first fear; to wit, a fear of eternal damnation, because he cannot say and unsay, do and undo. As a spirit of adoption he told me that my sins were forgiven me, that I was included in the covenant of grace, that God was my Father through Christ, that I was under the promise of salvation, and that this calling and gift of God to me is permanent, and without repentance. And do you think, that after he hath told me this, and sealed up the truth of it to my precious soul, that he will come to me, and tell me that I am yet in my sins, under the curse of the law and the eternal wrath of God? No, no, the word of the gospel is not yea, yea; nay, nay. It is only yea, and amen; it is so, “as God is true” (2Co 1:17-20).

3. The state therefore of the sinner being changed, and that, too, by the Spirit’s changing his dispensation, leaving off to be now as a spirit of bondage to put us in fear, and coming to our heart as the spirit of adoption to make us cry, Father, Father, he cannot go back to his first work again; for if so, then he must gratify, yea, and also ratify, that profane and popish doctrine, forgiven today, unforgiven tomorrow—a child of God today, a child of hell tomorrow; but what saith the Scriptures? “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22).

Objection But this is contrary to my experience. Why, Christian, what is thy experience? Why, I was at first, as you have said, possessed with a fear of damnation, and so under the power of the spirit of bondage. Well said, and how was it then? Why, after some time of continuance in these fears, I had the spirit of adoption sent to me to seal up to my soul the forgiveness of sins, and so he did; and was also helped by the same Spirit, as you have said, to call God Father, Father. Well said, and what after that? Why, after that I fell into as great fears as ever I was in before.

Answer. All this may be granted, and yet nevertheless what I have said will abide a truth; for I have not said that after the spirit of adoption is come, a Christian shall not again be in as great fears, for he may have worse than he had at first; but I say, that after the spirit of adoption is come, the spirit of bondage, as such, is sent of God no more, to put us into those fears. For, mark, for we “have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” Let the word be true, whatever thy experience is. Dost thou not understand me?

After the Spirit of God has told me, and also helped me to believe it, that the Lord for Christ's sake hath forgiven mine iniquities: he tells me no more that they are not forgiven. After the Spirit of God has helped me, by Christ, to call God my Father, he tells me no more that the devil is my father. After he hath told me that I am not under the law, but under grace, he tells me no more that I am not under grace, but under the law, and bound over by it, for my sins, to the wrath and judgment of God; but this is the fear that the Spirit, as a spirit of bondage, worketh in the soul at first.

Quest. Can you give me further reason yet to convict me of the truth of what you say?

Answ. Yes.

1 . Because as the Spirit cannot give himself the lie, so he cannot overthrow his own order of working, nor yet contradict that testimony that his servants, by his inspiration, hath given of his order of working with them. But he must do the first, if he saith to us—and that after we have received his own testimony, that we are under grace—that yet we are under sin, the law, and wrath.

And he must do the second, if—after he hath gone through the first work on us as a spirit of bondage, to the second as a spirit of adoption—he should overthrow as a spirit of bondage again what before he had built as a spirit of adoption.

And the third must therefore needs follow, that is, he overthroweth the testimony of his servants; for they have said, that now we receive the spirit of bondage again to fear no more; that is, after that we by the Holy Ghost are enabled to call God Father, Father.

2. This is evident also, because the covenant in which now the soul is interested abideth, and is everlasting, not upon the supposition of my obedience, but upon the unchangeable purpose of God, and the efficacy of the obedience of Christ, whose blood also hath confirmed it. It is “ordered in all things, and sure,” said David; and this, said he, “is all my salvation” (2Sa 23:5). The covenant then is everlasting in itself, being established upon so good a foundation, and therefore standeth in itself everlastingly bent for the good of them that are involved in it. Hear the tenor of the covenant, and God's attesting of the truth thereof—“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people; and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest; for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more” (Heb 8:10-12). Now if God will do thus unto those that he hath comprised in his everlasting covenant of grace, then he will remember their sins no more, that is, unto condemnation—for so it is that he doth forget them; then cannot the Holy Ghost, who also is one with the Father and the Son, come to us again, even after we are possessed with these glorious fruits of this covenant, as a spirit of bondage, to put us in fear of damnation.

3. The Spirit of God, after it has come to me as a spirit of adoption, can come to me no more as a spirit of bondage, to put me in fear, that is, with my first fears; because, by that faith that he, even he himself, hath wrought in me, to believe and call God “Father, Father,” I am united to Christ, and stand no more upon mine own legs, in mine own sins, or performances; but in his glorious righteousness before him, and before his Father; but he will not cast away a member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones; nor will he, that the Spirit of God should come as a spirit of bondage to put him into a grounded fear of damnation, that standeth complete before God in the righteousness of Christ; for that is an apparent contradiction.

Quest. But may it not come again as a spirit of bondage, to put me into my first fears for my good?

