

The Spirit of Power, of Love, and of a Sound Mind

by J.C. Philpot

God has not given us the spirit of fear, but has given us the power, love, and sound mind that we need to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Proverbs 2:6, 1 Corinthians 2:16, 2 Timothy 1:7, James 1:17, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the contrast between the spirit of fear, bondage, and darkness that does not come from God, and the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind that are gifts from God. He explains how a Christian possesses two sets of feelings - one bad and one good, and how certain feelings like guilt, distress, and fear may puzzle believers about their source. Philpot delves into the source and effects of slavish fear, emphasizing that God has not given us this fear, but can still work through it for our spiritual good. He then explores the blessings God has given - a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind, highlighting how these gifts enable believers to believe, love, and have a sound judgment in spiritual matters.

Transcript

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"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7

Every Christian who is at all acquainted with his own heart is conscious of possessing two distinct sets of feelings. He feels, for instance, that there dwell in him anger, pride, self-righteousness, carnality, worldly-mindedness, with a host of other evils; and that these are neither dying nor dead, but are alive in him to his sorrow; for he has more or less daily reason to groan under their burden, and to feel their miserable power and influence.

But on the other hand, so far as light and life are given to him to see and feel, he cannot but be conscious that he possesses another set of feelings, quite distinct- such as faith, hope, love, patience, humility, repentance, godly sorrow for sin, prayerfulness and spirituality of mind, with heavenly affections that often

carry his soul upward to God. For though these gracious and divine feelings may be obscured and buried for a time in clouds of mist and darkness, yet are they again and again revived and brought to light.

Now as he is conscious that he possesses those two distinct sets of feelings in his soul, so he has little difficulty in deciding of what nature those feelings are and whence they take their rise. He knows one set of them to be altogether bad, and the other to be altogether good; that one set proceeds wholly from sin and self, and the other wholly and solely from the grace and power of God.

But there are certain feelings in his soul of which he is doubtful what is their source, to what influence he is to ascribe and to whose account he shall place them. For instance, such feelings as guilt of conscience, distress of soul, bondage of spirit, slavish fear, perplexity and darkness, with many exercises that arise in the mind out of trial and temptation- what shall he say of these? What name shall he give them? Are they evil or are they good? Do they come from heaven, or from hell? Do they spring from grace or are they rooted in nature? How can he call them evil when he had them not in a state of nature, and when they seem- if not grace, at least to accompany grace? For he must come to this conclusion, that if he had no religion he would have no such exercises.

On the other hand, how can he say that they are good? They are not faith, nor hope, nor love, nor anything like these heavenly graces. They communicate no present enjoyment to his soul, nor do they seem to bring any glory to God. So he does not know what to make of them nor where to place them. Shall he call them good or evil? Shall he put them down to the flesh, or ascribe them to the Spirit? He hangs in uncertainty where he shall place them and what he shall think of them, and still more what he shall think of himself as under their power and influence.

I think the words before us may contribute, with God's help and blessing, to throw a little light upon these perplexing points.

The apostle declares, in the most plain and positive manner- "God has not given us the spirit of fear." He here lays down, with divine authority, that a certain spirit, which he calls the "spirit of fear," God has not given us; and he lays down by its side certain blessings that he says, with the same decisive authority, God has given us. Now what shall we say of anything in the heart which God has not given us? Can we say that it is good, spiritual, heavenly, saving, or divine? We cannot say so, for if "every good and perfect gift comes from God," then what God has not given us is neither good nor perfect. On the other hand, what shall we say of those things which God has given us- such as "a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind?" We must say of them that these are blessings indeed- choice gifts from the God of all grace.

I shall endeavor, with God's blessing, in opening up the words of our text, to cast a little light, as the Lord may enable me, upon those feelings which I have been speaking of as so puzzling and perplexing to the child of God, and shall endeavor to trace their source, how they arise, and to what they tend; why they are permitted, what good they bring about; and how, though not from God, they are made still to work for the soul's good. That will form with God's blessing, the first branch of my discourse this afternoon. I shall secondly, as the Lord may enable me, pass on to show what God has really given by his grace to those who fear his name, which I find the apostle sets down under three distinct heads- "A spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind."

