

“TRUST IN THE LIVING GOD”

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“We trust in the living God.”

1 Timothy 4:10

IF we are inclined to grieve because everything around us changes, our consolation will be found in turning to our unchanging God. If we lament the ills of mortality, it will be wise for us to turn to Him “who only hath immortality.” If our earthly joys fade and die, it is a blessed thing for us to be able to go to the fountain of undying joy, and there to drink deep draughts of bliss which shall cause us to forget our misery.

Without any further preface, I ask you to follow me while first, in a very simple manner, I speak upon *the great truth of the existence of the living God*. And then, secondly, while I draw *practical inferences from that existence*. Before I close my discourse, I shall have a question to put to you.

I. First, for a little while, let us think of THE GREAT TRUTH OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE LIVING GOD. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.”

He meant, by that expression, first, *that God is truly existing and not like the dead gods of the heathen, which are no gods at all*—which, in fact, have no existence as gods. Vast multitudes have bowed down before images of wood, or stone, or ivory, or gold—but of them all it might truly be said, “Eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through their throat.”

It is a sure sign that a man’s understanding is dead when he can worship a dead god. But you and I, beloved, “trust in the living God.” He is the God who made heaven and earth, and all that is in them. He is the God who supports the whole universe by the power of His almighty arm. He is the God who rules and overrules in nature, providence, and grace. He is the true God, the only real God—no dream God, no phantom or myth conjured up by imagination, but a real God, the only living and true God.

May we worship Him, then, with real worship, real adoration, and true sincerity of heart! What a blessing it is for us that we are able to worship the true God! We might have been left, as our remote ancestors were, to seek after God, if haply we might find Him, or to worship gods that are no gods and be lost in the mazes of superstition, unable to find the Most High. But “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” and therefore “we trust in the living God,” the real God.

A second meaning of this expression, I have no doubt, lies in *the fact of God’s self-existence and independence*. “We trust in the living God,” who is “living” in a very emphatic sense. You and I are living, but our existence is entirely dependent upon the will of God. Although He has given us immortal spirits, yet that immortality only comes to us by reason of the divine decree.

And the glorious immortality of believers comes to them by virtue of their vital union with their ever-living Head, their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have no independent immortality—it is not inherent in us and it must be sustained by perpetual emanations of the divine power. It is a fire which could not maintain its own glow. It must be fed, or it would go out. But God is self-existent, the great I

AM—and if all His creatures could cease to be, He would be just as completely God without them as with them.

*“He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be.”*

His is a fire which burns without fuel—a sun which scatters light without itself diminishing. God is independent, self-existing, the only really “living” being in the entire universe in the fullest and most emphatic sense of the word “living.”

What a joy it is to worship such a God as this, because nothing can diminish His life, His force, His power. If His courts are sustained, not by the tribute of men, but by His own wealth, if His sovereign state stands, not by the might of armies, but by His own omnipotence, and if He Himself is all-sufficient, not because He gathers up all things into Himself, but because all things are from Him, and are all in Him in their germ and seed—is He not a God whom we all ought to worship—in whom, worshipping, we may joyfully trust—and relying on whom we may be perfectly at rest, for He cannot fail us, neither can He fail Himself in any respect or degree?

A third meaning of the expression “living” in Paul’s declaration, “We trust in the living God,” I have no doubt is to be found *in the fact of the existence of God through all eternity*. There was a time when you and I, who are now alive, were not alive. And there will be a time when, as far as this world is concerned, we shall be numbered with the dead.

But there never was a period in which God did not live. He always was, and always is, and always will be “the *living* God.” Let your thoughts fly back to eternity if you can—for, mark you, all our ideas of eternity are very shallow and superficial. We cannot form any clear notion of what “eternity” means, and the very fact that we speak of a “past” eternity proves that we have to bring it down to our finite apprehension and to use inaccurate words to express our imperfect and incorrect ideas.

But far back, when the sun, and moon, and stars, and the whole universe slept in the mind of God, as a forest sleeps within an acorn cup, even then God was “the living God.” Before the first ray of light had broken in upon the pristine darkness—ay, before there was any darkness—before anything was created—God was “the living God,” and was just as great and as glorious as He is now.