Ans. The text saith the contrary; for we “have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” Nor is God put to it for want of wisdom, to say and unsay, do and undo, or else he cannot do good. When we are sons, and have received the adoption of children, he doth not use to send the spirit after that to tell us we are slaves and heirs of damnation, also that we are without Christ, without the promise, without grace, and without God in the world; and yet this he must do if it comes to us after we have received him as a spirit of adoption, and put us, as a spirit of bondage, in fear as before.

This ungodly fear wrought by the spirit of the devil.

Quest. But by what spirit is it then that I am brought again into fears, even into the fears of damnation, and so into bondage?

Ans. By the spirit of the devil, who always labours to frustrate the faith, and hope, and comfort of the godly.

Quest. How doth that appear?

Ans. 1. By the groundlessness of such fears. 2. By the unseasonableness of them. 3. By the effects of them.

1. ***By the groundlessness of such fears.*** The ground is removed; for a grounded fear of damnation is this—I am yet in my sins, in a state of nature, under the law, without faith, and so under the wrath of God. This, I say, is the ground of the fear of damnation, the true ground to fear it; but now the man that we are talking of, is one that hath the ground of this fear taken away by the testimony and seal of the spirit of adoption. He is called, justified, and has, for the truth of this his condition, received the evidence of the spirit of adoption, and hath been thereby enabled to call God “Father, Father.” Now he that hath received this, has the ground of the fear of damnation taken from him; therefore his fear, I say, being without ground, is false, and so no work of the Spirit of God.

2. ***By the unseasonableness of them.*** This spirit always comes too late. It comes after the spirit of adoption is come. Satan is always for being too soon or too late. If he would have men believe they are children, he would have

them believe it while they are slaves, slaves to him and their lusts. If he would have them believe they are slaves, it is when they are sons, and have received the spirit of adoption, and the testimony, by that, of their sonship before. And this evil is rooted even in his nature—"He is a liar, and the father of it"; and his lies are not known to saints more than in this, that he labours always to contradict the work and order of the Spirit of truth (Joh 8).

3. It also appears *By the effects of such fears*. For there is a great deal of difference betwixt the natural effects of these fears which are wrought indeed by the spirit of bondage, and those which are wrought by the spirit of the devil afterwards. The one, to wit, the fears that are wrought by the spirit of bondage, causeth us to confess the truth, to wit, that we are Christless, graceless, faithless, and so at present; that is, while he is so working in a sinful and damnable case; but the other, to wit, the spirit of the devil, when he comes, which is after the spirit of adoption is come, he causeth us to make a lie; that is, to say we are Christless, graceless, and faithless. Now this, I say, is wholly, and in all part of it, a lie, and HE is the father of it.

Besides, the direct tendency of the fear that the Spirit of God, as a spirit of bondage, worketh in the soul, is to cause us to come repenting home to God by Jesus Christ, but these latter fears tend directly to make a man, he having first denied the work of God, as he will, if he falleth in with them, to run quite away from God, and from his grace to him in Christ, as will evidently appear if thou givest but a plain and honest answer to these questions following.

This fear driveth a man from God.

Quest. 1. Do not these fears make thee question whether there was ever a work of grace wrought in thy soul?

Answ. Yes, verily, that they do.

Quest. 2. Do not these fears make thee question whether ever thy first fears were wrought by the Holy Spirit of God?

Answ. Yes, verily, that they do.

Quest. 3. Do not these fears make thee question whether ever thou hast had, indeed, any true comfort from the Word and Spirit of God?

Answ. Yes, verily, that they do.

Quest. 4. Dost thou not find intermixed with these fears plain assertions that thy first comforts were either from thy fancy, or from the devil, and a fruit of his delusions?

Answ. Yes, verily, that I do.

Quest. 5. Do not these fears weaken thy heart in prayer?

Answ. Yes, that they do.

Quest. 6. Do not these fears keep thee back from laying hold of the promise of salvation by Jesus Christ?

Answ. Yes; for I think if I were deceived before, if I were comforted by a spirit of delusion before, why may it not be so again? so I am afraid to take hold of the promise.

Quest. 7. Do not these fears tend to the hardening of thy heart, and to the making of thee desperate?

Answ. Yes, verily, that they do.

Quest. 8. Do not these fears hinder thee from profiting in hearing or reading of the Word?

Answ. Yes, verily, for still whatever I hear or read, I think nothing that is good belongs to me.

Quest. 9. Do not these fears tend to the stirring up of blasphemies in thy heart against God?

Answ. Yes, to the almost distracting of me.

Quest. 10. Do not these fears make thee sometimes think, that it is in vain for thee to wait upon the Lord any longer?

Answ. Yes, verily; and I have many times almost come to this conclusion, that I will read, pray, hear, company with God's people, or the like, no longer.

