

THE RIGHT KIND OF FEAR

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“Happy is the man that feareth always.”
Proverbs 28:14

BUT did not John say that “fear hath torment”? Then, how can he be happy who has fear, and especially he who has it always? Did not John also say that “perfect love casteth out fear”? How is it then, that he is happy in whom love is not made perfect, if so be that the fear which John meant is left in it? Dear friends, the explanation is that the word “fear” is used in different senses, and both Solomon and John are right, neither is there any conflict between their two statements.

There is a fear which perfect love casts out because it has torment. That is the slavish fear which trembles before God as a criminal trembles before the judge—the fear which mistrusts, suspects, and has no confidence in God—the fear which, therefore, keeps us away from God, causes us to dread the thought of drawing near to Him, and makes us say, like the fool to whom the psalmist refers, “No God.” Many of you know what this kind of fear is, for you once suffered from it, though I trust you are now delivered from it by faith in Christ Jesus, and by the love which the Spirit of God has wrought in your hearts.

There is also another sort of fear which springs out of this slavish fear, and which is to be equally shunned, namely, a fear which leads to the apprehension that something evil is about to happen. There are many persons, who have so little faith in God that they fear that the trials, which will sooner or later overtake them, will also overthrow them. They are afraid of a certain form of suffering that threatens them, they fear that they will not have patience enough to bear up under it, they feel sure that their spirit will sink in their sickness.

Above all, they are dreadfully afraid to die. They have not yet believed that God will be with them when they pass through the valley of deathshade, and because they cannot trust Him, they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. They cannot say that all things work together for good to them, but they often say, as poor old Jacob mistakenly said, “All these things are against me.” And so they go on, fearing this, and fearing that, and fearing the other, and their life is spent, to a great extent, in sorrow and sighing. May the Lord graciously deliver any of you who are in that condition!

That is a kind of fear from which the true believer is free. He knows that whatever happens, God will overrule it for the good of His chosen. “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” Resignation to the divine will has made him feel that whatever the Lord wills is right, he does not seek to have his own will, but he is glad to make God’s will his will, and so he is perfectly satisfied with all that comes. God save you, my brethren and sisters in Christ, from all fear of a slavish sort!

Above all, no Christian ought to have any fear which would bring dishonor upon the truthfulness, the goodness, the immutability, or the power of God. To doubt His promise—to suppose that He will not make it good—this is indeed a fear which has torment. To doubt God’s faithfulness—to suppose that He can ever forget His children, that His mercy can be withdrawn from them, or that He will be favorable to them no more—this also is wrong.

To doubt the perseverance of the saints, when God’s Word has so plainly declared that He will keep their feet, and will perfect the work which He has begun in them—indeed, to doubt anything that has the

inspired Scriptures to support it, and to tremble in any way when your trembling arises out of a suspicion that God may change, or cease to be faithful to His promises, and faithful to His Son, all that kind of fearing is to be cast far from us.

But dear friends, there is another fear that ought to be cultivated—the reverential fear which the holy angels feel when they worship God, and behold His glory—that gracious fear which makes them veil their faces with their wings as they adore the Majesty on high. There is also the loving fear which every true, right-hearted child has towards its father—a fear of grieving so tender a parent—a proper feeling of dread which makes it watch its every footstep, lest, in the slightest degree, it should deviate from the path of absolute obedience. May God graciously grant to us much of this kind of fear!

Then there is a holy fear of ourselves, which makes us shun the very thought of self-reliance—which weans us equally from self-righteousness and self-confidence—and which makes us feel that we shall surely fall unless the Lord shall continually hold us up, and that we shall certainly die unless He shall sustain our spiritual life. This fear of our own selves—the fear of sinning against God—is a fear which we ought always to cherish, and concerning which the text says, “Happy is the man that feareth alway.”

I have taken this topic for a special reason. You know that we have recently had a great deal of preaching of “Believe! Believe! Believe!” and I have very heartily joined in the evangelistic services which have been held. We have also had a great deal of singing about full assurance, and we have had a little chattering about perfection, or something wonderfully like it, as far as I can make it out, and as I put all these things together, I cannot help being afraid that there will be a great growth of the mushrooms of presumption.

