

The Churches Increased.

by Edward Payson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of walking in the fear of God, which leads to a church's growth, obedience, and service to God.

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, Isaiah 44:3, Acts 9:31, Romans 8:15, Romans 15:13, 1 Corinthians 14:25, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Hebrews 12:28

Topics: "Church Growth", "Holy Living"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of churches walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. He highlights the rarity and pleasure of seeing the church enjoying rest and utilizing it properly to be edified and multiplied. Payson emphasizes that walking in the fear of God involves veneration for God, humble submission to His authority, and a holy jealousy to avoid displeasing Him. Walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost includes experiencing peace of conscience, a strong hope of adoption, and foretastes of heavenly joys. Payson urges believers to live in a manner that convinces others of the reality and desirability of religion, drawing down God's blessings and potentially leading to great additions of saved souls in churches.

Transcript

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied"

Acts 9:31

this passage, my friends, we have two things presented to our view, which it is at once pleasing and unusual to see. In the first place, we see the church of Christ enjoying an interval of rest. That this, though a very pleasing, should be an uncommon sight in a world like this, is not surprising. While passing through it the church of Christ is in an enemy's country; a country in which it is exposed to constant trials, temptations and assaults; and in which we are warned to expect tribulation.

Like the first disciples it is embarked on a tempestuous sea, where the waves run high, and the winds are contrary; while the haven of eternal rest seems far distant, and a night black with stormy clouds conceals it from view. But when, as is sometimes the case, Jesus comes to visit his church walking upon the tempestuous sea, then for a short season the storms are hushed, the clouds scattered, and great calm succeeds. Then, as in the text, the churches enjoy rest. In the second place, we see in this passage, what

is still more uncommon and pleasing, the church improving this season of rest in a suitable manner.

Generally speaking, the churches of Christ are far from doing this. On the contrary, in the short intervals of outward peace and prosperity allotted them, they are prone to decline, to forsake their first love, and become formal, useless and conformed to the world; so that storms are often less dangerous and hurtful to them than a calm. But in the present instance, this was not the case. The churches improved this interval of rest in some measure as they ought. Hence they were edified or built up, and walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

In other words, their numbers, as well as their graces, were greatly increased. The mode of expression here employed plainly intimates, that the great additions made to their churches were a consequence of their walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. From the passage therefore, may be fairly deduced the following proposition: When the members of churches walk in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, great additions will probably be made to them of such as shall be saved.

To illustrate and establish this proposition, is my present design. In the prosecution of this design I am led to inquire, I. What is meant by walking in the fear of God? By the fear of God is here evidently meant, not that guilty, slavish fear, which impenitent sinners often feel, but the holy, filial fear, which is peculiar to real Christians. This fear is every where represented by the inspired writers as one of the most essential parts of true religion, and is indeed not infrequently used by them to denote religion itself.

It is produced and maintained in the heart by the agency of the divine Spirit. It arises from a believing apprehension and an experimental knowledge of the existence, character, perfections, and constant presence of Jehovah; it is occasioned by a spiritual discovery, made to the soul, of his awful, adorable and infinite perfections; and its natural effects are, veneration for God, submission to his will, obedience to his commands, and a holy watchful care to avoid every thing which may grieve, displease, or provoke him to forsake us.

From the brief description of the nature and effects of Godly fear, it appears, that walking in the fear of God implies, 1. A habitual and profound veneration for his character and institutions. This veneration is directly opposed to irreverence, carelessness, and formality in the service of God. It extends to every thing of a religious Nature with which he is connected. It leads those who are under its influence to worship him with humility and godly fear; to venerate his names and attributes; to treat his ordinances and institutions with reverential regard, to read and hear his word with humility and prostration of soul, to honor and sanctify his holy day, and to remember that holiness becometh his house forever.

The profound veneration for God, and for every thing of a religious nature with which he is immediately connected, is required of us by the inspired writers in almost innumerable passages. Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let him be your fear and your dread. Stand in awe and sin not. Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold such guiltless. To this man will I look, who trembleth at my word. It requires but a very small acquaintance with the scriptures to convince us, that the most eminent saints, and those who were admitted to the greatest intimacy with their Maker, have ever been most distinguished for the reverence and godly fear which we are considering, and which these passages so expressly require.