Without an angel to sing His praise, or a human being to look up to Him with holy reverence or with tearful repentance—yet still independent of them all, He was “the living God” then. What a blessing it is for us that it was so! There was never a period in which Satan could plot and plan against us, but what God had existed before him eternally.

That evil spirit is but the infant of a day compared with God, the Eternal of all the ages, the Everlasting Father, who was always able to anticipate everything that could possibly occur, knowing beforehand all that might be detrimental to us, countermining every mine of the arch-enemy, and baffling all the old serpent’s cunning in such a way as, in the end, to add still more to His own glory.

And as He was “the living God” in the past, so He is “the living God” in the present, and just as truly living as He was ten thousand millions of years ago—to speak of eternity after the fashion of men. Dr. Watts hit the mark when he sang,—

*“He fills His own eternal NOW,
And sees our ages pass.”*

Ages and years are past, or present, or future to us—but they are all present to Him. When a man looks upon a map, he can cover a whole country with his hand. But a traveler has to journey many weary miles before he can cross that country from one end of it to the other. But on the map your hand covers it all. And all eternity is under the hand of God like that country on the map covered by a human hand. God is “the living God” now as much as He ever was—as powerful, as wise, as loving, as tender, as strong as He ever was, blessed be His holy name.

And so He will be throughout the whole of the future. We cannot tell all that will yet happen in this world, but one thing we know—God will always be “the living God.” It is probable that once powerful nations will be utterly destroyed and that there will be terrible disasters beyond anything that has yet been experienced. We know that the present dispensation will utterly pass away and that “the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed.”

But this fact is sure, that He who has been the dwelling place of His people in all generations, will be the dwelling place of His people in all the generations that are yet to come. There will never be a funeral knell to tell us that our great Lord is dead. There will be no need for weeping amongst the blessed spirits above because He, who was their Creator, Protector, Preserver, and Friend has ceased to be, for He ever will be “the living God.” So, because of His eternal existence, He is right worthy to bear this title—ay, and to monopolize it, for it belongs to Him alone.

*“Great God! how infinite art Thou!
What worthless worms are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to Thee.*

*“Your throne eternal ages stood,
Ere seas or stars were made.
Thou art the ever-living God,
Were all the nations dead.*

*“Eternity, with all its years,
Stands present in Thy view;
To Thee there’s nothing old appears;
Great God! there’s nothing new.”*

The fourth meaning of the text seems to me to be this. *God is called “the living God” as being always Himself really and truly God in the full capacity of His being.* Sometimes we say of a man that he is “all alive.” At another time, he does not appear to be fully quickened. He has life to some extent, but not in its fullness. We say of the man, by and by, that he is dead—not that he has ceased to exist, for man will no more cease to exist than will God Himself, but we speak of him as dead because his body, which is part of his being, lies moldering in the tomb.

But God is all life and only life. No portion of Him (I must use human language, though the words are incorrect which I am using, as our words always must be when we speak of God), no faculty, no power, no attribute of God can be smitten by any paralysis, or can, in any degree, or in the slightest measure, be subject to any failure which is at all akin to death. God is all alive and altogether life and nothing but life.

God’s wisdom is always infallible, His power is always almighty, His energy is at all times efficacious for everything that needs His attention. There never can come a time when He will be bowed down with age, or wearied with toil, or affected by suffering. “The living God” is the whole God, or as the holy beings in heaven call Him—and it means the same thing—“Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” He is the whole God.

Whatever the word “God” means—and we do not know, nor shall we ever know all that it means—it is too vast to be conceived by anyone but God Himself—but whatever that is, that is what God always is to the full measure, never in any degree diminished by what we call death. He is evermore “the living God.”

I like to think of this truth because God Himself speaks of it again and again. The Lord said to Moses in the wilderness, “Is the LORD’s hand waxed short?” In the prophecy of Isaiah we read, “Thus saith the LORD...Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?”

And a little later, this prophet was inspired to write, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.”

And today He is as mighty as He was in those glorious days when, in the van of Israel’s host, He led His people in safety through the depths of the Red Sea and delivered them forever from the iron bondage of Pharaoh. Ay, blessed be His holy name, He is still “the living God”—as full of life and power as ever He was.

