

GODLY FEAR AND ITS GOODLY CONSEQUENCE

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A SERMON
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*“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and His
children shall have a place of refuge.”*
Proverbs 14:26.

IN the Book of Proverbs you meet with sentences of brief wisdom, which, to all appearances, belong entirely to this world, and pertain to the economy of the life that now is. I do not know whether it is true, but it was said that years ago our friends in Scotland had a little book widely circulated and read by all their children, which consisted of the Proverbs of Solomon; They say that it was the means of making the Scots, as a generation, more canny, shrewd, and wiser in business than any other people. If it is so, I should suggest that such a book be scattered throughout England as well, and, indeed, anywhere and everywhere! The book might have been written, at least some parts of it, by Franklin or Poor Richard, for it contains aphorisms and maxims of worldly wisdom, compact but profound, sometimes poetic, but always practical. Has it never surprised you that there should be such sentences as these in the Book of Inspiration—secular proverbs, for so they are—secular proverbs intermixed with *spiritual* proverbs—the secular and the spiritual all put together without any division or classification? You might have expected to find one chapter dedicated to worldly business, and another chapter devoted to golden rules concerning the spiritual life; but it is not so. They occur without any apparent order, or at any rate without any order of marked division between the secular and the spiritual—and I am very glad of it. The more I read the Book of Proverbs, the more thankful I am that there is no such division, because the hard and fast line by which men of the world, and I fear some Christians, have divided the secular from the spiritual, is fraught with innumerable injuries. Religion, my dear friends, is not a thing for churches and chapels alone; it is equally meant for countinghouses and workshops, for kitchens and drawing rooms. The true Christian is not only to be seen in the singing of hymns, and the offering of prayers, but he is to be distinguished by the honesty integrity, the courage and the faithfulness, of his ordinary character. In the streets and in the marketplaces, or wherever else the providence of God may call him, he witnesses the good confession. It is easy to secularize religion in a wrong sense. There are many, I doubt not, that desecrate the pulpit to worldly ends. How can it be otherwise, if “*livings*” are to be bought and sold? I cannot doubt that the sacred desk has been a place simply for earning money, or for gathering fame, and that sacred oratory has been as mean in the sight of God as the common language of the streets. I do not doubt that many people have put religion as a show-card into their business, and have tried to make money by it. Like Mr. By-ends, they thought that if, by being religious, they could get a good wife—if, by being religious, they could be introduced into respectable society—if, by being religious, they would bring some excellent religious customers to their shop, and if, indeed, by being religious they could get themselves to be esteemed, it would be a very proper thing to do! Now, this is making religion into irreligion; this is turning Christianity into selfishness; this is the Judas spirit of putting Christ up for pieces of silver, and making as good a bargain as you can out of Him; and this will lead to damnation, and nothing short of it, in the case of anybody who *deliberately* attempts it. Woe to that man! He is a son of perdition. Better for him he had never been born! Instead of profaning the spiritual, the right thing is to spiritualize the secular till the purity of your motives, and the sanctity of your conscience in ordinary pursuits shall cause the division to vanish. Why, there should be about an ordinary meal enough religion to make it resemble a sacrament. We should wear our garments, and wear them *out* in the service of the Lord, until they acquired as much sanctity as the very vestments of a consecrated priesthood. There should be a devout spirit in everything we do. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him.” No, it is not a less holy thing to be the Christian merchant than to be the Christian minister. It is not a less holy thing to be the mother of mercy to your own children than to be the sister of mercy to the sick children of other people

in the hospital ward. It is not a less sacred thing to be the married wife than it is to be the virgin consecrated to Christ.

Wherever you are, if you discharge the duties of your calling as in the sight of God, you can, by prayer and thanksgiving, saturate your lives with godliness and make every action drip with sanctity, till, like Ashur of old, it shall be said of you that you have dipped your foot in oil. So shall you leave the mark of grace wherever you leave footprints. Let us endeavor to be so minded, and refrain from sorting out our actions, saying to ourselves, “In this thing I am to be a Christian: in the other thing I am to be a businessman.” “Business is business,” says somebody. Yes, I know it is, and it has no business to be such business as it very often is. It ought to be Christianized, and the Christian that does not Christianize business is a dead Christian—a savorless salt, and with what shall such salt be savored when the salt, itself, has lost its flavor? Mix up your proverbs. Be as practical as Poor Richard counsels, and then be as spiritual as Christ commands. You need not be a fool because you are a Christian. There is no necessity to be outwitted in business; there is no necessity to be less shrewd, less sharp; there is no necessity to be less pushing because you are a Christian. True religion is sanctified common sense, and if some people had got a little common sense with their religion, and some others had got a little more religion with their common sense, they would both be the better for it. And this Book of Proverbs is just this common sense, which is the rarest of all senses, saturated and sanctified by the presence of God, and the power of the gospel ennobling the pursuits of the creature.

