

Rev. 1:17-18. Fear and Its Remedy

by Horatius Bonar

Christ's glory and majesty are overwhelming, but He comforts His people with His power, authority, and declaration of eternal life.

Scripture: Revelation 1:17

Topics: "Fear", "Comfort in Christ"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the profound encounter of John with the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:17-18, where John's fear leads him to fall as dead before the Lord. Christ reassures him with a gentle touch and the words 'Fear not,' revealing His eternal nature as the First and the Last, the Living One who conquered death. Bonar highlights the importance of recognizing Christ's glory and His role as the source of life, comfort, and authority over death and hell. This vision serves as a reminder for believers to find strength and peace in the knowledge of who Christ is, especially in times of fear and uncertainty. Ultimately, Bonar encourages the congregation to embrace the living Christ, who holds the keys to life and death, and to cast away their fears.

Transcript

"And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He who lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen--and have the keys of hell and of death." --Revelation 1:17, 18.

The spirit of this book, as of all others written by God, is the 'testimony of Jesus.' It bears witness to him throughout--to His person, His work, His kingdom. Here are things both new and old concerning Him. He is the Revealer, and He is the revealed One; the Teacher and the lesson; the Sower and the seed. In the marvelous visions of this prophecy respecting Him and His kingdom, faith has much to rest on, and hope much to feed on. They are worthy of all study--and 'blessed is he who reads.'

The three things in this passage which need our notice, are--

- (1) The vision.
- (2.) The apostle's alarm.
- (3.) The comfort administered by Christ.

I. The VISION. "And when I SAW Him." That which John saw was real; so that of it he could say, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you' (I John 1:1). He saw the Lord; and he knew that it was He. He 'beheld His glory' (John 1:14). It was this same glorious Christ that Isaiah saw upon His throne (Isaiah 6:1-3). It was He whom Ezekiel saw in His majesty, seated in the chariot of the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:24, 26; I Chronicles 28:18; Psalm 18:10). It was He whom Daniel saw 'clothed in linen,' and 'girded with gold,' and resplendent as the lighting (Daniel 10:5,6). It was a vision of the Son of man--not as He was in the day of His weakness and sorrow--but as He now is in the day of His might and gladness. A glimpse of this glory John had seen, some sixty years before, on the transfiguration mountain--but hastily and with dazzled eyes. This was more prolonged and complete--intended, moreover, for a steadier gaze.

It was the very Son of man who stood beside him, even He who, though 'crucified through weakness, lives by the power of God;' even He who died, and was buried, and rose again, and ascended into the heavens, and sits in glory at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. He appears now clothed in flowing clothing, and girt with a golden belt. His head and hair are of effulgent whiteness; His eyes like flames; His feet like glowing brass; His voice like many waters; seven stars in His right hand; a glittering sword flashing from His mouth; His face like the noonday sun!

It was a vision of wondrous splendor--very unlike what John had been accustomed to see in Christ; unlike the son of the carpenter; unlike the Man of sorrows, with his much-marred visage; unlike the crucified criminal, with bleeding head, and pierced hands and feet. In this heavenly vision, all that was feeble and earthly, all that was sad, and bruised, and weary, had passed away, like clouds passing from the sun, and leaving it to give forth the fullness of its radiance. He seemed now clothed with heaven itself, in all its majesty and brightness!

A vision like this suited John well in his lonely exile. The last of the apostles--the sorrowful survivor of a whole generation of beloved ones, most of whom had died the martyr's death--persecuted for his Lord's sake--how cheering for him to be thus reminded that He, for whose sake he suffers, is the GLORIOUS One! It suited no less the seven Churches to whom he wrote--sustaining them in their sufferings, rousing them from their sloth, and rebuking them for their loss of first love and early faith. It suits us no less in these last days. We need to be reminded of the glory of Him whom we are following. It will comfort us in tribulation; it will shame us out of unfaithfulness; it will nerve us for battle and for toil; it will quicken, and invigorate, and purify.

