

The Fear Of God!

WITHOUT the fear of God no one successfully practise righteousness. It is not the morbid fear or the sort of mental distress a person experiences when he is in a state of alarm or in danger. But it is the fear of reverence for God Almighty which springs from a knowledge of His holiness and greatness, and which makes one keep His commandments for one's own blessing.

Some people think that the fear of God is a matter of an outward appearance or vain show of piety. When they see a person who appears to be quiet, bashful and soft in speech they conclude that he is of good character and God fearing. But experience has shown that certain men who in the open seem to be gentle and shy are in actual fact very mischievous. In secret they do iniquitous acts – they defile young spinsters and even ungodly house wives; they conspire and plot against people. So too some “quiet” women are like a snake under the green grass and are very unfaithful, wicked and dangerous.

There are also certain people who appear to be religious. Whenever the name of God or Jesus Christ is mentioned they show signs of respect. When they enter a religious congregation to worship they put on a garb of “holiness”: they walk on the tips of their toes and pace like a chameleon to their seats; they say prayers with an air of devotion and sing with “angelic” voices. But if you look beyond their sanctimonious attitude, you find traits of a devil. Their hearts are filled with malice, envy and so on, and in their dealings with their fellow men they are inhuman. It will be wrong to think or say that such people are God-fearing. They are not but are hypocrites. – Matthew 15:7-9

In Proverbs 8:13, It is written: “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the forward mouth” And in Proverbs 16:6, King Solomon stated; “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.”

We can understand from the texts just cited that the fear of God makes one refrain from evil, and that in essence means the keeping or doing of the commandments of God. That was why after the Israelites had seen certain wondrous things done by God in those days, Moses told them: “Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.” (Exodus 20:20) In this text two kinds of fear are shown. The first in the clause fear not, is that of fright or worry of a person in a state of alarm. So Moses counseled them not to be alarmed or frightened. But the second in the emphasized portion is the fear of God which would make them not to sin.

Furthermore, Moses exhorted the Israelites, saying: “That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.” – Deuteronomy. 6:2. The importance of the fear of God, therefore, cannot be overstated. It makes God's spiritual and material blessings come to one. It was Job who quoted God as saying: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” (Job 28:28) And the Psalmist said: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endureth for ever.” – Psalm 111:10; see also Proverbs 1:7.

Instances

In the Holy Bible there are instances of men and women who feared God and who were blessed. The instance of Joseph who maintained his integrity when he was enticed by the wife of his master, Potiphar, in Egypt, is a case in point. Because he feared God he refused to deal sexually with his master's wife as she wanted him to do, and he said to the foolish woman: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Read Genesis 39:7-10) But is it not true that some people today – especially among the sophisticated, the so called civilized ones – relish in committing adultery? However, we can understand that such people have not the fear of God; and except they repent to satisfy God they cannot escape the divine retribution of their wickedness.

There is also the case of the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, in Egypt. They were women who feared God. When Pharaoh, the wicked king of Egypt, noticed that the Israelites were fruitful, and increased abundantly, till the land was full of them, he was stirred by envy and became uneasy. He feared that the children of Israel might become stronger than they and affiliate with their enemies to war against them. Apart from a number of oppressive measures the Egyptians took against the Jews, Pharaoh ordered the two midwives that whenever a Jewish woman put to bed, the child if a male should be killed at once but if it be a female it should be spared.

It is interesting to note that the midwives, because they were God fearing, defied the order of the king. As it is written: "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men, children alive; Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses." (Exodus 1:15-21) and the Moffatt Translation of the Bible renders the last part of the text thus: "God prospered the midwives; since the midwives had revered God, He made them mothers of families."

We cannot fail to draw the attention of present-day Christians, who are privileged to be in the humanitarian professions of nursing and midwifery, to this instance of godly fear and human touch shown by the Hebrew midwives. The lesson all doctors, nurses, midwives as well as all other persons in other walks of life should learn from it is that it pays to fear God. But whoever acts otherwise will only but bring upon himself in the end God's wrath and vengeance. However long it may be, God will act some day unexpectedly.

