

25. *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.* (Marg. set on high.)

A snare brings a man into straits. He is not master of himself. Here Satan spreads *the snare*, and *the fear of man* drives into it. And a fearful *snare* it is, and ever hath been to thousands. Many, once entangled, have never escaped. It besets every step of the path-way to heaven, every sphere of obligation. The king turns aside from strict integrity.<sup>1</sup> The judge wilfully pronounces an unrighteous sentence.<sup>2</sup> The Minister faints under the cross;<sup>3</sup> and too avoid it, compromises the simplicity of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> There is a timidity in acting out an unpopular doctrine. The people cannot bear the *full* light. The Sun of righteousness is therefore exhibited under a mist; but dimly visible; shorn of his glowing beams. The strictness of the precepts is unpalatable. It must therefore be softened down modified, or explained away.<sup>5</sup> Or inconstancy of profession must be quietly dealt with, lest the good opinion of some influential man be forfeited. Such is the power of evil shame! Such low thoughts, not only of God, but of immortal souls, and usefulness to our fellow-sinners! This time-serving shews a manpleaser, not a true "servant of God" (Gal. i. 10), and brings a blast alike to his work and to his soul.†

The same deadly influence operates in families. Sometimes even parents shrink from the open protection of their child. (John, ix. 22.) They dare not avow a supreme regard to his primary interests, or profess in opposition to many around them, the Patriarch's godly determination--"As for me and, my house"--however evil it may seem to others--"we will serve the Lord." (Josh. xxiv. 15.) Every class of society exhibits this corrupt principle. Perhaps the highest are bound in the most abject and hopeless chains; and to their tyrant they seem to acknowledge a sort of conscience, or religious obedience. They will set at nought all religion without fear; but such submissive slaves are they to the omnipotency of fashion, that they would "tremble very exceedingly"‡ at the suspicion of godliness

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xv. 24. Matt. xiv. 9. <sup>2</sup> John, xix. 8, 13, 16. <sup>3</sup> 1 Kings, xix. 3. Jon. i. 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. ii. 12; vi. 12 <sup>5</sup> Isa. xxx. 9, 10. Jer. v. 31.

\*Epistle to Philemon.

† Zech. xi. 17. 'Remember Dr. Dodd '--writes Mr. Venn to his son--' myself heard him tell his own flock, whom he was lecturing in his house that he was obliged to give up that method of helping their souls because it exposed him to so much reproach. He gave it up, and fell from one compliance to another, with his corrupt nature; and under what reproach did he die! Let the concluding advice of this excellent Minister be well pondered. --'Be afraid of nothing more than the detestable cowardice of a selfish and unbelieving heart.'--*Life*, pp. 255, 256.

‡ Gen. xxvii. 33. The same word in the original.

attaching to them; thus "honouring" a vain idol above the Lord of heaven and earth. Many would be bold to front danger, who would shrink from shame. They would fearlessly face the cannon's mouth, and yet be panic-struck at the ridicule of a puny worm. Or even if some public excitement roused an impulse of boldness for religion, in the more quiet atmosphere there is a cold timidity of silence. They shrink from the bold consistency of a living witness. They are afraid of the stamp of singularity. They are satisfied with a meagre external decorum, with no spiritual character or privilege. All is heartless delusion.

What--again, makes so many, specially among the young, ashamed to be found upon their knees; to be known as readers of their Bibles; to cast in their lot decidedly among the saints of God? They know the Christian to be on the right side; and oft is there a whisper of conscience--'Would that my soul were in his place!'<sup>1</sup> But they have only half a mind to religion. *The fear of man bringeth a snare.* And therefore they ask--not 'What ought I to do?' but, 'What will my friends think of me?' They cannot brave the finger of scorn. And if they seem for a while to be in earnest, 'their slavish fears' (as Bunyan well describes the case), overmaster them. They betake themselves to second thoughts--namely--that it is good to be wise, and not to run, for they knew not what, the hazard of losing all, or at least bringing themselves into unavoidable and unnecessary troubles.\* They would rather writhe under their convictions, till they have worn themselves away, than welcome what Moses "esteemed greater riches than the treasures of Egypt--*the reproach of Christ.*" (Heb. xi. 26.)

But how painful to see the children of God entangled in the *snare*! The father of the faithful twice denied his wife.<sup>2</sup> His son follows his weak example.<sup>3</sup> "Aaron fashions the golden calf,"<sup>4</sup> "The man after God's own heart" sinks himself into the lowest degradation.<sup>5</sup> Hezekiah, distinguished for his *trust*, gives way to his *fear*.<sup>6</sup> The ardent disciple, even after the most solemn pledges to his Saviour, and after all act of great boldness in his defence, yields up his courage to a servant girl, and solemnly abjures his Lord.<sup>7</sup> Oh! do we not hear the warning voice against "entrance into temptation--against the weakness of the flesh?"<sup>8</sup> Let us run into our hiding-place, and cry--"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." (Ps. cxix. 117.) Humbling indeed is the contrast between the boldness of the servants of Satan and the timidity of the soldiers of Christ! Who of us has not cause of painful self-condemnation?