I. What God has NOT given us. Fear, as spoken of in Scripture, and as felt in the experience of God's saints, is two-fold: there is a gracious, godly fear; and a slavish, carnal fear. Of gracious fear, we read thus- "I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me;" that it is "a fountain of life, to

depart from the snares of death;" and that it is "the beginning of wisdom." In fact, it is, as an old divine has called it, "a grace of the largest import;" for it contains in its bosom all other graces; and is of this peculiar nature, that the more the other graces of the Spirit flourish, the more does this grace flourish likewise. It lives in the closest union with faith; it thrives with a growing hope; flourishes with an increasing love. The more the Lord appears in his grace, the more does filial fear (for that is its best and truest name) flourish and abound in the soul; the deeper it sinks into the heart, the firmer root it takes; and the firmer the root, the nobler stem it raises, and the larger, more spreading, and more fruitful branches it sends forth on every side. It is not, therefore, of this holy, this filial fear that the Holy Spirit speaks by the pen of Paul, when he declares that God has not given it to us; for the Lord does give us that spirit of godly fear- it is one of his choicest graces; it is eminently good for him to give and us to receive, as being that grace whereby we are preserved from departing from him.

But there is a fear that does not come in the same way from God, which is not a new covenant grace, and yet is in the heart of those who fear God. What does this fear, then, spring from, for it must have some origin? Why, it springs from a sense of guilt, and is found to exist where the grace of God is not. We see it in Adam immediately after the fall. When Adam was in his unfallen condition, he could meet his Creator cheerfully and walk and talk with him as a man talks with his friend. But when Adam sinned and fell, fear, servile fear, became at once made manifest. He hid himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees in the garden. And why did he do this but because he feared to meet him?

When Cain slew his brother, this fear fell upon him, for he feared lest every one that found him should slay him. So it was with Saul, when he "fell immediately on the earth, and was sore afraid because of the words of Samuel;" so it was with Ahab; so with Herod, so with Judas; and so it will be to the end of the world; for to most men Death is the king of terrors. And what is this but a slavish, servile fear? God has not given a fear that has torment. And such is ever the mark of this slavish spirit of fear.

But not only have such characters as I have alluded to this servile, slavish fear, but the saints of God are also much under its influence; for as they are often under the influence of unbelief, so are they frequently under the influence of this, its bosom friend and partner.

1. But whence springs, what is the source of this kind of fear? It evidently arises from guilt of conscience. Were the conscience not guilty there would be no room for this fear in the heart. A guilty conscience is produced by the law, and therefore the law both generates and feeds this slavish fear. The law is ever telling us to "do and live;" and when it has thus set before us a task to perform which we can never execute, then it begins to curse us for not doing all that it requires, ever saying- "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Not being able, then, to perform what the law requires, we fall under the wrath that the law reveals, come under the curse that the law thunders out, and thus fall into bondage, darkness, and slavish fear before God.

2. Again, this spirit of slavish fear that God has not given to us is very much mingled with, as, in fact, it is much grounded upon, unbelief. Before our eyes and in our hands is the Gospel; there is Jesus Christ set forth in his blood and righteousness; and there are the promises, all full of mercy, grace, and truth. Here they all are- the table, as it were, spread with delicacies and luxuries. Why not come and eat? Why not approach and feast upon the gospel banquet? Why not sit under the shadow of Jesus with great delight and find his fruit sweet to your taste? Unbelief forbids. Unbelief keeps the soul back. Unbelief says, "It is not spread for you. You have no interest in this precious blood. True it is that it 'cleanses from all sin;' but it does not cleanse you from your sins. You have neither part nor lot in the matter." Therefore, though you

may see the righteousness of Jesus revealed in the word of truth, you cannot get under it; though you see the atoning blood, you cannot feel its application to your conscience; though you behold mercy and grace shining forth in the glorious person of Christ, yet cannot you bring that mercy and grace with divine power into your own soul; and while you cannot obtain pardon and peace, you feel your mind full of unbelief. Now wherever there is the presence and power of unbelief, there will be a spirit of fear, of this slavish, guilty fear, that holds the soul down in bondage, darkness, and death.

