



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

The Terror of the Lord a minister's incentive

The substance of a sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day, 9th January 2000, by the minister, Rev. Ivan Foster.

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men , 2 Corinthians 5:11.

Paul, as was often the case in his writings to the Corinthians, was explaining the motives and the sincerity of his preaching. Following the declaration of his anticipation of being with Christ when he died, he set down his earnest desire to serve Christ in the light of that bright and solemn prospect. *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him , 2 Corinthians 5:8-9.* Paul preached with eternity in view. The eternal things were very real to him. The judgment, the Judge, the appearance of all men before the judgment and the sentence passed there -- all were vividly real to the apostle and moved him to preach the gospel with great earnestness of soul.

But one thing in particular was his incentive to warn men and women -- *the terror of the Lord*. One of our ministers was told by a visitor to his service, "If our Church of Ireland minister preached hellfire as you do, he would have no congregation." Presumably, that minister keeps his congregation by not preaching the truth of God. His motive is the maintenance of his wages rather than the salvation of his people.

Paul took account of the terror of God when he preached. It was that which filled his mouth with earnest warnings of wrath to come. Consider our text.

I. WHAT IS THE TERROR OF THE LORD?

The word terror means that which is *awe-inspiring, fear, reverence* . We must not think of this word in the usage it receives in our newspaper. If we did, we would think of murder and lawlessness. It does not carry that meaning. Rather, it is that view of the Lord that fills us with awe and holy fear at His wonder and glory. It silences us, it stills us.

Such a view of the Lord is gained only from a reading and studying of the Bible. It is in the sacred volume alone that God fully reveals Himself to men. Conscience and the natural creation provide us with indications of God and His majesty and power. But the information about God obtained from these sources is very limited and very open to misinterpretation. When we read the Bible we see there an infallible setting forth of God's person. The Bible teaches that . . .

1. God is terrible in His power. God's power is awesome. The sight of such a natural wonder as the Grand Canyon fills one with awe and wonder. I well remember my own feelings -- they are really indescribable -- as I gazed tremblingly over the edge of that abyss to the tiny river almost a mile below me. That was truly an awesome sight. If the result of one of the powerful acts of God fills us with awe, what must not the power of God itself be like? *Power belongeth unto God , Psalm 62:11.* To God alone belongs power. Any power or strength exercised by creatures is a derived power. It is not inherently of themselves. It will be taken away from us one day. So great was the majesty of God as He came down to Sinai that it is recorded: *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear*



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and quake , Hebrews 12:21. Moses was more familiar with God's glory than almost any man who has ever lived, but yet he was struck with fear and trembling at the sight.

2. He is terrible in His knowledge. Consider these words. *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,* Matthew 12:36-37. God knows everything about His creatures. He knows our every thought! He knows our every word! Little wonder then that Peter counselled: *And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,* 1 Peter 1:17. The word *fear* used by Peter is the same word that is translated *terror* in our text. The thought of the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing God, Who will one day call all to account, ought to strike fear and awe into our hearts.

3. He is terrible in His wrath. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath,* Ps 90:11. You can never exaggerate the wrath of God. Whatever fear a man may have of God, it will be seen that God's wrath is in keeping with man's worst fears. God's wrath toward sin and wickedness and those who refuse the gospel call to repentance is a terrible thing! *It is a fearful* (this word is related to the word *terror*) *thing to fall into the hands of the living God,* Hebrews 10:31.