Elisabeth, the wife of Zacharias the priests, was also a God-fearing woman. She, as well as her husband, kept the Lord's commandments without blame and they were both righteous in the sight of God. Though Elisabeth was barren she did not part from her husband as some godless women would do neither did she turn to other gods. She remained faithful to God and to her husband till old age. In the long run, God comforted and blessed her with a child, and thus became the distinguished mother of John the Baptist – a great prophet who had the honour of being the forerunner of Christ Jesus. – Luke 1:5-14, 24-25, 57-58.

Goodness

It pays much, we reiterate, to fear God. King David said that the goodness of God which He has prepared for those who fear Him is great, and that He cares for them and delivers them from their troubles. (Psalm 31:19, 33:18, 19; 34:7) He declared: "Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever." – Psalm 112:1-3; see also Psalm 145:19; 147:11; Proverbs 14:26, 27; Ecclesiastes. 8:12, etc.

Moreover, King Solomon said: "The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened." (Proverbs 10:27) Again, he stated: "The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil." – Proverbs 19:23.

It is required of those who are in authority that they should rule in the fear of God. They should not oppress people or exploit their ignorance and weakness to benefit themselves. It is righteousness that would make the Most High to guide, protect and bless them (the rulers). Hence David, the king and prophet, declared: The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. (2 Samuel 23:3) Moreover, it is written: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it." – Proverbs 29:2, 7.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to recall what happened among the Jews after their return from Babylonish captivity as recorded in Nehemiah chapter five. When there was scarcity of food, the nobles and rulers took undue advantage of their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. Usury became the order of the day. They exacted of the common people money, corn and so on, to the extent that people mortgaged their lands, vineyards and houses in order to get daily bread. There was a general outcry of the people.

But when Nehemiah was appointed governor he distinguished himself as a man of honour, integrity and prudence because he feared God. The role he played to restore order for the good of the nation was a mark of true greatness and nobility for which in ecclesiastical history he is venerated. Nehemiah rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said: "Ye exact usury, every one of his brother, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen?" (Verses 6-9) He made them restore to the people their lands, vineyards and houses, and parts of the money, corn, wine and oil that were exacted from them. – Verses 10-13.

Nehemiah himself stated that since the time he was appointed governor, he and his brothers never ate of the governor's provisions. And he added: "But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the FEAR OF GOD." – Verses 14, 15.

We can see from the foregoing what effect the fear of God can have on the character of a person.

An End

The various incidents of atrocities, corruption, immorality and so forth, which are happening in all parts of the world, are clear indication that, despite man's advance in science, technology and social life, the world is spiritually degenerating – all because the majority of people do not fear God.

Here in Nigeria we have our experiences. In spite of the awareness of our people about the sins and ills that culminated in the current tragedy of this nation, many are not yet sober neither have they learnt to fear God. Some still continue in perpetrating wicked acts such as murder, stealing, bribery, oppression, nepotism, fraud, adultery, fornication, lying and such like. Those who take pleasure in violence, or any type of evil, must be told this home truth of the Scriptures that iniquity has an end, and the end is in sight.

We are now living in an age when God would make the wicked taste the fruit of their doings. The Bible says: "They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same." (Job 4:8) And King Solomon declared: "The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward. As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered." – Proverbs 11:18-19, 21.

Wholesome Fear

A Christian will not be worth his name if he does not fear God. We agree that gentleness is a Christian virtue but the fact is that any virtuous act which is not based on the fear of God is spiritually unprofitable. St. Paul admonished that Christians should purify themselves and live in the wholesome fear of God. Said he: "Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." – 2 Corinthians 7:1.

The apostle also exhorted Christians to submit themselves one to another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21) He further said: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." – Hebrews 12:28.

What is more, St. Peter in his epistle stated: "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." – 1 Peter 2:17.

It is good and profitable that men everywhere should fear God and do what is right. And King Solomon said: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." – Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14.