Another meaning of this expression is that *God is active and energetic and not a mere name*. There are plenty of people who are willing to believe in a god of a certain sort, but I hardly know how to describe their god. They are not atheists—they would be horrified if we called them by that name—but their notion is that everything is regulated by what they call, “the laws of nature.” If you ask them what “nature” is, they give you some curious answers.

One man says, “I do not go into your places of worship and sit there, and hear you talk about God. I like to walk about and worship nature.” If it is in London that a man talks like that, I should like to ask him what he calls “nature.” Does he mean these miles of brick walls, and the dark lanes and alleys at the back of them? If he means that, I should not like to worship his “nature.”

Or does he mean the grass in the meadows and the flowers of the field? If so, I hardly think that I should like to worship what cattle eat—it seems a degradation for a man to stoop as low as that. But they will say and do anything to get rid of the idea of the living and true God. “Nature”—“providence”—and so on, are the expressions they use, just as if “God” did not enter into their calculations—or as if He had gone out of the business and left the whole concern to go on by itself.

I should not like to be the child of a father who, the moment I was born, had me washed and dressed by machinery—and had a cradle ready for me to be rocked by machinery and fed me by machinery—who, all the while that I was under his roof, dressed me by machinery, and fed me by machinery, and taught me by machinery, but I never saw him. In fact, I only knew that there was some mysterious force about somewhere, but I never saw him or it—and never knew anything about his personality. That is the kind of dead force that many men call “God.”

But *our* God, in whom we trust, is a God with a great, warm, loving heart, a thinking God, an active God, a working, personal God, who comes into the midst of this world, and does not leave it to go on by itself. Although He is a stranger in the world, even as His people are also strangers and foreigners by reason of the revolt that men have made against their liege Lord and Sovereign, yet it is still His world and He is still in it.

I like to think of “the living God” being in this world which He created, for, now when I look at the cowslip or the daffodil, I know that it is God who paints these flowers of the spring so delicately. When I gather the geranium or the fuchsia, I know that it is God’s pencil which has been at work, and I love to look at the blossom, and feel that I am near to God—just as I should feel if I were to go into a friend’s studio and see there some of his sketches and paintings. I know that he has been there and that no other hand than his could paint that picture so well.

And in like manner, I know that no other hand but that of my God could paint these pictures of nature so beautifully, thus I am brought very near to “the living God.” O dear brethren and sisters, it is such a joy to me to remember that God is not a mere dead force—an abstract something or other which gives energy to the world, or which did give energy to it ages ago, but has now gone away and left the old energies to work till they wear themselves out!

Oh, no, I believe that the Lord God still walks among the trees of this garden—that the Lord God, like a shepherd, still watches over His sheepfold—that the Lord God still speaks to us in the thunder, smiles upon us in the sunlight, scatters His blessings down in the dew and the rain—that He gives us the fruitful fields of harvest and the golden days in which the sheaves can be gathered into the garner—ay, and that He is just as truly at work for us in the winter months, sweetening the clods by the winds and the frost, and so preparing the earth to bring forth food for man and grass for the cattle. We delight to think that in all these ways, God is still “the living God.”

Yet once again, God is “the living God” in that *He is the Source of life, the Giver of life, and the Sustainer of life*. We are living creatures, but He is the living Creator. We are living dependent, but He is “the living God” upon whom we all depend. He spoke us out of nothing and He could speak us back to nothing if He pleased to do so. We are the creatures of His will, living on His estates as tenants who may, at any moment, be dismissed at His pleasure, receiving the very breath that is in our nostrils at His absolute discretion.

But God is life itself, and after all the streams which have flowed from Him to His creatures, there is as much life in Him as at the first. And when He says, “Return, ye children of men,” and we go back to Him, He will have no more life than He has now, but He will be as He has always been, “the living God.”

*“Let them neglect Thy glory, Lord,
Who never knew Thy grace;
But our loud songs shall still record
The wonders of Thy praise.*

*“’Twas He, and we’ll adore His name,
That form’d us by a word;
’Tis He restores our ruin’d frame:
Salvation to the Lord!”*

Now, in the six ways I have brought out only one thought—which I want to impress on your minds, because it has been such a sweet thought to me. I have, in imagination, looked upon all whom I know upon the earth and I have said of them all, “They are dying creatures.” This is always true, but it is often forgotten. Yet, when one is taken away who has been very precious to us, we begin to realize this truth.