With warm days and damp days, and with everything tending to make vegetation luxurious, we may expect to see an abundant crop of poisonous fungi growing up—noxious agarics, toadstools, and I know not what besides. They will come up in a night, but they may not be destroyed in a night, and they will be a great nuisance, and possibly worse than that. So I want to speak in such a way that we may all be led to do some sincere heart searching, and to commend to you the cherishing of an anxious fear lest, peradventure, all that glitters should not prove to be gold, and lest much of that which looks like wheat should, at the last, turn out to be tares.

I. My first observation shall be that THERE IS, AFTER ALL, VERY GRAVE CAUSE FOR FEAR.

Otherwise, Solomon would not have been inspired to write, “Happy is the man that feareth alway.”

There is cause for fear, dear brethren and sisters who love the Lord, *because corruption still remains in us*. In the best man or woman here, there is still the old flesh that lusts against the Spirit, that flesh which is in constant enmity to the Spirit, and will never be reconciled to it. If that flesh keeps quiet for a time, it is there all the while, just as a lion is still a lion even when he is lying hidden in his den. He only needs some dark hour to come, and he will rush forth from his den, so is it with the flesh which still lurks within us.

When a man imagines that all his corruptions are gone, that is no proof that he is clean rid of them, but only that he does not really know his true condition, for if God were but to lift the veil that covers his eyes, and let him see the great deeps of sin that are in his nature, he would soon discover that he has grave cause for fear, and he would be driven to cry out to God, “Oh, keep me, I beseech Thee, or else I shall commit spiritual suicide! I must and shall become like the vilest of apostates, unless Thy sovereign grace shall hold me on my way.”

There is also cause for fear, my brethren, *if you look around at the world in which we live*. This vile world has not changed its character, it is no more a friend to grace than it was in the days of the early Christians. It was a difficult thing to be a Christian in the days of Diocletian and the other persecuting Roman emperors, but I sometimes think that it is an even more difficult thing to be a Christian now. To be a soldier under Hannibal, and to fight bravely when crossing the Alps, must have been a difficult task, but it was far more trying for the soldiers when they reached sunny Italy, and their holiday amusements destroyed the discipline of the army.

The Christian camp, at the present time, seems to be pitched in a sunny plain, where all the surrounding influences tend to relax the sinews of the warriors, and to take away their strength. It is hard to keep to the narrow way when the broad road runs so near to it that sometimes they seem to be one. The time was when the broad road was so distinct from the narrow one that we could easily discern who was travelling to heaven, and who was going to hell, but now, the devil has engineered the broad road so very close up to the side of the narrow way that there are many people who manage to walk on both of them, they never seem so pleased as when they can first take a little turn on the narrow road, and then, afterwards, take another turn on the broad one.

Let us never imitate Mr. Facing-both-ways, but let us walk only in the narrow way that leads unto life, whatever it may cost us to do so. You must be in a very singular position if you never have any temptations, indeed, I should not be surprised to learn, if you live where you have no temptations, that you are undergoing a worse trial than temptation itself would be. In such a place as that you are very likely to get stagnant. The very pleasantness of the situation may put you off your guard, and you will not live so near to God as you would have done if your surroundings had seemed to be more opposed to your growth in grace. There is cause for fear then, when all around us there is an enemy behind every bush, a temptation lurking in every joy, and a devil hiding himself under every table—when, as old Francis Quarles used to say—

*“The close pursuer’s busy hands do plant
Snares in thy substance; snares attend thy want;
Snares in thy credit; snares in thy disgrace;
Snares in thy high estate; snares in thy base;
Snares tuck thy bed; and snares surround thy board;
Snares watch thy thoughts; and snares attach thy word;
Snares in thy quiet; snares in thy commotion;
Snares in thy diet; snares in thy devotion;
Snares lurk in thy resolves, snares in thy doubt;
Snares lie within thy heart, and snares without;
Snares are above thy head, and snares beneath;
Snares in thy sickness, snares are in thy death.”*

Besides that, dear friends—in addition to having a store of dry tinder within our heart, and showers of sparks falling near us—besides having a great heap of gunpowder within our nature, and being constantly exposed to the fires that burn all around us, we must remember that *there is such a thing as self-deception in the world*. This is a great and a common danger. Do you not yourselves know some who have been self-deceived?

