

We come this morning to our third sermon in a short series entitled, Christian or Gospel Fear, or that fear of God that all Christians have, and a believing embrace of the gospel produces—thus far we have seen Its Blessedness and Its Definition—this brings us this morning to begin considering, Its Descriptions—that is—as we observe what the fear of God does—we see it behaving in certain ways—thus having sought to define it, I want to now describe it...

Perhaps I can illustrate it this way—if in the first sermon I sought to paint the backdrop, then last week sketch in the main figures, this week I intend to begin painting with a smaller brush, beginning to fill in some of the finer details, and hopefully, in the not so distant future, I'll have painted for you an accurate portrait of Gospel Fear...

Thus—by the phrase Gospel Fear: Its Descriptions I mean—throughout Scripture we see it doing certain things—acting in various ways—thus—it's my desire for the next few sermons to identify various descriptions of Gospel Fear—at present I have four descriptions—Trembling before the Just Judgments of God, Bowing before the Holy Word of God, Standing in awe before the Mighty Works of God, and Walking in carefulness before the Fatherly eyes of God—Trembling, Bowing, Standing, and Walking—these are four activities of Gospel Fear...

Now—by God's just judgments I mean, his temporal judgments upon individual and nations, as previews of His eternal judgment upon this world—you may be surprised how many chapters are given over to describe these judgments—and what is to be our response to them—why has God recorded them in His word—for His people to fear Him for them...

(1) Gospel Fear is the soul's comprehension (understanding) of the whole character of God, (2) brought to bear upon itself as a fallen and redeemed creature, (3) which regulates our feelings toward God, and actions before God...

- I. Trembling Illustrated
- II. Trembling Expanded
- III. Trembling Clarified
- IV. Trembling Applied

#### I. Trembling Illustrated

1. Now—I trust it goes without saying, that this particular aspect of Gospel Fear is the most neglected in our day...
2. And—to be fair—it's without doubt the most difficult—because it's easy to overstate, and fall into a legal fear...
3. It's for this reason—I intend to provide necessary clarifications—but here I simply want to examine 5 sample texts...
4. For at the end of the day—it matters not what Calvin, the puritans, and John Bunyan say—but what says the Scripture...
5. Now—as we consider these 6 texts—I want you to notice how Christians react to the reality of God's judgments...
6. [1] Ps.119:120—"My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments"—literally—"My flesh stands on-end for terror of You, and I fear You for Your judgments..."
7. [a] What he did—"My flesh stands on-end for terror of You, and I fear You"—this describes intense fear and dread...
8. [b] Why he did it—"I fear You for Your judgments"—the word "judgments" is used as a synonym for the Scriptures...

9. In fact throughout Psalm 119 there are at least 7 words used to describe Scripture—word, testimony, statutes, law, fear, precepts, and judgments...
10. But—these words, while they refer to the Scriptures in general, each describe a particular part of those Scriptures...
11. In other words—here David is referring to the Scriptures in general, which describe God's judgments upon men...
12. V118—"You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love Your testimonies. My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am in fear of You, for your judgments..."
13. The Psalmist was just reflecting upon God's present judgments upon the wicked, which preview His future judgment...
14. There is coming a day when God will—"put away all the wicked of the earth like dross"—this is a universal and final judgment...
15. Notice—this produced within him two responses—"therefore I love You testimonies"—that is—His testimony within Scripture of His grace, ultimately in Jesus Christ...
16. In other words—pondering the future judgments of God upon a wicked world—drove him to cling to God's mercy...
17. But this is NOT his only response—"My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am in fear of You, for Your judgments..."
18. Thomas Manton—"The judgments of God ought to beget a deep sense and trembling, not a slight affection, in us. The Prophet said, *The lion has roared, who will not fear?*"
19. [2] Hab.3:2—"O LORD, I have heard Your speech and I fear: O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy..."
20. The prophet had heard about God's coming judgment upon the nation of Israel, for her sins of spiritual adultery...
21. Hab.3:16—"When I heard, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself..."
22. His body trembled as he pondered the reality of coming judgment—he trembled within himself—in his soul...
23. [3] Lk.12:4-5—"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him..."
24. I've mentioned this text, actually Matthew's version, several times throughout these sermons, and it's now time to explain it in greater detail...
25. I think this statement is liable to all forms of misunderstanding—thus let me consider it under two headings...
26. [a] A negative—"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do..."
27. Our Savior was sending His disciples out to proclaim a message that would be rejected, despised, and hated...
28. In fact—they themselves would be rejected, despised, hated, and put to death—their bodies would be killed...
29. But—our Savior exhorts His disciples not to fear them, because killing the body is all that wicked man can do...
30. [b] A positive—"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him..."
31. Now—let me first clarify—our Savior is NOT exhorting His disciples to worry that Christ may put them into hell...
32. That is NOT the point—the point is—they are to fear Him as the one who ALONE has the power to condemn...
33. In other words—His disciples were to preach the gospel, conscious of the reality, that a literal, eternal hell exists...
34. And—within this hell—God in Christ, will punish the wicked—with conscious punishment—in body and soul...

