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"Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men."

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### DIVINITY.

#### THE FEAR OF THE LORD A PRESERVATIVE FROM RUIN.

Concluded.

2. But Solomon in *his* speaks of the snares of death. Let us then enquire what those snares are, and where they are laid.

By the world snares in this place, we may understand those allurements and temptations which are held out to catch and ruin the soul.

Of these, there is a variety to suit every taste, temper, and situation.

The men of the world are skilful in the art of deception. Satan the subtle enemy has a boundless store of devices, and a busy set of agents to draw you into the traps and gins he has laid. None are so much endangered, as are those who are seduced and overcome, as the young and the unsuspecting.

There are some fine-spun snares calculated to warp the mind from the best principles, and entangle it in the worst errors. Into such errors the ignorant and inexperienced are often drawn step by step, before they are aware of the consequences. Perhaps they are first pleased with curious questions, and afterwards bewildered with refined subtilities and quibbles in the shape of arguments. There are many snares prepared to lure and captivate the imagination. We see in too many instances, how easily the youthful fancy is caught with novelty, wealth and splendour. Many snares are baited to attract the animal passions and appetites. How often is the venom that destroys the soul conveyed through those narrow inlets, the senses. To enumerate even half the snares that beset your path exceeds my power.

Do you ask, where are these snares laid? I reply.

Sometimes they are laid in books. I love to see in young people a taste for reading, yet it needs to be well directed. Thousands of volumes are easily to be found, that are filled with matter worse than most deadly poison, yet mixed with a high seasoning of wit and humour. Many young people eagerly seize plays, novels, idle tales, and such other things as tend wholly to unsettle their thoughts, vitiate and corrupt their passions, and open their way into the haunts of dissipation. Be careful, my young friends, what books you choose: you may wish something to entertain you, and call that dry reading which does not suit your taste. Yet remember it is, not what is most agreeable at first, but that which will prove most useful in the end, ought to be chosen both for the body and the mind. If we frequently give a child luscious sweetmeats, we make it loathe the wholesome food, and by pampering the appetite destroy its health. You may indeed find many books that instruct and entertain at the same time, and if you consult your well-informed and serious friends, they will gladly direct you to them.

Deadly snares are often laid among companions. Young people are powerfully influenced by example. They catch, as if by sudden contagion, the sentiments and the language of those around them. Bad examples have always been numerous, but good ones very scarce. Be not then too eager to get into an extensive acquaintance. You cannot be too cautious in the choice of your associates. How many have been unwarily linked in with gay, dissipated companions, and by their smooth words, and corrupt ways, led to ruin. The wise man gives this needful advice, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not;" *Prov. i. 10-17*. Beware then of following vain or vicious persons, whatever attractions they may possess. It is a maxim which daily observation confirms, "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

There are many snares in the concerns of business. Religion indeed is no friend to idleness. We are commanded to be both diligent in business, and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. The most dangerous condition, is to be wholly unemployed, and gi-

ven up to indolence. Yet there are few callings, and worldly pursuits, that are not attended with some temptations and snares. It is necessary that most persons should engage in business, but the evil is in being carried away by the crooked maxims, loose manners, and selfish spirit of the world. How many promising young men, while they imagine they only launch boldly into trade, are also launching into the dangerous tide of dissipation. While they are gaining ground in the world, they are losing almost every advantage of a religious education.

There are many snares laid among the amusements pursued by the young. We cannot, say you, be always tied to learning and labour. I know it. Relaxation is allowable, because in a due degree it is useful. But the gay amusements of the world are generally the first inlets to folly and profligacy. I believe most young people begin to indulge in them with the intention of not going too far. When however they are or so drawn within the whirl of fashionable diversions, it is no easy matter to escape the gulph in which other have been swallowed up and lost. What numbers, for instance, have begun to play cards, merely to pass away a few hours of time or imitate those around them; who at length have been brought to boggery and desperation by gaming.

3. I shall shew how the fear of the Lord guards you from the snares of death.

1. Godly fear will preserve you from destruction, because it will render you watchful.

Those who, by the flattering charms of the world, and the wiles of Satan, are lulled into slumber, so as to forget that death and judgment are hastening to meet them, are in the greatest danger. Let us not sleep, but watch and be sober. Remember that the bait of temptation is so artfully disposed, as to conceal the hook. The pit-falls and traps of vice are covered with flowers. The crafty Fowler stands hid behind the bush, till his hapless victim is entangled. Now, holy fear will induce you to ponder the path of your feet, that your goings may be established. Even the falls and miscarriages of others, will then put you on your guard. Holy vigilance will make you turn away your eyes from beholding vanity, and your feet from pursuing folly. Many plead for what they call little indulgences, and pretend we should not notice slight deviations. But it is the little thief (as Bishop Hopkins says) that creeps in at the window, who opens the door to the whole gang that stands waiting without. You can only be safe while every avenue is watchfully guarded.