I have had a wide experience in watching over the souls of others, and many persons have come under my notice, who have thought themselves Christians, and I have often wondered how they could think so. I have seen that in their lives which has led me to feel sure—as sure as one man can feel concerning another—that the grace of God could not be in them, yet they have not had any doubt or suspicion concerning their Christianity.

Now, brethren and sisters, do not you know some people like that? Well then, is it not possible that the judgment which you have formed concerning them is the very same that others have formed concerning you? And perhaps that judgment is true.

There have been great preachers, who have been very eloquent men, and God has even condescended to use them in His service, yet, afterwards, it has been discovered that they were living in gross sin all the while that they were preaching holiness to others. If that has been the case with only one preacher, might it not also be the case with me? Have you never heard of church members, who have come regularly to the communion table, and been very prominent in the work of the church, and apparently leading the way in all good things, yet after all, they were rotten to the core? They had made

a mistake altogether—unless they had willfully deceived others instead of themselves—in professing to be Christ’s people at all. Well then, if some have acted like that, may not you do the same? I do not wish to say anything unpleasant merely for the sake of making you feel uncomfortable, but I want you to remember that my text says, “Happy is the man that feareth always.”

Sometimes, to examine the foundation on which we are building for eternity, to look into the profession which we have made, to see whether it will stand the wear and tear of daily life, and to judge whether it will be likely to endure the test of our dying day, and the still sterner test of the day of judgment—is a wise occupation for every one of us.

The man who dares not have his ship examined is the man who knows that some of the timbers are rotten, and if you do not like being examined, you are the very men who ought to put yourself through that process without a moment’s delay, obeying the injunctions of the apostle, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

There is also great cause for fear, because *some Christians have been “saved; yet so as by fire.”* Oh, with what difficulty have some of God’s ships entered the eternal harbor! They have lost their masts, the deck has been swept clear of everything, they have been well-nigh abandoned as derelict, and if it had not been that the eternal grace of God had ensured the safety of the vessels, they must have drifted away to destruction, and gone to the bottom of the sea.

And what tugging there has been to get some souls into heaven! Do you not know some of that sort? I saw one, not long ago. I had highly esteemed him at one time, but from what I learned afterwards, I saw how little cause there was in him for my esteem. He had professed to be a child of God, but he was weeping and wailing, and asking whether there was any hope for him.

As a contrast to such a sad case, I may say that I have stood by the bedsides of many others, and have learned from them lessons that I can never forget, for they have told me something of the joys of heaven by the very glances of their eyes, and the wondrous words which have fallen from their lips, often more full of poetry than poetry itself. They have seemed to be inspired, and to be favored with visions of the hereafter as they have looked through the veil which had become so thin to them.

But I have also seen some, such as the one I mentioned just now, who have not lived near to God, who have neglected prayer, who have done but little service for Christ, and when they have come to die, they have been “saved; yet so as by fire.” They have had to come, in their last moments, without any comfort or hope, without any joy in the Lord and cry, “What must we do to be saved?”—just as though they had never known the way of salvation, although they have been professors for years. Instead of having an abundant entrance into heaven, they have just been saved, and no more.

Now, you and I do not want to have such an experience as that, and therefore let us always fear lest we should get into such a state of heart that this should be our case. Let us fear lest we lose communion with God, let us fear lest we misuse any grace which the Holy Spirit has given to us, let us fear lest we become fruitless and unprofitable, let us fear lest we lose the light of JEHOVAH’S countenance, if we do so fear, we shall understand what Solomon meant when he wrote, “Blessed is the man that feareth always.”

II. Now secondly, I want to prove to you that THE MAN WHO DOES SO FEAR IS A HAPPY MAN. I will show you that by a few contrasts.

The word “happy” in our text may not exactly mean that the man enjoys happiness just now, but that he is really happy, he has the root of true happiness in him, and he will have the fruit in due time.

