

The Secret of Deliverance from Evil

[Horatius Bonar](#)

"By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." – Proverbs 16:6

There is "evil" in the world. The world is now the opposite of what God made it, "good," "very good." It lies in wickedness. There is evil within and without; evil moral and material. "Every creature of God" was made good, but each one has become evil. There is evil in the sense of disorder, pain, disease, sorrow, death. There is evil in the sense of sin. It is this last that our text points to; for evil in the sense of disease, or death, or sorrow, is not to be cured just now, by the remedy our text suggests, or by any remedy whatever. For such cures as these we wait until the resurrection of the just.

What then is this evil which God calls sin? To know this we must go to the Bible; and the Bible points us to the fall, to the deluge, to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Sinai, to Calvary, that we may learn what it is, and what God thinks of it. Specially the two last, Sinai and Calvary; not Sinai without Calvary, nor Calvary without Sinai; the law must be read in the light of the Cross. There is another revelation or declaration of sin; but it is not yet come; the second death, an eternal hell. And yet when it does come it will not tell us more than the cross has done.

Men make light of sin; fools make a mock at sin. At the worst they treat it simply as a calamity, an unavoidable misfortune, a hereditary evil, for which they are not wholly responsible. God's estimate of sin is unspeakably dreadful. "It is the abominable thing which I hate; it is an evil that I cannot bear; it cast the angels out of heaven; it ruined the world; it brought the deluge; it drew down the fire and brimstone; it slew my Son; it will yet set the world on fire; it will kindle hell."

God does not look on sin as man looks. We wonder at all this, and say, Why then does God allow it to remain? Why did he let it enter? Why does he not sweep it off? We answer, God allowed it to enter, just that it might spread and unfold itself; and yet also that it might at length be utterly rooted out. He did not destroy it at once, because he wished to show its awful nature, its power to propagate, its manifold aspects, the utter impotency of mere creaturehood; and yet also to crush it forever. God at this moment is carrying on these two processes— letting sin spread and develop itself, getting rid of it.

One great object in redemption is, to destroy sin from man's heart and from man's earth. The Bible is a revelation of God's means for thus extirpating sin. The Son of man came to deliver us from it; and he does so by bringing us back to

the fear of God. How am I to get rid of this evil? This is the great question.

1. Not by TIME. Time cures many things, but not this. Time wears the rock away, but it cures not sin. Sin only grows more inveterate when left to itself.
2. Not by EFFORT. Strength of human will is no more successful against sin than the helm of the little skiff in the day of the raging tempest. Human resolution will not do. The enemy is too subtle and too strong.
3. Not by HUMAN WISDOM. Science and philosophy can do nothing. Human skill, human devices and physical appliances— laws social, or sanitary, or political, can do nothing. Sin is too terrible a disease for MAN to heal.
4. Not by LAW. By the law is the knowledge of sin, not the cure of it. Law is powerless in such a case. It is but a torch held up at midnight to show the ruin, and havoc, and woe.
5. Not by TERROR. By terror evil may be pent up— compelled to hide itself, not driven out. No terror nor force can make a man holy.

If not by these, then by what is evil expelled from us? By the fear of Jehovah, our text replies. It is only this that goes to the root of the matter. This is the true medicine, the true corrective, the true deterrent, the true expulsive energy, acting both from without and from within: from without, because He whom we fear is without; from within, because this fear of Jehovah is implanted within us.

By the fear of God we do not mean the dread of God or the terror of the Lord. Dread may restrain evil, but cannot extirpate; it may make a man a plausible hypocrite, but not a saint. The true fear of the Lord, the moment that it begins to act upon the soul, leads men to depart from evil. This fear of God has its root in pardon. "There is forgiveness with you that you may be feared." Forgiveness, ascertained forgiveness, conscious forgiveness; this is the beginning of all true fear. The lack of pardon, a doubtful pardon, a pardon to be worked for all the days of our life, may produce dread, but not fear.

This true fear of God, resting on an ascertained forgiveness, expels a world of evil from the human heart, and keeps it from re-entrance. It loosens the hold which sin has on us; it liberates us, that we may be free to be holy. The evil things which God hates: bondage, gloom, moroseness, doubt, hard thoughts; as well as love of the world and love of sin, are all detached from us, and we from them. Like sunshine falling on a frozen river, the fear of God dissolves our frozen faculties, and sets a flowing the waters of the soul.

It works itself out, unfolds itself in such things as—

1. OBEDIENCE. We obey because we fear. This is the true obedience, the result of filial, happy fear. We are constrained to obey; and yet we obey freely and

joyfully.

2. FELLOWSHIP. Without the fear which springs from pardon there could be no fellowship. Dread keeps the soul from God; true fear brings it near. Dread shuts up the soul against communion with God; true fear leads it to unbosom itself without reserve, yet with reverence.

3. LOVE. Fear produces love, and love produces fear. They minister to each other. God's forgiving love kindles love in us; and yet it is reverential love, for he who has forgiven and loved us is so infinitely great and glorious.

4. ZEAL. Work for this God becomes our second nature. We cannot but work. The effect of this blessed fear upon us is to set all our faculties in motion, to make us zealous men. Slothfulness, and selfishness, and indifference, when touched by this fear, flee away like unclean spirits.

Thus we say to ourselves,

1. I fear God, therefore I must LISTEN to him. I am not terrified into listening, I am attracted to it. The voice of that infinite Jehovah who has freely forgiven me is to me the sweetest as well as most solemn of all voices. I love to hear Him speak; and I am always saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

2. I fear God, therefore I must try to PLEASE him. I must not merely seek to avoid offending or displeasing, I must try to please him; and I must live, like Enoch, a life of God-pleasing; not man-pleasing, nor self-pleasing.

3. I fear God, therefore I must GIVE UP SIN. This new fear of God has turned my love of sin into hatred. I hate sin, because I fear God. He hates it, therefore I hate it, and give it up. The more I think of him, the more am I disposed to part with all sin.

4. I fear God, therefore I must DO HIS WILL. The will of him whom I fear must ever be my rule of duty. The more that I fear him, the more will his will become my rule. Not my will, but may yours be done, is what we say to the God whom we fear.

5. I fear God, therefore I must SEEK TO BE LIKE HIM. Mere dread would never lead us to desire conformity to his image; but fear does. It is God's glory that we thus stand in awe of; and beholding it, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

Thus it is that by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. Yes, this is the divine cure for sin. This is our strength against temptation; our refuge against the fear of man; our help against every adversary. And what a glorifying thing it is to God when we say that his fear would deliver you from all sin. And what a solemn thing it is to tell the sinner— it is the lack of this fear that is making you what you are.

"Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God to restrain them." Yes, the lack of this fear is the cause of all the evil, and the presence would be the introducer of all good.

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