

THE TERROR OF THE LORD

“The terror of the Lord” is an expression of Paul’s in connection with the judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:11), and one which we ought to fully estimate. It is the natural companion idea to *“the joy of the Lord”*; for whatever goes to constitute this must in the absence or deprivation thereof become *“the terror of the Lord”* in the public enunciation in the presence of the person affected. Personal presence is the essential part of the idea, for there can be no terror without conscious relation to the matter inspiring the terror. Deprivation without this would not be terror.

“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”

An illustration of this we have in the case of Paul’s efforts to persuade Felix. As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled (Acts 24:25). There must have been something terrifying in Paul’s exhibition of judgment to come to make Felix tremble.

The forbearance of God makes men forget that He is *“great and dreadful and terrible”* as well as *“humble and gracious and loving,”* and that after a time of patience and long-suffering He breaks forth like a devouring fire (Isa. 42:14). It is part of a scriptural ministration of the gospel to declare that there is *“a fearful looking for of judgment and a fiery indignation,”* which shall devour the adversary (Heb. 10:27), as well as a looking for the blessed hope of receiving *“the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”* (Titus 2:11; Eph. 2:7). It is part of the Truth proclaimed by the apostles, not only that God will give eternal life with glory, honour and peace, to those who obey Him, but that He will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish *“to them that are contentious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness”* (Rom. 2:6-9).

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Having the same knowledge, we ought to do the same—reminding one another that *“our God is a consuming fire”* as well as a refuge of peace and comfort; and pressing upon men around us that vengeance awaits also *“those that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* . . . the prospect of which caused Felix to tremble.

There has always been a terrible side to the ways of God, after a time of unappreciated peace and patience. Adam and Eve found the moment a moment of terror when, for a very slight deviation (as men reckon) from the revealed will of God, they were expelled from the delightful enclosure of Eden, and sent into a desert of sterility and labour to dishonour and death. Cain found the vagabondism and universal enmity enforced upon him for his unbrotherly executiveship, a punishment greater than he could bear. The frantic crowds on the morning of the Flood in Noah’s day petitioned in vain against the devouring terror of the Lord in the relentless waters that overwhelmed them. Sodom, in *“pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness,”* having treated the warning words of Lot as the words of *“one that mocked,”* awoke in startled agony when the sun had risen on that fateful day to find, in terror, escape cut off from the burning storm that consigned them to *“the vengeance of everlasting fire.”* The populous community of the Amorites, who, in seven nations, rested voluptuously in the days of Canaan’s plenty, all heedless of the God that made and owned them, swooned in courage-killing terror in the presence of Joshua’s advancing host, with sword in hand, on a mission of extermination, because of the overflowing cup of their iniquity. Then, think of the terror after terror that befell that very avenging host in their subsequent generations, when, because of their forgetfulness and disobedience of God, *“the sword without and terror within destroyed both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs.”* Behold, Jerusalem herself, at last stricken in silence by the terror of the Lord fallen upon her, multitudes within her dying in speechless misery from

want of all friendship and all food, and other multitudes perishing in screams as the ruthless flames laid the doomed city in ashes. The terror of the great day of retribution that comes with Christ will exceed and combine all the terrors that have gone before. It is *“the time of the dead”* which no other time has been before. There has been resurrection before, but not for judgment. *“Women received their dead raised to life again”* more than once during the times of the Law. Many cases of resurrection occurred in connection with the Lord’s work at his first coming, including that of *“many bodies of the saints which arose”* at his resurrection (Matt. 27:52); but none of these cases could earn for the day of their occurrence the description of Christ as *“the time of the dead.”* This is a description applied alone to the epoch introduced by the sounding of the seventh trumpet following hard after the second woe whose echoes (French Revolution) have hardly subsided in the world’s history. Why it should be so applied is perfectly clear when all the testimony is placed together.

“At that time many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.”

This is what the angel said to Daniel (Ch. 12:2),

“All that are in the grave shall come forth” is what Jesus said (John 5:29).

“There shall be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust” is what Paul said (Acts 24:15), who also said that Christ would judge them at his appearing (2 Tim.4: 1).

The Apocalyptic phrase is, *“the time of the dead that they should be judged”* (Rev. 11:18). This tells us there is no judging of the dead till Christ returns again to the earth; but it also tells us there will be a judging of them then. And so general and so large is the event as to justify the description of the epoch that witnesses it as *“the time of the dead.”* *“Many of them that sleep”* shall come forth. Many means not a few; it also means not all. When we ask why not all, the Scriptures give but one answer and that answer is a reasonable answer: namely, that all have not knowledge of the divine requirements, and therefore do not stand upon the basis upon which condemnation in judgment will be rendered.

“Men that have no understanding are like the beasts that perish” (Psa. 49:20).

“This is the (ground of) condemnation that light is come (John 3:19).

“If ye were blind ye should have no sin” (John 9: 41).

“To him that knoweth to do good, but doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17).

“He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not” (Matt. 7:26).

“Who, knowing the judgment of God that those who do such things are worthy of death, etc.” (Rom. 1:32).

“Times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth” (Acts 17:30).

“The words that I have spoken shall judge” (John 12:48).

“Preach the gospel . . . he that believeth not shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

“The servant that knew his Lord’s will shall be beaten with many stripes, and the servant that knew not . . . few stripes” (Luke 12:47).