Well, poor Christian, I am glad that thou hast so plainly answered me; but, prithee*, look back upon thy answer. How much of God dost thou think is in these things? how much of his Spirit, and the grace of his Word? Just none at all; for it cannot be that these things can be the true and natural effects of the workings of the Spirit of God: no, not as a spirit of bondage. These are not his doings. Dost thou not see the very paw of the devil in them; yea, in every one of thy ten confessions? Is there not palpably high wickedness in every one of the effects of this fear? I conclude, then, as I began, that the fear that the spirit of God, as a spirit of bondage, worketh, is good and godly, not only because of the author, but also because of the ground and effects; but yet it can last no longer as such, as producing the aforesaid conclusion, than till the Spirit, as the spirit of adoption, comes; because that then the soul is manifestly taken out of the state and condition into which it had brought itself by nature and sin, and is put into Christ, and so by him into a state of life and blessedness by grace. Therefore, if first fears come again into thy soul, after that the spirit of adoption hath been with thee, know they come not from the Spirit of God, but apparently from the spirit of the devil, for they are a lie in themselves, and their effects are sinful and devilish.

*Prithee – I pray you or I ask you.

Objection But I had also such wickedness as those in my heart at my first awakening, and therefore, by your argument, neither should that be but from

the devil.

Answer. So far forth as such wickedness was in thy heart, so far did the devil and thine own heart seek to drive thee to despair, and drown thee there; but thou hast forgot the question; the question is not whether then thou wast troubled with such iniquities, but whether thy fears of damnation at that time were not just and good, because grounded upon thy present condition, which was, for that thou wast out of Christ, in thy sins, and under the curse of the law; and whether now, since the spirit of adoption is come unto thee, and hath thee, and hath done that for thee as hath been mentioned; I say, whether thou oughtest for anything whatsoever to give way to the same fear, from the same ground of damnation; it is evident thou oughtest not, because the ground, the cause, is removed.

Objection But since I was sealed to the day of redemption, I have grievously sinned against God, have not I, therefore, cause to fear, as before? may not, therefore, the spirit of bondage be sent again to put me in fear, as at first? Sin was the first cause, and I have sinned now.

Answer. No, by no means; for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; that is, God hath not given it us, “for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7). If, therefore, our first fears come upon us again, after that we have received at God’s hands the spirit of love, of power, and of a sound mind, it is to be refused, though we have grievously sinned against our God. This is manifest from 1 Samuel 12:20; “Fear not; ye have done all this wickedness.” That is, not with that fear which would have made them fly from God, as concluding that they were not now his people. And the reason is, because sin cannot dissolve the covenant into which the sons of God, by his grace, are taken. “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail” (Psa 89:30-33). Now, if sin doth not dissolve the covenant; if sin doth not cast me out of this covenant, which is made personally with the Son of God, and into the hands of which by the grace of God I am put, then ought I not, though I have sinned, to fear with my first fears.

Sin, after that the spirit of adoption is come, cannot dissolve the relation of Father and son, of Father and child. And this the church did rightly assert, and that when her heart was under great hardness, and when she had the guilt of erring from his ways, saith she. “Doubtless thou art our Father” (Isa 63:16, 17). Doubtless thou art, though this be our case, and though Israel should not acknowledge us for such.

That sin dissolveth not the relation of Father and son is further evident—
“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, [Abba, or] Father, Father.” Now mark, “wherefore thou art no more a servant”; that is, no more under the law of death and damnation, “but a son; and if a son, then an heir of

God through Christ” (Gal 4:4-7).

Suppose a child doth grievously transgress against and offend his father, is the relation between them therefore dissolved? Again, suppose the father should scourge and chasten the son for such offence, is the relation between them therefore dissolved? Yea, suppose the child should now, through ignorance, cry, and say, This man is now no more my father; is he, therefore, now no more his father? Doth not everybody see the folly of such arguings? Why, of the same nature is that doctrine that saith, that after we have received the spirit of adoption, that the spirit of bondage is sent to us again to put us in fear of eternal damnation.

Know then that thy sin, after thou hast received the spirit of adoption to cry unto God, Father, Father, is counted the transgression of a child, not of a slave, and that all that happeneth to thee for that transgression is but the chastisement of a father—and “what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” It is worth your observation, that the Holy Ghost checks those who, under their chastisements for sin, forget to call God their Father—“Ye have,” said Paul, “forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” Yea, observe yet further, that God’s chastising of his children for their sin, is a sign of grace and love, and not of his wrath, and thy damnation; therefore now there is no ground for the aforesaid fear—“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12). Now, if God would not have those that have received the Spirit of the Son, however he chastises them, to forget the relation that by the adoption of sons they stand in to God, if he checks them that do forget it, when his rod is upon their backs for sin, then it is evident that those fears that thou hast under a colour of the coming again of the Spirit, as a spirit of bondage, to put thee in fear of eternal damnation, is nothing else but Satan disguised, the better to play his pranks upon thee.

