

THE FEAR OF MAN

MEN who are haunted by fears easily become slaves to conventions – social, cultural, religious or otherwise – which they in their own heart of hearts know to be ungodly or contrary to Christian rules. In most cases such fears are figments of the imagination or they are simply based on superstitions. But men of faith and courage who realize that it is honourable to please God rather than men find no difficulty in breaking with an attitude to life which tends to subject them to or make them slaves of traditions and superstitions.

The *Illustrated World encyclopedia* in its definition of and comments on fear, states: "Fear is a feeling of uncertainty or dread that something painful or dangerous is about to happen. When you feel fear your body goes through a physical change. Your eyes open wider. Your heart beats faster. Your blood seems to pound through your body. The muscles in *your* body react, *too*. Your jaw tightens and your teeth clamp tightly together, or you may lose control of your facial muscles and your jaw may drop and your mouth hang open.

"A different kind of fear, a mental fear, is the cause of most mental illnesses. Almost every case of mental disorder, or nervous upset, is caused by a fear or dread of some unknown or unreal thing. When these causes are discovered and treated by a doctor, the fear is removed and the patient is on the road to getting well."- Vol. 8, page 1947.

There are varieties in the causes or objects of fears among men. Things that give certain people a scare may amount to nothing of a fright to some others. Writing on "How to Deal with Nervous Fears and Phobias", a Psychotherapist stated: "One person fears isolation or loneliness, another has a terror of heights or of open spaces. Some people fear death, others fear insanity. Some women fear men, and some men are irrationally scared of women. Not long ago a woman told me that she would never go anywhere without her husband; she was afraid of her heart palpitation or that her legs would give way beneath her.

"There is no end to the things we can be afraid of, and yet we find that often we can give no rational explanation of our fears" - *The Psychologist Magazine*, Feb. 1959.

In the Holy Bible there are instances of fear exhibited by people. The fear of punishment was shown by Adam and Eve when they hid themselves among the trees in the Garden of Eden after they had violated the commandment of God. "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he (Adam) said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." - Read Genesis 3: 6-10.

Guilty Conscience

A man with a guilty conscience is always at a loss to have his courage in both hands. Though some die-hard criminals sometimes attempt to muster up some measure of bravery outwardly when they are caught but at heart they quail. Take for example the case of a landlord who was caught in adultery with the wife of his tenant who by standards of social rank and age was not his grade. But because of his guilty conscience

he (the landlord) was shivering like a leaf in fear, and his answer to every reprimand by the angered tenant was "yes sir, yes sir"!

It is good to have clean hands in whatever we do so that we may not be scared stiff of anything. Indeed, King Solomon said: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." - Proverbs 28:1.

Furthermore, it is written: "The sinners...are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." - Isaiah 33: 14-16.

The fear of danger or death was manifested by the disciples of Jesus Christ when they were with him in a ship and a terrible storm arose on the sea. The waves covered the ship while Christ was asleep. "And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" - Read Matthew 8: 23-27.

We can understand from the utterance of Jesus Christ to his disciples in the text just cited that **weakness or lack of faith in God can make a coward of a man**. Peter the apostle denied the Lord Jesus thrice before the cock crew when he (Christ) was in the heat of persecution. (Matthew 26: 69-75.) But when St. Peter had matured wonderfully and flourished in faith, having received the anointing of the holy spirit, he never again denied Jesus Christ. Rather he preached Christ with all boldness.

And when Peter and John were threatened by the wicked rulers of Jerusalem and were commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, they retorted outright: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4: 6-20) And when on the next occasion Peter and other apostles were confronted with a similar charge to restrain them from preaching Jesus Christ they answered more firmly: "We ought to obey God rather than men." - Acts 5: 21-29.

The Christians of today must follow the good example of FAITH and COURAGE in pursuing the cause of truth and righteousness as shown by the early disciples of Christ. Never should anyone allow the fear of the devil and men to deter him from doing what he knows to be the will of God.

In certain departments some senior officers goad their juniors as alleged into committing crimes such as bribery. When the junior ones go on duty or errands some of those at the top will always want them to return with booty of ill-gotten gains. Those of low ranks who endeavour to keep clean hands are never in the good books of the corrupt masters; rather they are marked as unfit for promotion and are often threatened with dismissal. And in order to be promoted and for fear of the persecution of corrupt bosses many people, because of their faithlessness and poor understanding of the way of God, yield to sin.

However, anyone who is a Christian indeed or faithful child of God will not succumb to the whims of godless men and displease God the Father. He will rather choose to

suffer persecutions in doing the will of God, which will lead to everlasting reward, than to have **promotion of iniquity** and be visited by God in the end. The Bible states: "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: 19,21.