Let this suffice by way of introduction. Now we are going to plunge into the text. “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and His children shall have a place of refuge.”

I. WHAT IS THIS FEAR OF THE LORD? The expression is used in Scripture for all true godliness. It is constantly the short way of expressing real faith, hope, love, holiness of living, and every grace which makes up true godliness. But why was *fear* selected? Why did it not say, “*Trust* in God is strong confidence”? Has not religion been commonly described by *faith* rather than by *fear*? In legal indictments it is sometimes said of a man, that he, “not having the fear of God before his eyes,” did such-and-such. Why is the *fear* of God selected? One would say that, according to the general theology of this period, we ought to have selected *faith*. But the Spirit of God has not given us the phrase—faith in God. He puts fear, because, after all, there is a something tenderer, more touching, more real about *fear* than there is about some people’s faith, which faith may very readily verge upon presumption! But in speaking of fear, we must always discriminate. There is a fear with which a Christian has nothing to do. The fear of the slave who dreads a taskmaster we have now escaped from. At least we ought to be free from such bondage, for we are not under the law, which is the taskmaster, but we are under grace, which is a paternal spirit, and has given us the liberty of sons. Brothers and sisters, if you labor under any dread of God which amounts to a slavish fear of Him, do not cultivate it. Ask God to give you that perfect love of which John tells us casts out fear, because fear has torment. Do not be *afraid* of God, whatever He does with you. The kind of fear commended in the text is not such as appalls the senses, and scares the thoughts. It is a fear that has not anything like being *afraid* mixed with it; it is quite another kind of fear. It is what we commonly call *filial* fear of God, like the child’s fear of his father. Just think for a minute, what is a child’s fear of his father? I do not mean an *evil* child, a child that is obstinate, but a young man who loves his father—who is his father’s friend, his father’s most familiar acquaintance. Thank God, some of us have children whom we can look upon as near and dear friends, as well as dutiful sons and daughters, to whom we can speak with much confidence and love. What is the fear that a well-ordered, well-disciplined, beloved child has of his own father?

Well, first, he has an awe of him, which arises out of admiration of his character. If his father is what he should be, he is to that son a real model. The youth looks upon what his father does as exactly what he would like to do, and what he aims to copy. His judgment is to his son almost infallible. At any rate, if he sees reason to differ from his father, he is a long while before he brings himself to prefer his own judgment. He has seen his father’s wisdom in other matters so often that he mistrusts his own apprehension, and would rather trust to what his father tells him. He has a profound conviction that his father is good, kind, wise, and could not do anything, or ask *him* to do anything which would not promote his own good. So he feels a sort of awe of him—a fear of him—which prevents his questioning what his father does as he would have questioned anybody else. He is prone to conjecture that his father may have got some reason behind him that would explain what he does not understand. He would not give another person credit for having that concealed virtue, but he has such an esteem for his father—his dear

father—that he fears to raise any questions about his father’s character, his conduct, or his conclusions. In fact, that character so rules his admiration, and commands his respect that he does not *think* of questioning it. Well, now, dear friends, how far higher must be our fear of *God* in this view of the matter? How could we question Him? No, whatever He does, we say, “It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him.” Like Aaron, when his two sons were stricken down, and that as a summary punishment of their transgression, it should be said of us, as it was recorded of him—“He held his peace.” Aaron could not say anything against God, however severe the stroke was. So, brothers and sisters, we cannot judge God. I hope we have given up that folly. We ought to be afraid to do it. Sometimes terrible horror takes hold upon me, when I now and then, meet with a brother or sister (I hope in Christ) who will tell me that God has taken away a dear child, and they cannot forgive Him. “That cannot be right, sir.” Oh, it is a dreadful thing for us to get into such a state of heart that we question anything that God does! No—“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Is it meet, do you think, to imagine that our heavenly Father can do anything that is unkind or unwise towards us? It is not possible! The *Lord* has done it! Let that be your ultimatum. We fear Him too much to question what He does. Our reverence of Him makes us jealous of ourselves.