When the French Agnostic, Voltaire, came to die, he manifested the most dreadful fear of meeting with the One Whose presence and power he had lived to deny. It is said that he clung to those at his bedside, attempting to bring them with him beyond the grave. How great is the wrath of God! *Wrath to come* is a familiar phrase in the Bible. *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* Matt 3:7. *Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come,* 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Do you stand in fear of that wrath which most certainly is to come? It is wrath to its fullest measure. *For the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost* , 1 Thessalonians 2:16. We never see judgment meted out upon evil-doers in our land to anything like its proper measure. But there is a day coming when men will face God's measure of judgment for their sins. What a terrible tribunal that will be! *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them,* Revelation 20:11. The God Whom men have mocked will one day set up His throne of judgment. What a day that will be! The day of Christ's return will be a day of wrath for Antichrist and his armies. Hear their cry, recorded for us in Revelation 6:14-16. *And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb .* How great is the terror of God's wrath! May God be pleased to grant to this generation in Ulster a knowledge of the fear of the Lord.

II. WHAT IS IT TO KNOW THE TERROR OF THE LORD?



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It is not a knowledge man has by nature. Paul describes natural man's attitude toward the Lord. *There is no fear of God before their eyes*, Romans 3:18. That verse gives us a clue about what it means to know the terror of the Lord. It is something to be perceived or observed. The word *knowing* is translated *seen* in Matthew 2:2. *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him*. It is also translated by the word *wist*, meaning *know*. *And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place*, John 5:13. It means to *see*, to *comprehend*. In our text, Paul was saying "having seen, having had the terror of God brought before our minds, we persuade men."

1. It is to be aware of the terror of the Lord. *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*, 1 Thess 5:2. Christians ought to live with a perfect and constant awareness of the day of the Lord and the judgment it will bring upon those who are in their sins. Many preachers are inclined to dismiss the subject of Christ's return as a matter for cranks to study. It clearly was not treated so by Paul. If the Church of Christ was more aware of the terror of that day, then the world around us would be so much more informed of the truth of God's judgment.

2. It is to be assured of the terror of the Lord. It is to be so assured and aware as never to forget it and so walk in awe of God. Hated truths are often disputed. Today, even amongst Christians, an unpalatable doctrine is often treated with unbelief. They cast the truth behind them. But to be assured of the terror of the Lord is to walk with it ever before us. It is more real than the things of earth that are seen by our eyes. Is the terror of the Lord as real as this to you?

3. It is ever to take account of it. It is ever to consider it when we make life's decisions. Joseph did so. *How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Genesis 39:9. This is Joseph taking account of the terror of the Lord. So did Peter. *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*, 2 Peter 3:11. He calls upon those to whom he writes to walk in holiness in the light of the coming judgment. Such a knowledge has kept many from hell. *What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?* Job 31:14. The right contemplation of this question must turn a man to Christ for salvation; for pardon; for cleansing from sin. It was just such a contemplation that caused the Philippian jailer to ask the question: *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* Acts 16:30.

III. SUCH A KNOWLEDGE DROVE PAUL TO CALL UPON MEN TO PREPARE TO MEET GOD

Paul is telling us that because he was persuaded of the terror of the Lord, he spent his time and energy seeking to persuade those he met to seek mercy from God through Christ Jesus. In Luke 16:27, we read of the rich man, in hell, anxious to see his brothers warned of wrath to come. How many, if they could, would shout from beyond the grave to warn loved ones of wrath to come.



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1. Such a knowledge of God results in zeal. Paul suffered, wearied himself telling others of their need. His view of wrath caused him to forget himself in his efforts in issuing the warning.

2. It results in persuasion. It will drive the Christian to line up arguments in order to convince the sinner. We should never miss an opportunity. Our families, our neighbours, aye, you in this meeting who are not saved are going to hell and need to be told. Do you, sinner, fault us? We would persuade you to come to Christ, to call upon Him earnestly and trust in His redeeming blood. Only then will you be saved from the terror of God's wrath.

3. It generates a concern for all. Paul targeted men. The word refers to mankind, to all humanity. Paul sought to persuade all of their need to repent and believe the gospel. Tonight, I have sought to warn you of the danger that lies ahead. It may well be nearer to you than you can possibly realise. May God spare you and bring you in repentance to Himself May God speak to you powerfully on this matter tonight. May you be persuaded to come to Christ.