2. Godly fear will render you devout, and thus keep you from destruction.

A due sense of your liability to error, your weakness and insufficiency, will urge you to a throne of grace, to seek for guidance and strength. It is said, "Cornelius feared God, and his prayers and alms ascended as a memorial before him." He who never prays, is like a man going a long journey, who never asks which is the right way, but always, taking the road that appears the smoothest, goes astray. If you fear the Lord, you must not only flee from the wrath to come, but also ask your way to Zion with your face thitherward. "He," says Dr. Owen, "who prays as he ought, will endeavour to live as he prays. He that can live in sin, and abide in the ordinary duties of prayer, never prays as he ought. A truly gracious praying frame is inconsistent with the love of, or reserve for, any sin."

3. Godly fear will lead you to solid happiness, and thus rescue you from seeking vain pleasure in the way of danger. The ardent, youthful mind must either have something to enjoy, or something to expect; something in possession or something in pursuit. Now piety furnishes both. My text tells you, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." This fountain is always at hand, always free of access, always full and overflowing. After tasting that the Lord is gracious, you will not be so much tempted to dip into every muddy stream, or drink in iniquity as the ox drinketh in water. Do you earnestly pray

for divine grace, and rejoice in the Saviour's presence? Then you will assuredly be preserved from the paths of the destroyer.

The following are the words of the celebrated Sir Matthew Hale, who, both as an upright judge and a sincere christian, was one of the brightest ornaments of his age: "They who truly fear God, have a secret guidance from a higher wisdom than what is barely human, namely, the Spirit of truth and goodness, which does really, though secretly, prevent and direct them. Any man that sincerely and truly fears Almighty God, and calls and relies upon him for direction, has it as really as a son has the counsel and direction of a father, and though the voice be not audible, nor discernible by sense, yet it is equally real, as if a man heard a voice saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.'"

"The observance of this secret admonition of the Spirit of God in the heart, is an affectual means to cleanse and sanctify us; and the more it is attended to, the more it will be conversant with our souls, for their instruction. In the midst of difficulties, it will be our counsellor, in the midst of temptations, it will be our strength, and grace sufficient for us; in the midst of trouble, it will be our light and comfort."

I shall now sum up the hints dropped in this discourse, in a few words of exhortation.

1. I exhort you, my young friends, to think of the dreadful consequences of living and dying without penitence and without pardon. When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death. When God's judgments are opened and displayed to view, as written in the threatenings of the word, irreligious and presumptuous men are apt to cry out, When shall these terrible things be? The subtle serpent whispers, as to our first parents, ye shall not die; for 'all the flattering delusions of that temper are but the old lie new minted, and stamped with fresh flourishes and devices to beguile. But will you believe the devil, rather than the God of truth? Will you banish all serious thoughts about the things that belong to your peace? Let me affectionately entreat you to weigh well the testimonies of the divine word. If any of you should turn away with levity and contempt from the language of exhortation, resolving to go on in your evil ways, I must faithfully tell you before hand, what will be the end of your course. If there is one truth in the Bible, you must drink up, even to the dregs, the cup of divine wrath. O what pangs will pierce you in the hour of death! Think how you shall appear before that God, who has been a witness of all your actions, words, and thoughts! What can you urge to justify you? Ah! you must stand speechless, and sink under the burden of your guilt, without hope. How can you escape, if you neglect the great salvation?

2. I exhort you to think upon the dangerous snares that beset your path. Do not suppose that these cautions are needless. The broad way, the way of an ungodly world, is hung with enchanting allurements, and seducing charms, but still it leadeth to destruction. Be not then deluded with glittering appearances, nor intoxicated with sensual delights, nor entangled in worldly cares. There are some errors drawn out, like the spider's web to catch the heedless. Beware of those who would amuse you with such notions as feed pride, rather than promote humility; and slacken holy diligence instead of quickening it. Such persons have often art enough to gain the confidence of the young, and softly wind around them one silken fetter after another, till they are entirely led away captive.

Think seriously of the danger that lies in the indulgence of the flesh. Keep at a safe distance from the realms of intemperance and wantonness. Do not venture to draw a little nearer and nearer, under the persuasion that you can stop at what point you please. You neither know your own weakness, nor the power of temptation. The descent in paths of vice is easy, but a return is difficult. Would you not rather have a dry crust with a blessing in it,