II. The apostle's ALARM. 'I fell at His feet as one dead.' Similar to this was the effect of ISAIAH'S vision--'Then I said--Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5). Similar to this was the effect of EZEKIEL'S vision, when he 'fell on his face' at 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord' (Ezekiel 1:28). Still more similar to this was the effect of DANIEL'S vision, when not only 'a great quaking fell upon the men that were with him, so that they fled to hide themselves,' but he himself 'retained no strength,' and his 'loveliness was turned into corruption' (Daniel 10:7,8). Similar to this was the appearance of the angel to ZECHARIAH in the temple, of which it is said, that 'when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him' (Luke 1:12). In the case, too, of the Bethlehem SHEPHERDS, the effect was similar--'The glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were greatly afraid' (Luke 2:9). But the TRANSFIGURATION vision was most similar to this of the Revelation, both because John himself was there, and Jesus had there put on the heavenly glory in all its radiance. It is said that, when the disciples saw and heard it, 'they fell on their face, and were greatly afraid' (Matthew 17:6).

In all this there was the old idea (circulating even among the heathen), that no man could see God and live--an idea which man's evil conscience suggests, believing that God must be the sinner's enemy, that He can only show Himself in order to slay him. Not discriminating between what was true in this idea and what was false, even righteous men were filled with terror at the visible manifestations of God. And though we might have expected something different from this in the beloved disciple, when his old Master appeared to him, still let us remember that he was still in flesh and blood--still a feeble, imperfect man, both in soul and body.

Besides this, there was much fitted to overawe him. The vision was so SUDDEN and so GLORIOUS--the splendor so overpowering, the voice so majestic, the place so lonely, that it was not amazing that he should have 'fallen at His feet as one dead;' especially as the contrast in appearance between the Christ that he knew once, and the Christ that he saw now, was so great. He could still recognize his Lord; but how marvelously changed! And this outward change might for a moment raise the thought that there could not have been the same familiar fellowship as in the days of His sorrowing lowliness.

We know how the altered dress, and circumstances, and manners of a long-absent friend, suddenly returning, suggests misgivings as to the continuance of confidence and love, and we are not sure how far we may count upon his friendship. Here there might be something of this feeling in the apostle's mind; and, at any rate, the heavenly glory could not but be overwhelming to one who had still but the tremulous frame of mortality, the feeble eyes and ears of earthly imperfection.

This vision of the Holy One, side by side with himself, would make the apostle feel his unholiness, and cry out, like Isaiah--'I am unclean!' Self-aborrence could not but be uppermost in his mind, even though fear might be cast out by love. Nor is there anything more fitted still to deepen our sense of sin, and give us true self-loathing, than direct dealing with the Holy One--the being brought into contact with Himself, whether in His grace or glory. The law may fail; comparison with our fellow men will fail; inspection of self will fail; but direct transaction with the Lord Himself will accomplish all. Compare yourselves with Him--that will search--that will abase.

But if John, who had known Christ so well and long, was thus overawed at the glory--what will become of you, O Christless sinner! In the day of the full revelation of that glory? How horrendous will that day be to you! How it will overwhelm you! O sinner, learn to know this Christ now as the Savior, before the day arrives when you shall see Him as the Judge! His LOVE would save you now--His MAJESTY will crush you then.

III. Christ's method of COMFORTING His apostle, and soothing his alarm. He begins this by laying His right hand on him--the right hand where was 'the hiding of His power' (Habakkuk 3:4), and in which John had just seen the seven stars; that right hand which John had so often beheld raised to heal and to bless; the right hand in which were the marks of the nails! As the expression of condescension and kindness, as the symbol of priestly blessing, the action would at once be understood by the apostle; and the touch of the well-known hand, thus laid on the head of the apostle as he lay upon the ground, would be of itself reassurance and peace.