Now, here are two men. One of them says, “I am a child of God, I have had a very deep experience, I know all the doctrines of grace, blessed be God, and I feel that I am thoroughly confirmed in Christian habits. I may be tempted to sin, but I shall be able to resist the temptation.” Take a good look at that man, so that you will know him when you see him again. With a formal prayer, he leaves his bedroom in the morning, and he goes forth to his business, perfectly satisfied with himself whatever may happen.

Here is another man. He says, “I believe I am a child of God, for I have trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior, and I know that I am safe in His hands, but I dare not trust myself. I feel that unless He shall uphold me all through this day, I may, by my words, or my actions, bring dishonor upon His holy name, and I tremble lest I should do so.” See him kneeling down there by his bedside, and hear how earnestly he pleads with God. His prayer is something like this, “O Lord, I am as helpless as a little child, hold Thou me up, or I shall surely fall! I am like a lamb going out among wolves, O Lord, preserve me!”

Now, which of these two do you regard as the really happy man? The happiness of the two men may, to a superficial observer, appear to be about equal, but which happiness would you prefer to have? I say—and I think most of you will agree with me—God save me from the so-called happiness which is careless and prayerless, and give me that holy fear which often drives me to my knees, and makes me cry to God to keep me.

Well now, night has come on, and the two men have reached their homes. Neither of them has fallen into any gross sin during the day, they have both been preserved from that evil. One of them retires to his bed after a few sentences of formal prayer, with no life or earnestness in it, and no expression of his gratitude to God, and he soon falls asleep in perfect contentment with himself.

The other man looks carefully over all that has happened during the day, for he is afraid lest he may have sinned against God even unconsciously, and he takes notice of things which the other man does not think anything of, and he says, “Lord, I fear that I erred there, and that I failed there, forgive Thy child, and help me to do better in the future.” Then he says, “I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast kept me, by Thy grace, from being surprised by sudden temptation, and Thou hast enabled me to honor Thy name, at least in some degree! I give all the glory for this to Thee, and now, my Lord—

*“Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,
I lay me down to rest,
In the embraces of my God,
Or on my Savior’s breast.”*

Now, which is the happy man of these two? I know which I should like to be—the man who is so fearful and so full of trembling that he wonders that he has not fallen, and who is sometimes almost afraid that he has, and who, therefore, walks humbly before his God. Is he not infinitely to be preferred to the other man who thinks it is a matter of course that he shall always stand, and who has no qualms of conscience about what he calls little faults? You may rest assured that the seeds of untold misery are already sown in that man’s heart.

Think of these two men under another aspect. Imagine that they are sailors out at sea. One of them is well aware that a certain course is very dangerous. Some captains have been able to take it, and have made “a short cut” by doing so, and he decides that he will take that course. He can see that his vessel is bound to go near some very ugly-looking rocks, and among a number of sharp ledges where many others have been wrecked, but he is a bold, daredevil sort of fellow, he believes that all will be right, and he has no fear.

But here is the other captain, and he says, “My motto is to keep as far away from danger as I possibly can. I know that in fair weather, that passage may be safe, but then I cannot reckon on fair weather. I may be caught in a fog, and not know where I am, or a terrible storm may come on, and drive me where I do not wish to go. I shall, therefore, take the longer course, which is also the safer course.”

Now, in which of these two vessels would you like to sail, and which of the two captains do you esteem to be the happy man? Of course, you say the second one. We admire courage, but we do not admire foolhardiness, and the Christian man, who seeks to steer clear of temptation, who endeavors to be precise and exact in his mode of living, so as not to go near to sin, but to avoid it, and keep away from it, must be judged to be, in the best sense of the word, a happier man than the one who courts temptation, and heedlessly rushes into a position of peril.

Look at the difference between what these two men regard as happiness. The one who was not afraid said, “Why should I fear? Am I not getting to be an old-established Christian now? Have I not resisted temptation for such a long while that I need not fear it now? I feel that I may do what young people must not do, it would too dangerous for them, but it will never hurt me.”

So he talked, but look at him now. He has become so fond of the drunkard’s cup that he was seen reeling through the streets, or else he has been so enchanted by the lusts of the flesh that he has committed himself fatally.