3. But again, this spirit of fear is often very much connected with backsliding and departing from the right ways of the Lord. There is not an individual under the influence of grace who does not more or less backslide in heart, lip, or life; in fact, every step we do not take forward, we really take backward; and every moment we are not enjoying the sweet presence of God, we are living to sin and self. To do this is to backslide. Whenever we cease to come to the Fountain of living waters and begin to hew out for ourselves "cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"- this is to backslide. We may not be given up to great, grievous, and open backslidings. The Lord may and usually does keep the feet of his saints, and preserves them from the commission of sins that might grievously injure their character, wound the cause, and bring much distress upon their own souls. But apart from this, all do more or less wander or backslide in their feelings from God. A sense of this produces guilt of conscience; and from this guilt comes slavish fear.

4. But again, worldliness of mind, being too much occupied in business, or unduly carried away with the cares and anxieties of life, producing a neglect of seeking the Lord's face and calling upon his name, and getting as a necessary consequence into a cold, lifeless, stupid state of soul, when all the life and power of godliness seem for a time buried and lost- all these things, as they produce guilt of conscience, so they open the door for this spirit of slavish fear.

In this state there is little or no access to God, the Bible is a sealed book, the company of God's saints little sought, the Lord himself much forsaken, his presence seldom felt, and his love rarely or scarcely ever shed abroad. Many of the saints of God seem to go on for much of their lives under the continual influence of this spirit of fear, and rarely feel any enjoyment of the things of God. And so they go on sometimes year after year without any liberty, sweetness, or spiritual consolation; pressed and kept down by the slavish fear that works in them, and brings forth fruit unto death.

Now God has not given us this spirit of fear. It does not proceed from his grace. It is not the fruit of the Spirit. It is not wrought by his own divine hand in the soul. And yet though it is not a grace or a gift, the Lord in a wonderful way overrules it and makes it work for spiritual good. It is the same with this as with some other kindred feelings. Who can say that he has not derived benefit from guilt of conscience? What made you first pray- seek the Lord's face- cry for mercy through a Savior's blood? Guilt of conscience.

What made you first come to hear the gospel, or at least receive the truth contained in it as suitable to your wants and woes? What made you mourn and sigh in secret, and hang down your head overwhelmed with gloom and trouble? What made life a burden to you, what stripped the world of all its fancied charms, dissolved all its magic, and showed you in its true colors what this scene was and what happiness it could give? Guilt of conscience.

What kept you from resting upon a name to live- on an empty profession- on a mere doctrinal acquaintance with the truth? What made you long for something that you never had felt, experienced, tested, or known? What made you feel dissatisfied with all your own experience and everything that others

seemed so well satisfied with? Why was there in your mind a secret condemnation of the whole of your religion, first and last? Why were you afraid at times that you were a hypocrite, and had been deceiving others, or were deceived yourself? And why did you feel miserable, and wretched, so that you thought none could be burdened like you? Guilt of conscience.

What, too, made you to give the Lord no rest until he began to appear in love and mercy to your soul, and what made you ply him with his own promises and come to the throne of grace with earnest desires that he would show mercy to you? Why, guilt of conscience. So you see that guilt of conscience, though it is the parent of this slavish fear, yet does produce in the hands of God good effects; and you have had the evidence of it in your own hearts.

In the same way, servile fear, though it makes a man who is under its influence very wretched and miserable, debars him of much comfort and peace, and robs him of much that other Christians seem to enjoy, yet has this good effect- it keeps him from false liberty. There is a presumptuous liberty, much of it in our day- a liberty God never gave and which he will never own- a liberty of the flesh, arising out of a mere notional and doctrinal acquaintance with God's truth. Now servile fear, though it produces bondage and darkness will keep the man who is under its influence from taking hold of this presumptuous liberty, because false liberty and slavish fear can never reign and rule together in the heart. One must go down before the other. Either presumptuous liberty will turn slavish fear out of the house, or slavish fear will be the death of presumptuous liberty. They cannot both dwell as friends and brethren in the same heart; they cannot both be masters. If you are under the influence of slavish fear, you cannot be under the influence of presumptuous liberty. If presumptuous liberty rules and reigns in your heart, it will never tolerate the presence and power of slavish fear. So that if you have been kept from presumptuous liberty, it may have been in a good measure owing to that wretched fear that has worked such bondage, and darkness, and death in your soul.