These dispositions are far more important than most Christians are aware; for God is a jealous God, jealous for the honor of his great name, and he has given us many awful proofs that he will not suffer himself to be irreverently treated with impunity. On a most awful occasion he said, I will be sanctified in them that draw near to me. Churches, therefore, whose ministers do not feel and exhibit this veneration for God, who worship him in a formal, careless manner, and take little or no care to bring their hearts into a suitable frame, when they are about to enter his sanctuary, approach the throne of grace, or come to the table of Christ, have no claim to be considered as walking in the fear of God; nor any reason to hope for the tokens of his favor. 2.

Walking in the fear of God implies humble and unreserved submission to his authority. That it is the natural tendency of fear to produce submission to the being feared, you need not be told. This submission will correspond in nature and effect with the fear which occasions it. A servile fear will produce only a constrained, apparent submission; but the fear we are describing will produce a submission cordial and unreserved, such as the scriptures require. The influence of this fear will extend to all the powers and faculties of the soul.

It will constrain the understanding to submit implicitly to the authority of God's revealed will; producing that meek, docile, child-like acquiescence in its decisions, without which our Savior assures us that none shall enter the kingdom of heaven. This disposition is directly opposed to that pride of human reason, that presumptuous, caviling, unyielding spirit, which leads men to set up their own vain fancies and prejudices in opposition to the word of God; to deny, pervert, or explain away those parts of it which they dislike; and to object against every thing which does not coincide with their own humors, or preconceived opinions.

A person who is suitably influenced by this temper needs no arguments to convince him of the truth of any doctrine, however mysterious or contrary to his previous sentiments it may be, which comes supported by the authority of a plain Thus saith the Lord. This authority is to him, what oaths are said to be in another case, an end of all strife, and dissension, and he bows down before it with a ready and pleased submission. The fear of God also influences the will, rendering it pliable and submissive; and conforming it to the will of God.

Its language to God is, Not my will but thine be done. It is therefore directly opposed to that independent, rebellious, repining spirit, which leads men to set themselves up as the rivals of Jehovah, to question or disregard his authority, to oppose his sovereignty, to complain of the strictness of his law, and to murmur at the dispensations of his providence. It leads those who are under its influence to rejoice that the Lord reigns, and to feel pleased and satisfied with what he is, with all that he says, and with every thing he does.

The indulgence of a discontented, unreconciled temper is therefore evidently incompatible with walking in the fear of God. Farther. The fear of God controls and regulates the affections. It leads those who are under its influence to love and to hate, to hope and to fear, to rejoice and to mourn in conformity with the divine commands. It teaches us to love being, truth, and holiness; and to hate nothing but sin. It teaches us to hope for glory, honor, and immortality through the merits of Christ, and to fear nothing but the displeasure of God, and those sins which excite it.

It teaches us to rejoice in God, and to mourn for our sins, and for the sins and miseries of others. These effects it produces in direct proportion to the degree in which its influence is felt. Lastly. The fear of God controls, in some measure at least, the imagination. It is true that this lawless, and almost untameable

power seems to be less influenced by the fear of God, than any other faculty of the soul. Still, wherever the fear of God exists, the imagination will be constrained, in some degree, to submit to it.

Its sallies will be carefully watched, its excursive wanderings will be checked; it will be speedily recalled when it roams into forbidden ground, and be often compelled to assist the Christian in his meditations on death, judgment, and the realities of eternity. Knowing that the thought of foolishness is sin, he who fears God will at least strenuously endeavor to prevent vain thoughts from lodging within him, and his endeavors will gradually be crowned with success. Such is that submission of the soul to God, which walking in his fear implies. 3.

Walking in the fear of God implies a holy jealousy of ourselves, and a watchful care to avoid every thing which may grieve, displease, or provoke him to forsake us. The kind of fear, which we are describing, proceeds from love. He who is under its influence fears God only because he loves him, and he fears him supremely because he loves him supremely. This supreme affection leads him to desire, above all things, God's favor and presence, and to dread nothing so much as their loss.

