

A Holy Fear of God and His Judgments

by John Cotton November 3, 1727

Psalms 119:120

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

I persuade myself that this text has so often employed the thoughts of many of us since we felt the awful shaking trembling of the earth under us that we have been and are now ready to cry out,

My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; and I am afraid of Thy judgments

It is a day of no little distress, concern and fear, and it may well be so, for what a holy and provoked God may be about ready to do with us, He alone knows. One thing is certain, our transgressions have been multiplied, and our iniquities testify against us. In past years the Lord has been, in various awful ways, testifying to His anger and displeasure against us, and we may be wisely afraid He will do yet more awful and terrible things. I am convinced that this is the great fear of every one that truly fears the great God today. Would to God that we did not have such solid reasons to fear that the Lord will yet dispense more terrible things in righteousness to a sinful, unreformed people. Yet I am sure the spirits of all flesh in the midst of us have reason enough to tremble for fear of what God may further bring upon us.

I shall improve the words of the text then, on this solemn occasion, by applying it not only to particular persons but more especially to a backsliding and sinful people. Accordingly, I propose this doctrine for our present instruction and improvement;

DOCTRINE. The condition and circumstances of a people may be such that their flesh may well tremble for fear of God, and they may wisely be afraid of His judgments.

In the prosecution of this doctrine I will show:

- I. What is meant by the judgments of God and what judgments we are exposed to that we ought to be afraid of.
- II. What is meant by trembling for fear of God and being afraid of His judgments.
- III. That our condition and circumstance are such that we have abundant reasons and occasions to tremble and be afraid.

I. What is meant by the judgments of God and what judgments we are exposed to that we ought to be afraid of.

The judgments of God are those manifestations of His vindictive or corrective justice whereby He lets the world know what a sin-hating God He is.

These judgments are temporal, spiritual, and eternal. God can arm the whole creation against us and make everything we enjoy destructive to us. God does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men but when, by their sins, they provoke Him, He sends down His judgments upon them. The judgments of God ought to be the object of a natural man's fear, for hereby God reveals His just displeasure against sin.

"The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth" (Psalm 9:16).

Godly men are afraid of God's judgments. This was the case of the Psalmist in the text, "I am afraid of Thy judgments." This was so of holy Job,

"Destruction from God was a terror to me" (Job 31:23).

The judgments of God and the rebukes of heaven that we lie exposed to and are often suffering and groaning under various. The great God, who is holy in all His ways and righteous in all His works, is sometimes provoked to come out in judgment and to write bitter things against us in the way of His Providence. It is sometimes the sovereign and holy pleasure of God to lay us under some sore judgments and to threaten the infliction of yet more and greater ones. There are the judgments of sword, pestilence, and sickness that the Lord often bring upon us. He sometimes sends cleanness of teeth or a great scarcity of the necessities of life. He sometimes withholds the rain which makes the earth fruitful, causing the heavens over us to be as brass and the earth under us as iron and the rain of the land powder and dust (Deuteronomy 28:23,24). We have sometimes had sad occasions to say with the prophet,

"the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the tress of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto Thee; for the rivers of water are dried up, and fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness" (Joel 1:19, 20).

God sometimes visits His people with scorching droughts so that the fruits of the earth are diminished, the tress do not yield their fruit nor the land its usual increase. Sometimes God sends surplus of rain so that the crops drown or rot. Sometimes He sends infectious epidemic sickness that proves mortal and sweeps away multitudes. There is also the judgment of the sword, when God lets loose the enemy upon us, to waste our substance and destroy the lives of many our people. The sovereign and righteous God has dreadfully punished us in years past by long and bloody wars, when we have seen garments rolled in blood, our young men slain, and many carried into miserable captivity and there poisoned with the Romish religion. There are also judgments of storms and tempests of wind, of thunder and lightening which we have seen and felt to an uncommon degree in the weeks and

months that are past. Only a very few weeks ago, upon the evening before the Sabbath, the Lord brought down upon us a violent storm and awful were its effects on our orchards and among the trees of the woods, while some in the city were sorely wounded and one slain.