And yet the apostle tells us, "God has not given us the spirit of fear." Then how can we view the spirit of fear as a benefactor or a friend if it does not come from God? Well, do you think God has given you unbelief? Has God given you temptations? Has God given you infidelity? Has God given you darkness of mind? Has God given you bondage of spirit? None of these things God has given you; and yet, in God's mysterious way, these things are continually over-ruled by his grace and made to work great benefits in the soul. Who sent Job his temptations? Was it God? It was indeed with the permission of God; but they were not sent directly or immediately from his hand. They came from Satan, as we find in the 1st and 2nd chapters. And yet they were made a great blessing to Job. So a spirit of fear- the slavish bondage that your soul may perhaps even now be under- the fears of death that you may be terrified with- the terrors and apprehensions of eternal wrath- your dread lest you be a hypocrite in the things of God- God has not revealed these things as mercies and blessings that flow from his gospel, nor has his Spirit wrought them in you by his grace. Yet there they are; and the Lord may and does work by them, and out of this evil bring forth good, as he does out of a thousand other things.

Here is this terrible rebellion in India. At present all is dark. The tempest is still roaring, and we cannot see clearly through the storm; but after it has passed away, we may see great good come out of it. We may see England's power established there as it never was before. We may see idolatry put down to an amazing extent and the devil defeated and outshot with his own bow. I do not say that it will be so. We cannot prophesy in matters of this nature. But if we cannot prophesy as regards temporal things, we may as regards spiritual. You may have had a little India in your own heart. War and fire and massacre may have been going on there; and you may have thought, "What good can ever come out of all this scene of

confusion and trouble?" Yet good has already, could you see it, come out of it, and still further good will come out of it; for God's prerogative is to bring good out of evil. Therefore, though God has not given you by his Spirit and grace the servile fear which the text speaks of, yet there it is; and God may and does work by it and bring good out of it.

It is called, I may just remark, "the spirit of fear," because it is so subtle, so energetic, and so penetrating into all the corners of the heart; this being the character of spirit as opposed to flesh. Flesh is lumpish and heavy, does not easily move; but spirit, like the wind after which it is called, acts and moves everywhere. So the spirit of fear is used to denote that subtle energy and that penetrating activity which servile fear exercises in a man- possessing him, as it were, and piercing into every secret recess and corner, and bringing him under its direct and powerful influence, as the wind acts on the sails of a ship.

II. But I pass on to consider what I proposed to speak of in the second place- What God HAS given us. Three things are spoken of in our text, all of which are meant by the apostle to stand in opposition to the spirit of fear. The three blessings that God has given us, and which are direct opposites to the spirit of fear that we have been considering, are- Power; Love; and a Sound Mind. These we will view separately.

A. "POWER" is the grand distinctive characteristic of the gospel of the grace of God. It is therefore declared to be "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes;" and the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of Christ administered here below in and by the gospel, is said to be "not in word but in power." "I will know," the apostle says, "not the speech of those who are puffed up, but the power." The apostle was very jealous over his own preaching, as he tells us he was with the Corinthians "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling;" and this was a part of his godly jealousy, lest their faith might not "stand in the power of God."

But you will ask- "What is power?" To answer this question, we may put another- What is power as we usually understand the term? It is some movement, force, or influence, put forth by an agent, whatever that agent might be. We speak, for instance, of "water-power." Running in yonder valley is a stream of water; as this approaches the town, it is penned up and a wheel is put in a certain direction to meet the current. The water now acts upon the wheel; the wheel turns; and we call the moving cause "water-power." Or we see a locomotive move upon the railway. Our fathers would have stared with astonishment to see a train moving, as it were, of itself. They would have thought it little else than a miracle. We know the cause. We know that steam has been controlled and brought under man's direction so as to exert a certain power, which power is made manifest in dragging an enormous weight at an enormous velocity. This we call "steam-power." Now if the water never turned the wheel- if the steam never moved the locomotive, how could we say that there was power in either water or steam?

Take the idea into grace. Here before our eyes and in our hands is the Scripture, the pure word of God. Now unless the word of God acts upon a man's heart as the water acts upon the wheel, or as the steam upon the locomotive, there is nothing done. And that is the case with hundreds and thousands. They read the Scripture or hear the Scripture read, but nothing is done, at least as regards salvation. There is no divine power put forth, and no power being put forth nothing is produced of a divine nature. But God acts by his word upon the hearts of his saints, and he acts with power; for his work is a powerful work, produces powerful effects, and leads to powerful results. This, then, is what God is here said to have given us- "the spirit of power."