35. Perhaps I can put it this way—Christ would have His people fear Him as the Lord of both—heaven and hell...
36. Thus—this passage is actually an incentive for His disciples, not to fear man, and to proclaim the gospel message...
37. [4] Rom.11:19-22—"You will say then, Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off..."
38. [a] Branches were broken off—this refers to the unbelieving Jews who were cut off and ultimately cast into the fire...
39. [b] Branches were grafted in—this refer to the believing Gentiles, who were savingly grafted into Jesus Christ...
40. Thus—what was to be the attitude of the Gentiles, in light of these two facts—"Do not be haughty, but fear..."
41. Why—"For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either"—in other words, the judgment that fell upon the unbelieving Jews was to have a present, powerful, and positive influence upon them...
42. Thus—v22 provides two sources behind Gospel Fear—"Therefore behold the goodness and severity of God..."
43. [5] 2Cor.5:9-11—"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but also trust are well known in your consciences..."
44. Paul says—he knew "the terror of the Lord"—that is—that terror of God that comes, by viewing Him as Judge..
45. Now—as we shall see in a couple of weeks, Christians should fear God as Judge, only as He is reconciled in Christ...
46. That is—the fear of God produces within us, a fear of caution, because we fear His Fatherly and loving chastisements...
47. But—I suggest that's not primarily what Paul is here refereeing to—but he's referring to an inward trebling...
48. A trembling that results from knowing that most of his hearers would not be prepared for this coming judgment...
49. In other words—the knowledge of what will happen to most people at this judgment—produced a terror with Him...
50. Or else—perhaps I can put it like this—Paul viewed God as an angry Judge who will destroy man in hell-fire...
51. My friends—while it may sound morbid and unappealing to most modern Christians—Christians need this fear...
52. We all, without exception, need to go, through the Scriptures, to hell, and be reminded of what awaits our unsaved friends and family...
53. It's the lack of this fear or terror that's resulted in preachers filling their sermons with useless stories and jokes...
54. [6] Heb.12:28-29—"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire..."
55. In verses 25-27 the apostle is contrasting the giving of the old and new covenants—if those who refused to hear Him in the OC were judged, how much more those living in the NT era, with all of its brighter revelation...
56. [a] A gracious exhortation, v28—"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear..."
57. In other words—in light of the what God has given us in Christ—"let us have grace"—let us find grace in Christ...

58. BY WHICH—"we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear"—gospel fear is the result of grace...
59. [b] A sober motivation, v29—"For our God is a consuming fire"—that is—He is, He consumes His enemies...
60. V25—"See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven (Heb.2:1-3)..."
61. Thus—the facts that we've been given a gracious kingdom and God is a consuming fire—are incentives to serve God with reverence and godly fear...
62. But—I want you to notice something important in v29—"OUR GOD"—that is—He's our God through covenant...
63. Thus—the fear encouraged here is NOT divorced from faith or assurance—this is OUR GOD through Christ...
64. But—and this too is very important—just because He's our God, doesn't mean He ceases to be a consuming fire...

