

The Privilege of Fearing the Jealous God

by Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

Malachi 3:17

I. The Text Opened

A. Malachi 3:17

1. “And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,” (Malachi 3:17).
2. These words are part of the promise which God makes to them that fear him, or to those who are good in evil times.
 - a) In them take notice of, 1. The Blessing promised; that God will spare them. 2. The manner of this Indulgence; amplified, and set forth by the Carriage of a Father to his Son; in which a double Reason of this Indulgence is intimated.
 - b) 1. Propriety, his own Son.
 - c) 2. Obedience; his Son that serves him.
 - (1) *Parents are not severe to any of their children, especially the dutiful.*
 - d) 1. Propriety, his own Son.
 - (1) *A faulty child is a child still, and therefore not so easily turned out of the family as a servant.*
 - (2) *We often forget the duty of children, but God does not forget the mercy of a Father.*
 - e) 2. But this is not all; it is not a prodigal son, a rebellious son, that is here considered, who by Moses’ Law might be turned out and stoned; Deut. 21:18-21.
 - f) If children put off all respect of natural duty, parents were to put off all compassion towards them.
 - g) But this is not the case here:
 - (1) *It is a good child that is here spoken of; his own Son that serves him.*
 - (2) *When a son is dutiful, a parent will not be harsh and severe to him upon every failing.*
 - (3) *This is the expression that God uses to set forth his indulgence and compassion towards them that fear him.*

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: That God’s sparing his children, notwithstanding their manifold infirmities, is one of the choice privileges of them that fear him.

1. What it is to spare them.
 - a) It is seen on two occasions, when he comes to accept them, and when he comes to afflict them.
 - b) In accepting their imperfect services, and not correcting them at all, or correcting them in measure, and in mercy.
 - c) Sometimes sparing is spoken of in Scripture with respect to some judgment to be inflicted, and so it is an act flowing from mercy, withdrawing, or moderating deserved judgments.
 - (1) *At other times, sparing is spoken of with respect to a duty to be accepted.*
 - (2) *We need to be spared in our best actions, they being defective and defiled.*

2. This is a choice privilege: So it will appear to be, if we consider, 1. The holy Nature of God. 2. The strictness and purity of his Law, both as to the Precept and Sanction. 3. Our incapacity of appearing in the Judgment. 4. The sense which conscience has of Sin.
 - a) All these must be considered, because usually men heal their wounds slightly, and afterwards they fester into a more dangerous sore.
 - b) And again, we are not affected with God's pardoning mercy, because we do not see with what difficulty it is brought about.
3. 1. The holy nature and justice of God.
 - a) His nature inclines him to hate sin, and his justice to punish it: Joshua 24:19, "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God, he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins."
 - (1) *The least sin is an offence to God who is so pure and holy; 1 Sam. 6:20, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"*
 - (a) *That is, this God who is so jealous of his institutions.*
4. 2. The Purity and Strictness of his Law, both as to the Precept and Sanction.
 - a) (1.) The Precept; which reaches to the soul, and the operations of every faculty; thoughts, purposes, and desires; as well as words and actions.
 - (1) *Therefore when David had admired the purity of the Law, he adds, Psalm 19:12, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."*
 - (2) *Oh the multitude of our errors that we know! And the multitude of them we do not know! But God knows them.*
 - (3) *How imperfect is our Obedience? How many times have we transgressed this holy Law of God?*
 - b) (2.) As to the Sanction, the Law saith, The Soul that sinneth shall die, Ezek. 18:4.
 - (1) *Now this being the Sentence of God delivered in a Righteous Law, how shall we escape it?*
 - (2) *Surely it cannot fall to the Ground; unless some provision be made, it will eternally take place.*
5. 3. Our incapacity of appearing before God by reason of the multitude of our sins.
 - a) There are no children of God but have a great and vast debt on them; and if God should call them to an account, and should not spare, not one of them could stand, or appear in court.
 - b) Psalm 130:3-4, "If thou, Lord! shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord! who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."
6. 4. The sense which conscience has of these sins.
 - a) (1.) Consider it in its old natural bondage, somewhat of which yet remains while sin remains; so conscience accuses of the sins that are committed.

B. The grounds and reasons of this indulgence, or sparing, which God uses towards them.

1. 1. God's merciful nature, which inclines him to pass by the infirmities of his saints.
 - a) This appears by the description of God given to Moses, when the Lord proclaimed his name.
 - b) Exod. 34:6, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."
 - (1) *Since this is the description which God gives of himself, therefore it deserves to be weighed by us.*
 - (2) *The first notion is merciful, by which God's Nature inclines him to comfort those that are in misery by reason of sin.*

(3) *The next is gracious, which implies his self-inclination to do good to his Creatures, without any precedent obligation on their parts.*

(4) *The third is longsuffering, or slowness to anger; he is not hasty to revenge the wrongs done him by the creature.*

(5) *The last is, abundant in goodness and truth, that is, expressing his kindness and bounteous nature many ways, not at one time and in one sort only, but upon all occasions, and in all ways in which we stand in need of his help, and therefore will deal tenderly with his people.*

(a) *Micah 7:8, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."*

(i) *He takes pleasure in showing acts of mercy, rather than acts of vengeance.*

2. 2. The satisfaction of Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through Faith in his Blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of Sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, (Rom. 3:25).

a) In him God will satisfy his justice, and accept of the believing penitent.

b) He did not spare his Son that he might spare us.