We will now, with God's blessing, examine a little more closely how this power acts; for it is the power of God's Spirit- the operation of his grace; or, to speak more correctly, it is the power of God himself upon the heart of man. For as the water acts upon the wheel, as the steam acts upon the locomotive, so does God, through the word of his grace, act upon the soul of man. "Of his own will he begat us through the word of truth." "The word of God is quick and powerful." "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty." Let us apply this.

1. Here is a poor guilty sinner, in his own feelings justly condemned to die. Burdened by guilt, he is under the influence of that slavish fear of which I have spoken- for you must take the two in opposition to each other as the apostle places them, power and fear. He cannot believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or in his own saving interest in him, though he would gladly do so; nor can he lift himself up or out of that sunken state into which he has been cast by guilt of conscience. He trembles at the wrath to come. He fears death and hell; but he cannot deliver himself from the fears that work in his guilty conscience.

Now what does this man need? He is helpless and almost hopeless. He therefore needs the Lord to put forth a power in his soul that he himself cannot exercise; and when the Lord is pleased by the word of his grace to put forth this power and to raise up a living faith in that man's heart, then he can believe. Nor can he believe to any effectual purpose until the Lord gives power; for his faith, if it be genuine faith, is "to stand in the power of God," and it cannot stand in the power of God unless it first be in the power of God. You must be in a place before you can stand in it. God gives that soul power to believe, and then he does believe; and that is power.

2. But his servile fears have almost kept him down even from hoping that matters would one day be otherwise with him- from hoping in the grace of God. Nor can he, so long as he is in slavish fear, raise up "a good hope through grace" in his soul; for if it comes through grace, and he has not any sensible communication of grace, he cannot have a good hope. He may have a hope, but he can hardly be said to have a good hope; and while under the influence of slavish fear, he often does not dare to hope. Though he is not in despair he is in despondency; nor can he get beyond a dim and distant hope that his soul may be saved. But when the Lord puts forth power by applying a promise to his soul, or by giving him strength to believe in the Lord Jesus, he raises up a good hope; for grace, that is, the free favor of God, comes into his heart, and then he has power to hope in the Lord of life and glory. He is now enabled to loosen the anchor from the ship and to cast it forth into firm holding ground. The anchor was there before, but he had no power to let it go; and thus it could not take hold of the wounds of Jesus or enter within the veil.

3. Nor had he power to love. He would love, but could not. We cannot love the Lord until we know that the Lord loves us; nor can we love him with all our heart and soul until he tells us that he loves us with all his. When he says "I have loved you with an everlasting love," and sheds abroad his love in the soul, this gives power to love him. When, too, he sets himself before our eyes in his divine beauty and blessedness, this makes us fall in love with him. For beauty kindles love. It is so often in natural love, and always so in divine.

4. Nor can we submit to God's will, if that will crosses our own. Many a dear saint of God would be reconciled to his heavenly Father's will, but cannot, for he feels a rebellious heart; and while his heart is full of rebellion there is no power to submit. This power must be given of God; and the Lord sometimes does in rich and tender mercy give it. He has but to speak and it is done; he has but to touch the heart and it softens; he has but to appear and the soul melts at the sight. Thus is power given to submit to God's will in opposition to our own.

So might I run through the whole list of divine graces, such as a spirit of prayer and supplication, spirituality of mind and heavenliness of affections, fighting against sin and Satan, crucifying the lusts of the flesh, putting off the old man, putting on the new, and with him the whole armor of God, and remaining faithful unto the end. We have no ability to do any of these things, except as God gives us inward power; and this strength he makes perfect in our weakness.

When we are come to the end of all our own power, we are only come to the beginning of God's. When we see an end of all our own perfection, then only do we begin to see the beginning of Christ's beauty and glory. And when all creature loveliness and all native goodness fades and comes to nothing, then the beauty and blessedness of the person, work, love, and blood of Jesus begin to open to our admiring view.

B. But I pass on to show the second thing which the apostle tells us God has given us in opposition to the Spirit of fear; and that is the spirit of LOVE. Now love is a grace that may be counterfeited, like all other graces; but to give a real spirit of divine love and affection is as much beyond the power of Satan as it is beyond his will.