Whatever hardship a faithful Christian encounters because of his desire to keep the laws of God and remain loyal to his Creator will certainly redound to his blessings. It was C. H. Spurgeon who said: "Many men owe the grandeur of their lives to their tremendous difficulties." This is true.

Secret Cults

Again, there are also people who fear to break away from certain associations like witchcraft or secret cults into which they have been initiated even though they no longer have faith in those societies. Their fear is based on the superstitious belief that by reason of certain oaths they had taken during their initiation, they will suffer or die if they cease to be members.

Similarly, some people are afraid of idols which they worship. They think that if they are converted to Christianity they will become victims of evil spirits. For the same reason of fear some others do service by way of sacrifice to their ancestors who had long turned to dust. (Genesis 3: 19; Job 34: 14,15; Psalm 30: 9; Ecclesiastes 3: 19, 20.) These fears spring from their ignorance of the purpose and power of God.

We know the devil does lots of things in his bid to keep men in spiritual bondage but the gospel of Jesus Christ is of greater force for good in the lives of the believers. Any one who is under the grip of fear to break away from an evil association, be he a member of a secret society, a worshipper of idols, a magician, wizard or witch, should pray to God for help and seek advice from true ministers of the gospel and they will find comfort in the word of God and rest unto their souls. If only they are convinced of the truth of God's word and they exercise faith in Him their fears will be dispelled and God will give them protection. Said King Solomon: "**The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.**" - Proverbs 29: 25.

Among those in such secret societies are responsible people who have been lured into them with the hope of being helped in time or trouble and also with the promise of getting them good jobs or contracts to earn their livelihood. With a few exceptions, some of these promises do not materialize. And though the people become frustrated and often regret their having joined such societies, they find themselves in great straits to get out of them for fear of persecution and the oath of death they had taken out of ignorance.

According to the Scriptures, it is the wish of God that His children or worshippers who, out of spiritual ignorance, strayed into unchristian or evil societies, should get out of them and He will receive and bless them. As it is written: "Do not unite yourselves with unbelievers; they are no fit mates for you.

What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? And therefore, come away and leave them, separate yourselves; says the Lord; do not touch what is unclean. Then I will accept you, says the Lord, the Ru1er of all being; I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters."-2 Corinthians 6: 14, 17, 18. *New English Bible*. See also Ephesians 5: 11-13; Deuteronomy 18: 10-12 and Isaiah 8: 19.

In the days of the early apostles of Christ people who had evil spirits and some who practiced magic were converted to Christianity. This happened at Ephesus where St. Paul kept the whole area stirred with God's message. Thus it is written: "Moreover many of those who had become believers came and openly confessed that they had been using magical spells. And a good many of those who formerly practiced magic collected their books and burnt them publicly. The total value was reckoned up and it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver." - Acts 19: 18-19. *New English Bible*.

Today, in the God's Kingdom Society like in the apostolic days, there are people who have left secret cults and some other evil practices to become ardent Christians and they are happier by the grace of God. There is no point of being a coward and enslaving oneself against one's conscience in an evil cause or tying oneself to the apron-strings of satan.

"Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that men should fear; seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come.." - Shakespeare.

Spirit of Power

True Christians must not fear the devil or his agents but they should fear God in Whose hands is the life of all mankind. Jesus Christ said: "And fear not them (satan and his agents) which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him (God) which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." - Matthew 10: 28.

And. St. Paul, in his second epistle to Timothy, declared: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." (2 Timothy 1: 7, 8) Moreover the apostle exhorted: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. **So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.**" - Hebrews 13: 5, 6.

The words of Jesus Christ at Matthew 10: 28 and the exhortations of St. Paul just referred to, are enough to inspire confidence in any sincere Christian believer. Your determination to do the will of God and to follow Jesus Christ faithfully may cause ungodly men to reproach, persecute or forsake you, and will of course, make you lose the social "popularity" and flatteries of the ungodly. But these things are nothing to worry about. God's protection and other blessings for you, by His grace, by far outweigh what you lose for forsaking sin or for refusing to mortgage your conscience.

St. Paul had similar experiences and he said: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ..." - Philippians 3: 7-11.

It is better to be a friend of God and be hated by ungodly men of the world than to gain worldly popularity and be the enemy of God. James the apostle said: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." - James 4: 4.

What is more, St. Peter said: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And

who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" -1 Peter 3: 12,13; see also Romans 8: 31.

We appeal to you, our dear readers, not to play or gamble with your spiritual well-being or salvation because of fear; if you do so, you will surely lose and weep bitterly in the end. - Hosea 14: 9; 2 Corinthians 5: 10; Romans 14: 12.

Consider all that we have stated, and may God give you faith and understanding. Amen.