Now, upon the evening after the Sabbath, the Lord has brought upon us the unusual and terrible judgment of an earthquake. We have thus seen those awful words fulfilled,

"Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire"(Isaiah 29:6), and

"The earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth"(Psalm 18:7).

Among the awful judgments of God, that of the earthquake is much described. It is very particularly and most awfully detailed in the twenty-fourth chapter of Isaiah which you will do well to read this day with very great attention I will single out a few verses and read them to you now.

" behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof... The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled; for the Lord hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left... All the merryhearted do sigh... The noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be gone. In the city is left desolation... Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up our of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare; for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake... The earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard... and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again"(verses 1, 3-12, 17-20)

The Prophet predicted that in that day:

"they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:19).

The Lord said, "Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place"(Isaiah 13:13).

The Prophet Ezekiel also spoke of earthquakes saying,

"Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; so that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls creep upon the earth, and all men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at My presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground"(Ezekiel 38:19,20).

Joel wrote,

"the Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake" (Joel 3:16).

The prophet Haggai recorded,

"For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations..."(Haggai 2:6,7).

Malachi also spoke of this day of the Lord,

"For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that is shall leave them neither root nor branch"(Malachi 4:1).

In the Gospel we read of earthquakes as forerunners of our Saviour coming to judgment,

"There shall be famines, and pestilence's, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:7,8).

Matthew speaks here of the Son of Man's coming the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and oh the same signs preceding it that the prophets I have just mentioned spoke of. The apostle Peter also speaks remarkably of our hastening unto the coming of the day of God and of its coming most suddenly and unexpectedly upon a secure, unprepared world, when

"the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2Peter 3:10).

Thus we see that we may wisely look for such awful shaking dispensations as we have been under this week. They are very terrible indeed and God only knows what will be the outcome. It certainly looks as if God is very angry with us and that we are ripe for His terrible judgments. When God threatens to bring judgments in general and earthquakes in particular, He says,

"I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger"(Isaiah 13:13);

"For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath have I spoken. Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land"(Ezekiel 38:19).

Our flesh, therefore, trembles for fear of what God may be about to do in a still more special manner by this judicial dispensation.

I must also speak of spiritual plagues and judgments we lie exposed to and, doubtless in many instances, are bringing down upon ourselves. These are the worst of God's judgments. How can any temporal judgment be compared with being given up to blindness of mind and hardness of heart, to being cast away from the presence of God and having His Holy Spirit cease striving with us, in having the Word and the means of grace made a savor of death unto death instead of life unto life, having a blinding and hardening effect on the hearts of men. Oh, dreadful judgments!

These above all others are to be feared, for if these judgments are inflicted on any, they will ripen rapidly for eternal destruction. If persons under such judgments are allowed to continue longer upon the earth, it will only be to fill up the measure of their iniquities and to permit them to treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgments of God which will be revealed against them and forever inflicted on them in the world to which they are going.

This, I trust, will suffice to answer the first question, "What is meant by the judgments of God and what judgments we are exposed to that we ought to be afraid of."

II. What is meant by trembling for fear of God and being afraid of his judgments?

1. Trembling for fear of God implies our solemn and awful apprehensions of the great God, who brings such judgments upon us.

We are to adore God's infinite wisdom and almighty power. We are to love Him who is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has ever hardened themselves against Him and prospered? He removes the mountains and they know not. He overturns them in His anger. He shakes the earth out of her place and the pillars thereof tremble (Job 9:4-6) We must sanctify this Lord of Hosts Himself and make Him our fear and our dread. To fear God means that we adore His sovereignty and righteousness even in His awful dispensations and that we employ our serious,

devout, and solemn thoughts on these and other glorious excellencies and perfections of Almighty God displayed in His judgments. They must be the subject of our frequent and solemn meditations so that we may always maintain in our hearts suitable apprehensions of the great God who sends His judgments upon us.