I will yet give you two or three instances more, wherein it will be manifest that whatever happeneth to thee, I mean as a chastisement for sin, after the spirit of adoption is come, thou oughtest to hold fast by faith the relation of Father and son. The people spoken of by Moses are said to have lightly esteemed the rock of their salvation, which rock is Jesus Christ, and that is a grievous sin indeed, yet, saith he, “Is not God thy Father *that* hath bought thee?” and then puts them upon considering the days of old (Deu 32:6). They in the prophet Jeremiah had played the harlot with many lovers, and done evil things as they could; and, as another scripture hath it, gone a-whoring from under their God, yet God calls to them by the prophet, saying, “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou *art* the guide of my youth?” (Jer 3:4). Remember also that eminent text made mention of in 1 Samuel 12:20, “Fear not; ye have done all this wickedness”; and labour to maintain faith in thy soul, of thy being a child, it being true that thou hast received the spirit of adoption before, and so that thou oughtest not to fall under thy first fears, because the ground is taken away, of thy eternal damnation.

Now, let not any, from what hath been said, take courage to live loose lives, under a supposition that once in Christ, and ever in Christ, and the covenant cannot be broken, nor the relation of Father and child dissolved; for

they that do so, it is evident, have not known what it is to receive the spirit of adoption. It is the spirit of the devil in his own hue that suggesteth this unto them, and that prevaileth with them to do so. Shall we do evil that good may come? shall we sin that grace may abound? or shall we be base in life because God by grace hath secured us from wrath to come? God forbid; these conclusions betoken one void of the fear of God indeed, and of the spirit of adoption too. For what son is he, that because the father cannot break the relation, nor suffer sin to do it—that is, betwixt the Father and him—that will therefore say, I will live altogether after my own lusts, I will labour to be a continual grief to my Father?

I conclude then, that that fear that is wrought by the spirit of bondage is good and godly, because the ground for it is sound; and I also conclude, that he comes to the soul as a spirit of bondage but once, and that once is before he comes as a spirit of adoption: and if therefore the same fear doth again take hold of thy heart, that is, if after thou hast received the spirit of adoption thou fearest again the damnation of thy soul, that thou art out of Christ and under the law, *that* fear is bad and of the devil, and ought by no means to be admitted by thee.

—Taken From: *The Fear of God* by John Bunyan.

John Bunyan: (1628-1688) English minister, preacher, and one of the most influential writers of the 17th century. Beloved author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Holy War*, *The Acceptable Sacrifice*, and numerous others. Born at Elstow near Bedford, England. All of Bunyan's works including *The Fear of God* are available for download free of charge on our website at www.johnbunyan.org.

A Fear to Be Desired

by C. H. Spurgeon

“And shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”—Hosea 3:5.

A DISTINCTION TO BE OBSERVED.

Human language is necessarily imperfect. Since man's fall, and especially since the confusion of tongues at Babel, there has not only been a difference in speech between one nation and another, but also between one individual and another. Probably, we do not all mean exactly the same thing by any one word that we use; there is just a shade of difference between your meaning and mine. The confusion of tongues went much further than we sometimes realize; and so completely did it confuse our language that we do not, on all occasions, mean quite the same thing to ourselves even when we use the same word. Hence, “fear” is a word, which has a very wide range of meaning. There is a kind of fear which is to be shunned and avoided, that fear which perfect love casts out, because it hath

torment. But there is another sort of fear which has in it the very essence of love, and without which there would be no joy even in the presence of God. Instead of perfect love casting out this fear, perfect love nourishes and cherishes it, and, by communion with it, itself derives strength from it. Between the fear of a slave and the fear of a child, we can all perceive a great distinction. Between the fear of God's great power and justice which the devils have, and that fear which a child of God has when he walks in the light with his God, there is as much difference, surely, as between hell and heaven.

In the verse from which our text is taken, that difference is clearly indicated: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord;" so that this fear is connected with seeking the Lord. It is a fear, which draws them towards God, and makes them search for him. You know how the fear of the ungodly influences them; it makes them afraid of God, so they say, "Whither shall we flee from his presence?" They would take the wings of the morning if they could, and fly to the uttermost part of the earth, if they had any hope that God could not reach them there; at the last, when this fear will take full possession of them, they will call upon the rocks and the hills to hide them from the face of him who will then sit upon the throne, whose wrath they will have such cause to dread. The fear of God, as it exists in unrenowned men, is a force which ever drives them further and yet further away from God. They never get any rest of mind until they have ceased to think of him; if a thought of God should, perchance, steal into their mind, fear at once lays hold upon them again, and that fear urges them to flee from God.

But the fear mentioned in our text draws to God. The man who has this fear in his heart cannot live without seeking God's face, confessing his guilt before him, and receiving pardon from him. He seeks God because of this fear. Just as Noah, "moved with fear," built the ark wherein he and his household were saved, so do these men, "moved with fear," draw nigh unto God, and seek to find salvation through his love and grace. Always notice this distinction, and observe that the fear which drives anyone away from God is a vice and a sin, but the fear that draws us towards God, as with silken bonds, is a virtue to be cultivated.