A child, also, without any fear of his father in the wrong sense, is sure to be very deferential in his father’s presence. If his father is in the way, and if quiet is needed in the house, he will take his shoes off his feet, and be very quiet lest his father should hear, and he should disturb the unruffled calm. He watches carefully, and studiously guards his conduct, lest anything he does amiss should reach his father’s ear, and grieve his father’s heart. Now it would be very wrong for a child merely to restrain himself in his father’s presence out of respect for him, and then break the bounds with unbridled licentiousness in his father’s absence, as I fear many do. But you and I need not fall into this danger, because we are always in the presence of our heavenly Father in every place. Who among us that fears God as he ought would wish to do anything anywhere which is wrong, and offensive to Him, seeing that—

*“Wherever we roam, wherever we rest,
We are surrounded, still, with God”?*

Daring were the person that could insult a king to his face, and commit a trespass in his presence! A sense of the presence of God, a conscience that prompts one to say, “You God see me,” fosters in the soul a healthy fear which you can easily see would rather inspire than intimidate a man. It is a filial, childlike fear, in the presence of one whom we deeply reverence, lest we should do anything contrary to his mind and will. So, then, there is a fear which arises out of a high appreciation of God’s character, and a fear of the same kind which arises out of a sense of His presence.

Further, every child, of the sort I have described, fears at any time to intrude upon his father’s prerogative. When he is at home he feels that there are some points in which he may take many liberties. Is it not his home? Has he not always been there? But there are some things of which, if they were suggested to him to do, he would say, “Why, it is impossible; only my father may do that! I cannot give orders as if I were the master! I cannot expect to govern! I am here, and I am glad to be here, but I am under my father; I must not presume to exercise the control to which he has an exclusive right.” Now, that is one of the fears which a child of God has. “No,” he says, “how should I venture to stand in the place of God? God bids me—it is not for me to object or to ask, ‘Shall I or shall I not?’ That would be to usurp the place of ruler, to be a master to myself, to ignore the fact that the Lord, alone, is the ruler. Such a thing God appoints; then it is not for me to wish the appointment different. Should it be according to my mind? Am I the comptroller? Is divine providence put under my supervision? No,” says the child of God, “I cannot do anything so inconsistent with a dutiful allegiance.” There are some things which he feels would be arrogating a position unbecoming altogether in a creature, and much more unbecoming in a creature that has received the spirit of fear whereby he cries, “Abba, Father.” O brothers and sisters, it is well to have a fear of getting to feel great—a fear of getting to feel good—a fear of getting to feel *anything* that would violate your fealty, or disregard the worshipful reverence you owe to the Most High, as if you took sinister license because you were given a sacred liberty, or refused to do homage because you had received favor! Oh no, the virtuous child does not thus slight his indulgent father; neither must we ever think irreverently of our covenant God.

Holy fear leads us to dread anything which might cause our Father’s displeasure. A good child would not do anything which would make his father feel vexed with him. “It vexes me,” he says, “if it vexes my father.” So let there always be with us a fear to offend our loving God. He is jealous, remem-

ber that! It is one of the most solemn truths in the Bible, “The Lord your God is a jealous God.” We might have guessed it, for great love has always that dangerous neighbor, jealousy, not far off. They that love not, have no hate, no jealousy—but where there is an intense, an infinite love like that which glows in the bosom of God, there must be jealousy! And oh, how jealous He is of the hearts of His people! How determined He is to have all their love! How I have known Him to take away the objects of their attachment, one after another—break their idols, and deprive them of their precious vanities—all to get their hearts wholly to Him, because He knew it would never be right with them while they had a divided heart. It was injurious to themselves, and so He is jealous of that which injures them, and jealous of that which dishonors Him.