2. Trembling for fear of God means that we are sensibly touched and affected with the consideration of the judgments that are or may yet be brought upon us.

It suggests that we so abhor them that they make deep impressions upon our hearts; that our spirits are so sorrowfully affected with the tokens of the divine anger visible therein that we weep bitterly in secret places in the consideration thereof. Indeed, they have the power to make us cry out,

"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" (Jeremiah 9:1).

Our hearts then should be deeply and sorrowfully affected with the judgments of heaven inflicted or threatened to the point that we are grieved and concerned continually. This may be very much what is meant by "trembling for fear of God and being afraid of His judgments."

3. Trembling for fear of God means our humbling ourselves exceedingly before Him who is thus visiting and threatening us.

We can wisely lay our hands on our mouth and our mouths in the dust before Him and there repent and abhor ourselves. We ought, while trembling before Him, to judge and condemn ourselves, acknowledging that we are guilty before God, that He is justly angry with us, and that He could, in righteousness, afflict us until we are so consumed that not even a remnant escapes. We need to humbly acknowledge and declare that the Lord is just in whatever He is pleased to lay upon us; that He does right but we have done wickedly; that He punishes us much less than our iniquities deserve and, therefore, He is justified when He speaks and clear when He judges. We need to humbly accept the punishment of our sins and bear the indignation of the Lord because we have sinned against Him. We have every reason to continue sighing and crying for the abominations that are committed among us and for the many provoking evils that are to be found in the midst of us, to the infinite dishonor of the holy God and the wounding of many precious souls.

4. Trembling for fear of God implies in it the greatness of our fear and distress.

In the text it appears that the apprehensions of God's judgments frightened that psalmist as nothing else could. It is doubtless expressed this way to set forth the greatness of his fear and to show how deeply he regarded the hand of God therein. We see how profoundly Moses felt the judgments of God,

"Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? Even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath" (Psalm 90:11).

We too must receive the judgments of God in such a way as to prove they are no light and trivial thing to us. This was the attitude of David when he prayed

" Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure" (Psalm 6:1).

When men are very much frightened, their countenances change and their bodies tremble. Nothing can cause this trembling more than the sense of God's anger manifested in His judgments, if we are rightly sensible of them. Belshazzar's knees shook and trembled at the judgment threatened in the writing on the wall (Daniel 5:6). The holy prophet Habakkuk quaked for fear of God saying, *"When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself" (Habakkuk 3:16).*

Just so the Psalmist, in these words of our text, expresses the greatness of his fear at the apprehension of God's displeasure in His judgments. Is it not clear that these words imply our fearing nothing so much as the Lord's anger in His judicial dispensations? Surely the consideration thereof should fill us with the greatest fear and concern of spirit that God has been so provoked that He has had to come out against us in His anger and to threaten our utter ruin and desolation. This fear and trembling implies in it a conscientiousness and diligent care to avoid and forsake every provoking evil to rush to God in Christ as our only refuge and safety.

Our fear of God must excite us to depart from all evil and to abstain from all appearances of it and approaches toward it. We must stand in such awe of God that we dread to allow ourselves to commit any known evil, realizing that sins are the procuring causes of the divine anger. Out of holy fear and concern of soul we will, in times of distress and danger or when under judgments indicated or feared, make haste to Christ to get under that shadow of His wings. At such times we will, in fear and trembling, say,

"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusteth in Thee; year, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast" (Psalm 57:1).

Such things as these are implied in our trembling for fear of God and being afraid of His judgments. I now proceed to the third and last head propounded

III. That our condition and circumstances are such that we have abundant reasons and occasions to tremble and be afraid.

A professing people may be left to fall into sad degeneracy. They may forsake the Lord God of their fathers, depart from the blessed truths of His Word, abandon Him in respect to His holy institutions, worship, and ordinances, disregard Him in

their conversation by walking in the way of pride, sensuality, and unrighteousness and by being unholy and profane. The fear of God can be so evidently wanting in men that their conduct becomes scandalous, and they sin against great light, love, and grace. Our apostasies from the good ways of the Lord may even be such that He says to us,

"I have planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then are thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?" (Jeremiah 2:21)

It is recorded concerning the children of Israel,

"They turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so" (Judges 2:17).