Thinking over this matter, I seem to see a procession going past me. I can remember many of those who have passed me. They have gone by while I have remained here and I shall never see them here any more—a long array of my Master’s servants, some of them bearing His banner aloft and others marching with their swords drawn, because of fear in the night. Some of them were weak and feeble folk, who had to be guarded on both sides by sturdy champions.

And now, those of you who are before me as I speak, are also passing away—and there are more coming on, but they are only coming that they may go. I said, just now, that I was looking on at this procession, but that was a mistake, for *I am in the procession and I am passing on with the rest!* What shadows we all are! What fleeting things! What mists—what paintings on a cloud! We can scarcely say that we live, for, the moment we begin to live, that moment we begin to die and—

*“Every beating pulse we tell
Leaves but the number less.”*

This earth is not “the land of the living.” This world is a dying world. The living world is beyond death’s cold river. Here are graves innumerable. What part of the globe is there that has never yet been a cemetery? Every particle of dust which is blown in your face in the street may have once formed a portion of some living being.

O death, you rule over all! No, you do not, for there is One who rules over even you, O death! You can have no power over “the living God.” But you are His servant, permitted to work out His purpose, for it is through death that we pass into life. By the death of our redeeming Lord, we have been redeemed from destruction, and therefore, we can turn away from everything that wears the aspect of death and change, and turn to Him who is ever the same and of whose years there is no end—the Eternal, in whom we trust.

II. Thus have I set forth, as best I could, the great truth of the existence of “the living God.” Now, in the second place, LET US DRAW SOME PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THIS GREAT TRUTH.

And the first inference is this—*an inference of reverential awe and holy trembling*. What a great God He is whom we have professed to worship! When a poor pagan bows down before his wooden god, I should not wonder if what little sense he has should make him loathe and ridicule himself. But we have gathered here to worship “the living God.”

Moses tells us, in the 5th of Deuteronomy, verse 26, that the Israelites said, when the law of God was given to them, “Who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?” Well might they stand there trembling because “the living God” had come down and touched the mountains, so that they smoked like great altars of incense. This is the God whom we worship. Far hence be all trifling! Vain thoughts, be gone! Before “the living God” we should prostrate ourselves in the very dust.

“O you, who profess to serve the Lord, mind that you serve Him faithfully, for it is “the living God” whom you serve, the God who is not to be mocked with hypocritical service! O you, who know that you are not reconciled to Him, remember that it is to “the living God” that you are not reconciled. And recollect that solemn and true declaration, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” and that other, “Our God is a consuming fire.” So I say that our first inference should be that of reverential awe and holy trembling.

The next should be, to God’s people, *an inference of holy courage*. Are we on the Lord’s side? Then, my brethren and sisters, let us never fear, for we are on the side of “the living God.” Who can successfully defy Him? Who dares to throw down the gage of battle against Him? You remember what young David said to Saul concerning Goliath of Gath, “Your servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.”

It was grandly put, as though he had said, “This big fellow is only the servant of a dead god, and he and his god may both come out against me, and I, little as I am, yea, less than nothing in myself, will go to him in the name of the living God and bring back his head as the trophy of victory. Let no man’s heart fail because of him.”

So now, if the biggest Goliath that ever lived at Rome or anywhere else should come stalking out against us, let us say, “Who is he, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” If the God of Israel is not now living, all is over with the cause of truth and righteousness. But we may say, as David did on another occasion, “The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock.” As long as He lives, we may boldly say, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

This, too, should be *our great security in time of danger*. I like to recall that incident in the life of Hezekiah when he took that abominable Assyrian letter, “and spread it before the LORD.” Do you ever take your letters to the Lord, brother? That is the best thing in the world to do with them when they are evil ones.

Hezekiah spread his letter before the Lord and said, “LORD, bow down thine ear and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.” That was the point and the king felt quite sure that Sennacherib would be overthrown because he had defied the living God.

If God had been a dead god, Sennacherib might have done with Him as he did with other idol gods. He asked, “Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed?” He did not realize that they were all broken to pieces because they were mere idols. But this time, he was defying “the living God.”

