

# The Fear of Death

from **Short Papers**

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"Want of subjection to God" — is, in every creature in whom it is found, *Sin*. I intentionally say, want of subjection, or, *the absence* of subjection (i.e., *non*-subjection, which is *negative*); and I do not say *in*-subjection: because, to many minds, insubjection would seem something positive. But the absence of subjection is *sin*, without its being needful to prove the positive presence of any activity of rebellion, or any act of rebellion whatever.

It is written concerning *man*, "The wages of sin is *death*." We know from Scripture that on man\* death has two parts: there is, 1st, the death of the body, when the mortal life ceases to animate it; and there is, 2ndly, hereafter, the second death. Moral death (as men speak) is sin indwelling. To touch a certain tree in Eden was the expression of man's independence toward God. I can think with awe and dread of the touching it, without sin or moral death; but when the will to touch it was once formed, there was sin; and when Eve had touched it, there was moral death. The judgment of this sin was death of the body, and after that the judgment and second death, of the whole race who might descend from Adam and Eve.

\*That "By sin came death;" that "The wages of sin is death," etc., was said of man, who had been made a living soul, with power to recognise God as the Source and Giver of all good, is clear. Animals and vegetables are not upon the same footing as man as to death; God has not put them upon the same grade in creation as He placed man.

Why do men fear death? I cannot answer this question in full here — a few words must suffice. An honest infidel (if such a thing can exist) told me that "death was as a black curtain across his path, and was ever there before him, telling him that he was worse off, by trusting to reason, than the Christian, by trusting to faith; for reason was at a dead stand before death. Faith could walk through it, and know what was on the other side." To intelligent nature, death must be a fearful thing; because death is the judgment which God spake of as the result of man's transgressions. And to unintelligent nature, it is very humbling to be not only exposed to the attacks of a strong adversary, who cannot be guarded against, or set aside and sent away, and who is gradually gleaning away, to the bottomless sack behind him, the generation to which we belong.

To him that has God's word in his hand, death is known to be a just act of the judgment of God, by reason of sin, and that it has an arrear of details behind it in the second death.

When the Christian doctrine is known and received of a new nature communicated to each believer, and of the present connection of him that has it with Christ, as a living person now in heaven, — everything as to death is changed.

Nature's view and faith's view of death must differ; because the testimony of God as to what death is, in itself, and, to a man in nature, is the opposite of what His testimony is as to what death is to a believer in Christ. Observe

1st. There is an *essential* difference between a believer, on the one hand, and, on the other, Adam, as set in his first estate in Eden, together with all those who have no higher nature than he had; and,

2ndly. The basis, or ground of standing, of the two are contrasted —

a) Man was a *living soul*, that knew God as the Giver;

and

his basis, or ground of standing, was obedience.

Alas!

his race are all dead in soul, and ascribe to themselves what is due to God alone.

b) The believer is *quicken*ed in the Spirit; one Spirit with the Lord,

and

stands in and together with Christ.

Happily,

Christ was, now is, and will be FOR him; and the Spirit of Christ dwells *in* him.

I do not admit that death is the wages of sin, to a believer, in any sense whatever. As a man, I was upon the ground of nature. Christ found me there, and undertook for me. His whole work, as finished ere He rose, went to settle all *that* for me. He had paid all; and He cried, "It is finished!" ere He gave up the ghost. When He rose from the grave, He rose as a Head; and the purpose of grace concerning me has now been fulfilled, for I know and believe that I rose together with Him. Does the death of believers enter into the debt to be paid? Surely not. For if the death of *one* of them was needful, as part payment, then, also, the death of all of them. But all will not die, but a great part be changed. And if I have to pay *part* of the penalty, then the penalty is not paid already by Christ, and grace is no more grace; nor am I upon the ground of being in Christ Jesus at all, but I am still upon the ground of being in Adam, and a debtor. Well! but shall I not die? Do not you see believers dying all around you I No; *never*. I shall not die. If the tabernacle be taken down, that will not kill *me*. *I myself, a man in Christ*, can go through the death of this body *cheerfully*, Christ cheering me as one, through grace, associated with Himself; just as I can go through all the sorrows of the wilderness *as a Christian*, and not only as a man. I do not see that the new man — the man in Christ — ever dies.

The Christ who stood for me, as my substitute, in His death, has, by the faith He has given to me in His work there, and in Himself, as alive from the dead, enabled me to know that the whole score that stood against me has been cleared off; and not only so but myself put upon an entirely other ground than that I was upon before; not now in Adam, where all die, but in Christ, where all are made alive. I am not now under a broken law, nor before a God who is demanding of a ruined creature the payment of his debts, and the enduring of the penalties of sin. I am in the wilderness where Christ once was, but I am there as being already a redeemed one, and in communion with Him, who is now *for* me in heaven. If I am to pass through death,\* the first question will then be, *By what death I shall glorify God* (a very different thought from that of nature)? and the second, *How much shall I gain by the death of my body?* "for to live is Christ, and to die is gain," to the Christian, at least.

\*A man in nature (or merely as a descendant of Adam), could not talk of *passing through death*. He himself was to die. The Christian passes through death. Death is his; it pays him, as a Christian, tribute; he is in all things more than conqueror; the victory in death is already his, in Christ. But a man in nature is under death; pays tribute to it in the most awful way: is conquered and vanquished by it.