The fathers endeavored to uphold religion in its power, but their children did not do so. Notice how Moses once spoke to them,

"Behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, and increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the Lord toward Israel" (Numbers 32:14).

Alas! How this very thing is true in this day. The first generation of Christians has gone off the stage and in a manner the second, and is there not another, and a more sinful, risen up in their stead? We read,

"Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?" (Joel 1:2)

Were there such judgments formerly in New-England as there are now? You may, therefore, conclude that you have departed from God and by your sins have provoked Him so to punish you. Must not this very thing be said with reference to our state and circumstances and the later dispensations of God toward us? Alas! For us!

Did we ever have more reason to stand trembling before God under fearful apprehensions of impending vengeance when we consider the many scandalous, provoking evils abounding among us including oppression, injustice, fraud, deceit, falsehood, evil speaking, pride contention, intemperance, drunkenness, unchastity, excessive and inordinate love of the world, and may I add, the rudeness and profaneness of young people? God Himself, and our duty to Him, is evidently neglected and forgotten by many, and a form of godliness is maintained and kept up without the life and power of it. The sacred and dreadful name of God is dishonored and blasphemed by profane cursing and swearing. His holy Sabbaths, instead of being strictly observed and sanctified, are very much profaned by idle, vain, trifling and unsuitable conduct. Some forsake the house of the Lord, frequently neglecting and needlessly staying away from the public worship of God. Has not manifold

contempt been put upon the Lord's holy ordinances and institutions? Are there not many who disregard coming to them in a serious and worthy manner? Must we not acknowledge that mutual Christian love and charity grow cold? Are not both the love of men to God and the love of men to their neighbors treated with a visible coldness and indifference that clearly mark the lack of the power of godliness? Alas, for this people!

Are not the iniquities I have just described, and many more, prevailing among us and testifying against us, loudly proclaiming our impiety and great degeneracy, declaring that we are an impenitent, incorrigible, and unreformed people still, ripening rapidly for a destruction without remedy? Surely then, if this is the case with us, we have reason to tremble for fear of God and to be greatly afraid of His judgments. We might wisely be afraid of temporal plagues and judgments of a far heavier and sorer nature than we have yet been visited with, for the transgressions of God's covenant people are exceedingly provoking to Him and richly deserve to be severally punished. I beg of you, do not forget that our sins are the more offensive and provoking to God for we are a people in covenant with Him. We are not altogether unlike those of old of whom it was said,

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

See how God once solemnly threatened Israel,

"But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandment; and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break My covenant; I also will do this unto You, I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume thy eyes, and cause sorrow of heart; and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies; they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain' for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. And if ye will not be reformed by Me by these things, but will walk contrary unto Me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of My covenant; and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in

one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight; and ye shall eat and not be satisfied. And if ye will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrary unto Me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. And I will destroy your high places and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my should shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savor of your sweet odors" (Leviticus 26:14-31).

Do not we in this day need to be justly afraid of the fulfillment of these terrible threatenings? Indeed, some of them have been awfully inflicted already.

When we consider our many and grievous provocations of the great God, have we not reason to fear we shall be laid utterly waste and desolate? Or if the Lord shall yet spare us, have we not reason to be greatly afraid of having brought on ourselves that fearful judgment denounced against Israel after the Lord had sworn He would not forget any of their sins and that the land should tremble for them?

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos 8:11, 12)

And even if our eyes shall yet see our teachers, and our ears they hear the Word of life dispensed to us, have we not reason to fear that the Lord's Ambassadors shall be sent on that same doleful errand the Prophet Isaiah was when one of the seraphim touched his mouth with a live coal from off the altar and told him,

"Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:9-10)

I say, when we reflect on our past unprofitableness and unfruitfulness under the precious means and advantages enjoyed by us, may we not fear the Lord thus judicially coming out against us and causing the means of grace to have a blinding and hardening efficacy upon us? May we not fear that some are already and more shall be, under such a judicial dispensation that they have not been nor are likely to be reformed, either by signal mercies or terrible judgments? May not the Lord say unto this people, as He once said unto Jerusalem when He wept over it, oh that "thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42).

