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A FEARFUL THING

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Heb. 10:31

Why should this be esteemed a fearful thing—surely “God is love”; and to fall into his hands must be to fall into loving hands?

It is doubtless because of our present imperfect, dying condition, that we are seldom able to reason clearly on any subject, examining all sides of a question. This difficulty confronts us continually. One mind grasps only “election”; another sees only “free grace”: One sees God, only as an austere tyrant, cold, pitiless, and just; another sees Him only as kind and loving, and too tender to be just.

While our tendency to one-sidedness in such reasonings is more to be pitied than condemned, yet it becomes all who realize this weakness, to guard against it, and to lay aside all prejudice, and take into account every side of such subject, as presented in God’s Word, that we may “see light in his light.”

Thus viewed, we find the doctrines of Election and Free Grace, both taught in Scripture, and as heretofore shown, beautifully harmonious. And thus we have found God perfect both in Justice and in Love. “The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy”—“God is love.” It is equally true that there is no unrighteousness with God—“Justice is the habitation of his throne.” He will not condemn the righteous; and he will by no means *clear* the guilty. Every deed must receive a just recompense of reward, whether it be good, or bad. As we continue this investigation, we shall find that this uncompromising, impartial justice of God, no less than his love, is the firm, strong foundation upon which our hopes of the future must build.

Our conceptions of God, and of his dealings, are based largely upon our own methods. Because we imperfect beings exercise our pity and love often at the expense of justice, therefore we are apt to suppose that God’s methods are the same.

You frame a law for your children based on their supposed ability to obey. You may find that you have made an imperfect law—one too severe for the ability of your child; therefore, when your

child violates it, your sense of justice, as well as of love, calls for a remission of part of the penalty. Or your law may be none too severe, and you may be so lacking in justice and proper government, that when the child disobeys, your mercy tramples upon your own law, and you fail to punish. But with God it is different. His mercy and love can never trample upon his justice. "True and righteous are thy ways, Lord God Almighty. Judgment (wisdom) and Justice are the habitation of thy throne."

"Forever firm Thy Justice stands,
As mountains their foundations keep."

God deals only with *perfect* things. As God created man, he was good—"very good"—*perfect*. (Deut. 32:4.) God being perfect, could give only a perfect law for the government of his creatures. That perfect law, in brief, was *obedience* to his will. God made one penalty for violators of his just law: It was that such being should be deprived of existence—"Dying thou shalt die"—"dust thou art, and unto dust shalt *thou* return." (Gen. 2:17; and 3:19.) This penalty could not be remitted, because it was *just*, and to remit it would be for God to act unjustly. It was not too severe a penalty, for God

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is too wise to err. We may see, as God does, that anything short of perfect obedience to his perfect will and law, would create trouble and general discord not only to the sinner, but to all associated with him; therefore, it is a merciful provision for the good of all God's creatures, that "the wages of sin is *death*."

The same attribute of *Justice* which was a guarantee of his communion with his Maker, and which provided the bliss of Paradise to Adam while obedient, became the avenger of the broken law, inflicting the penalty by driving man out of the garden, and cutting off his communion and fellowship with God. We cannot doubt that Adam sought anxiously to have his sin of disobedience forgiven, and to be reinstated to a right to life in Paradise, and to favor and communion with God. But the law of God was inexorable. God could not excuse the sin, for he cannot look upon (the least) sin with any degree of allowance. (Hab. 1:13; Psa. 5:4,5.) He could not grant him a free *pardon*, for he was justly guilty, and he could "by *no means clear* the guilty." (Exod. 34:7.) The penalty (death) had to be inflicted, and it was.

To have pardoned Adam, God would have made himself a liar, for he had said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die." Had God broken his word and law in that instance, our confidence and trust might well be shaken in every subsequent promise of his Word. The absolute unchangeableness of

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God is the firm foundation upon which all his loving promises rest. For the same reason, we know that God can never *pardon* sin. [Recall the distinction heretofore shown between *pardon* and *forgiveness*. The word *pardon* does not occur in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament it should be translated *forgive*.] God's verdict is that "the wages of sin is death," and since he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, therefore, death will always be the wages which his justice will inflict on sinners. If he changes not, he will never look upon sin with any degree of *allowance*, and there could be no stronger proof of a time coming when evil and evil-doers shall be no more.