Or it may be that he was strongly tempted to make money very quickly, and quick money making and honesty never go together, except by a very extraordinary concatenation of circumstances, and this man thought it would end all right, and that he should make a great haul, so he asked the devil to help him throw the net in just that once, and now he has got into the clutches of the law, and his name—the name of a man who once made a profession of religion—is bracketed with that of other rogues and vagabonds!

But now look at the timid man—the man who said, “I know that I shall never be intoxicated if I never take anything that is intoxicating, I know that I shall not be a thief if I never take anybody’s money but my own, I know that if I never indulge even in indelicate expressions, if I never think of or look at anything that is impure, I shall not be likely to go in that evil way which I utterly abhor,”—that is the man who is both safe and happy, “The man that feareth alway.”

Some people call him a milksop, and say that he has not spirit enough to do as others do, but just look at him. He can go in and out of the house of God as an honorable Christian man, while the other one, of whom I have told you, is a moral wreck, and his name is a byword and a reproach.

I can bear my testimony that I have seen high professors so act as to become a stench in our nostrils, and on the other hand, I have seen poor, timid girls, who were half afraid they were hypocrites, and poor trembling men, who used to come to me for comfort and counsel, lest they should be deceiving themselves. I have seen many of the latter class enter the port of glory like ships in full sail coming into the harbor, while those other vessels, with their painted hulls, that seemed to tempt a shot from the enemy, have gone to the bottom, and they have been lost to us, and lost to themselves.

Now I will suppose that both these men, whom I have been describing, have fallen into a certain sin, see what a difference there is between them now. The man who has not any fear says, “Well, yes, there is no doubt that I did wrong, but then,”—and he begins telling all about the circumstances under which he says that he was “overtaken.” He tries to make out that he was an innocent victim who was deceived by somebody else.

Now listen to “the man that feareth alway.” “Ah!” says he, “I have sinned,” and he hangs his head in shame, and then adds, “I have no excuse to make, and you cannot say anything to me that will be half so heavy and so hard as what I say to myself. God will forgive me, I have no doubt, for I have truly repented, but I can never forgive myself.”

The first man has a dry eye, and a proud, defiant spirit, and it is very likely that, having committed that one great sin, he will go on, and commit another, and yet another, and get harder and harder in his heart continually, yet all the while talk about being one of God’s elect, who will be saved at last. Well now, that man is not a happy man. I pray that none of us may ever experience the wretchedness of having a seared conscience, and get into a state of indifference in which we can trifle with sin, and yet pretend to be the servants of God.

But oh, if we do fall into sin, may the Lord make us very tender about it! Let this be our prayer—

*“Quick as the apple of an eye,
O Lord, my conscience make!
Wake my soul, when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.”*

Dear brothers and sisters, may you, by God's grace, be preserved from sin, but if sin should come upon you unawares, may your bones be broken by it, and may you feel that your very heart is wounded because you have wounded your God! To repent of sin, is one of the hallmarks of a Christian, but to have a hardened, un-trembling heart, is one of the sure marks of the reprobate who are far off from God.

I might thus continue to show you, by a hundred contrasts, that the man who feareth always is the really happy man. Suppose that we are fishing, and that we have cast our lines into the water. There is one fish that is altogether afraid of our bait, and of all our arrangements, and he swims as far as ever he can up or down the stream away from us.

But here are some fish that are quite charmed with our worm. They say that they do not mean to swallow the hook, but we do not believe them. They say that they mean to get the worm off without letting the hook catch hold of them. They have very clever ways of sucking worms off hooks, and they are going to show what they can do, and soon they are caught.

But happy is the fish that fears the bait as well as the hook, and so keeps right away from both of them. When some of us were boys, we used to set traps for the sparrows and other birds in winter time, and we would watch to see them go in to eat our crumbs inside the trap. Sometimes there would come a bird that had seen our arrangement before, and had been almost caught in it, and knew all about it. Well, as soon as ever he looked at it, he made up his mind that he would give our trap a very wide berth, so he flew away as far as he could.