What awful symptoms there are of blindness and hardness of heart right in our midst. Ought we not to fear that men are dreadfully blinded and hardened in

their sins when there is not so much as external reformation in connection with such an awful judgment of God as this earthquake? Are not the very iniquities that have been frequently and solemnly testified against by the Lord's ambassadors prevailing now as much as ever before? It was once said by an eminent divine of our own, in a sermon on a very public and solemn occasion, "That there was not a general reformation in respect of so much as any one evil found amongst us." If this is still so, and we continue going on incorrigibly in our evil ways, we must look for a continuation of temporal judgments and of shaking dispensations to be trembled at.

"The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein?" (Amos 8:7,8)

Hopefully, these truths will suffice for the confirmation of the doctrine I have set before you, that the condition and circumstances of a people may be such that they have abundant reasons to tremble for fear of God and to be afraid of his judgments. If I am not greatly mistaken, we are in such a condition, and the circumstances of this day should give us sad occasion for such reflections.

I proceed to make some application of these truths

USE ONE. We learn from the text considered, the astonishing stupidity, madness, and folly of those who do not fear the Lord and are not afraid of His judgments.

Sinners usually mock at God's judgments and put the evil day far from them, but if they would just consider that God's omniscient eye can find them out and His omnipotent arm can punish them, they may justly fear and tremble as the godly Psalmist does here in our text. I am inclined to hope that there is not a man, woman, or child who is able to reflect upon the providential dispensation of God toward us but who has had, and especially since that awful night after the last Sabbath, some concern of spirit awakened in them about working out their own salvation with fear and trembling and thereby preparing for the coming of the Lord. Verily, if you cannot say that it has been so, you have been exceedingly stupid! If you cherish such a frame, you are guilty of the greatest madness and folly. Indeed, if you do not fall down before Him and give glory to that God who has made the earth to tremble and so make confession of your sins and seek earnestly for peace with Him, He may not give you any further warning before he executes the fierceness of His anger upon you.

"Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not Me? Saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at My presence?" (Jeremiah 5:21, 22).

USE TWO We learn from this text what is the best frame with which to entertain God's judgments.

We are to adore the perfections of the glorious God who is displayed in them. We are to be afraid of them, deeply abhorring the divine displeasure and humbling ourselves under His mighty hand. We are to stand in such awe of Him that we renounce and abandon every evil way and rush to the Lord Jesus Christ as our only place of refuge.

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." (Psalm 2:12)

USE THREE We learn from this text that it is not cowardly to be afraid of God's judgments but very agreeable to true Christian courage.

God is no fit match for us to contend with. No one has ever hardened himself against Him and prospered (Job 9:4). He is our Creator, we are His creatures. We are as clay in the hands of the potter. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. God cannot err on His end, as the princes of this world may in the execution of their displeasure through impotency or want of knowledge, for He is infinite in knowledge, wisdom, and power, and there is no comparison between infinite and finite. It is not cowardly then to fear God. Our Saviour advises us,

"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28)

Such wise fear is agreeable to true Christian courage. This should be expressed in our lives by maintaining a reverential fear of God upon our minds, in fighting against the enemies of our salvation; in mortifying our lusts; in steadfastly persevering in all the duties of our holy religion; in not disobeying His commands, despising His judgments, scorning His rod or setting ourselves in opposition to His threatening, which is the most daring and prodigious folly and madness and will be found so in the end.

USE FOUR. We learn from what we have heard the reason for the Lord's awful threatening us as He does at this day.

Our many provoking iniquities have been the procuring cause. Our evil ways and doings have brought these rebukes from heaven upon us. We are not humble even unto this day, neither have we feared or walked in His statutes which He set before us and before our fathers. Therefore the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, has set His face against us for evil (Jeremiah 44:10,11).