Let us have this holy fear very strong upon us, and we shall avoid anything which might grieve the Spirit of God. A true child of the kind I have tried to describe—and I hope there are some about—is always afraid of doing anything which might cast a suspicion upon his love and his respect to his father. If he feels that he has done something which might appear discourteous, or be interpreted as akin to rebellion, he is eager to explain at once that he did not mean it. Or, if he has made a mistake, he is eager at once to rectify it, and would say, “Father, do not read my conduct severely. I love You with all my heart. I may have erred; I *have* erred; I beg to express my deep regret and repentance.” He could not bear it that his father should think, “My child has no esteem for me, no respect for me, no love for me.” It ought to go hard with every Christian when he thinks he has given God cause to doubt his love. I should suspect he has, when he finds cause to suspect it himself. When you say in your soul, “Do I love the Lord or not?”—just think whether God may not be saying it—whether Jesus Christ, the ever blessed, may not feel cause, next time He meets you, to say to you, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me? *Indeed*, do you love Me?” Three times He may have to put that question because you have given Him a treble cause for mistrusting you, as to whether, indeed, your heart is right before Him. We know that the Lord knows all things, and He knows that we love Him. We fall back on that, but still we would not so act that the action should look as if we did not. We do not want so to think, or speak, or do anything that should give just cause for suspicion to the All-wise One as to the reality of our professions of love.

Fear, then—this blessed fear—is what we must all cultivate, and the Lord grant that we may have it, fully matured and fitly exercised, for “blessed is the man that fears always.”

II. But, now, giving our meditation a more cheerful turn, let us follow the teaching of our text. It says that this fear has strong confidence in it. WHEREIN IS THAT CONFIDENCE SEEN? The history of men that have feared God may perhaps enlighten us a little on this matter. It is written concerning Job that he was a man that “feared God and eschewed evil.” Satan was permitted to tempt him, and he came into deep trouble, but how blessed was the confidence of Job in all his trouble! How brave a thing it was to say, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!” How grand it was of him to say in answer to his wife: “What? Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?” Best of all that was one of the noblest resolves that ever mortal uttered, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” A man up to his neck in trouble—no, with the billows going over him, and yet his confidence in God is not moved—no, not for a single moment. He declares that, if God does not set him right now while he lives, yet he believes that his God, his kinsman, lives, and that, if he dies, yet after his death God would avenge him. “I know,” says he, “that my avenger lives, and though after my death the worms devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, and I shall get right somehow.” He feels sure about that, so his confidence is strong, and it lessens not in time of trouble. You see the same implicit confidence in Habakkuk. He draws a dreadful picture—“Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall.” He foresees the full stress of the calamity, and prophecies that it *shall* come to pass. “Yet,” he said, “will I rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation.” That was the simple consequence of his fear of the Lord. He feared, and therefore trusted. He knew the grandeur of the divine character. He trembled to impute wrong or unfaithfulness to God; he feared Him too much to have one hard thought of Him, or to utter one mistrustful word about Him; so in the grandeur of that fear he felt a strong confidence! Both Job and Habakkuk experienced, and even tested this, and there are many schooled in the same school, who have spoken after the same valiant fashion when all God’s waves and billows have gone over them.

That confidence will not only appear in time of trouble, but it will appear in acts of *obedience*. The Lord calls His people to obey Him, and sometimes obedience requires great self-denial. We may have to

surrender what we greatly prize for Christ's sake. It is not always easy to be confident in doing that which demands quick decision. We may be prone to parley or to do as though we were driven, yielding to stern compulsion rather than surrendering with sweet submission. But to do it with strong confidence can only come to us from having the fear of God before us. Now, Abraham feared the Lord with all his heart, and when the Lord said, "Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him up for a burnt offering upon a mountain which I will tell you of"—if he had not feared God wonderfully, and dreaded to do anything that would look like rebellion against His orders, he would have said, "What! Commit murder—for it will come to that—slay my own dear child?" But no, though he could not understand it, he felt sure that God had some meaning in it—that God could not be ordering him to do what was wrong—that there must be a way by which it would be made right. Besides, he remembered that in Isaac was his seed to be called, and his descendants were to come out of Isaac. How, then, can God keep His promise? How can He fulfill the covenant? This did not distress Abraham, but being "strong in faith, he staggered not through unbelief." Therefore he rose up early in the morning and prepared the wood. I have looked with tears at the spectacle of that old man, far advanced in years, preparing the wood, and then putting the wood upon Isaac, and then going with him, and telling the servants at the bottom of the hill that they must stay lest they should interrupt the consummation of that wondrous deed of faith. And then Isaac says to him, "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" It must have brought the heart of Abraham into his mouth. Still he seemed to swallow that dreadful thought, and he said, "My Son, God will provide Himself a lamb." And he takes Isaac and lays him on the altar, and draws a knife—going through with it—right through with it, to the very last, with wondrous heroism; till the Lord stopped his hand. But for his deep fear of God he would never have had the confidence to go through with such an act of obedience.

