

## SIN AND ITS WAGES.

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WHAT is the bitterest thing in this Universe? Reader can you tell! Is it disease, or hunger, or poverty, or exile, or persecution, or death? No! not one of these, nor all conjoined! It is *Sin*.

I. What is *sin*? It is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. Mark the definition. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well. He that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. A persecuting Saul, and a blood-thirsty Manasseh, are unmistakeable criminals in the eye of divine justice; but who shall exonerate the Priest and the Levite who pass by on the other side, and abandon to their fate the afflicted and unfortunate. Negative virtue will not answer. The gospel demands action, work, fruit. We are bound not only not to *hate* but to *love*. Should you never swear, should you never steal, should you never lie, should you never violate the Sabbath, should you never commit adultery, should any one be able to say, "All these things have I kept from my youth up," still the law would be unsatisfied. *Religion is positive*. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." To say that we have avoided offence, is wholly insufficient. The precept is, Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, *do* it with thy might. Ye are my friends if ye *do* whatsoever I command you. Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and *doeth* them, I will liken him unto a wise man that built his house upon a rock, &c.

II. God made man upright—He created him in His own

image, and gave him dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God blessed man and blessed the world in which he lived. The soil teemed with life, and vegetation, and beauty. The grass yielded seed after his kind, and the herb yielded seed after his kind, and the tree yielded fruit whose seed was in itself after its kind. Peace and happiness reigned; for transgression had not entered, and all was very good. But the moment that sin intruded, the image of God disappeared. Not only the creature, but creation itself felt the shock. When Adam disobeyed, God spake unto him and said, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground." Here, then, was the origin of sorrow. Bitterness sprang from sin. In Adam all died, because in Adam all sinned.

III. From this source come exhausting labor and consuming pain. The diseases which pour in upon us like a flood, have their origin here. All the blood that flowed, and still flows from martyred veins, can point to sin as the instigator. Sin is the cause of all the agony that is, or was, or is to be! It kindles the passions, destroys the character, fills the graveyard, and peoples hell. Had sin no existence, there would be no frightful battlefields, no desolated homes, no weeping widows, no crushed and bleeding hearts. The way of the transgressor is hard. Go to the prison-house which contains some helpless and hopeless victim of crime. Bid him unveil his bosom for a moment, whilst you survey that inward agony that eats as doth a canker; ask him to tell you something of the fear and anxiety and remorse which torment him through weary days and sleepless nights; through the dreadful weeks which intervene between him and the scaffold; acquaint yourself with those mighty struggles which confound the guilty soul; go with the condemned to the gallows, behold him as he takes a last adieu of father, mother, wife, or children; go to this dying murderer, now that a step only interposes between him and the judgment, and whisper in his ear, what think you of sin; and his answer will be, "bitter, bitter, bitter. Sin is an evil thing, and a bitter."

IV. Go to Calvary, if you would learn the awful evil and bitterness of sin. There hangs a sufferer. Look on him! That is not the face of guilt. There is a calm glory about it

that speaks of innocence and heaven! But the crowd have condemned him, and the shout of implacable vengeance goes up to God! The multitude are inexorable as they lift their victim to the cross. Those unoffending hands are torn and fastened by nails, and the blood flows freely to the ground. There he hangs! that wonderful man who fed the hungry and clothed the naked and healed the sick and raised the dead! The crowd mock and insult. The only answer is, Father, forgive! In His own great agony He forgets not the sorrows and desolations of others. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman behold thy son. Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother." A dying thief turns a penitential eye to the suffering Saviour and exclaims aloud, "Lord remember me when thou comest to thy kingdom." The answer was immediate and direct, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." And now occurred the strangest scene of all. Between the vision of this holy sufferer and the eternal Father, there descended a veil of horrible darkness; and a cry that rent the very rocks and aroused the sleeping dead, ascended up from Calvary. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Now *why* did Jesus suffer? The cause was *sin*. He was made sin for us"—He was treated and regarded as a sinner on our account. "All we, like sheep, had gone astray, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all."