This appears even more clearly in the Hebrew, for they who best understand that language tell us that this passage should be read thus, "They shall fear toward the Lord, and toward his goodness." This fear leans toward the Lord. When thou really knowest God, thou shalt be thrice happy if thou dost run toward him, falling down before him, worshipping him with bowed head yet glad heart, all the while fearing toward him, and not away from him. Blessed is the man whose heart is filled with that holy fear which inclines his steps in the way of God's commandments, inclines his heart to seek after God, and inclines his whole soul to enter into fellowship with God, that he may be acquainted with him, and be at peace. It is also worthy of notice that this fear is connected with the Messiah: "They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their King," who stands here as the type of Jesus the Messiah, the King of Israel; and further on it is said, "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness;" and I should not do wrong if I were to say that Christ is Jehovah's goodness, that, in his blessed person, you have all the goodness, and mercy, and grace of God condensed and concentrated. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the

Godhead bodily.” So, that fear which is a sign of grace in the heart, that fear which we ought all to seek after, always links itself on to Christ Jesus. If thou fearest God, and knowest not that there is Mediator between God and men, thou wilt never think of approaching him. God is a consuming fire, then how canst thou draw near to him apart from Christ? If thou fearest God, and knowest not of Christ’s atonement, how canst thou approach him? Without faith, it is impossible to please God, and without the blood of Jesus there is no way of access to the divine mercy-seat. If thou knowest not Christ, thou wilt never come unto God. Thy fear must link itself with the goodness of God as displayed in the person of his dear Son, or else it cannot be that seeking fear, that fear toward the Lord, of which our text speaks. It will be a fleeing fear, a fear that will drive thee further and yet further away from God, into greater and deeper darkness, into dire destruction, in fact, into that pit whose bottomless abyss swallows up all hope, all rest, and all joy for ever.

***The Grace Which is to be Cultivated:
“they shall fear the Lord and his goodness.”***

We will divide the one thought into two; and, first, I will speak about that fear of God, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, a token of grace, a sign of salvation, and a precious treasure to be ever kept in the heart. What is this fear of God? I answer, first, it is a sense of awe of his greatness. Have you never felt this sacred awe stealing insensibly over your spirit, hushing, and calming you, and bowing you down before the Lord? It will come, sometimes, in the consideration of the great works of nature. Gazing upon the vast expanse of waters, looking up to the innumerable stars, examining the wing of an insect, and seeing there the matchless skill of God displayed in the minute; or standing in a thunderstorm, watching, as best you can, the flashes of lightning, and listening to the thunder of Jehovah’s voice, have you not often shrunk into yourself, and said, “Great God, how terrible art thou!” not afraid, but full of delight, like a child who rejoices to see his father’s wealth, his father’s wisdom, his father’s power, happy, and at home, but feeling oh, so little! We are less than nothing, we are all but annihilated in the presence of the great eternal, infinite, invisible All-in-all. Gracious men often come into this state of mind and heart by watching the works of God; so they do when they observe what he does in providence.

Dr. Watts truly sings,

*“Here he exalts neglected worms
To sceptres and a crown;
Anon the following page he turns,
And treads the monarch down.”*

The mightiest kings and princes are but as grasshoppers in his sight. “The nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance,” that has not weight enough to turn the scale. We talk about the greatness of mankind; but “all nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” Again Dr. Watts wisely sings,

*“Great God! how infinite art thou!
What worthless worms are we!”*

When we realize this, we are filled with a holy awe as we think of God's greatness, and the result of that is that we are moved to fall before him in reverent adoration. We turn to the Word of God, and there we see further proofs of his greatness in all his merciful arrangements for the salvation of sinners, and especially in the matchless redemption wrought out by his well-beloved Son, every part of which is full of the divine glory; and as we gaze upon that glory with exceeding joy, we shrink to nothing before the Eternal, and the result again is lowly adoration. We bow down, and adore and worship the living God, with a joyful, tender fear, which both lays us low, and lifts us very high, for never do we seem to be nearer to heaven's golden throne than when our spirit gives itself up to worship him whom it does not see, but in whose realized presence it trembles with sacred delight.

It is the same fear, but looked at from another point of view, which has regard to the holiness of God. What a holy being is the great Jehovah of hosts! There is in him no fault, no deficiency, no redundancy; he is whole, and therefore holy; there is nothing there but himself, the wholly perfect God. "Holy! holy! holy!" is a fit note for the mysterious living creatures to sound out before his throne above; for, all along, he has acted according to the principle of unsullied holiness. Though blasphemers have tried, many times, to

*"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his judgments, be the god of God,"*

they have always failed, and still he sits in the lonely majesty of his absolute perfection, while they, like brute beasts, crouch far beneath him, and despise what they cannot comprehend. But to a believing heart, God is all purity. His light is "as the color of the terrible crystal," of which Ezekiel writes; his brightness is so great that no man can approach unto it. We are so sinful that, when we get even a glimpse of the divine holiness, we are filled with fear, and we cry, with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is a kind of fear which we have need to cultivate, for it leads to repentance, and confession of sin, to aspirations after holiness, and to the utter rejection of all self-complacency and self-conceit. God grant that we may be completely delivered from all those forms of pride and evil!