If, indeed, I walk here below after the flesh, and according to it, I shall find (believer though I am) that I am in the wilderness, as Israel was; but if I walk after the Spirit, and according to it, I shall

find the wilderness is to me what it was to Christ. Faith would make me taste it *as* Christ tasted it. Experience as a man would make me taste it as Israel tasted it. Two very different ways of tasting it. If in the wilderness, then I have already passed through the Red Sea. It may be that little faith may have a great deal to relate of long experiences made! and awful ones too! ere it knew *where* it was, and how it had passed through the sea. But at whose cost, and toil, and labour, was that boundary mark between Egypt and the wilderness passed by Israel? Surely their God was at charges for them altogether, and none other. And what shall *we* say as to what *we did*, or suffered, in the redemption which our God wrought out in Christ Jesus, and revealed to us!

Is Jordan a worse stream than the Red Sea? or who has ever been called to cross it at his own charges? or why lingered the hearts of the two and a-half tribes on this side of the river? Did they wisely so to choose?

The pestilence, or famine, or war, sweep o'er the earth. The wave of Death rolls in upon a man who is in nature; it finds him in nature, with nothing in him which is beyond nature. It takes its course (say), and *he* dies: it comes next to a believer. But here another question arises, viz., not only who is it that has the power of death (that is, the devil), but "that one," says Christ, "is one of my sheep, I gave my life for it." Has Satan — has death — any title which is above Christ's? No; none. Suppose, however, that the time be come for that individual to glorify God by being stoned to death — by being nailed to a cross head downwards. If he that has the power of death is hailing a storm of stones on Stephen, He that has the power of *life* is there too. A saint is not like an ordinary man; he cannot be killed till Christ, as Prince of Life, acts. Death may roll in, under a general and a particular providence, among men as mere men. But a saint has to go on high; the life — well-spring of life, eternal life — in him, opened there by Christ, and fed by Christ every moment, can neither be stopped up by the enemy, nor can the thread of life be cut off by him. Satan cannot do it. It needs Christ to gather up the life to Himself.

Jesus of Nazareth, alive again from the dead, and owned in heaven as Lord of all and Christ; and, proof thereof, the believer down here consciously in possession of a life in and from Him; — these are the two great points as to freedom from the fear of death.

I believe that the common expression, that death is the portal into eternity, is a very erroneous one. This life, to a mere man, is the portal: as the tree falleth, so shall it lie. But to the believer, eternal life has been given to him, and he has been already introduced, really, though by faith, into the presence of God and of Christ. Christ, in the glory of the place where he is, has made Himself known, with life-giving power, to me, or I am not a Christian. For he that does not know Jesus Christ risen from the dead is none of His. I have no doubt that the expression referred to, and similar ones, are among the means used by Satan to confuse the thoughts of Christians.

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P.S. — The *hope* of many seems defective. They speak as if they hoped to wait on earth until the Lord comes down to it. Such is not my hope, as a heavenly Christian.

Faith reveals to me Christ as Son of God, now upon the Father's throne. I, on earth, have enjoyed Him there, as did Paul when he was here. So does he now also, that, absent from the body, he is present with the Lord. Until He leaves the place where He is, there will be this enjoyment; to *many* in His presence, and to some few upon earth. When I speak of Hope, my hope, like my faith, has Him as the substance of it. I being in the body, my *faith* lays hold of Him, and of *who* and *what* He is, and *where* He NOW is; the very things which I should taste (only the more fully and without let) if I were absent from the body and with Him. *Hope* views Him, not as in His present position, but in a *future* one.\*

*Hope* has Christ in what is *to Him* a future position for its substance: it must be so, for the Spirit in us views things, not according to our feelings, but according to Christ. He has to rise up from the position in which He now is, in order to enter into those heavenly courts which form part of the redemption-spheres. So far as I can see, He conducts with Him, in His train, the company of blessed ones who have been absent from the body and present with Him. That the dead in Christ shall rise first, is true; yet while it be but a moment, but the twinkling of an eye, that the power, which is in Him, will take to cause the corruptible to put on incorruption, and the mortal to put on immortality. They that sleep will be first, but the rest follow close after; one blessed crowd, though it have its front-line and its rear-line.

\*I would not admit that Paul's hope, as a Christian, was realised by being absent from the body and present with the Lord, though, in a human sense, Paul did long for that.

The way that some shrink from *being present with the Lord, and cleave to being absent from Him*, is strange!

Do they find that all in them is so perfectly homogeneous with the glory to come, that they would harmonise with it in body, soul, and spirit, just as they are, if He came? How, then, not be happy with Himself where He is?

Is it that they have no taste for solitude with Christ, so that they know not how to trust themselves all alone to Him? Or is there, to His lovers, nothing attractive in His being where He is? Or are Peter, James, and John in a lower condition than they were in when they were pilgrims on earth?

The quiet experience of Christ, as pilot of my soul, is not strange to me. He is to choose for me, and He is to be trusted, whichever way He leads. Who knows the straits of death so well as He, or how to comfort a Stephen therein? The passage through the veil is a pass well known to faith, and neither did Christ — the living Christ — ever yet fail me; nor are the courts of heaven, as a *terra incognita*, afar, afar off, with a wide sea between.

What it is, I know not; but I do fear that, in many, in this respect, things that are seen, and can be seen, have a stronger hold upon them than things which are spiritual and but the objects of faith. Or is it that, like Jacob at Jabbok, they can send their all over the *little* brook, but not pass over themselves until their flesh has been crippled?