But does not this unswerving justice render God's Love and Mercy powerless—is not the sinner therefore, hopelessly lost in death, even beyond the reach of infinite love? No, God's wisdom and love have provided a way by which he can be *just*, and yet forgive and receive the sinner back into his favor. This is the glad tidings—that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Then we see that while God could not *pardon*, or excuse sin, and could not remit its penalty unconditionally; yet, in *some way*, he was able to do it through Christ. How, through Christ? Could Jesus do what Jehovah could not—could he unconditionally remit our sins? No, but "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24)—that is, he bore the *punishment* of our sins there—death. The Father "laid upon him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6.)

This was not unjust on God's part. There could be no injustice in laying our stripes upon Jesus, provided Jesus was willing to suffer—"the Just (one) for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Pet. 3:18.) We are assured by any number of Scriptures, that Jesus did share in the Father's plan for our "*ransom* from the grave." (Hos. 13:14.) One text will suffice for proof of this: "Consider him (Jesus) who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." The *joy* set before Jesus was, doubtless, the promise of his *exaltation* to a place of honor and power higher than he ever before enjoyed. (See Phil. 2:9-11.)

Thus we see that the Justice of God did not render his love powerless, but each adds to the brilliancy of the other. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, *that we might live* through him." (1 John 4:9.)

Now, what Jesus did for the race was to *redeem*, *ransom*, or *purchase* them. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Pet. 1:18,19.) "Ye were *bought* with a price." (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; and 2 Pet. 2:1.) But we hear an objector—You are using the word *bought* in its ordinary sense—this is too much of "*a commercial idea*." We inquire, what other way could we use the word, without *wresting* the Scriptures? The word has only one signification. The Greek word from which *bought* is translated, is *agorazo*, and conveys the

“commercial idea” in the fullest sense; it means *to purchase in open market*. It occurs twenty-one times in the four Gospels in connection with buying food, linen, fields, meat, etc.

If the commercial idea is correct—if we were *bought*, something was given *for us*, and to some one. Paul says—“The man, Christ Jesus ... *gave himself a ransom (antilutron—*an equivalent price) for all.” (1 Tim. 2:6. See also Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45.) In answer to the question, to whom he *paid* the price or gave himself, the Apostle tells us that “Christ ... through the eternal Spirit, *offered himself without spot, to God.*” (Heb. 9:14; and 7:27.) The sacrifice lasted for three-and-a-half years, ending at the cross; but it was presented before God on our behalf when Jesus ascended. The Holy Spirit, since Pentecost, has been a witness of our *forgiveness* for Christ’s sake—on account of Christ’s ransom. It is most abundant proof that Jesus’ sacrifice was acceptable and well pleasing to God. *Since then*, remission of sins and resurrection from death are preached in his name. This was never *preached before*, because, until then, our ransom price had not been paid. (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31,32; and 13:38; and 3:26; Matt. 28:18,19.) Though some were permitted to commune with God before that, it was only after a sacrifice had been offered, typical of Jesus’ better sacrifice.

From *what* were we purchased, or redeemed—from eternal torment? No, let Scripture answer—“I will *ransom* them from the power of the *grave*; I will redeem them from *death.*” Hos. 13:14.

Justice held the race in the prison of *death*, and to purchase their release was the object of Jesus’ death. We were in death because of sin, and he died for *our sins*, that by taking our place in death, we might go free. And now we wait, during this Gospel Age, until the Bride shall be selected, and expect that then all the prisoners in Adamic death will be set at liberty—restored to life.

Then if Jesus is our *Purchaser*, all men belong to him and are under his control, subject to his authority. He may do what he pleases with the race; hence we read, “*Ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*” (1 Cor. 3:23.) If he is their purchaser and owner, he has a right to do for them what he pleases. His plan is briefly expressed by Paul: “Who will have *all men to be saved* (saved from Adamic death) and (then) to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4.)

Thus we see why it is that “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” (John 5:22.) It is because the Father has *already* judged all in Adam, and *condemned all* to death, and could not treat with sinners except through a Redeemer who became a *mediator* (go between.)

The mediator is in full harmony with the Father’s law, and designs bringing all mankind who *will*, to a knowledge of *the truth*, and to perfection of manhood. When this work is accomplished, he will

cease to act as a “mediator,” and the responsibility of the perfect restored man will be direct to God, the Father, as it is written: “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power ... and when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also, himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor. 15:24-28.)

