

exciting the displeasure of one who is not only so holy and so good, but so righteous and so terrible in majesty.—Now, this fear of God is wisdom. Such a fear, man could not of himself have imagined to be possible. He could never have supplied the vinculum or bond between fear and love: he could never have discovered how these were possible in the case of the sinner and God. But God has revealed how; and he now pronounces that such fear is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. The fear of God (still consistent with confidence and love), is wisdom, because God is to be feared. It is wisdom because it is just what ought to be. It consists with the very fitness of things. Must not that being be worthy of fear who exists of himself, by his own necessity of being, and who made all things; that being whose majesty is faintly symbolized in the glory of creation; whose majestic footsteps are beheld in the operations of providence—who has impressed his presence in the visible heavens, the most magnificent object we have to contemplate, in the sun, and in all the vast and sublime objects of nature? If he is not to be feared, then reverence or fear is not a sentiment of our heart. Read any of the descriptions of God's majesty in the psalms, and then say if God is not to be feared. Are the attributes of spotless holiness and unerring rectitude not worthy of veneration? do they not inspire awe? Have we never felt "how awful goodness is"? We shall one day feel it, if we do not feel it now. We shall see how terrible God is on his throne of holiness! Is his power not an object of reverence or fear, power which could crush the universe in a moment, and make his righteousness glorious in the destruction of his enemies? God is to be feared even in the meeting of his saints. What veneration inspires the Angels when they cover their faces before the throne! Nor is this expression adequate to the feeling by which they are actuated. All heaven responds to the sentiment, and the mighty host are even now bending before him, and crying to one another, "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." Surely, then it is wise to fear God: "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom."

But it is wisdom, because it is the best safeguard against sin; and it is surely wisdom to cherish what will protect us from it. That surely is the highest wisdom. Sin is the greatest of all evils.—

There is nothing so much to be hated and shunned. And yet, that evil is in our own hearts. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. And what can so effectually defend us against such an evil as the fear of God? That sentiment continually abiding with us would deter us from the commission of sin, or the indulgence of it even in the thought. It is the description of the wicked, that they have no fear of God before their eyes, and therefore they are wicked. Men could not endure wickedness, they could not indulge or encourage it for a moment, if they had the fear of God before them. Our Saviour enjoins the fear of God upon us for this very end: "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear. Fear Him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into Hell; yea, I say unto you fear Him." The early churches *walked in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and were multiplied.* There is no evil against which we are safe, if destitute of the fear of God. But "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil." "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." Therefore it must be wisdom.—Hence the parallelism here: "to depart from evil is understanding." "Grant me understanding," says the Psalmist, "and I shall keep thy law." To depart from evil is understanding as contradistinguished from a different course. It is awful folly to commit sin. It is folly in itself, and it is folly when considered in its consequences. These consequences are misery now, and, if unrepented of, eternal misery hereafter. Is it not folly to do that which is to occasion future misery, perhaps eternal woe? Remember, by every sin you are planting an additional sting in your bosoms, an additional thorn in your dying pillow, and treasuring up for yourselves, if not saved in God's mercy, wrath against the day of wrath. But if we would avoid sin, we must avoid temptation, and this is also implied in the expression to "depart from evil." Accordingly, it is said, "the wise man forsooth the evil, and fleeth from it." And Solomon, the wisest of men, admonishes us to "enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men—to avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not unless they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken from them unless