He feels that God's favor is life, and that his loving kindness is far better than life. He feels that God is the health, the strength, the happiness, the life, the salvation of his soul. In one word, God is to him all in all. His language is, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire besides thee. When God is present, difficulties vanish, burdens become light, afflictions are pleasant, sorrow is turned to joy, a new luster is spread over the whole face of nature, temporal blessings are enjoyed with double relish, and spiritual privileges become privileges indeed.

But when God departs, strength, and hope, and happiness depart with him. The Christian finds that his sun is gone; his spirits droop; his graces languish; existence becomes a burden; the means of grace are insipid, and temporal friends and comforts become like pictures in the absence of light, which, however beautiful, can afford no pleasure. Since such are the consequences of God's absence, it is not surprising that the Christian should fear it above all things; and that this fear should lead him to guard with scrupulous watchfulness and care against every thing which may tend to expose him to such an affliction.

Speaking of the covenant which he will make with his people, God says, I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Hence it appears, that it is the natural tendency of the fear of God to preserve those who feel its influence from apostasy and declension. It leads them like Enoch to walk with God; to keep near to him, to wait upon him in the diligent use of all the appointed means of grace, and to guard against the first symptoms of declension; and, when asked whether they will forsake him, to reply with Peter, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Such, my friends, are the principal effects of the fear of God; and if we would walk in his fear, we must feel and exhibit these effects, not only occasionally, but habitually, and like David have respect to all God's commandments, and be in the fear of God all the day long. In the preceding remarks I have attempted to show what effects the fear of God will produce upon the temper and conduct of an individual, who walks in it, or is habitually under its influence. Now, as churches are composed of individuals, it follows, that, when all, or nearly all the members of a church live under the habitual influence of this principle, the church itself, considered as a body, will walk in the fear of God; and all the duties which are incumbent on it as a body, will be diligently and faithfully performed.

Of those duties, which are incumbent on the church itself, rather than on any member of it separately considered, the first is, to provide the means of grace and of religious instruction for itself, its children, and

those who are immediately connected with it. It, is the indispensable duty of every church to provide, if possible, a suitable place for the public worship of God, and a competent teacher to lead in his worship, and perform the other duties of the ministerial office.

Every Church ought to consider these things as the necessities of life; for such they are in the strictest sense. Indeed, they have a much better claim to this title, than many things to which it is commonly applied. If, as our Savior informs us, one thing is needful, then the means of obtaining that one thing, are of the first, and most pressing necessity. It is indispensably necessary that a Christian should know and do the will of God; but it is not necessary that he should live.

It is indispensably necessary that children should be instructed and converted, but it is not in the same sense necessary that they should live. It is better that he and his family should be without a shelter, and without food, than that they should be without the means of grace, of religious instruction and salvation. Every church which walks in the fear of God will feel this, and act upon this principle. They will say, we can do without everything else, better than we can do without the preaching of the gospel.

They will say, if he who provideth not for the temporal wants of his own, and especially for those of his own house, has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel, what is he who provides not for the far more pressing spiritual wants of his own soul, and of those who are dependent on him? Our fathers felt, and acted on this principle. As soon as a town contained sixteen families they felt able to support the gospel, and did support it. And every church which walks in the fear of God will feel and act in a similar manner.

They will fear, that if they neglect it, they shall be found guilty of lightly esteeming those precious gifts which Christ purchased with his blood, that he might bestow them on the rebellious; for among these gifts, pastors and teachers for the work of the ministry, hold a conspicuous place; they will fear that by this neglect they shall offend God, and provoke him to forsake them; an evil, which as we have already seen, those who walk in his fear dread above all other evils.

They will fear that, if, like the Jews, they run every man to take care of his own house, and suffer the house of God to lie waste, he will scourge them for it as he did his ancient church by withholding his blessing, and blasting their labors. And they will fear when their children are suffered to grow up without enjoying the stated preaching of the gospel, and without forming habits of observing the Sabbath, and attending stately on the public worship of God, they will acquire habits of neglecting all religious institutions, and perish in their sins.

