The Ruler of Hell
Scripture: Matthew 10
Code: BQ62911

And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

People, and even Satan himself, **are unable to kill the soul**. Physical death is the full extent of the harm they can bring us; they cannot touch the **soul**, the eternal person. Even the bodies they destroy will one day be resurrected and become imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42).

It should be made clear that **destroy** does not here mean annihilation. The lost will not cease to exist, but in their resurrected bodies "will go away into eternal punishment," just as the saved in their resurrected bodies will go into "eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). The word behind **destroy** (*appolumi*) does not convey the notion of extinction but of great loss or ruin. Paul uses the same term in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, where he speaks of "eternal destruction"-a phrase that would not make sense if "destruction" meant annihilation, which by definition cannot be eternal. That which is annihilated ceases to exist.

Jesus' point here is that the only **fear** a believer should have is of **Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell**; and only God can do that. In the last days Satan himself will be cast into hell, which is the Lord's domain, not Satan's.

But this **fear** is not that of terror or fright, but of reverential awe and honor. It is not that a believer is in danger of having his soul and body cast into hell, because his eternal destiny is heaven. God's ability to **destroy both soul and body in hell** is mentioned here only to contrast His unlimited and permanent power with Satan's limited and temporary power. God is the only One who can determine and bring to pass the destiny of souls and bodies.

Reverence of God in His sovereign majesty is a powerful motivation for Christians to serve Him and to be fearless of any earthly, physical consequences that service may bring. The power of human threats seems rather puny in comparison to the power of God's promises.

When Hugh Latimer was preaching one day in the presence of King Henry VIII, he reports that he said to himself, "Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the king is here; be careful what you say." Then he said to himself, "Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the King of kings is here; be careful what you do not say." For such unflinching faithfulness Latimer was eventually burned at the stake. But He feared

failing God more than he feared offending men.

Over a period of some 300 years of terrible persecution, ten generations of Christians dug nearly 600 miles of catacombs beneath and around the city of Rome. Archaeologists estimate that perhaps a total of 4 million bodies were buried there. A common inscription found in the catacombs is the sign of the fish, the Greek word for which (*ichthus*) was used as an acrostic for “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.” Another common inscription found there is “The Word of God is not bound.” During the most prolonged period of persecution in the history of the church, those believers revered God more than they feared man.

Since that day, many more millions have given their lives for the cause of Christ. Perhaps as many as 50 million believers were martyred during the Dark Ages, and millions more have been martyred in our own century, largely by communist regimes in Europe, Asia, and Africa. As is said of Lord Lawrence on his memorial in Westminster Abbey, they feared man so little because they feared God so much. In many other countries, state religions prohibit Christian missionary and evangelistic work and seriously restrict worship by those who are already Christians.

The faithful disciple values his **soul** immeasurably more than he values his **body**, and he will gladly sacrifice that which is only physical and corruptible for the sake of that which is spiritual and incorruptible. Jim Elliot, mentioned earlier in the chapter, wrote, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Jesus’ warning in verse 28 may have been specially directed at Judas, as an early appeal for him to consider that the God he rejected **was able to destroy both** his **soul and** his **body in hell**. Beyond that, it stands as a continuing warning to the unbelieving Judases of all time.

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