(1) *Christ's bruises, and our salvation are called the pleasure of the Lord.*

(2) *The Lord was willing of both, and well content with both.*

3. 3. His gracious Covenant, which may be considered, 1. As to the terms or conditions it requires. 2. As to the Penalties which God hath reserved a Liberty to inflict.

a) 1. As to the Terms, or Conditions propounded; it requires perfection, and accepts sincerity.

(1) *It requires perfection.*

(2) *Gen. 17:1, "I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect."*

(3) *Surely the Covenant of Grace requires perfection; for the righteous Law is adopted into the frame of it, as the rule of our duty: otherwise our defects were no sins; and otherwise allowed failings were consistent with sincerity; and where shall we then stop?*

(a) *It certainly invites us to the highest degree of goodness, and makes perfection itself our duty.*

(4) *And there is mercy in it, that our duty and happiness may agree, and we may not have liberty to be bad and miserable, but ever bound to our own happiness; which consists in an exact conformity to God, and the most perfect subjection to him.*

(a) *But yet it accepts sincerity.*

(b) *If our hearts are upright with God, and set to obey, please and glorify him, and we make it our main work so to do, God will not enter into judgments with his servants, nor be strict to his children, nor condemn those that love and fear him.*

(c) *2 Chron. 30:18-20, "But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one, that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the Sanctuary. And the Lord hearkned to Hezekiah, and healed the people."*

(5) *Therefore he does not take advantage of our infirmities to ruin us.*

(a) *Indeed, as the Covenant commands perfection, it notes our infirmities, to humble us, in order to our cure; but as it accept sincerity, for Christ does not look to our Infirmities as a Judge, but as a tender Physician, to rid us of them, and free us from them more and more.*

- b) There is sparing as to acceptance.
 - (1) *A father, if there is any blemish in his child, he will pity it, and cover it.*
 - (2) *He accepts in good part the willingness of his son to serve him, though he, through weakness, fail in the exact manner of performance.*
 - (3) *So our heavenly Father accepts a willing and honest heart, though we come short of that perfection required in the Law.*
- 4. The qualification of the persons to whom God makes this promise; in the context, They that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name.
 - a) Those whom God owns for his peculiar people fear him.
 - b) It is necessary for them; for the best need to be spared, as a father spares his own son that serves him, or else what would become of them?
 - (1) *If they were not under such a pardoning Covenant, how could they maintain any peace in their own souls, being guilty of so many daily failings, which they resent more tenderly than others do more fouler faults?*
 - (2) *Gal. 6:16, "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."*
 - (a) *We still stand in need of mercy, free and undeserved mercy, that our failings may be pardoned, our persons and duties accepted, our afflictions moderated, and we may be accepted and go to heaven at last.*
 - (3) *Certainly the obstinate and impenitent are excluded, Deut. 29:20, "The Lord will not spare him but the Anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the Curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him."*
 - (4) *But if any fear him and serve him, they may hope for his mercy, Psalm 147:11, "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."*
 - c) They that live in a constant obedience to his commands, and a holy trust in him, not by any tenure of merit in themselves, but free and undeserved Mercy in Christ, they are spared, they are accepted, yes, they are blessed, and God delights in their welfare.

III. The Text Applied

A. A Caution

1. Use, I give a caution and warning to the people of God, that they do not entertain the jealousies of God, as one that watches all opportunities and advantages against us to punish us, as if he seemed to be glad at our halting.
 - a) No, this is a Blasphemy against his holy and gracious nature, and a flat contradiction to the discoveries and expressions of his love in his Covenant.
 - b) There is some sparing even in his striking; for if he bring one evil to prevent a greater evil, to save us from eternal misery, that is mercy.
 - c) He strikes for a while, that he may spare for ever, 1 Cor. 11:32, "For when we are judged, we are Chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the World.
2. Also, to show us the privilege of them that fear God, or have a son-like, and child-like affection to him.
 - a) He does not speak here of the first grace infused into the penitent, but of those that are already admitted into his family.
 - b) Surely their privilege is exceeding great.
 - (1) *I. They do not need to be discouraged in their duties, though they are imperfect.*
 - (2) *God will not call them to a strict account.*

- (3) *Christ when he feasts with his Spouse, he will eat the honey with the honey-comb, Song of Songs 5:1, he accepts all heartily.*
- (4) *He that forgave all their sins at first, will excuse their infirmities.*