Surely no church, which does not dread these evils, and guard against them, so far as they are able, by providing a suitable place of worship, and a competent religious teacher, can be justly said to walk in the fear of God. The second duty incumbent on churches, considered as such, consists in faithfully maintaining the discipline of Christ in his house. This duty a church which walks in the fear of God will, it is evident, carefully perform. They will not, by neglecting it, render themselves partakers of other men's sins.

They will tolerate among themselves none of those sins which are expressly said to exclude such as are guilty of them from heaven. They will admit none but such as exhibit scriptural evidence that they are the disciples of Christ, and they will be induced by no worldly motives to retain such as he requires them to exclude. This they will do, lest God should forsake them, if he sees among them the accursed thing. A church which neglects this duty, which spares known offenders through fear of temporal inconvenience or loss, cannot be said to walk in the fear of God.

They fear something else more than they fear him. A third duty incumbent on churches, considered as such, consists in assembling at proper seasons for social worship. This duty an apostle expressly enjoins. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another daily. This last clause seems to intimate that he referred, not so much to assembling on the Sabbath, as to more private assemblies for the purpose of mutual exhortation and social prayer.

Such meetings will be highly valued and carefully maintained by every church which walks in the fear of God. A fourth duty incumbent on every church considered as such, is to take care of the religious education of its children. It is true that the religious education of children is a duty more immediately incumbent on their parents; but it is incumbent on churches to take care that such of their members as are parents perform this duty. The neglect of it ought to be regarded as a subject of church discipline.

Addressing his ancient church as an individual, God says, Thou hast taken my Sons and my daughters which thou hast borne unto me, and hast sacrificed them unto idols to be devoured. Is this a small matter, that thou hast slain my children? But it is evident that the Jewish church did not actually sacrifice children to idols in its collective capacity. This was the act of individual parents. Yet because the church did not interpose to prevent the sacrifice, it is charged upon it as the act of the whole.

And so if children of the church are now sacrificed to Satan on the altar of the world by their parents, the church itself is answerable so far as their own neglect was the cause. Lastly. It is the duty of churches, as such, to assist feeble and destitute sister churches with pecuniary aid according to their ability. The primitive churches considered it as a duty, nay it was often enjoined upon them as a duty, to assist other churches, when circumstances made it necessary, in supporting their poor.

Much more then may we consider it as a duty to assist in furnishing them the means of grace, when without such assistance they cannot obtain the blessing. This is a duty which we owe, not only to them, but to the cause of Christ, which will thus be advanced, and to our fellow creatures, whose salvation may thus be effected. If the love of God does not dwell in him, who can see a brother or sister destitute of daily food without attempting to relieve them, how can the fear of God rule in a church, which can see sister churches destitute of the bread of life, without making an effort to supply them?

I proceed to inquire, II. What is meant by walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. When our blessed Savior was about to be separated from his disciples he promised that he would not leave them comfortless, but that he would pray the Father, who would send them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, that he might abide with them forever. This gracious promise he has faithfully performed. The Holy Ghost has been sent from heaven to dwell in the hearts of believers, and all the comforts of a religious nature which they enjoy on earth, are communicated by him.

These comforts are of various kinds, and it is impossible on the present occasion fully to describe them. We can only mention some of the principal. Among the consolations of the Spirit we might perhaps, without much impropriety, enumerate the graces which he bestows, and the temper which he produces. As the Spirit of grace, he is the author and the preserver of all those graces which constitute the Christian temper. As the Spirit of God, he makes the soul a partaker of the divine nature, and creates it anew in the image of God.

As the Holy Spirit, he sanctifies us throughout, in spirit and soul, and body, communicating to us that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. As the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, he produces in us a heavenly temper, weans us from things below, and draws our affections to things above. The fruits

of the Spirit, says an apostle, are love, joy, peace, long suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Now if any happiness is connected with the exercise of these graces, if there is any pleasure in being holy, in resembling God, in possessing a heavenly temper, as there undoubtedly is the greatest, then the graces which the Spirit of God imparts and the temper which he produces, may justly be reckoned among the comforts of the Holy Ghost.

