

***"My flesh trembleth for fear of thee;
and I am afraid of thy judgments."***

Psalm 119:120

The justice of God is a tremendously awful subject of contemplation, even to those who are safely shielded from its terrors. The believer, in the act of witnessing its righteous stroke upon *the wicked of the earth*, cannot forbear to cry out--*My flesh trembleth for fear of thee.*¹ Thus did the holy men of old tremble, even with a frame approaching horror, in the presence of the Divine *judgments*. David trembled at the stroke of Uzzah, as if it came very near to himself (2 Sam. vi. 6-9). "*Destruction from God*"--saith holy Job--"*was a terror to me: and by reason of his highness I could not endure.*" (Job, xxxi. 23.) Such also was the Prophet's strong sensation--"*When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at thy voice: rottenness entered into my bones.*" (Hab. iii. 16. Comp. Jer. iv. 19. Dan. iv. 19.) And thus, when God comes to *tread down and put away* his enemies for the display of the holiness of his character, and to excite the *love* of his people--those that stand by, secure under the covert of *their hiding-place* (Verse 114)--cannot but "take up their parable and say--Alas! who shall live, when God doeth this!" (Numb. xxiv. 23.) The children of God reverence their Father's anger. They cannot see it (such is his "terrible Majesty!" Job, xxxvii. 22) without an awful fear; and this *trembling* at his judgments upon the ungodly covers them from the heavy stroke. Those that refuse to tremble shall be made to feel, while those that are *afraid of his judgments* shall be secure. "Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked." (Ps. xci. 8.) "I trembled in myself," said the prophet, "*that I might rest in the day of trouble.*" (Hab. iii. 16.) Even the manifestations of his coming "for the salvation of his people" are attended with all the marks of the most fearful terror--as if his voice would shake the earth to its very foundation--"*Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven--the earth feared and was still: when God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth.*"²

To mark this *trembling* as the character of the child of God, we need only contrast it with the ungodly scoffing, "Where is the God of judgment? Where is the promise of his coming? The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." (Mal. ii. 17. 2 Pet. iii. 4. Zeph. i. 12.) Thus do men dare to "run upon the thick bosses of his bucklers" (Job, xv. 26), instead of *trembling for fear of him!* This "stoutness against the Lord" (Mal. iii. 13), excites the astonishment of the hosts of heaven; so discordant is it to their notes of humble praise--"*Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name; for thy judgments are made manifest!*" (Rev. xv. 4.) Such is the special acceptance of this *trembling* spirit, that some shadow of it obtained a respite even for wicked Ahab (1 Kings, xxi. 27-29), and a pardon for the penitent Ninevites (Jonah, iii. 5-10); while its genuine "tenderness of heart" screened Josiah from the doom of his people (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27), and will ever be regarded with the tokens of the favour of this terrible God. "To this man," saith he, "will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that *trembleth at my word.*" (Isa. lxvi. 2, 5.)

1 'A thrilling horror curdles my skin.' The thing cannot be poetically expressed without periphrasis.--BISHOP HORSLEY.

2 Ps. lxxvi. 7-9. See the effect of a manifestation of the glory of the Saviour to the Evangelist, for the purpose of special consolation and support. Rev. i. 17, 18. Comp. also Dan. x. 8-17.

Believers in Christ! rejoice in your deliverance from that "fear which hath torment." (1 John, iv. 18.) Yet cherish that holy reverential fear of the character and judgments of God, which will form your most effectual safeguard "from presumptuous sins." (Ps. xix. 13.) The very supposition, that, if God had not engaged himself to you by an unchangeable covenant, his fearful *judgments* would have been your eternal portion, is of itself sufficient to mingle the wholesome ingredient of fear with the most established assurance. What! can you look down into the burning bottomless gulf beneath your feet, without the recollection--If I were not immoveably fastened to the "Rock of Ages" by the strong chain of everlasting love, this must have been my abode through the countless ages of eternity. If I had not been thus upheld by the grace, as well as by the providence, of God, I might have dropped out of his hand, as one and another not more rebellious than I have fallen, into this intolerable perdition! O God! *my flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*³

Thus the dread of *the judgments of God* is not necessarily of a slavish and tormenting character. "His saints" are called to "fear him" (Ps. xxxiv. 9); and their fear, so far from "gendering unto bondage," is consistent with the strongest assurance (Comp. Hab. iii. 16, with 17, 18); nay, even is its fruit and effect. (Heb. xii. 28.) It is at once the principle of present obedience (Ib. xi. 7), and of final perseverance. (Ib. iv. 1.) It is the confession of weakness, unworthiness, and sinfulness, laying us low before our God. It is our most valuable discipline. It is the "bit and bridle" that curbs the frowardness of the flesh, and enables us to "serve God acceptably," in the remembrance, that, though in love he is a reconciled Father, yet in holiness he is "a consuming fire." (Ib. xii. 29, with 28.)

Now, if we are under the influence of this reverential awe and seriousness of spirit, we shall learn to attach a supreme authority and consideration to the least of his commands. We shall dread the thought of wilfully offending him. The fear of grieving him will be far more operative now, than was the fear of hell in our unconverted state. Those who presume upon their *gospel* liberty, will not, probably, understand this language. But the humble believer well knows how intimately "the fear of the Lord" is connected with "the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (Acts, ix. 31. Comp. Matt. xxviii. 8), and with his own steady progress in holiness, and preparation for heaven.

3 How striking was H. Martyn's experimental apprehensions of this subject! 'In prayer in the evening I had such near and terrific views of *God's judgments* upon sinners in hell, that *my flesh trembled* for fear of them. The passages of God's holy word, that proved the certainty of hell-torments, were brought to me in such a way as I never before felt. I flew trembling to Jesus Christ, as if the flames were taking hold of me! Oh! Christ will indeed save me, or else I perish.'--*Journals*, vol. i. 382.