The fear of God also takes another form, that is, the fear of his Fatherhood, which leads us to reverence him. When divine grace has given us the new birth, we recognize that we have entered into a fresh relationship towards God; namely, that we have become his sons and daughters. Then we realize that we have received "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Now, we cannot truly cry unto God, "Abba, Father," without at the same time feeling, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." When we recognize that we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," children of the Highest, adopted into the family of the Eternal himself, we feel at once, as the spirit of childhood works within us, that we both love and fear our great Father in heaven, who has loved us with an everlasting love, and has "begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

In this childlike fear, there is not an atom of that fear which signifies being afraid. We, who believe in Jesus, are not afraid of our Father; God forbid that we ever should be. The nearer we can get to him, the happier we are. Our highest wish is to be for ever with him, and to be lost in him; but, still, we pray that we may not grieve him we beseech him to keep us from turning aside from him; we ask for his tender pity towards our infirmities and plead with him to forgive us and to deal graciously with us for his dear Son's sake. As loving children, we feel a holy awe and reverence as we realize our relationship to him who is our Father in heaven, a clear, loving, tender, pitiful Father, yet our Heavenly Father, who "is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."

This holy fear takes a further form when our fear of God's sovereignty leads us to obey him as our King; for he, to whom we pray, and in whom we trust, is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and we gladly own his sovereignty. We see him sitting upon a throne, which is dependent upon no human or angelic power to sustain it. The kings of the earth must ask their fellow men to march in their ranks in order to sustain their rulers, but our King "sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be" a king. As the Creator of all things, and all beings, he has a right to the obedience of the entire creature he has made. Again I say that we, who believe in Jesus, are not afraid of God even as our King, for he has made us also to be kings, and priests, and we are to reign with him, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Yet we tremble before him lest we should be rebellious against him in the slightest degree. With a childlike fear, we are afraid lest one revolting thought or one treacherous wish should ever come into our mind or heart to stain our absolute loyalty to him. Horror takes hold upon us when we hear others deny that "the Lord reigneth;" but even the thought that we should ever do this grieves us exceedingly, and we are filled with that holy fear, which moves us to obey every command of our gracious King so far as we know it to be his command. Having this fear of God before our eyes, we cry to those who would tempt us to sin, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is not because we are afraid of him, but because we delight in him, that we fear before him with an obedient, reverential fear; and, beloved, I do firmly believe that, when this kind of fear of God works itself out to the full, it crystallizes into love. So excellent, so glorious, so altogether everything that could be desired, so far above our highest thought or wish, art thou, O Jehovah, that we lie before thee, and shrink into nothing; yet, even as we do so, we feel another sensation springing up within us. We feel that we love thee; and, as we decrease in our own estimation of ourselves, we feel that we love thee more and more. As we realize our own nothingness, we are more than ever conscious of the greatness of our God. "Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged," says the prophet Isaiah, and so it comes to pass with us. The more we fear the Lord, the more we love him, until this becomes to us the true fear of God, to love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. May he bring us to this blessed climax by the effectual working of his Holy Spirit!

Now I want to dwell, with somewhat of emphasis, upon the second part of this fear: "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness." It may at first seem, to some people, a strange thing that we should fear God's goodness; but there are some of us who know exactly what this expression means, for we have

often experienced just what it describes. How can we fear God's goodness? I speak what I have often felt, and I believe many of you can do the same as you look back upon the goodness of God to you, saving you from sin, and making you to be his child; and as you think of all his goodness to you in the dispensations of his providence. You may, perhaps, be like Jacob, who left his Father's house with his wallet and his staff; and when he came back with a family that formed two bands, and with abundance of all that he could desire, he must have been astonished at what God had done for him. And when David sat upon his throne in Jerusalem, surrounded by wealth and splendor, as he recollected how he had fed his flock in the wilderness, and afterwards had been hunted, by Saul, like a partridge upon the mountains, he might well say, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"

In this way, God's goodness often fills us with amazement, and amazement has in it an element of fear. We are astonished at the Lord's gracious dealings with us, and we say to him, "Why hast thou been so good to me, for so many years, and in such multitude of forms? Why hast thou manifested so much mercy and tenderness toward me? Thou hast treated me as if I had never grieved or offended thee. Thou hast been as good to me as if I had deserved great blessings at thy hands. Hast thou paid me wages, like a hired servant, thou wouldst never have given me such sweetness and such love as thou hast now lavished upon me, though I was once a prodigal, and wandered far from thee. O God, thy love is like the sun; I cannot gaze upon it, its brightness would blind my eyes! I fear, because of thy goodness." Do you know, dear friends, what this expression means? If a sense of God's goodness comes upon you in all its force, you will feel that God is wonderfully great to have been so good to you. Most of us have had friends who have become tired of us after a while. Possibly, we have had some very kind friends, who are not yet tired of us; but, still, they have failed us every now and then at some points; either their power could not meet our necessity, or they were not willing to do what we needed. But our God has poured out his mercy for us like a river; it has flowed on without a break. These many years he has continued to bless us, and has heaped up his mercies, mountain upon mountain, until it has seemed as though he would reach the very stars with the lofty pinnacles of his love. What shall we say to all this? Shall we not fear him, and adore him, and bless him for all the goodness that he has made to pass before us; and, all the while, feel that, even to kiss the hem of his garment, or to be beneath his footstool, is too great an honor for us?