But since these fruits of the Spirit are usually considered as something different from his consolations, we shall not farther insist upon them on the present occasion, though they are doubtless possessed by all, who walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Of these comforts properly so called, I mention, 1. Peace of conscience, or, in other words, peace with God, arising from a persuasion wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, that we are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved.

It is true that the pardon of sin is procured for us by the death and intercession of Christ; but it is also true that this blessing is applied to us only by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. It is his peculiar work, to subdue the enmity and unbelief of our hearts, and when this work is accomplished, to take the things which are Christ's, and show them to us. He opens the eyes of the guilty, desponding, and almost despairing sinner, and shows him that Christ is just such a Savior as he needs; that he has performed and suffered every thing necessary for the complete salvation of his people; that by him all who believe are justified from those things from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses; and that he is able to save, even to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

These precious encouraging truths he persuades and enables the sinner to embrace; and the consequence is, that, being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and he feels that his sins are forgiven him for his name's sake. His conscience being purged from dead works, no longer condemns him, and therefore he has confidence towards God, and knows by experience the blessedness of him, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. This blessedness, consisting in peace of conscience and peace with God, he continues to enjoy so long as he walks in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost; being filled, as the apostle expresses it, with all joy and peace in believing.

With this state of pardon and acceptance is intimately connected, 2. A strong and well-grounded hope, arising at times to a full assurance, that we are adopted into God's family, and that consequently we have a title to all the privileges of his children. This hope, so productive of happiness to all who possess it, is produced and maintained in the souls of believers by the Spirit of God. Hence the apostle prays that the Christians at Rome might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

This hope the Spirit produces and maintains by forming in the hearts of believers the image of their heavenly Father, giving them a filial temper towards him, and then shining in upon his work in their heart and enabling them to discern it. Agreeably, we find the apostle writing to believers, Ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father; and the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Having thus convinced the believer that he is a child and an heir of God, the Holy Spirit enables him to claim and enjoy the privileges of a child, and the apostle informs us that, through Christ, Christians have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Agreeably, so long as Christians walk in the fear of God, the Holy

Spirit enables them at all times to approach him as their Father in heaven, with holy boldness and filial confidence; to make known to him all their wants, to cast upon him all their cares, and to claim his protection, guidance, assistance, and blessing.

He also enables them to understand, believe, and apply to themselves the exceeding great and precious promises of his word; to feel a strong confidence that he will withhold from them no good thing, and that he will cause all things to work together for their good. Thus he comforts and supports them under their various trials, and enables them to discover, even in the severest, new proofs that they are the children of God. He teaches them that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; and that their present light afflictions which endure but for a moment, will work out for them a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.

Hence they are enabled to glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience and many other blessed effects. 3. Another branch of the comforts of the Holy Ghost consists in the foretastes, which he here gives believers, of the joys of heaven. The apostle, after informing us, that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived of those things which God has prepared for them that love him, adds, -- but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.

Of the truth of this assertion every Christian, who walks in the fear of God, is convinced by happy experience. Like the blessed inhabitants of heaven, such persons are enabled by the Holy Spirit, to enjoy fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, to participate in the joy that is felt in heaven when sinners repent, and to unite with the spirits of the just made perfect in ascribing blessing and glory, and power unto God and the Lamb. At intervals, which return more or less frequently, in proportion to their diligence, zeal, and fidelity, God is pleased to grant them still greater consolation, to lift upon them the light of his countenance, and cause them to rejoice in his salvation.

He sheds abroad his love in their hearts, makes them to know the great love wherewith he has loved them, shines in upon their souls with the pure, dazzling, transforming beams of celestial mercy, truth, and grace; displays to their enraptured view the ineffable beauties and glories of him who is the chief among ten thousand, and enables them in some measure to comprehend the lengths and breadths, the heights and depths of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge. While the happy Christian, in these bright enraptured moments, sinks lower and lower in self-abasement and humility, the Spirit of God, stooping from his blest abode, raises him as it were on his celestial wings, and places him before the open door of heaven, and enables him to look in and contemplate the great I AM, the Ancient of days, enthroned with the Son of his love, the brightness of his glory.