USE FIVE. Let our flesh now tremble for fear of God. Let us be afraid of His judgments. Let us at last hearken immediately to the exhortation to reform and amend our ways and doings. This we most certainly must do if we are to expect or even hope to be saved from destroying judgments.

My dear neighbors, are you trembling this day for fear of God? Are you now afraid of His judgments? Are you sensibly touched and deeply affected with the

threatening tokens of the divine anger? I am sure you ought to be, and if you are not, you are stupid indeed! I hope there are few or none before the Lord now but who are in this day of fear and apprehension, serious and thoughtful concerning what may be God's meaning in this terrible dispensation. Surely the great God is very wroth. Therefore, He has been shaking the earth so terribly. In this week before us we may expect to feel yet more terrible shocks, if a thorough repentance and reformation do not prevent additional judgment. This very repentance you have been, oh how often, exhorted and urged to, and the Lord who alone knows and searches hearts, knows how many of you there are who have never yet complied with this exhortation and have, therefore, been greatly instrumental in bringing down this unusual judgment of God upon us.

Unto such I would now address myself and with bowels of pity and concern entreat and beseech you not to go on any longer in your unrepentant state. I advise such not be deaf to God's voice unto them this week but to be searching their hearts and trying their ways. I beseech you to no longer delay taking some suitable time to look within yourselves and to reflect with all possible seriousness and solemnity of spirit upon all your past evil ways and doings. You are also to bring to your remembrance and to especially mourn for the carnality, the corruptions, and great wickedness of your evil hearts, realizing that carnal mind and heart within you in enmity against God. Oh, be persuaded to bring your hard, corrupt, and depraved hearts to God for softening, renewing, cleansing, and healing. Plead with Him that He will take away your hearts of stone and give you hearts of flesh! Oh, plead with God the gracious promises He has made to do so for those who will seek Him for it. And as you bring unto the Lord your corrupt and wicked hearts, so come to Him also with the wickedness of your lives laying heavy upon your hearts; wickedness by which you have dishonored God, squelched the Spirit of God and wounded your own souls. Oh, come with the utmost grief, distress, and anguish. Know and see the evil and bitterness of such ways and doings which your conscience must tell you have not been right. Abhor yourselves before God in the very remembrance of them. Judge and condemn yourselves before him as utterly unworthy of any mercy or salvation from Him, and having thus mourned for your provocations of God, earnestly implore divine pity and pardoning mercy through the merit of Christ for His sake alone. Resolve, by the help of divine grace, that you will cast away from you all your transgressions. Then you will have reason to hope to be saved from the judgments of God or hid under that shadow of his wings until the heat of His indignation is past. By such a repentance and reformation you may answer the Lord's design and end in the threatening dispensation we have been experiencing. You might then have reason to hope that the Lord will turn from the evil which He had thought yet further to have brought upon you.

"Therefore now amend your ways and doings, obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you" (Jeremiah 26:13).

Oh, what encouragement have we then to be humbling ourselves before God as we do this day. But what will all our confessions avail if we will not forsake as well as confess our sins. Let each one of us then, from this day onward, set himself to reform and amend everything that is amiss. Let every one ask, "What have I done?" And "have not I done a great deal to bring down this new and tremendous judgment on the land?" If we do not, with the greatest possible concern of soul, do so, this will not be an acceptable day unto the Lord. I trust God has a remnant of His reformed and faithful people here, a number of such that tremble at His Word and at His judgments, men of humble and contrite spirits, men of prayer and of holy conversation, men who are burdened over the sins of the times and of the place in which they live, who are daily interceding with God for sparing mercy to a sinful land. And how many such are there in other towns and places, doing as we are doing here and have been in a very solemn manner all this week, who are this day pleading with God for mercy to a sinful people. But whether their intercessions shall prevail, God only knows.