Then there will come upon us, when we are truly grateful to God for his goodness toward us, a sense of our own responsibility; and we shall say, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" We shall feel that we cannot render to him anything compared with what we ought to render; and there will come upon us this fear, that we shall never be able to live at all consistently with the high position which his grace has given to us. As God said concerning his ancient people, we shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that he has procured for us. It will seem as though he had set us on the top of a high mountain, and had bidden us walk along that lofty ridge; it is a ridge of favor and privilege, but it is so elevated that we fear lest our brain should reel, and our feet should slip, because of the height of God's mercy to us. Have you never felt like that, beloved? If God has greatly exalted you with his favor and love, I am sure you must have felt like

that many a time.

Then, next, this holy fear is near akin to gratitude. The fear of a man, who really knows the love and goodness of God, will be somewhat of this kind. He will fear lest he should really be, or should seem to be, ungrateful. "What," he asks, "can I do? I am drowned in mercy. It is not as though my ship were sailing in a sea of mercy; I have been so loaded with the favor of the Lord that my vessel has gone right down, and the ocean of God's love and mercy has rolled right over the masthead. What can I do, O Lord? If thou hast given me only a little mercy, I might have done something, in return, to express my gratitude. But, oh! thy great mercy in electing me, in redeeming me, in converting me, and in preserving me, and in all the goodness of thy providence, toward me, what can I do in return for all these favors? I feel struck dumb; and I am afraid lest I should have a dumb heart as well as a dumb tongue; I fear lest I should grieve thee by anything that looks like ingratitude."

Then the child of God begins, next, to fear lest he should become proud; "for," says he, "I have noticed that, when God thus favors some men, they begin to exalt themselves, and to think that they are persons of great importance; so, if the Lord makes the stream of my life flow very joyously, I may imagine that it is because there is some good thing in me, and be foolish enough to begin to ascribe the glory of it to myself." A true saint often trembles concerning this matter; he sometimes gets even afraid of his mercies. He knows that his trials and troubles never did him any hurt; but he perceives that, sometimes, God's goodness has intoxicated him as with sweet wine, so he begins to be almost afraid of the goodness of his God to him. He thinks to himself, "Shall I be unworthy of all this favor, and walk in a way that is inconsistent with it?" He looks a little ahead, and he knows that the flesh is frail, and that good men have often been found in very slippery places, and he says, "What if, after all this, I should be a backslider? Thou, O Lord, hast brought me into the banqueting house, and thy banner over me is love; thou hast stayed me with flagons, and comforted me with apples; thou hast laid bare thy very heart to me, and made me know that I am a man greatly beloved! Shall I, after all this, ever turn aside from thee? Will the ungodly ever point at me, and say, Aha! Aha! Is this the man after God's own heart? Is this the disciple who said he would die rather than deny his Master?" Such a fear as that very properly comes over us at times, and then we tremble because of all the goodness which God has made to pass before us.

I think you can see, dear friends, without my needing to enlarge further upon this point, that, while a time of sorrow and suffering is often, to the Christian, a time of confidence in his God; on the other hand, a time of prosperity is, to the wise man, a time of holy fear. Not that he is ungrateful, but he is afraid that he may be. Not that he is proud; he is truly humble because he is afraid lest he should become proud. Not that he loves the things of the world, but he is afraid lest his heart should get away from God, so he fears because of all the Lord's goodness to him. May the Lord always keep us in that state of fear for it is a healthy condition for us to be in. Those who walk so very proudly, and with too great confidence, are generally the ones who first tumble down. My observation and experience have taught me this; when I have met with anyone who knew that he was a very good man, and who boasted to other people that he was a very good man, he has generally proved

to be like some of those pears that we sometimes see in the shop, very handsome to look at, but sleepy and rotten all through. Then, on the other hand, I have noticed a great many other people, who have always been afraid that they would go wrong, and who have trembled and feared at almost every step they took. They have feared lest they should grieve the Lord, and they have cried unto him, day and night, “Lord, uphold us;” and he has done so, and they have been enabled to keep their garments unspotted to their life’s end. So, my prayer is, that I may never cease to feel this holy fear before God, and that I may never get to fancy, for a moment, that there is, or ever can be, anything in me to cause me to boast or to glory in myself. May God save all of us from that evil; and the more we receive of his goodness, the more may we fear, with childlike fear, in his presence!