He contemplates, he wonders, he admires, he loves, he adores. Absorbed in the ravishing, the ecstatic contemplation of uncreated loveliness, glory, and beauty, he forgets the world, he forgets himself, he almost forgets that he exists. His whole soul goes forth in one intense flame of admiration, love and desire, and he longs to plunge into the boundless ocean of perfection which opens to his view, and to be wholly swallowed up and lost in God. With an energy and activity of soul unknown before, he roams and ranges through this infinite ocean of existence and happiness, of perfection and glory, of power and wisdom, of light and love, where he can find neither bottom nor shore.

His soul dilates itself beyond its ordinary capacity, and expands to receive the tide of felicity which fills and overwhelms it. No language can do justice to his feelings, for his joys are unspeakable; but with an emphasis, a meaning, an energy, which God only could excite, and which God alone can comprehend, he

exclaims in broken accents, My Father, and my God! Thus by the agency of the Spirit is he filled with all the fullness of God, and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory, till his wise and compassionate Father, in condescension to the weakness of his almost expiring child, graciously draws a veil over glories too dazzling for mortal eyes long to sustain; leaving him still however in the enjoyment of that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Such, my friends, are the joys which the Spirit of God occasionally imparts to those who walk in his fear; or rather such is the exceedingly imperfect description of them which we are able to give. Having thus attempted to show what is meant by walking in the fear of God and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, I proceed to show, III. That when the members of churches habitually walk in this manner, great additions will probably be made to them of such as shall be saved. That this will be the case appears probable, 1.

From the consideration, that such a life and temper, displayed by professed Christians, will naturally and most powerfully tend to convince all around them of the reality and happy effects of religion, to remove their prejudices against it, and to show them that its possession is highly desirable. No one who has attended to the subject can doubt, that, if we except the natural enmity of the heart to God, the manner in which professors generally live is the greatest of all obstacles to the success of the gospel.

It is this which blunts the edge of the sword of the Spirit, and causes the arrows of conviction to rebound from the sinner's breast. It is in vain to press on our impenitent hearers the necessity of regeneration, while they see little or no difference between those who profess to have been the subjects of this change and themselves. It is vain to tell them that religion is productive of happiness, while professors appear gloomy, anxious, and dejected, instead of walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.

But when professors live as they ought, when the fear of God rules in their hearts, and the peace of God beams forth in their countenances; when they cause their light to shine before men, and adorn the doctrine of God in all things; then sinners begin to tremble, their most plausible objection is wrested from them; their armor is taken away, and they are exposed, naked and defenseless to the arrows of conviction. The life of every Christian then becomes a sermon more pungent and convincing than any which ministers can preach; and the church, while she thus appears fair as the moon, and clear as the sun, is more terrible than an army with banners to the enemies of religion. 2.

That great additions will be made to churches which walk in this manner, is probable from the consideration, that walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, is exceedingly pleasing to God, and naturally tends to draw down upon them his blessing. Indeed he has bound himself by many promises to bless and build up his church, when its members conduct in this manner; and in no instance, that can be adduced, has he failed to fulfil these promises. Them that honor him he will honor.

But in no way can churches honor him more effectually than by living in the manner described above; and, therefore, when they thus honor him, they may expect that he will honor them by preserving them from division, and adding abundantly to their numbers and graces. That this will probably be the case, appears, Lastly, from the consideration that, when churches walk in this manner, it proves that God is pouring out his Spirit upon them, and that a revival of religion is already begun.

That without the influences of the Holy Spirit a church cannot walk in his comforts, is too evident to require proof; and that without them no church will walk in the fear of God, is equally certain. Whenever we see a church walking in this manner, we may be confident that God has commenced a work of grace among them, and there is every reason to hope that this work will be carried on till many are added to the church.

The subject we have been considering, my friends, suggests several important reflections.