## II. Trembling Expanded

### A. Because of the awesome power and severity displayed by God in His judgments

1. Here I want to suggest 3 reasons behind this activity of Gospel Fear—why do Christians tremble at the just judgments of God...
2. The first reason is this—because of the awesome power and severity displayed by God in His just judgments...
3. Especially in God's final judgment upon the wicked—we beheld a mighty display of God's righteous wrath...
4. My friends—when you possess a knowledge of that power—it will cause your heart to tremble before God...
5. Ps.90:11—"Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath" (Ps.76:7-9)—notice two things...
6. [1] A rhetorical question—"Who knows the power of Your anger"—who is able to understand the depths of God's righteous anger...
7. Or else—Who is there among the sons of men, who considers these things—who sincerely takes them to heart...
8. Man by nature is a blind fool—he thinks nothing of God's righteous judgments—both temporal and eternal...
9. [a] Temporal—by this I mean—those present judgments of God upon individuals and nations within this life...
10. Rom.1:18—"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."
11. For example—the universal flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues against Egypt, the destruction of many Hebrews in the wilderness, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and the destruction of Babylon—all displayed the power of God's anger...
12. [b] Eternal—by this I mean—God's eternal judgment as found against the impenitent in eternal fire and hell...
13. All these others, are mere shadows, previews, of what awaits sinners in that place where their worm dies not...
14. [2] A proper response—"For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath"—for your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you...
15. In other words—there is a direct correlation between God's powerful wrath and the fear that is His due—God is to be feared for His powerful judgments...

### B. Because Christians understand they remain deserving of God's fiery judgments

1. Historically—we make the distinction between deserved and applied guilt—deserved guilt is what every Christian natively deserves, and applied guilt is that what every non Christian will justly receive...
  2. Christians deserve to go to hell—this is what their sins deserve—but they will not because Christ went for them...
  3. Conversely—we are treated as righteous in Christ, forgiven and accepted in Him, though we do not deserve it...
  4. Thus—there is a very real sense in which, all Christians will remain, for all eternity—hell deserving sinners...
  5. Now—obviously brethren, we are more than that—we are forgiven, accepted, beloved—children of the Most High...
  6. But—that does NOT alleviate the fact, that by nature, every single Christian remains—a hell deserving sinner...
  7. Every true Christian knows that—they know that if it was not for the grace of God, they deserve eternal wrath...
  8. Ps.103:10—"He has NOT dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities..."
  9. Ps.130:3-4—"If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared..."
  10. 1Tim.1:15—"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief..."
  11. Ezekiel Hopkins—"A true godly fear of God looks at the wrath of God, with dread and terror; but not with expectation. That is the difference. Slavish fear looks upon the wrath of God; and expects it: Godly fear looks upon it as due; but not with expectations that it should inflicted upon it..."
  12. Let me illustrate—think of a young criminal who lived back in the medieval ages, sentenced to death by hanging...
  13. The day of his execution, as he's being lead to the scaffold, his older and innocent brother jumps up to take his place...
  14. And thus—in the stead of his younger and guilty brother—the older brother endures the pain of a horrid death...
  15. Now—let me ask you a question—what would that young man think for the rest of his life, every time he saw the gallows...
  16. I suggest obviously—every time he saw a criminal executed—he was painfully reminded of what he deserved...
  17. And this is also true of every Christian—every time we hear about the wrath to come, we are reminded of what we deserve...
  18. My friends—let me put it as simple as I can—you and me, as forgiven sinners, remain deserving of eternal fire...
  19. Ezekiel Hopkins—"So, when believers look back upon that wrath and fiery indignation, that they have narrowly escaped; upon that lake of brimstone, that boils and burns behind them, wherein thousands of others are forever swallowed up; this cannot but affect them with a holy horror and fear of God's wrath against sinners, though they have full assurance of his love..."
  20. Ezekiel Hopkins—"Those, to me, are suspicious professors, that make a great blaze with their joys, in the apprehensions of their right to heaven; but never tremble, under the apprehensions of their deserts of hell..."
- C. Because we know what it took for God to save us from these infinite judgments
1. This is why a Christian trembles when pondering the eternal judgments of God—because he knows what it took to be saved from this judgment...
  2. That is—every time a Christian looks into lake of fire, he's reminded of the suffering that keeps him from it...
  3. Think back to my illustration—the young man delivered from the gallows, would not only be reminded of what he deserved, but he would also be reminded of what his brother endured...