While the gracious right HAND is thus laid on John, the WORDS of grace accompany the action--'Fear not.' In these there is no hidden spell, no native power to calm, apart from the recognized character of Him who speaks them--just as the effect of a promise depends on the ascertained mind and power of the promiser. 'Fear not' coming from the lips even of the glorified Son of man, could not fail to recall times

when they were used to the disciples by this same Christ, in the days of His earthly humiliation; so that the effect of this utterance, in the ears of the apostle, was at once to identify the present glorious Being with that Jesus who had gone out and in with His disciples on earth, and who thus declared Himself to be the same in mind and heart, the same in love and sympathy, as when He calmed their fears upon the Sea of Galilee with the kindred words--'It is I; do not be afraid!'

Before the words 'Fear not' can have any effect in calming a single fear, or dispelling a single doubt, there must be the knowledge of the character of Him who speaks them. Until then they are as idle wind. Suppose that you lose your way in the wide desert, and with its terrors compassing you on every side, you begin to tremble for your safety. An unknown wanderer passes you, and says "Fear not' but his words do not calm you. One of your fellow travelers says, 'Fear not' but neither do his words soothe you. But suddenly you meet with some well-known Arab acquaintance, some chief of the desert, in whom you have confidence, and he says, 'Fear not!' you are reassured in a moment.

So is it in your transactions with the Lord. You must know WHO and what He is before His words of peace will avail. Know Him, and His one 'Fear not' will suffice to cheer and sustain you in any circumstances of danger, or perplexity, or conscious unworthiness. He who received publicans and sinners, who went to be 'a guest with a man who was a sinner,' is just such an one as you may go to, and such an one as can say to you, 'Fear not!' with the certainty that the gracious words proceeding from His well-known lips, do mean all that they seem to do, and will speak to you all the peace which they seem to contain.

The announcements that follow all bear upon this point. They not only say, 'It is I,' but they show WHO and what this 'I' is. They give reasons for the 'Fear not' and these reasons are all concerning the speaker Himself. It is what He tells us about Himself that He expects to soothe us and to banish alarm; for it is only His 'perfect love' that can cast out fear, and restore confidence to the soul. Hear, then, what he says:

(1.) I am the FIRST. This would recall to John the words of his own Gospel--'In the beginning was the Word' (1:1); 'the same was in the beginning with God' (1:2). It recalls to us the psalmist's expression, 'From everlasting' (Psalm 90:1), and the description, in the eighth chapter of Proverbs, as to the unbeginning eternity of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:22); and reminds us of Paul's 'yesterday'--the everlasting yesterday (Hebrews 13:8), for the two passages correspond strikingly. And in the announcement, 'I am the first and the last,' we recognize the same truth as, 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.' The epithet 'first' points to time, or rather to eternity; 'Alpha' to eternal wisdom; and 'beginning' to creatorship, as it is written, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' (Genesis 1:1). He thus means to say to John, 'Fear not--I am the eternal One!'

(2.) I am the LAST. Not that to Him there is truly any 'last;' for to Him, as the true Melchizedek, there is 'neither beginning of days, nor end of life' (Hebrews 8:3); but He stands in the place of that which men call 'laws,'--He is the crowning, the consummating, the summing up of all--the great Circumference, as He is the great Center of the universe! He is not only 'FROM everlasting,' but 'TO everlasting;' the same 'today, and forever,' as He was 'yesterday;' the 'Omega' as truly as the 'Alpha;' the 'ending' as much as the 'beginning.'

As God, the eternal Son, He is neither first nor last--but as the Christ, the God-man, He is both; and He is all that can be supposed to be included in both. As all the past eternity was His, so is all the future; and over all that future He watches; all that future He regulates in behalf of His own--'for His body's sake--which is the church.' Well may He say to John, 'I am the last,' 'fear not!'