From this standpoint we can see how and why “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” It is because, if in his hands, though loving, he is just, and cannot look upon sin with *any degree of allowance*. If in his hands we know that the *slightest* imperfection must condemn us to *death*, how graciously, then, has God provided a “cleft rock” for our shelter, a perfect covering for our nakedness, in the person of Jesus our Lord.

When Adam sinned, and prayed that God would excuse his sin, and not inflict the death penalty, as no doubt he did, and when he found his entreaty vain, then he, and all his race, found that it was indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But Paul’s language implies that some might *again*, a second time, fall into God’s hands, and again find it a fearful experience. He has graciously placed us all in the hands of Christ, and has committed the judgment or trial of all to him, in order that whosoever will, may come to perfection again, and live forever in harmony with his law, which in their present fallen condition they could not keep. A way by which we could now fall into the hands of the living God, is by coming out from under the *covering* of our cleft rock, ignoring the *ransom price*, and “counting the blood of the covenant a common thing.” Any who thus withdraw themselves, are exposed to a *second* condemnation to death, at the hands of God—the “*second death*,” for which “there remaineth no more a sacrifice.” Truly, then, for anyone not *absolutely perfect*, and able to keep God’s law perfectly, this leaving of the covering of Christ’s ransom is a fearful thing.”

This is the evident teaching of this Scripture and its connections; but only those who have come to a knowledge and recognition of Jesus as Lord and Redeemer, who have accepted of justification through his ransom, and have thus come under him, into his hands and from under the curse of Adam’s penalty, could *again* fall into the Father’s hands, for all unjustified are yet in the Father’s hands, and under his condemnation. Only those who are *justified by faith* have escaped the condemnation, consequently only these could be *again* condemned, or fall *again* into the hands of God. (Rom. 8:1.) Note the context: It teaches that the *falling* into the hands of God, is the *second death*. Verses 26-29 (Heb. 10) show the class to be the willful sinners, who sin against knowledge, do despite to God’s favor, count the blood of Christ a common or ordinary thing, and fail longer to recognize it as their *ransom* or *covering*. Such take off the garment of Jesus’ righteousness, and have only the filthy rags of their own righteousness in which to present themselves to God. The

condition of such, is a fearful one. When Adam had sinned he made aprons of fig leaves, to cover himself, but God provided coats of the skins of animals. This was but a figure of the condemnation of the race and our need of a covering for sins. Our righteousness is like the fig leaf apron—flimsy, worthless, and unable to cover us. The skins provided by God, typify the robe of Christ's righteousness which God has provided. Giving the robe to Adam *cost the life* of the animal; so the robe of our justification, *cost the life* of Jesus. Our redemption was bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ as a lamb slain.

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Verses 28 and 29 contrast the penalty for forsaking the true mediator, with the typical penalty under the law for forsaking the typical mediator, Moses. "He that despised Moses' law, *died without mercy*:" ... "of how much sorer (worse) punishment ... shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant *wherewith he was sanctified*, an unholy (common) thing"? The penalty under the type was DEATH, *without mercy*; but was only a cutting off of a life which at most could continue but a few years. It was only a hastening of a death penalty already impending, and from which penalty God has provided a redemption for every man. But they who knowingly despise the anti-typical Moses and the anti-typical sacrifices for sins, will have a much more severe penalty, in that they will suffer the *second death*, from which there is no redemption, no salvation, no resurrection, promised in God's Word.

All who see the force of this Scripture will realize the necessity of keeping under the cover of the blood of sprinkling, our ransom price, our substitute, who gave himself a ransom for all—who is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins (the church's) and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Scripture everywhere keeps up the distinction between the church and the world, as in the foregoing text, and note the fact, that there will be two distinct presentations to the Father. First, the church, when perfected at the end of this Gospel Age, will be formally presented to God, as we read: "Unto him (Jesus) that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God (Jehovah) our Saviour (through Christ) be glory and majesty and dominion and power," and "The trial of your faith (shall) be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (Jude 24,25; 1 Pet. 1:7.) Secondly, those of the world, who, after trial, during the Millennial Age, are found worthy of *life*, will then be presented to the Father. (1 Cor. 15:24.)

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