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Charles H. Spurgeon: (1834-1892) Influential Baptist minister in England. History’s most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. Born at Kelvedon, Essex.

Let Us Therefore Fear

by A.W. Pink

“Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”—Hebrews 4:1

The opening words of this chapter bid us seriously take to heart the

solemn warning given at the close of 3. God’s judgment upon the wicked should make us more watchful that we do not follow their steps. The “us” shows that Paul was preaching to himself as well as to the Hebrews. “Let us therefore *fear*” has stumbled some, because of the “Fear thou not” of Isaiah 41:10, 43:1, 5, etc. In John 14:27 Christ says to us, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And in 2 Timothy 1:7 we read, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” On the other hand, believers are told to “Fear God” (1Pe 2:17), and to work out their own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12). How are these two different sets of passages to be harmonized?

The Bible is full of paradoxes, which to the natural man, appear to be contradictions. The Word needs “rightly dividing” on the subject of “fear” as upon everything else of which it treats. There is a fear which the Christian is to cultivate,

and there is a fear from which he should shrink. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and in Proverbs 14:26, 27 we read, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence....The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life”; so again, “Happy is the man that feareth always” (Pro 23:14). The testimony of the New Testament inculcates the same duty: Christ bade His disciples, “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell” (Mat 19:28). To the saints at Rome Paul said, “Be not high-minded, but fear” (Rom 11:20). To God’s people Peter wrote, “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1Pe 1:17). While in Heaven itself the word will yet be given: “Praise our God all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him both small and great” (Rev 19:5).

Fear may be called one of the disliking affections. It is good or evil according to the object on which it is placed, and according to the ordering of it thereon. In Heb. 4:1 it is placed on the right object—an evil to be shunned. That evil is unbelief, which, if persisted in, ends in apostasy and destruction. About this the Christian needs to be constantly on his guard, having his heart set steadily against it. Our natural proneness to fall, the many temptations to which we are subject, together with the deceitfulness of sin, the subtlety of Satan, and God’s justice in leaving men to themselves, are strong enforcements of this duty. Concerning God Himself, we are to fear Him with such a reverent awe of His holy majesty as will make us careful to please Him in all things, and fearful of offending Him. This is ever accompanied by a fearsome distrust of ourselves. The fear of God which is evil in a Christian is that servile bondage which produces a distrustful attitude, kills affection for Him, regards Him as a hateful Tyrant. This is the fear of the demons (Jam 2:19).

“Let us therefore fear.” “It is salutary to remember our tendency to partiality and one-sidedness in our spiritual life, in order that we may be on our guard, that we may carefully and anxiously consider the ‘Again, it is written’; that we may be willing to learn from Christians who have received different gifts of grace, and whose experience varies from ours; above all, that we may seek to follow and serve the Lord Himself, to walk with God, to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Forms of godliness, types of doctrine, are apt to become substitutes instead of channels, weights instead of wings.

“The exhortations of this epistle may appear to some difficult to reconcile with the teachings of Scripture, that the grace of God, once received, through the power of the Holy Spirit by faith, can never be lost, and that they who are born again, who are once in Christ, are in Christ for ever. Let us not blunt the edge of earnest and piercing exhortations. Let us not pass them over, or treat them with inward apathy. ‘Again it is written.’ We know this does not mean that there is any real contradiction in Scripture, but that various aspects of truth are presented, each with the same fidelity, fulness and emphasis. Hence we must learn to move freely, and not to be cramped and fixed in one position: we must keep our eyes clear and open, and not look at all things through the light of a favourite doctrine. And while we receive fully and joyously the assurance of our perfect acceptance and peace, and of the unchanging love of God in Christ Jesus, let us with the apostle consider also our sins and dangers, from the lower yet most real earthly and time-point of view.

“When Christ is beheld and accepted, there is peace; but is there not also fear? ‘With Thee is forgiveness of sin, that Thou mayest be feared’ (Psa

130:4). Where do we see God's holiness and the awful majesty of the law as in the cross of Christ? Where our own sin and unworthiness, where the depths of our guilt and misery, as in the atonement of the Lord Jesus? We rejoice with fear and trembling... It is because we know the Father, it is because we are redeemed by the precious blood of the Saviour, it is as the children of God and as the saints of Christ, that we are to pass our earthly pilgrimage in fear. This is not the fear of bondage, but the fear of adoption; not the fear which dreads condemnation, but the fear of those who are saved, and whom Christ has made free. It is not an imperfect and temporary condition; it refers not merely to those who have begun to walk in the ways of God. Let us not imagine that this fear is to vanish at some subsequent period of our course, that it is to disappear in a so-called 'higher Christian life.' No; we are to pass the time of our sojourn here in fear. To the last moment of our fight of faith, to the very end of our journey, the child of God, while trusting and rejoicing, walks in godly fear" (Saphir).

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