(3.) I am the LIVING One. Thus should the passage be read--'I am the first, and the last, and the living One.' Throughout Scripture the name of the Messiah is associated with life. He is--Jehovah--the I Am--the Being of beings--the Possessor of all life--the giver of all life--the living and the life-giving One. His association with death is only transient--and that for the purpose of overcoming death, and bringing life out of death. He is the PRINCE of life--He is the LIGHT of life--He is the BREAD of Life--He is the WATER of life. Everything connected with LIFE is linked with Him; for as the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself.

The words, 'I am living One,' would remind John of the many things which he himself had narrated, and of the many words he had recorded concerning Christ as the Life; for he, of all the evangelists, has brought this great truth before us. It was as the Living One that He said, 'the Son quickens whom he will' (John 5:21). 'He who believes in me has everlasting life. This is the bread that came down from heaven, that if a man eats of it, he shall not die. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever. Whoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life' (John 6:50-54).

Ah! Truly it was the living One who spoke such words as these; and it is as the living One that He utters them still. We fall at His feet, like John, as one dead! He lays His right hand upon us, and says to us, "fear not; I am the living One;" it is not death, but life, that I have come to bring; and in beholding the glory of the living One, it is life, not death, that you should look for!

(4.) I was DEAD. Or, more literally, 'I became dead,' I laid down my life. His word of cheer to John, then, is; 'Fear not; I am He who died.' The words here remind us of those of Paul--'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is Christ who died.' Yes; it was with the Christ who died, that Paul had to do; and it was with the Christ who died that John also had to do, though, in the blaze of the glory that now dazzled him, he seems to have lost sight of this. To this, however, the Lord recalls him, in order to reassure him. He takes him back to the cross, and reminds him of what he saw and heard there. He sends him to the tomb, that he may again look upon the dead body of his Master.

And thus reminding him of the cross and tomb, He reproves his present terror, and makes him feel how unlikely, how impossible it was that any amount of 'glory, and honor, and power, and majesty,' such as that with which he was now surrounded, could alter the relationship between them, or make Him less the Christ whom he knew so well on earth; less the SAVIOR whom, as a sinner, he needed then, and needed still--less the LAMB of God that takes away the sin of the world--or make himself less the disciple whom Jesus loved--less the trusted one, to whom his Lord had confided that most precious of earthly deposits, His mother, when dying on the cross. It is as if He had said, 'Fear not; I am the SAME Jesus whom you saw die upon the cross, whom you saw lying in Joseph's tomb. Yes, fear not! I was dead.'

(5.) I am ALIVE for evermore. 'Though I died once, yet I die no more--death has me no more--death has no more dominion over me--I LIVE forever!' To have died, and yet to have triumphed over death--no, to have triumphed over it by dying, so that never again could death approach Him--this was the truth by which the risen Christ comforted His affrighted apostle. In DEATH He showed Himself the Lord of life! In LIFE He showed Himself the Lord of death! In dying, and living again, He showed Himself all that a sinner needs to give him boldness in his dealings with Him. This ever-living One, with whom death has now no more to do; this ever-living One, between whom and everything pertaining to death, a great gulf is fixed--He it is with whom we have to deal, in the great transactions of life and death.

He is made our Melchizedek--Priest and King--'after the power of an endless life;' and the life which he possesses forever is something more than what He possessed before His death, or could possess simply as God--it is "resurrection life", which only He who died could have, and with which He was filled for us in consequence of having died. That which we need, both for body and soul, is RISEN life, resurrection-life, the life of Him who has risen! And it is this that He so specially announces here when He says, 'I am alive for evermore!'

Here John abruptly interposes his hearty and joyful "Amen!" as if this announcement were the one which he most rejoiced in, and which at once woke up an echo in his bosom. He hears the words, 'I am alive for evermore;' and appreciating something of the mighty import of these words, and looking forward into that long eternity, during which he was to be partaker of all the life which this risen One possessed, he exclaims, with eager gladness, 'Amen!'