1. There is no sweeter or surer mark of being savingly interested in the blood of Jesus than to love him with a pure heart fervently; for we certainly never can truly and spiritually love him unless he has first loved us. This is the express declaration of the Holy Spirit- "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This made Paul say, "Who loved me and gave himself for me." Nor will our affections ever flow unto his glorious person, blood, and work, until we have had some divine discovery of these blessings to our heart and conscience.

We may try to love him; we may think it our duty to do so, and may be exercised and perplexed in our mind for our want of it; we may be secretly ashamed of our miserable coldness, and may lament our barrenness in this blessed grace. But no power of our own can raise up true love to Jesus and to what he is in himself. The spirit of love and affection to the Lord comes from the power of God put forth, springs immediately from the communications of his grace, and especially from the visitations of Christ to the soul. He always comes with love in his heart and hands, and never departs without leaving love behind him.

We read, "Because of the savor of your good ointments, your name is as the ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love you." When once the ointment is poured forth, the box that held it may be taken away, but the smell of the ointment still remains; as it was in the case of the woman who anointed the Redeemer's feet, when the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. So wherever Jesus has come in his Spirit and grace, when he departs he still leaves behind the savor of his presence, as the ointment poured forth. If, therefore, the virgins love him because his name is "as ointment poured forth" when he visits them with his presence, they love him no less for the sweetness he leaves behind when he departs.

2. Nor can we love the children of God except the Lord lays them upon our affections. Our hearts are by nature cold and selfish; we have no knowledge who the saints of God are, nor have we any sympathy with them, any delight in their company, any feeling towards them in their distress, or any union with them in their joy. We must love first him who begat, and then we shall love those who are begotten by him. We love the Master and then we love the servant; we love the head and then we love the members; we love Jesus and then we love those whom Jesus loves and who love him.

Thus to love is of grace, God's special gift, as the text declares; and by this as a sure evidence "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death."

You may think yourself a great Christian- you may boast of your deep experience; but if you do not love the saints of God, there are no present marks of the grace of God being in your heart. And if you love the saints of God, you will manifest it in your words and actions, and will show that you do love them by manifesting that brotherly affection, tenderness, forbearance, and sympathy, without which Christian love is but a name.

3. Nor can you love the Word of God except as it is made precious to your soul. You cannot love the preaching of the gospel unless it be commended to your conscience, unless it is full of sweetness and unction, and falls like dew upon your heart. If the preaching of the gospel brings peace to your soul, fills your heart with sweet and blessed feelings, melts your spirit in humility and love, makes Christ precious, dispels your doubts, removes your fears, and sheds abroad a little heaven within, you will love it because, as the power of God, it does all this for you. Otherwise you will be cold and indifferent towards it. It will be to you as it is to hundreds- a mere sound of words that neither sanctifies nor saves.

Likewise in reading the Scriptures. If you love the Scripture, you will be reading it; if you love the promises, you will be searching how you may find more and more power, sweetness, and life in them. If you love prayer, you will be much in prayer; if you love meditation and secret communion with the Lord, you will get away from everything else that you may enjoy more and more of it. You may know a man by his friends. A man will keep the company he loves. And so you may know a saint of God by the company he keeps, by the books he reads, by the people he loves, and by those fruits of righteousness which alone are found upon the gospel bough.

C. The last thing spoken of in our text as the special gift of God, is the spirit of "a SOUND MIND." What a mercy it is naturally to have a sound mind! It is one of the greatest temporal blessings that God can bestow upon a man. It is far better than intellect, imagination, poetical gift, or reasoning power. And how wretched it is to have an unsound mind! a mind in the least degree diseased, eccentric, or in any way tainted with those delusive fancies which mar all comfort and often lead to the worst of consequences. "A sound mind in a sound body," the heathen used to consider, in one of their proverbs, are the greatest blessings their gods could give. But however great be the blessing of a healthy body, a healthy mind as much exceeds it in value as it is superior to it in nature.

How you see men ruining themselves every day for lack of a sound mind! What extravagance, what folly are they daily committing! What disorder they bring upon their families, upon their property, and upon others also- what havoc and ruin from being crazed with some fancy or wild delusion! But the apostle is not here speaking of a sound mind in natural things, because though that is a most valuable temporal gift, it is not spiritual grace- it is a sound mind in the things of God that he joins in union with power and love. And I must say that I look upon this gift from heaven as an inestimable mercy to the church of God.