4. So too—every time we read about God's just judgments, we should be reminded of what He endured for us...
5. Perhaps I can put it like this—Christians should often stand beneath the cross and reflect upon what they deserve...
6. My friends—what do we think when we look upon our Savior, enduring His Father's just wrath in our place...
7. Some of you will remember last week in our SS class—where we described the torments of hell as twofold...
8. The pain of loss—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me"—the pain of sense—"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death..."
9. Our Savior endured within His human soul and body—the suffer and pain equivalent to that of an eternal hell...
10. Perhaps I can put it like this—Christ drank every drop of God's righteous wrath, that was our due for our sin...
11. There is a true sense in which, at Calvary, we behold the greatest display of God's powerful and just judgment...
12. Hymn—"Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Where you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Where you there when they crucified my Lord..."

### III. Trembling Clarified

#### A. Trembling is never divorced from HOPE

1. That is—true and Christian fear—never leads to despair or hopelessness—but it's ever tempered with a confident hope...
2. A hopeless fear is what we've been delivered from—it's the fear of torment that's been cast out by perfect love...
3. Remember, Gospel Fear beholds the whole of God's attributes—it beholds His holy justice but also His loving mercy...
4. Shorter Catechism—"Repentance is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ..."
5. Ps.147:11—"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy (Ps.33:18)..."
6. Now—let me remind you what hope is—hope can best be defined as—a confident expectation of all that God's promises...
7. Thus another way of saying this would be—trembling at God's judgments, is not contrary to a well-grounded assurance...

#### B. Trembling is never divorced from TRUST

1. That is—trembling at God's just judgments—always drives us closer to Christ, and never further from Him...
2. That fear of God—that drives us FROM God is not Christian or Gospel Fear—it's fear that only sees a part of God...
3. But—the kind of fear that drives us to God—not only sees the danger of judgment, but the safety in Christ...
4. For example—think of a loving father standing on a busy street corner with his young son, warning him of the traffic...
5. The father doesn't warn him of the danger to drive his son from him, but to drive him to him for safety and protection...
6. The more the young child knows and feels the danger—when he sees, hears, and even feels the wind of the cars—the more he will cling to the leg of his father...
7. So too—we read about the realities of God's future judgments in Scripture, to drive us to take refuge in Christ...

8. To cling to Christ more tightly—to prize the many promises of free and full salvation in the person of Jesus Christ..
9. Ps.115:11—"You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield (Ex.14:31; Ps.31:19; 40:3)..."

#### C. Trembling is never divorced from LOVE

1. That is—trembling at God's just and holy judgments—always enlarges our hearts with love for God in Christ...
2. Again, think of our illustration—as we ponder God's just judgments, and as we ponder Christ taking those judgments...
3. This not only increases our love for Christ, for the Father—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, SHOULD NOT PERISH, but have everlasting life..."
4. Thus—the more we behold and understand the just judgments of God—they more we will love God in Christ...
5. Deut.10:12—"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul..."
6. Lk.12:4-6—"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows..."
7. 1Jn.4:18—"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love..."
8. "Perfect love" refers to our sense and knowledge of God's love to us—brought to its intended purpose or goal...
9. The more we know God's love, the less we will fear that we ourselves will be lost—the two can not exist together...
10. The more our hearts are filled with the knowledge of God's love—the less room there will be for a slavish fear...

#### IV. Trembling Applied

1. [1] Behold the folly of those who refuse to fear God's holy and just judgments—this is the height of impiety...
2. Think of how so many people, foolish mock and ridicule God, and His right to punish sin in an everlasting hell...
3. Jer.5:21-22—"Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not; do you not fear Me? says the LORD, will you not tremble at My presence..."
4. [2] Behold how close to the kingdom are those who tremble for God's judgments—we could say they are half there...
5. We could say that one is open to the justice of God, but you must open your other eye, and see His mercy in Christ...
6. He has not only revealed through His word His coming judgment, but has also revealed His mercy in Christ...
7. Thomas Boston—"Look not always on an absolute God, for surely that can produce no fear of god but a slavish one...A God out of Christ you can discern nothing but inflexible justice, and the utmost terror...But a God in Christ you may behold bowels of mercy, and flowing compassions..."
8. Rev.15:4—"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy, for all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested..."
9. [3] Behold how glorious Christ looks in view of God's eternal and just judgments—remember, my illustration...
10. Every time the young villain, witnessed a hanging, every time we walked by that spot, his heart burned within him...

11. 1Thess.1:10—"to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come..."