But there were some other birds that would come, and look at the trap, and even perch on it, and presently some of them would get into it. Of course, they did not mean to be caught, they thought they knew the way to go just far enough into the trap to get those grains of wheat, and then to fly out, but once in, they could not fly out.

And sinners are just as foolish as those sparrows. Of course, they do not mean to be caught, they will fly out of the trap all right when they have eaten the wheat! Yes, but I say, happy is the bird that feareth always, and that keeps far off the trap, and unhappy is the bird that thinks it can go just so far into the trap, but fully intends to go no further.

Oh, how many young men and young women have been ruined because they have gone just so far into sin, meaning to stop there! But they could not stop there, they began to slide, and the ice carried them along where they never meant to go. The only safe plan is to keep off the ice altogether. If you do not take the first wrong step, dear friend, you will not take the second, and if divine grace makes you fear and tremble before you begin to go down the hill, you are not likely to be found amongst those who have fallen to the bottom. Happy is the man, in this sense, that feareth always.

III. But I must pass on to notice, in the third place, that THE MAN, WHO HAS THIS FEAR IN HIS HEART, WILL DO WELL TO HAVE IT THERE CONTINUALLY, "Happy is the man that feareth always."

Have this fear concerning your holy things. For instance, when you come up to God's house to worship, be afraid, as you are coming along, lest you should be only a lip-server, and so get no blessing. If you are afraid of that happening, it will not happen. And when you are sitting in your pew, say to yourself, "Now, it is possible for me to become a mere formalist in worship, and I may be listening to the Word of God with my ears, yet not receiving it into my heart. I am sorely afraid lest it should be so."

Brethren and sisters, it will not be so if you are afraid that it will be. And when the service is over, say to yourself, "I am afraid that I did not worship God in spirit and in truth, as I should have done, I fear that I did not praise Him, or pray to Him, with my whole heart, as I ought to have done. O Lord, pardon the iniquity of my holy things!"

I do not think any man ever preaches as he ought to preach if he is satisfied with his own efforts. I sometimes feel thankful to God for the feeling of dissatisfaction that possesses me every time I preach. I often feel, as I am going home, that I should like to go back again, and try to do it so much better—I do not mean better in an oratorical way, but pressing the truth home to men's hearts more earnestly and more simply. I think that in this sense, it is right that we should fear always.

Ah, my dear young brother in the college, you are afraid that you will become cold-hearted, but you never will as long as you cherish such a fear as that. If you are afraid that you will by and by, preach in a perfunctory, official manner, you will not fall into that bad habit if you live in dread of doing so. If you are afraid that you will not set a good example to your people, I believe that you will set them a good example.

But if you ever feel, “Oh, I can preach, and practice too, I am all right,” it may happen that God will rebuke your pride, and let you see, and perhaps let your enemies see, what a poor fool you are, after all. Blessed is the man who, in his holy things, feareth alway—the man who is afraid, when he is on his knees alone, lest he should not pray aright—the man who is afraid lest, either in public or in private, he should act the hypocrite before his God.

And happy is the man who has *this holy fear in his own house*—the man who says, “I am afraid lest I should not act as a Christian father ought to act towards his children, or as a Christian husband should act towards his wife.” Other members of the household may say, “I fear lest I should not be such a wife, or such a child, or such a servant, or such a master as I ought to be.” These are the people who usually are what they should be—those who are afraid that they are not. Those who are the most anxious lest they should fail are generally those who do not fail.

And I would like you also *to be anxious in your business, for fear lest you should in any way take advantage of anybody*—lest, in the measure, or in the weight, or in the price, or in the invoice, these should be any mistake which would unjustly benefit you. The man who is afraid of anything like that will be an honest tradesman, you may rest assured of that.

As for the servant or the workman who is afraid that he will not give a fair day’s work for a fair day’s wage, and the employer who is afraid that he will not give his servant or workman as much as he ought to give him—I can only say that I wish we had many more of that sort of men than we already have, though I know a good many of that sort. If we are afraid of wronging one another, and not loving our neighbor as ourselves, that is a healthy kind of fear, and the more we have of it, the more happy we shall be.