Oh, that this might be a day of atonement to us and to our houses. Oh, that God would hear and answer our supplications to Him in this time of distress, while we are trembling before Him and greatly afraid of further terrible manifestations of His holy displeasure. Let us beg the Lord to show us what He would have us learn and do by this awful voice by which He has spoken to us. I hope, my neighbors, this is your great concern his day. I dare not any longer delay calling you thus together that we might once more unite in humbling ourselves before God and seeking His face and favor.

We do not know what a day or a night may bring forth. We are told that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (2Peter 3:10), which intimates how unexpected it will be and how surprising to a secure and wicked world. How frequent and solemn are the exhortations given us in the Gospels to "Watch and Pray" and how awakening are the motives used to excite us to do so.

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is... Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!" (Mark 13:33, 35, 36).

Oh, what cause we have had to think much upon this exhortation and the call of God to us since the last Lords day night? How very surprising and amazing was the first sudden shock and convulsion we felt! Our houses and beds were shaking, and the earth was trembling and reeling under us like, I suppose, none ever felt in this part of the world before. And how many times has the awful noise been repeated, though not to such a fearful degree? Well may the people in this city and in the country round about be filled with the surprise and consternation of which we see and hear. Multitudes seem to be under great conviction, distress, and concern about their soul and eternity. Oh, that the impressions might abide until conversion to God is accomplished and the great work of their salvation is completed.

But it may be that up until now many of us have not been duly affected with God's awful providence. I trust many of you are now become more thoughtful about death, judgment, eternity and the speedy coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, that the Spirit of God might now fix in our heart His convictions and never leave you until you are savingly brought to God.

You ought surely to be afraid of delaying your repentance and reformation any longer. Be thankful for the time God has given you to repent. You might have been swallowed up in the deep vaults and caverns of the earth the very first night the earth shook. But the mighty God has stayed His hand and has spared you to this hour. Will you not now do as you were exhorted to do the last Lord's day? Come trembling and abased to your Saviour and say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Remember the Philippian jailor came trembling to Paul and Silas after the earthquake crying out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:25-34). Will you not do the same?

"Give glory to the Lord your God," I beseech you, "before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it grow darkness" (2Peter 3:11).

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2Peter 3:14).

If you have an interest in God through Jesus Christ as the portion of your soul, He will be your hope and your strength.

"The day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision... The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel" (Joel 3:14, 16).

Such of you may say and sing with the holy Psalmist,

"God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46: 1-3, 7)

We may say with the prophet Jeremiah,

"We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace... and all faces are turned into paleness. Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:5-7).

The Lord will set a mark upon such as ware sighing and crying for their own sins and the sins of others (Ezekiel 9:40), and He will be their protection and give them a part and portion of His kingdom that cannot be shaken when multitudes about them shall cry to the shaking rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the presence of Him that sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:16, 17).

Oh, that we could realize these things more! Let us cry unto God with whom is the residue of the Spirit, that He will now pour Him out upon us and our families, that our houses may be sprinkled with the blood of the great sacrifice. Let us all resolve that we will, by the help of God, walk before Him in our houses with a perfect heart; that we will put away all iniquity far from our churches; that family, religion, family prayer, instruction and government shall be maintained and kept up in them; that we will be more diligent and faithful in our Master's work; that we will be conscientious about sanctifying His holy Sabbaths; that we will be no longer slothful in the business of religion but fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord; that we will work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Make haste to Christ and so get on good terms with heaven. Give not sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids until you have sought earnestly a reconciliation to God. He may not suffer you to rest quietly if you neglect it. Oh, how comfortable it would be to be able to say with holy David,

"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

I will only add that I am greatly afraid that notwithstanding the surprise and consternation many have been and are yet in because of these terrible earthquakes, that if they should quickly and wholly cease, many in every place will return to their carnal, secure frames again. Oh, what need we have then to cry mightily unto God that He will make the impressions lasting on the souls of parents, children, young, old, rich, poor, bond and free! We have done it already. We will continue to do it, and we hope the lord will not turn away our prayers nor His mercy from us.