Although the Lord does not call you and me to such strong tests as that, yet He does try our faith. I have known sometimes when a man in order to do his duty has had before him what appeared to be a terrible dilemma—"I shall have to give up my employment! If I do that, what is to become of my children? Were I a single man I would do it without hesitation. I would face poverty; I would go down to the docks to ask for day labor. But there are the *children*. The children—what is to become of the children?" You see you cannot feel like Abraham, who gave up his darling child for God. You are staggered. Yes, but if your fear of God is very strong, you will say, "I cannot make a compromise with any sin. I cannot persevere with that sinful line of business in which I am engaged. Is this the ultimatum? Then it admits of no alternative. If God should leave me and my little children to starve, yet I must put all into God's hands. It is His to provide, not mine. He does not allow me to do a wrong thing under any circumstances. So here goes for God and for righteousness." If you have got a great fear of God, that is what you will do, but if you have not the reverence you will not have the confidence. For lack thereof you will timorously shrink back into the sin which galls you. May God give you the heroic confidence which springs from a deep fear of Him. The same confidence, the same loyalty to God will develop itself when persecution is involved. There are in this world, men who hate true religion, and the experiences which occur to true believers are consequently often very painful. If we have much fear of God, we shall have strong confidence, but if we have not the fear of God, then the fear of *man* will make us waver. Look yonder; Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold on the plains of Dura. A great many people stand about the colossal figure who are of the race of Shem, monotheists—that is to say, believers in one God; not polytheists, whose creed might excuse their idolatry. Listen now! At the sound of flute, harp, sackbut, and all kinds of music, the herald proclaims that whoever will not bow down and worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace! How quickly does this recreant race of Protestant people swallow their principles; see how they succumb, with their heads in the dust, worshipping the golden image. They had not much fear of the one God, and so they break all His laws. They have more fear of Nebuchadnezzar and his furnace than they have of Jehovah the God of Israel. But here are three young men, captives in Babylon, who stand before the king, and when asked why it is that they have not worshipped his gods and the image which he has set up, they declare that they will not worship his god or fall down before his image. They speak positively. They say, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, but, if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not worship your gods or the image which you have set up." Look at the king's fury! See how the devil lights up his face with lurid glare, how a legion of devils possesses him. "Heat that furnace seven times hotter than it has known," he says, "and cast these daring rebels therein." The men are calm, unrushed by his rage, un-

moved by his threats. They do not even take off their hats to him. There they stand, in their clothes, and their hats, calm and quiet. They defy the king, because who needs have a fear of Nebuchadnezzar that has a fear of Jehovah? Who needs fear a king that fears the King of kings? So they consent to be put into the furnace, for in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence.

It was bravely done by old Hugh Latimer when he preached before Henry the Eighth. It was the custom of the Court preacher to present the king with something on his birthday, and Latimer presented Henry VIII with a pocket handkerchief with this text in the corner, “Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”; a very suitable text for bluff Henry! And then he preached a sermon before his most gracious majesty against sins of lust, and he delivered himself with tremendous force, not forgetting or abridging the personal application. And the king said that next time Latimer preached—the next Sunday—he should apologize, and he would make him so mold his sermon as to eat his own words. Latimer thanked the king for letting him off so easily. When the next Sunday came, he stood up in the pulpit and said—“Hugh Latimer, you are this day to preach before the high and mighty prince Henry, King of Great Britain and France. If you say one single word that displeases His Majesty, he will take your head off; therefore, mind what you say.” But then he said, “Hugh Latimer, you are this day to preach before the Lord God Almighty, who is able to cast both body and soul into hell, and so tell the king the truth of God outright.” And so he did. His performance was equal to his resolution. However, the king did not take off his head; he respected him all the more. The fear of the Lord gave Latimer strong confidence, as it will any who cleave close to their colors—

*“Fear Him, you saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear!”*

Drive right straight ahead in the fear of the everlasting God and whoever comes in your way had better mind what he doing! It is yours to do what is right, and deny everything they devise that is wrong. God will bless you therein, and you shall praise Him!