A sentiment like that which we always find used in the Old Testament in reference to kings--'Let the king live forever. Amen.' It was in the eternity of this risen life of Christ that John rejoiced--in that same eternal life of the risen One let us rejoice, adding our Amen to that of the apostle, and saying, 'I know that my Redeemer lives!' Oh blessedness unspeakable! Oh consolation beyond all others! To be told that, in a dying world like ours, there is a living One like this--One all made up of life--One whom death can never touch--of whom no one can ever bring to you the tidings, "He is no more!"

No amount of death in us can affect Him, or prevent us receiving His endless life. Our death is swallowed up in this boundless life; so that, where 'death' has abounded, their 'life' abounds much more. This is the tree of life, whose leaves are health, whose fruit is immortality. Let us gather round and under this great 'Plant of Renown'; from it to draw present life to our souls, and the assurance of resurrection to ourselves, and to all who have slept in Jesus!

(6.) And have the KEYS of hell (Hades) and death. He claims power over soul and body, and over those regions into which they pass when separated here on earth. He opens, and none can shut! He shuts, and none can open! No one can enter these places except by means of Him--nor can any pass out of these except by His authority. He is absolute Lord of the invisible world, in all its realms!

This truly is blessed to the bereaved. It is not chance, nor natural causes, nor fate, nor the necessity of mortal disease. It is Christ Himself, Christ the living one, who effects the death--and in doing so takes both soul and body into His own keeping. In this sense is the sickbed His, and the deathbed His, and the burial His. He it is who is loosing life's bonds for a season, removing with His own hands, each of His own, and saying to body and to soul--Go in peace!

Nor can that invisible world hold any of its tenants one moment longer than He pleases. He keeps the KEYS, and as He leads in, so does He lead out. As He unlocks the gate in order that they may enter, so does He again unlock it, in order that they may leave it--to put on incorruption and strength and glory. No enemy, either of Himself or of the Church, shall prevail to hinder the unlocking of the gate, and the great exodus of the rising saints. Not the power of Satan, nor of death, nor of Hades--shall prevail. He has the keys of Hades and of death, and he will yet bring forth His own in triumph. 'The gates of Hades shall not prevail against His Church.' Though guarded by all the powers of hell, they shall be unlocked by Him who keeps the keys--they shall fly open, and the saints shall come forth to resurrection-glory!

Is it not true that 'all things are ours--whether life or death, things present, or things to come'? (1 Corinthians 3:22). For He is ours who is Lord of all these--'You are Christ's, and Christ in God's.' If so, we

may hear the voice that spoke to John speaking also to US--"Fear not--I have the keys of Hades and of death. Fear not the resurrection and the life. Fear not, I will yet swallow up death in victory; I will be its plague; I will the destruction of the grave; my dead people shall arise and live! Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust.'

What an antidote to fear, what a consolation in bereavement, what a binding up of wounds is this! Christ is Lord over all; over death and the grave, over the body and the soul. He binds, and none can loose. He looses, and none can bind. He kills, and none can make alive. He makes alive, and none can kill. He scatters, and none can gather. He gathers, and none can scatter. And to us He says, 'Fear not; I am the first, and the last and the living One.' We have known what death is, we shall now what life is; we have known what the grave is, we shall know what resurrection is; we have known the killing, we shall know the making alive; we have known the binding, we shall know the loosing; we have known the scattering, we shall know the gathering; we have known the corruption, we shall know we shall know the incorruption; we have known the withering, we shall know the blossoming; we have known the parting we shall know the meeting; we have known the sorrow, we shall know the glory and joy.

Thus it is that the words of consolation are all concerning Christ Himself. The counteraction of all fear--the removal of all doubt--comes from the knowledge of Christ Himself. 'Then were the disciples glad--when they saw the Lord.' He spoke peace to His apostle John by reminding him of who and what He was and is. So does He still speak to us--nor will one fear ever be dispelled, or one doubt removed, in any other way. The sight of Christ will do everything--no other sight will do anything. A simpler, fuller knowledge of this gracious One is all that we need to give us perfect peace, and to keep us in that peace forever!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/horatius-bonar/rev-117-18-fear-and-its-remedy/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net