<sup>1</sup> John, vii. 13; xii. 42, 43. Acts. xxvi. 11. 2 Tim. i. 15; iv. 16. <sup>2</sup> Gen. xii. 11-13; xx. 2, 11. <sup>3</sup> Ib. xxvi. 7. <sup>4</sup> Exod. xx-xii. 22-24. <sup>5</sup> 1 Sam. xxi. 10-13. <sup>6</sup> 2 Kings, xviii. 13-16. 2 Chron. xvi. 1-7. <sup>7</sup> Matt. xxvi. 69-74. <sup>8</sup> Ib. ver. 41 \* Conversation between Hopeful and Christian.

How different is this servile principle from the godly *fear of sin* which the wise man had lately marked as the substance of happiness! (Chap.. xxviii. 14.) *That is* a holy principle; this an inlet to sin.<sup>1</sup> That is our keeping grace;<sup>2</sup> *this* wounds our conscience, and seduces us also from our allegiance. 'By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil;<sup>3</sup> by *the fear of man* they run themselves into evil.\* The one is the pathway to heaven. (Chap. xix. 23.) The other, involving the denial of the Saviour, plunges its wretched slave into the lake of fire. (Mark, viii. 38. Rev. xxi. 8.)

But even apart from this tremendous end, observe its weighty hindrance to Christian integrity. Indeed--as Mr. Scott most truly observes--'it is'--often at least--'the last victory the Christian gains. He will master, by that grace which is given of God, his own lusts and passions, and all manner of inward and outward temptations. He will be dead to the pleasures of the world, long before he has mastered this fear of man. "This kind of spirit goeth not out" but by a very spiritual and devout course of life.† The hindrance meets us at every turn, like a chain upon our wheels; so that, like the Egyptian chariots, they "drive heavily." (Exod. xiv. 25.) Oh! for a free deliver-ance from this principle of bondage; scarcely however to be expected, till we have been made to feel its power!

Thank God--there is a way of deliverance. Faith unbinds the soul from fear. If fear makes the giant tremble before the worm, *trust in the Lord* makes the worm stronger than the giant. Neither the fury of the King,<sup>4</sup> or of the people;<sup>5</sup> neither the fire,<sup>6</sup> or the den of lions,<sup>7</sup> daunts and hurts him that "believeth in his God." 'He that fears to flinch, shall never flinch from fear.‡ Faith gives power to prayer. The strength from prayer makes us cheerful in obedience, and resolute in trial. Here is *safety*, strenght, courage, peace. Nothing but faith gives the victory; but the victory of faith is complete.§ He only, *who putteth his trust in the Lord*, is prepared, when God and man are at contraries, to "obey God rather than man." (Acts, iv. 19.) A secret union with God is implanted in the soul by this faith; an union as mighty, as it is secret; a sacred spring of life--the energy of God himself (Gal. ii. 20); triumphant therefore in the mightiest conflict with the flesh. The man, dependent on the world for happiness, is in bondage.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxix. 9, with Isa. lvii. 11. <sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. x. 12 Heb. iv. 1. <sup>3</sup> Chap. xvi. 6.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings, vi. 31, 32. <sup>5</sup> Num. xiv. 6-10. <sup>6</sup> Dan. iii. 17. 7 lb vi. 10

\* FLAVEL'S Treatise on Fear, Chap. ii. † *Life*, pp. 116, 117. ‡ Hildersham.

§ 1 John, v. 4. 5. Comp. Heb. xi 27. 'I cannot wield the sword of the Spirit'—said the weak and timid Haller to his friends, when going to the disputation at Berne against the Romanists. 'If you do not stretch your hands to me, all is over.' He then threw himself trembling at the feet of the Lord, and soon rose enlightened, and exclaiming- '*Faith in the Saviour gives me courage, and scatters all my fears.*'-D'AUBIGNE'S *Hist. Refor.* Book xv. Chap. ii.

CHAP. XXIX. 25. (cont.)

The servant of God is in liberty. It matters not to him, whether the world smile or frown. *He is safe*, beyond its reach--*set on high*.<sup>1</sup> Faith brings him to his strong tower. (Chap. xviii. 10.) There he is "kept by the power of God unto salvation." (1 Pet. i. 5.) *Fear brings us into the snare*. Faith brings liberty, *safety, exaltation*. Oh! thou God of power and grace, may my soul praise thee for this mighty deliverance, this joyous freedom! May I never be ashamed of my Master! May I be bound to his people, and glory in his cross! (Gal. vi. 14.)

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxix. 29; xci. 14. Isa. xxxiii. 16.