And, 1. Permit me to ask all the professed disciples of Christ in this assembly, whether the churches which they represent, or with which they are connected, walk in the manner which has now been described. Have you reason to believe that all, or nearly all your members are walking in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost? Are the churches to which you belong, diligent and faithful in the performance of these duties which are incumbent on them as a body, or in their collective capacity?

Do they all consider the stated preaching of the gospel as the first necessary of life, and act accordingly? Is proper care taken to secure the religious education of children? Is discipline faithfully maintained, according to the rules of Christ's house? Is there no evil, no accursed thing tolerated among you? Are your members careful not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is? and do they reprove, exhort, and admonish each other, agreeably to the commands of Christ and their own covenant obligations?

If any of you are conscious that the churches which you represent, are not walking in this manner, permit me to ask, 2. How far is this melancholy and criminal deficiency owing to yourselves? From the fact, that your churches have selected you to represent them on this occasion, we infer, that you have some reputation and influence among them. Now have you done every thing, which it is in your power to do, to persuade and induce your brethren to walk in this manner? Are you walking yourselves in this manner?

If the Master, whom you profess to serve, were visibly present, would he say of each of you, This man does walk in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost? If not, can you say how far the declining state of the churches, which you represent, is imputable to yourselves, or how much, or how soon, their state might be improved by your example and exertions, were they such as they ought to be? 3. Permit me, with affectionate earnestness, to press upon every professed disciple of Christ here present, the importance, the indispensable necessity of walking himself, and of doing every thing in his power to induce his brethren to walk, in the manner which our text describes.

To this the providence, as well as the word of God, now calls us. For a long time the churches in this vicinity, as well as through New England, have enjoyed rest; rest, probably, much more undisturbed, and privileges far greater, than were ever enjoyed by the primitive Christians. Indeed, what they thought a calm, we should probably consider a storm. All they wished for was, to be exempted from the spoiling of their goods, from bonds and imprisonment, from the stake and the cross, and to have liberty to serve God in peace.

They never thought of requesting an ungodly world to assist them in building places for worship, in supporting the gospel, or even in providing for their poor. All these things they regarded it as a privilege, as well as a duty, to perform. Could they have been placed in such a situation as we are, they would have thought it rest indeed. And shall we then abuse the goodness of God, and ungratefully requite him for the rest which he affords us by neglecting to walk in his fear, and practically regarding the consolations of his Spirit as a light thing?

Shall we by misimproving a calm, provoke him to send us a storm? Shall we, by declining from our first love, and neglecting to repent, constrain him to remove our golden candlesticks out of their places? God forbid. Let us rather walk ourselves, and if possible, persuade the churches with which we are connected to walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. And let us not confine our exertions to our own churches, but endeavor to make this county, at least, as a fruitful field, and a well watered

garden.

Let those who are of us build the old wastes, and repair the desolation of former generations, assured that, if we water others, we shall in turn be watered ourselves. And O, that every member, every professor of religion present, may return with the spirit of a missionary, the spirit of primitive Christianity, glowing in his breast, and that his example and influence may work like leaven till all around him are leavened. And may God in mercy say to these churches, From this day forth I will bless you.

To conclude. From the subject before us, all present may learn much of the nature of true religion, and in what manner to distinguish it from its counterfeits. It consists in walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. These two things God has joined, and let no man attempt to put them asunder. He who does this, and teaches men to do it, shall he called least in the kingdom of heaven; that is, according to the Jewish idiom, shall never enter it. Beware then, my hearers, of making this separation yourselves; beware of all who attempt to make it.

Wherever you hear a man speaking loudly of his religious joys and consolations, while he does not exhibit corresponding evidence that he fears God; while he is careless in his conduct, vain and trifling in his conversation, and irreverent in his manner of speaking of God and of religious subjects, be assured that his joy is only that of the hypocrite, or of the stony ground hearer which shall endure but for a moment; and be not surprised, if you should afterwards see such a man fall away.

And on the other hand, when you hear a man profess to fear God, while he ridicules or denies the reality of the comforts of the Holy Ghost, be assured that he is one who, while he has the form of godliness, knows nothing of its power.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/the-churches-increased/>

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