

SERMON ON MATTHEW 10:28

Lessons: Ps.34; Matt.10:24-39;  
A.C. 6071:2-5.

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January 5, 1964  
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"And 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." (Matt.10:28.)

In explication of the above text we read: "He who has learned from the literal sense of the Word that God is angry, that He punishes, leads into temptation, casts into hell, and causes evil, may be drawn into a false idea, as that from good Itself which is God, can come evil, thus what is opposite to Him; when yet from good comes good, and from evil comes evil. But this scientific appears with quite another aspect if interior truths are insinuated into it, as, for instance, this truth: that it is the evil with man that causes him to be angry, that leads man into temptation, punishes, casts into hell ...

"In like manner this truth: that all worship must begin with holy fear, within which is the thought that God will reward the good and punish the evil. The simple and little children must believe this, because they do not yet apprehend what permission is even according to the Lord's words, 'Rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.' (Matt.10:28.) and when they begin by not daring through fear to do what is evil, there is gradually insinuated love together with good, and then they begin to know that nothing but good is from God, and that evil is from themselves, and at last that all evil is from hell." (A.C.6071.)

Many in the New Church do not realize that they should be at first in a simple state in which they are in the fear of the Lord. We read: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Ps.111:10.)

Whenever the Lord comes to man in the Divine True, man comes into a state of fear of the Lord, as we read concerning John when he saw the Lord as the Son of Man: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." (John 1:17.) Also when the brethren of Joseph, were to be brought back to Joseph on account of the silver cup, they fell on the ground before Joseph out of fear.

Without fear society would be impossible. If it were not for the fear of the law, men could destroy each other. This is obvious with children: if children did not stand in a certain fear of their parents and teachers, they would run totally wild. With adults this is not so obvious, because they have more self control, and hid their evils, yet the same is true of adults, in so far as they are not regenerated.

While some people are born with more courage and some with less courage, all have by nature a fear of what may happen to them. The words of our text teach us that we should rise above the bodily and worldly fear and come into the fear of hell, or what is the same a fear of our own evil and falsity, which if not overcome, will draw us to hell.

At one time, in the churches, the sermons, were largely centered on threatening men with hell fire if they did not repent. In a reaction to this extreme the churches for the most part now preach love, and deprecate fear; yet fear is one of the essential means of preserving the human race. Nearly every man has a fear of danger to ones body and reputation, but, if he comes to feel that this life is only a moment compared to eternity, he can rise above the fears of this world and come into the fear for his salvation.

We read: "Those not yet ... fully regenerated ... do what is good from the fear of hell." (A.C.3816.)

The fear of hell has in it something of the love of self, for it is fear for oneself. Yet, as we are not fully regenerated, this fear performs an important function in subduing other loves which would bring us into a worse state.

The fear of God is the fear of the Divine True. If the Divine True comes to man it manifests the evils and falsities man is in, and it is this which induces fear. The reason few stand in the fear of God is that they do not in their hearts acknowledge the teaching of the Word that before regeneration their loves are infernal. The Divine True manifests the evil loves and thoughts man is in, and this causes man to fear. When there is a lack of such fear, there follows the lack of reverence and respect for the Word, the Church and its Doctrine.

The prevailing spirit of the world is expressed in the parable of the Lord, about the unjust judge, who, when a widow came to him and asked for help against her adversary, first refused but afterwards said: "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." (Luke 18:4,5.)

This spirit of the world tends to enter the Church, with those who have little fear of God or regard for men, yet do their duty to avoid the consequences, of failing to do it.

The Divine True comes to man either mediately or immediately. At first it comes mediately, as is most obvious with children, who have to be instructed by parents and teachers. Later it comes by means of the Doctrine of the Church given by men in enlightenment. If a man comes to his final state he is enlightened immediately by the Lord in reading the Word, but few come to this immediate enlightenment.

We read: "Every one must first obtain for himself the true from the Doctrine of the Church, and afterwards from the Word of the Lord." (A.C.6822.)

A man must first stand in fear before the Doctrine of the Church, and afterwards into the fear of the Lord in His Word.

Man should come to the holy fear, which is the fear of love, that is, a fear, out of love, lest one may do any thing displeasing to the Lord and His Church.

We read: "Fear is the common bond of both the upright and the evil, but with the upright it is internal fear, which is on account of salvation ... and therefore lest they should do anything contrary to conscience ... they have consequently fear lest they should do anything contrary to what is just and fair, ... But this becomes a holy fear, in proportion as it is conjoined with charity, and still more as it is conjoined with love into the Lord ... Such is the fear of God so frequently mentioned in the Word." (A.C. 7280.)

Fear belongs to the external man, for we read: "'Your fear and your terror' Gen. 9:2 signifies the dominion of the internal man; fear relates to evils and terror to falsities ... for when the internal man has dominion, the man has the fear of evil and the terror of falsities ... But the internal man does not fear evils, and is not terrified by falsities, but the external ... This fear and terror appears to be the man's, but the case is ... that when evil tempts the man (with whom the internal man has the dominion), to do any thing evil, or to speak anything false ... they are at once in a certain infernal fear and terror; and it is this fear and terror which are perceived in the man in relation to those things which are against conscience." (A.C.986.)

A man in an internal state is in a holy reverence of the Divine, but when he returns into an external state he returns into an external fear. Even the angels when they come into some activity of their proprium in their evening, and therefore see the nature of their proprium come into something of fear. Were this not so they could not be perfected and be brought to a new morning.

After one has passed through temptations, in which he is in fear, we often read in the Word of the Lord saying fear not, -thus the Lord brings consolation.

This is very manifest in relation of the text. - Immediately after the warning of the Lord, in our text: "Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Which appears threatening, the Lord consoles with words of love, namely: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt. 10:28-31.)

If a man has passed through temptations with their fears and terrors, and comes out of such a state, he must still beware for we read: "A man is not saved on account of temptations if he places any thing of merit in them; for if he does this, it is from the love of self, in that he congratulates himself on their account, and believes that he has merited heaven more than others, and at the same time he is thinking of his own pre-eminence over others by despising others in comparison with himself; all of which things are contrary to mutual love, and therefore to celestial blessings. The temptations in which man has overcome are attended with the belief that all others are more worthy than himself, and that he is infernal rather than celestial; for in temptation such ideas are presented to him; and therefore when after temptation he comes into thoughts contrary to these, it is an indication that he has not overcome, for the thoughts which the man has had in temptation are those to which can be bent the thoughts which he has after temptation; and if the latter cannot be bent to the former, the man either yields in the temptations or again comes into similar ones, and sometimes into more grievous ones, until he has been reduced to such a sanity that he believes that he has merited nothing." (A.C. 2273.)

May the fear of the Lord be in our hearts, and may this fear be converted into the holy fear that out of love we fear to do anything contrary to the Lord's love and wisdom.

Concerning our text in the Apocalypse Explicated we read: "Jesus said, Fear not them who are able to kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna." (Matt. 10:28) Here, however, 'to fear' signifies to have fear of dieing spiritually, thence a natural fear, which is fearfulness and dread; but spiritual fear is a holy fear, that abides within every spiritual love, variously according to the quality and quantity of the love. In such a fear is the spiritual man, and he knows that the Lord does not do evil to anyone, much less does He destroy body and soul in Gehenna, but that He does good to all and desires to raise up every one as to body and soul into heaven to Himself. This is why the fear of the spiritual man is a holy fear lest by the evil of life and the falsity of doctrine man should turn away, and thus do harm to that Divine Love in himself." (A.E. 696:23.)

AMEN