If, brother, “the living God” is on your side, “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.” If you, beloved, are walking before “the living God” in all sincerity, even if Sennacherib with a mighty host should come against you, the Lord your God would send His holy angel and smite your foes, and you should surely be delivered. Have no doubt or fear, if your God is “the living God.”

And this truth, brethren, *should always make us fearless of men*, for, after all, what are men? Remember what the Lord said to His servant, the prophet Isaiah, "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die?" The most powerful and most cruel man, who ever dares to threaten you, is only a man that shall die, and the Lord Jesus says to you, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do."

Herod is soon eaten of worms. Persecuting monarchs soon disappear when God condemns them. Therefore, while "the living God" is your God, never be afraid of a dying man.

***"Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear."***

Another inference from this truth is this. *It should bring relief to us in times of bereavement*. Sorrow is natural to us, but to push sorrow to an extreme is wrong. I have heard of a good woman, who had lost her husband, and who continued sorrowing over her loss for a very long time. Her little boy saw her weeping day after day, and at last, plucking her by the gown, he said to her, "Mother, is God dead?" "No, dear," she said, "but your father is." But that question made her stop her grieving, as it well might, for if God is not dead, our best Friend still lives. So let us be of good cheer.

If people had to come here and say, "That good woman, whom God so greatly blessed in the church's work, is dead. And that dear brother, whom we all loved, is dead. And the Pastor, too, is dead," who could help sorrowing? But even then it would still be true that "the Lord liveth." Always get back to that great fact, "the Lord liveth."

We shall have to put our beloved ones into the grave, but "the Lord liveth," blessed be His name. And as long as God lives, we need never ask, "What shall we do?" It is true that we shall not do much, but God will. We must never say, "Oh, there is such a great gap, it cannot be filled." God is alive and He can fill it, so you must not give way to despondency or despair.

We may grieve, for even Jesus wept, but let us never distrust the Lord, for as surely as He takes away one worker, He knows how to raise up another. And if the Lord should take from you your husband, He will Himself be your Husband. If He should let you be fatherless, He will be your Father. And if He should leave you childless, good woman, He will say to you, "Am I not better unto thee than ten sons?"

He can fill up every gap. Yea, and make your soul to overflow with supreme content.

***"Lo, I am with you,' saith the Lord,
'My church shall safe abide;
For I will ne'er forsake My own,
Whose souls in Me confide.'***

***"Through every scene of life and death,
This promise is our trust;
And this shall be our children's song,
When we are cold in dust."***

This truth ought also to keep us from grieving too much over our losses and crosses in business. You have had a great loss today, friend, and your face looks very long over it. Or you have heard of someone who was the means of bringing you much business, who has removed or is dead. Well, but "the Lord liveth." "Trust in the living God."

There have been times in the little business I have had to do for the Lord in connection with the Orphanage and the College, when the funds have been very short and sometimes we have run quite out. I have scraped the bottom of the meal barrel a good many times and I have had to squeeze the cruse to get a drop more oil out of it.

But we have trusted in the living God, and up till now, we have always found Him worthy of being trusted, and we believe we always shall. There have been failures and mistakes on our part and on the part of our friends, but never any on God’s part. We must all bear that testimony. Let us, therefore, all “trust in the living God.” If an ill wind blows upon us, let us believe that somehow or other, it will blow us some good. And if a rough tide comes up, let us believe that it will in some way or other, wash us nearer to our desired haven.

Once again, “we trust in the living God,” and *this gives us the richest consolation concerning our departed Christian friends*. As “the Lord liveth,” and He is their God, they are not dead. You remember Christ’s argument with the Sadducees, it was this—God has said, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” so that the dead saints are not really dead.

Whenever there comes out a new error, it generally breeds another, for errors are very prolific. Some people started the notion that the soul of man is not immortal—that the soul of the wicked would die. I was quite sure that, when they got as far as that error, they would go still further, and so the next notion was that every part of us will die when we die—that there is no soul that is immortal, or no soul at all, and that the righteous dead are all in their graves—souls and bodies and everything. That is the beautiful materialistic notion that, after having received Christianity, we are expected to imbibe.