Moreover, this fear of God declares itself in other things besides braving trouble and enduring. It will be a tower of strength to you when you stand up to bear witness to the truth of God. Have you anything to say for Jesus, you will say it in a very cowardly and in a sneaking manner if you have not a great fear of God; but if you fear God much, you will be like Peter and John, of whom when the council saw them it is said, “they wondered at their boldness.” The fear of God will make you bold in speaking God’s word.

Or should you fall down in sheer exhaustion, instead of standing up in sound enthusiasm; the fear of God will prove a potent restorative. Even if you are overthrown for a time, you shall overcome at the last. In the Book of Micah we read, “Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for though I fall, yet shall I rise again.” He that really fears God expects to conquer, even though for a time he seems to be defeated. This fear will come out gloriously in confidence in the hour of death. If we fear God we shall, like Stephen, fall asleep, even if it is amid a shower of stones. Glorious is the confidence with which Christians depart from this life when they can depend on the God whom they fear with reverence and serve with readiness!

III. I must hasten on to notice, in the third place, though not to dwell upon it as I could wish—UPON WHAT IS THIS CONFIDENCE BUILT? The fear of the Lord brings strong confidence, but why?

Why; because they that fear God know God to be infinitely loving to them, to be immutable and unchangeable, to be unsearchably wise and omnipotently strong on their behalf! How can they help having confidence in such a God? They know, next, that a full atonement has been made for their sins. Jesus has borne the wrath of God for them; how can they help being confident? They know that this same Jesus has risen from the dead and lives to plead for them, and in their ears they can hear the almighty pleas of Jesus always speaking in their favor. How can they help having confidence? They believe that this same Jesus is head over all things to His church, and ruler of providence. How can they help being confident in Him? To Him all power is given in heaven and in earth. They believe that everything is working together for their good. I ask again, how can they help being confident? They believe that the Spirit of God is in them, *dwells* in them! What confidence can be too staunch and steadfast for men who know this to be true? They know that there is a mysterious union between them and the Son of God; that they are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. What confidence can be too implicit? They know that there are two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie—His promise and His

oath, whereby He has given them strong consolation. With such strong consolation they may well have strong confidence—

*“The gospel bears my spirits up;
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation of my hope
In oaths and promises and blood.”*

Oh, what unwavering confidence may be based on this firm foundation (Christ) which God has laid for His people! But time fails me; I cannot enlarge upon it.

IV. Let me therefore close with a fourth reflection—HOW THIS CONFIDENCE AND THIS FEAR ARE FAVORED OF GOD! Observe the promise. “His children shall have a place of refuge.” So, then, you see that those who fear God, and have confidence in Him, are His children. They have a childlike fear, and then they have a childlike confidence, and these are the marks that they are His children. And what a favor is this! “To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” Oh, dear friends, there is a heaven lying asleep inside those words—*His children*. There is paradise eternal couched within that word—Abba, Father. If you know how to say it with the spirit of adoption, you have the earnest of the inheritance within you; you have got a heaven, a young heaven within your spirit. Oh, be glad! To be a child of God is greater than to be an angel. Why, were Gabriel capable of envy, he would envy you who are the children of the Most High, however poor or sick or downcast you may be. “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.”

“His children shall have a place of refuge.” Take heart, for this is a grand thought for you that fear Him and confide in Him; you shall have a place of refuge! There is Noah. All the world is about to be drowned. In vain might one climb to the tops of the mountains, for the waters will cover their highest pinnacle. Must Noah be drowned, then? Is his destruction inevitable? No, but there is an ark for him. God will not pull up the floodgates of heaven till Noah is shut in the ark. There is Lot—evil Lot. He has been acting very badly, and has got away down there in Sodom. Still, he is a child of God, and he is vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, proving that he has some fear of God in his heart. Well, what does the Lord say? “Hurry up,” He says, “for I cannot do anything till you have come out here.” Lot must get to Zoar. There must be a little city to shelter Lot. God cannot burn Sodom and Gomorrah till He has got Lot safe out of the way. He must find a refuge for His children. Well, there are His people down in Egypt. God is going to smite the firstborn, and He has ordered an angel to do it, and that angel is swift to obey His message—swift to do His bidding, and he will slay the firstborn of Israel as well as of Egypt when he goes upon his terrible errand. He will make no distinctions. Yes, but there are the blood marks over the door, and the angel sees that the bloody sacrifice has been offered in that house, and he passes by. God’s people must have a place of refuge, and He found them one in Egypt when the angel was let loose, and the angel of death was there.