And if, perchance, there should not seem to be in yourself any special cause for this fear just now—though “let him that thinketh he stands take heed lest he fall”—then *begin to be afraid for the church of which you are a member*. This is a fear which is always resting heavily upon me—the fear lest we should lose our earnestness in prayer—lest we should not care as much as we ought for the souls of men—lest the members of our church should grow worldly—lest we should become cold and indifferent towards our dear Lord and Master. Never lose this wholesome kind of fear concerning this church, and your fellow members, or concerning any other church with which you are connected.

Then, *have a solemn fear about your own children*, lest, possibly, you should not have trained them up as you should have done, or should not have prayed for them as you ought to have done, or lest your own example should not have been such as they could safely follow. Be afraid for your children, as Job was for his. When they met together to feast, he “offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” The man who is thus afraid that things may be wrong is the man who is most likely to keep everything right.

Many a man, who becomes a bankrupt, is so largely because he does not examine his books. He says that he does not like looking into his books, they are very unpleasant literature to him, and he never sees to the details of his affairs himself. He leaves this to John, and that to Thomas, and the other to one clerk, and something else to another, and then one day he wakes up to find that everything has gone to smash.

Do not let it be so in your household, or in your temporal affairs, or in your spiritual concerns, but look into everything yourself, and watch everything carefully, for in this way, by fearing alway, you will be both safe and happy in the hands of God.

IV. Now lastly, THERE ARE SOME WHO HAVE INDEED VERY GRAVE CAUSE TO FEAR.

There are some of my hearers at this service—I am glad that they are here—who, I am afraid, have cause to fear in a far deeper sense than that in which I have used my text. Some of you are not saved, you know you are not. You have never had your sins forgiven, you have never sought and found mercy through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.

And some of you are very ill, you were only just able to get here tonight. What! so ill as that, yet with no Savior to help you? Sick, well-nigh unto death, yet without a Savior? Likely to die soon, for you are consumptive, yet you have no Savior? Let me appeal to you, my dear friend, is this wise? Can you afford to run such a terrible risk? Why, the healthy may die at any moment, but as for you, death is already at your door, so surely you cannot afford to trifle with eternal things.

And some of you are getting old, yet you are not saved. Sixty years of age, and not saved? Seventy, eighty, and not saved? What *are* you at? A man told me the other day, that he would not come to hear me again, for he said, "The last time I came, you called me an old fool." Why was that? I asked. "Why," he replied, "you said that an old sinner was an old fool." So I said to him, "Are you an old sinner then? Because if you are, you are an old fool," and he could not deny it, for we are all fools till we are saved by Jesus Christ. A man must be a fool to run the risk of losing his immortal soul.

I have heard that a man once went up to the top of the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, and stood on his head there. What do you think he was? "A fool," you say. Yes, so he was, yet he only risked his neck, but you are risking your soul's eternal welfare, risking the loss of heaven and running a terrible risk of going to hell forever. O friend, is this wise? You know it is not, and that I am only speaking the truth when I tell you that you are a fool, and one of the worst of fools.

O sirs, if you are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are standing over the mouth of hell, upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten. You are hanging over the jaws of perdition by a single hair, and that hair is snapping.

I looked down my well this afternoon, as a man was going down it to do some necessary work, and I said to him, "Oh, do be careful! Pray be very careful!" I felt such dread upon me lest, possibly, the man should fall while he was going down that great depth, into which I looked till it made me giddy, and I cannot bear to think of some of you, who are in far greater danger, for you are hanging over the mouth of hell, with only a rotten rope to hold to.

Some of you may be in hell within a week, I cannot guarantee that any one of you will live ten minutes longer. All the physicians in the world would not be able to guarantee to any one individual that he should live even for five minutes. You are always liable to death and in danger of the wrath to come.

Therefore, escape for your lives, I entreat you, and meanwhile I would put you in fear about this matter, that through this fear, you may be driven to the only place of safety, even to Jesus Christ, who was lifted up upon the cross and now is exalted on high a Prince and a Savior. There is life in Him, there is life for you at this moment if you will only trust in Him. There is pardon for you now, if you will only believe in Him.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.