We are often reproached with being fanatics, enthusiasts, and people of a wild imagination, carried and led away by airy flights, without any sobriety of judgments or soundness of mind. I consider that no charge was ever more false or more misdirected. I consider that those of us who know the truth of God by divine teaching are eminently people of a sound mind eminently free from superstition, fanaticism, enthusiasm, or wild imaginations and delusive fancies. I never had sounder mind in my life than I have at this moment, and I am sure my religion has not made my mind unsound. It has made my mind sound naturally as well as spiritually, for it has cured me of a thousand airy fancies and wild ambitious desires, and given me sobriety in natural things as well as in spiritual.

To possess, then, the spirit of a "sound mind" is to have a sound judgment in the things of God- not to be drawn aside by every passing opinion- not to be allured by every novel doctrine- not to be charmed by every fresh device of the wicked one- not to be caught by every one of his flesh-pleasing snares; but to have that sobriety of judgment and holy wisdom in the things of God, with that fixedness of heart upon the Lord Jesus, and that solid experience of his Spirit and grace, as shall keep us from errors and delusions on the right hand and on the left.

Unless we have this spiritual sobriety, this ripe and matured judgment, and this firm establishment in the truth of God, we are almost sure to be drawn aside into some error or other. Satan will somehow deceive us as an angel of light. He will impose upon us some of his heresies and present them to our minds with such plausibility that they shall appear to be in accordance with the scriptures; he will puff us up with pride and presumption; he will draw us off the firm and safe ground of spiritual experience, to entangle us in a maze of confusion and error; he will beguile our minds with some of his subtle deceits, and lead us off that foundation which God has laid in Zion, and upon which all his saints have ever stood; and by working upon our Pharisaical or Antinomian mind, withdraw us away from the glorious truths that all the preachers of righteousness have ever taught. If we have not the spirit of a sound mind, we shall mistake a false experience for a true one- natural feelings for spiritual- the workings of pride and self-righteousness for the workings of the Spirit of God- and the deceits of the devil for the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

But where there is a sound mind- and that there ever will be, more or less, where there is spiritual light, divine life, gracious feeling, and a conscience made tender by God's fear- there will be a sound faith, a sound hope, a sound love, a sound repentance, and a sound work of grace upon the heart from first to last. To have a sound mind is to have a mind deeply imbued and vitally impregnated with the truth of God; and as that truth is the only really solid and enduring substance under the sun, it follows that those who know it experimentally for themselves are the only people really possessed of soundness of mind; for they only take right and sound views of all things and all events, natural and spiritual, and have, as the apostle says, "the mind of Christ."

You see, then, what God has not given, and what he has given. The gospel does not give us slavish fear, bondage, darkness, and death. The gospel does not preach to us wrath, condemnation, and hell. The gospel does not hold out curses and punishment and misery. This is not the gospel message, the gospel tenor, or the gospel spirit. The law does this, but the gospel does it not. The gospel holds forth and reveals Christ. The gospel proclaims pardon and peace, salvation and deliverance through atoning blood and justifying righteousness. And the gospel when applied to the heart by the Spirit of God, becomes "a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind." To possess these three salient blessings is to possess true religion, vital godliness, real spirituality- a religion such as will save the soul from death and hell. To have this made vitally known is to have the religion of Abel, of Enoch, of Noah, of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of all the ancient martyrs, of all the apostles and prophets, and of that innumerable company that John saw in vision, "with palms in their hands," who had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." All these had a religion given them of God; and though they may have had, as we may have had or still have, their servile fears, their slavish doubts, their miserable guilt of conscience, their dark and gloomy hours of bondage, yet they all possessed the "spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind." And such is ever the effect of God's grace, as wrought by his own divine power in the heart.

The question for us to ask ourselves is, how far we are partakers of this divine religion? We may have slavish fear, guilt, bondage, darkness, and death. Though these are felt by many a child of God, and by all during different periods of their spiritual life, yet are they not evidences of our being partakers of grace?

Have we "the spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind?" Have we any reason to believe that God by his grace has wrought anything in our hearts of a saving nature? If we have, it will be proved as such. We shall have the enjoyment here, and to him will be rendered here and hereafter all the praise, honor, and glory due to his glorious and blessed name.

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