So it happened all along through Scripture history. God sent a famine into the land, and after the famine some that had fled the country came back, and, among them, Naomi and Ruth. What is to become of Ruth? She has been a heathen. But she has come to fear God. She has put her trust under the shadow of the Almighty’s wings. What is to become of Ruth? Well, she must go and glean in the fields of him who is next of kin, and she found a place of refuge in his bosom. God takes care, you see, of those that fear Him and have confidence in Him. But there is another great famine, and all the country is barren for three long years. According to the word of God, there is neither dew nor rain, and there is no food, but there is one man there who fears the Lord above all the rest, and that is Elijah. Well, he must have a place of refuge. There, you see, by the brook Cherith He sits him down, and ravens, that were more likely to rob him than to feed him, come to bring him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening. I heard some time ago of a poor woman who was very hard pressed for food; but she remembered the promise of God, and she knelt down and appealed to Him that He would provide her bread. Just afterwards a friend came in who brought a loaf of bread to her, saying that this loaf of bread was bought for her husband, but her husband was not well, and he was unable to eat it because they found that a mouse had been eating it, and it so turned him that he could not eat the bread. But the loaf was not hurt; “And,” said the friend, “I dare say you will eat it; I have cut away the part that the mouse touched.” Oh, yes, God can make a *mouse* do it, or ravens do it. His people shall have a place of refuge. When the brooks are dried up and the ravens are gone, there is a widow woman over there who

has to sustain Elijah, and that woman's cruse is nearly empty, and her barrel of meal nearly all spent; but, still, her house is the place of refuge for Elijah, and God provides for him there!

When the Lord Jesus was here, He knew that Jerusalem was to be destroyed, and He knew that His disciples were to be there; but if history is to be believed—and I suppose it is—no Christians perished in the destruction of Jerusalem; yet they were very numerous. There is no mention of them by Josephus. They were all gone away, many of them to the little city called Pella, and other places beyond the River Jordan, because Jesus told them, when they saw Jerusalem compassed with armies, they might know that its destruction was near. So He counseled such as were in Judea to flee to the mountains, and thus when that destruction came, which was the most terrible calamity that ever happened on the face of the earth, His people had a place of refuge. And now, brothers and sisters, whatever is going to happen—and there are some that predict dreadful things—as for me, I do not know what is going to happen, and, which is another thing, I do not care—for His people shall have a place of refuge! “Though the earth is removed, and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and are troubled, though the mountains shake with the swellings thereof. There is a river, the streams of which shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” If it should ever come to this—that the whole earth should rock and reel, or burn and smoke and seethe, or burn, like a cauldron, into one boiling mass—if there is no room for God's people on the earth to find a refuge, He will find a refuge for them in the clouds. They shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. But, somehow or other, His people shall have a place of refuge. *His children shall have a place of refuge.* Lay hold on that. There is a refuge for you somewhere, Christian, even in the matter of ordinary providence, and there is always a mercy seat for you to go to. There is always the bosom of Christ for you to fly to. The fear of the Lord does not drive you *from* Him; it drives you *to* Him, and when it drives you to Him you have got a place of refuge!

I find that Moses Stewart reads the text differently from anybody else, and I am not sure that he is wrong. He says the text means that the children of those that fear God shall have a place of refuge, and if so, this is not the only passage of Scripture that proves it. There are many precious texts that speak of our children. Let us try to grasp the promise for our children as well as for ourselves, and pray for them that they may have a place of refuge. There are some believers going to be baptized tonight. I hope they have got a firm grip of that gospel promise that Paul uttered, where he says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, and your house.” The jailer did, you know, and we find that it is said, “He was baptized, and all his house”; and for this reason—that he believed in the Lord, rejoicing with all his house. Oh, we can never be satisfied till we see all our house converted, and all our household baptized, and all those that belong to us belonging also to the Lord our God, for thus it is, “His children shall have a place of refuge.” May God bless you, dear friends, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMONS—PSALM 38.

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