“Received mercy because I did it ignorantly” (1Tim. 1:13).

“Though thou knewest all this” (Dan. 5:22).

“Whosoever will not hearken to My words which he shall speak in My name (which implies that he knows of them) I will require it of him . . . the same shall judge him in the last day” (Deut. 18:19; John 12:48).

Knowledge or the absence of knowledge is always affirmed as the determining condition of responsibility, which is in accordance with the most elementary conception of justice afforded to us in the Scriptures, and suggested to us by the mental constitution God has given us. There are divine things in which it is lawful to ask:

“Doth not even Nature itself teach you?” (1Cor.11: 14).

Because, therefore, the mass of the dead were ignorant in the days of their life of the revealed will of God by which men will be judged at the resurrection, we may understand why "*many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth,*" and not all of them, shall awake in the time of the dead.

But the number of them that so awake will be sufficiently great as to be stupendous, seeing that even the small section of them accepted will be "a multitude that no man can number." The prospect of such an event as this resurrection affords a theme for the most stirring reflection. The dead are soon forgotten by the living. With few exceptions ten or twenty years are sufficient to blot them out of contemporary memory. Fifty years certainly, and as for a hundred years, who is there here that remember those who died a hundred years ago? When we go beyond that, how profound is the silence that has fallen upon past generations. The fact comes home to us when we visit old churchyard burying grounds; or ancient cathedral burying grounds: where we can scarcely make out the time-eaten inscriptions which tell us of persons that died centuries ago . . . who knows anything of these persons? . . . Every vestige of their affairs has disappeared from the face of the earth:

"Their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished."

If we take the process back to the apostolic age, it is only to find the obliteration more complete; except as to one or two, not a name, or a trace can be found of the men who honoured or disgraced the name of the Lord in their day and generation. As for the days of Abraham, the living of our day have a kind of feeling that the dead of those ancient days really never had an actual human life at all, or at all events, that they are as clean out of the reckoning of things as if they had never existed. Forgotten . . . utterly forgotten of men. Are they forgotten of God? The answer is, "*the time of the dead*" comes on. This is no myth or imagination. We have his pledge,

"Christ has risen,"

"God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead."

Though this covers large dispensational ground, it includes—

"The time of the dead that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants, to the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, small and great, and shouldest destroy them that destroy the earth."

Christ is the pivot and instrument of this whole work; God has given him "*power over all flesh*" for its execution. He "*hath committed all judgment unto the Son;*" and a day is appointed for its execution. That day is the day of his coming when the dead will answer his summons and come forth;

"They that have done good to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation."

The living busy with their ephemeral business have not only forgotten the dead, but they have forgotten Christ, "*the Lord both of the dead and of the living.*" But he has not forgotten one or other. He has not died or changed since his resurrection. He sent the message afterwards.

"I am he that liveth and was dead; behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of the grave and of death."

When he reappears on the scene he will find the living very busy as now. They will think him and his work "out of harmony with the spirit of the age." He will have his thoughts about them. Which set of thoughts will prevail? We know. It is the foolish generation now upon the earth that will be in the way, and they will have to be brought into fit with the eternal rationalities incorporate in Christ in order to be tolerated at all in the new order of things. How wise to get into this harmony now. Christ is at the door, as all the signs of the

times tell us; but even if he were not, it would not make the current folly wise. He is at the door in every generation, since from every responsible generation death divides him consciously from them but for a moment, however long chronologically; and it always has been the most egregious folly on the part of the living to forget the righteous judgment of God which in the time of the dead will cause every responsible man to find according to his ways.

“God is not mocked.”

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

How great will be the terror of the Lord in the time of the dead for those who are convicted of the crime of deliberate rebellion against the God of the spirits of all flesh. It is a disgrace that enters the soul for a man to be dishonoured in the presence of his fellow-men, whether in an educational competition or in a public meeting, or in a law court, or in the public Press, or at the hands of royalty; but who shall measure the humiliation of the man whom Christ refuses to acknowledge in the presence not only of the mustered dead of all ages, but of the attendant hosts of the angels who accompany Christ in his work? It is a terrible thing to be involved in public or private calamity of any kind; but what mortal experience of evil can equal the misfortune of those who are ordered to depart from the presence of Christ with the wailing multitude, who will appeal in vain to a clemency which they despised in the days of grace, and who leave him for a life of vagrancy and destitution to end their days in a dishonoured grave? It is looked upon as the most calamitous of human experiences to sink in poverty, neglect, and be the victim of painful and incurable disease; but what lot can compare with the portion of those who awake from the slumbers of ages (in many cases) to find themselves strangers in a strange time, and to receive the due reward of their deeds in the *“tribulation and anguish”* that will be decreed to *“every soul of man that doeth evil,”* in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus?

There is a time for everything. There is a time to look these solemn eventualities of the future in the face. We naturally seek relief from the effect they produce in our mind. The only safe relief lies in the remembrance that for the obedient—

“God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him,”—

And that this salvation, when conferred, means just the reverse of all the evil conditions that will befall the rejected: honour from God in the presence of a multitude of admiring friends; physical and mental capacity of the utmost strength and sweetness in the bestowment of an incorruptible nature that will never wear out, but manifest the brightness and joy of life for evermore; a place in the exalted community of the friends of God who, after these times of trial and states of evil, will be placed in possession of the earth in power and glory, and immortality. It may well be said—

“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and enter in through the gates into the city.”

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