But we are not such idiots, whatever they may think of us. We shall never believe that all our beloved friends, who, according to the Scriptures, have been with Jesus these many years, have never been with Jesus at all. In fact, do not exist at all, except whatever may be found of them in their coffins or in their graves.

How could that be if God was their God and if Christ’s words are true—“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”? They are alive, brethren—as much alive as they were alive here, with the exception of that mortal part which they have left behind to be prepared for immortality, as Dr. Watts truly wrote,—

*“Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh,
Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.”*

We go down to our graves, as Esther went to her bath of spices, to be prepared for the embrace of the great King. And in the morning of the resurrection, this poor body of ours, all fair and lustrous, shall be reunited with our glorified spirit, and we shall behold the face of the King in His beauty, and be with Him forever and ever.

“God is not the God of the dead” and therefore, those of whom He is the God will never die. The inference is clear and forcible. Believe in it, hold to it and rejoice in it, for it will comfort you to know that, as He is your God you will never die. “God is not the God of the dead.” Then, blessed be His holy name, I am not dead, though once I was dead, for He has quickened me into life. And I shall never be dead any more, for Jesus said, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” “The living God” is not the Father of dead souls, but He has an innumerable host of living children to be His heirs and to dwell with Him forever.

Did you ever notice that passage where Joshua tells the people to be ready to go over the Jordan, and says that, when the priests’ feet shall touch the river, it shall divide, and the ark shall be carried across? “And then,” said he, “hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.”

The joyful triumphs of believers in death, when they metaphorically cross the Jordan, are proofs to us that God is with His people, that He will drive out all our enemies before us, and give us a triumphant entrance into the promised land above. Glory be to the name of “the living God” forever!

III. Now I finish with the question which I said I might ask. It is this—IS “THE LIVING GOD” YOUR GOD?

If so, *then remember how near He is to you*, for Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:16, “Ye are the temple of the living God.” I will not dwell on that sentence, though I am tempted to do so, but what a wonderful thing it is that “the living God” should be willing to dwell inside our bodies! Oh, let us keep these bodies pure and let us see to it that we never fall under that terrible curse, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” But may our body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

And dear brethren, if “the living God” be really ours, *let us thirst after Him*, let us say, as did the writer of the 42nd Psalm, “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.” He is “the living God,” so thirst after Him and keep on thirsting after Him—and do not be content to try to live without Him, for, to live without “the living God” is to have death in life and not truly to live at all. Think, child of God, “the living God” dwells within you. Seek to realize His presence, long and pant to realize it more and more.

Are any of you obliged to answer my question truthfully by saying, “No, the living God is not mine”? Then, I must repeat to you those two texts that I quoted earlier in my sermon—“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” “For our God is a consuming fire.” That latter text has often been spoilt by being misquoted. I have many times heard it quoted, “God, *out of Christ*, is a consuming fire.” That is not the text at all. It is “*our* God”—the Christian’s God—God *in Christ* “is a consuming fire”—and if He is a consuming fire to His own people, what will He be to the ungodly?

That is a wonderful question that is asked in Isaiah 33:14. “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” And the answer is, “Nobody can, except the man that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly,” and so on. The prophet goes on to describe the man who has been renewed by grace, for he is the only man who can live in the everlasting burnings of the divine majesty and purity.

He can live there because the devouring fire will only burn up everything in him that is unlike God—but the new life that is in the Christian, the grace that the Holy Spirit puts into us, will endure the fire. Everything that appertains to man and to man’s work must be tried by fire, and if God has built into us the gold, and silver, and precious stones of His grace, and if we have built upon them our life work, both we and our work will endure the trial by fire.

But sinner, you will also have to go through that fire. And seeing that there is nothing in you but the wood, and hay, and stubble of self and sin—nothing in you but that which is foul and obnoxious to God, unholy and unrighteous—or self-righteous, which it really unrighteous—the fire will consume it. All your glory, your peace, your happiness, everything that makes life to be life, will be taken from you, and there shall remain for you nothing but existence, and this is the description of that existence—“These shall go away into everlasting punishment.”

Oh, may the Lord, who alone can give you life, give it to you now. For, if not, there will remain nothing but an everlasting death to be your portion. From that may you now be delivered, of His infinite mercy, through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—42, 980, 691

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