V. Sin wastes the body, enervates the intellect, and destroys both soul and body in hell. Go into the chamber where the wicked man dies; bend over him as his guilty spirit takes its flight, ascend up to the bar of God, and see the gates of glory close—follow the outcast adown the path of doom; see his awful plunge—listen to the shout of devils as they mock him in his fall. Go there once again, when the sun shall be darkened and the moon turned into blood; and yet again, and for the last time, when the judgment of the great day has assigned the guilty spirit to an eternal dwelling place of fire; and then tell me if sin is not an evil thing and a bitter.

VI. Men often talk of little sins and great sins! That there are degrees in sin, no right-minded person will deny. But the small sin originates what the large sin perfects. The one is a rill, the other a river. To judge correctly, we must not only look at sin, but at its consequences. Adam might have reasoned in his day, as some men do now, in regard to that first offence which "brought death into the world and all our

wo." What great harm can there be in eating this fruit? Ah! that was a fatal moment for Adam and his posterity, when he thus dallied with transgression. Go! learn the tale of human suffering since that day of doom when the "little sin" of Eden drove out man a fallen, ruined, and wretched wanderer. Calculate the sufferings of our world. Behold the starving, now that the very ground is cursed for man's sake. Linger on the battle-field as the shock of arms sends up to heaven the piercing cry of orphaned babes and helpless widowhood; look abroad on the wretchedness that wails along our highways; steal into the chamber where the spirit suffers and the body dies; visit every prison and enter every graveyard; count up the trophies of death; and then let your imagination bear you upward to the throne of God, to behold these countless millions who are driven away in their wickedness; follow them down to the worm that dies not, and to the fire that is not quenched; and when this mighty circuit has been accomplished, tell me then, if any transgression can be small, if any sin can be "little." Ah! if that be a little thing which closed the gates of Eden, and sent out man accursed from his maker's presence, then tell me something of great things. The soul that sins shall die. The wages of sin is death. Death is the penalty of any and of every offence. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

VII. Even the believer cannot sin with impunity. The doctrine that one saint shall have a higher place in glory than another, is generally entertained. We shall be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body. "Whatsoever a man sows that shall he reap." Every sin, therefore, which the Christian commits, retards his progress evermore. It is true that God forgives every iniquity of the believer, and justifies him freely through the grace that is in Christ Jesus. - In this doctrine we rejoice. But if men are *judged* according to the deeds done in the body, after justification has taken place, then will our *position*, in the eternal world, be determined by the diligence and faithfulness with which we have improved our talents in this land of probation. If these observations are true, the importance of early piety cannot be too earnestly inculcated. Sin is so evil and bitter, that to accomplish anything memorable and lasting, the spirit must be enlisted while the dew of youth is upon it. The lofty and daring are rarely ever attempted successfully by any but those in whose bosoms the germ of these mighty deeds has been developing from childhood. My young friends, if you would do God service, let your efforts begin early. Religion must

be embraced in our young days, or else the evil that we do can hardly ever be counteracted. He who spends the first years of his life in the service of satan, will have difficult work ever afterward even to *undo* the mischief that he has already done. The traveller who is ten miles from the city, with a capacity of walking only ten miles in two hours, or five miles in one hour, cannot afford (if his time be limited) to walk five miles in an opposite direction. The evening shadows, at such a rate, would overtake him at the very point from whence he set out. Throw not away the energies of body and soul, but dare at once to be faithful. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them." "For there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

VIII. No man can sin with impunity. Sin bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. The moral law is even more immutable than the laws of nature. *Your sins will find you out.* He that sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind. Fly as we may the ghost of former iniquities will haunt us. In the midst of feasting and revelry an invisible power shall send a quaking through our limbs, and the eye of the guilty one be pointed with horror to the handwriting on the wall. No sin was ever committed in this Universe that God did not send out after it a strong-armed avenger. Cain slew his brother, but Cain had a mark placed in his forehead, which neither supplication or tears could obliterate. Jacob defrauded Esau of his birthright, but Jacob, in turn, was injured and imposed upon by Laban, his father-in-law. Joseph was sold by his brethren into bondage, but in due time the hour of retribution was revealed, and they who hated the younger brother and persecuted him, had to crouch at that brother's feet for bread. David deceived Bathsheba and murdered Uriah, but the avenger of crime overtook David in the moment when he went up to his chamber and wept, saying "O! my son Absalom, my son, Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O! Absalom, my son, my son." Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, and his children perished amidst its fires. Adonibezek said, "Three score and ten kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meet under my table, as I have done, so hath the Lord requited me. Abimelech conspired with the Schemites and slew his seventy brethren, in order that he himself might possess the kingdom. Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech; that the cruelty done to the three score and ten

sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech, their brother, which slew them, and upon the men of Sechem, which aided him in killing his brethren! Abimelech himself was slain, and thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did unto his father in slaying his seventy brethren. Judas betrayed and sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, but Judas went out afterwards and hanged himself. The Jews crucified Jesus, and cried, his blood be upon us and our children, and for eighteen hundred years the Hebrew has been a "weary-footed wanderer."

IX. But is there no city of refuge where the avenger of sin cannot enter and destroy? The answer is, *Yes!* There is help for the sinner; there is a remedy for sin. Our safety is in the Cross. With a hand on Jesus, the law is silenced. The avenger of blood is satisfied as he beholds the blood of Christ. He died, the just in the room of the unjust, and is, therefore, the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

The heathen, in his blindness, imagined a stream whose Lethæan waters could dispel all gloomy recollections. But the gospel offers in reality what the benighted pagan only fancied in his caprice. Yea, it offers not oblivion simply, but pardon—pardon for the past and security for the future. He that believeth on the Son hath LIFE, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life. Our iniquities are removed as far from us as the East is from the West, whilst the guilt and power, and sting of sin, are forever extracted. So that the Christian can say with truth:

There is a fountain filled with blood  
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
 Lose all their guilty stains.

There is a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb. On its banks is the tree of life, and the leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations.

## THE STRICT SEARCH.

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“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind; nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

A traveller in his journey crossed the frontier, and had to pass through the custom-house. The officers said to him, “Have you any contraband goods?” “I do not think I have,” was the answer. “That may be true,” said the officers, “but we cannot let you pass without examination. Permit us to search.” “If you please,” said the traveller, “but allow me to sit down while you perform your duty.”

They then began their search; and first examined his portmanteau. Afterward they turned to his person, and searched his pockets, pocket-book, his boots, and his neck-cloth.

The examination being over, the traveller thus addressed the officers: “Gentlemen, will you allow me to tell you what thoughts this examination has awakened in my mind? We are all travelling to an eternal kingdom, into which we cannot take any contraband goods. If you had found any prohibited articles upon me, you would have taken them from me, and have fined me for it. Now, think how many careless travellers pass into eternity, laden with sins which are forbidden by the heavenly King. By these forbidden things, I mean deceitfulness, anger, pride, lying, covetousness, envy, evil-speaking, and similar offences, which are hateful in the sight of God. For all these, every man who passes the boundary of the grave is searched, far more strictly than you have searched me. God is the great searcher of hearts; and although the number of transgressors is very great, and their rank and station very different, yet not one can escape, for ‘every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.’”

The King of heaven, not willing any of us should perish, sent his only begotten Son to become our substitute to make reconciliation for transgressors, and to clothe us with his righteousness, without which we cannot see His kingdom. This

Messiah, or *sent one*, is Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who came down to earth on purpose to bear "our sins in his own body on the tree," to save all that believe on Him, to wash us from our spiritual pollution, and to clothe us with the spotless robe—the wedding garment of his righteousness. And "they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," "are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in his temple."

The custom-house officers listened with attention, and when he had finished, expressed the hope that they would be permitted to see and hear him again.

"Gentlemen," continued the traveller, "whether we shall meet again on earth is uncertain: God only knows; but, as I am about to leave you, I will tell you something more—it is about **TWO PLANKS**. A preacher wishing to explain to his congregation what a dangerous delusion those persons are in, who seek salvation partly from the righteousness of Christ, said to them: 'Supposing it is needful for you to cross a river, over which two planks are thrown. One is perfectly new, the other is completely rotten. How will you go? If you walk upon the rotten one, you are sure to fall into the river. If you put one foot on the rotten plank and the other on the new plank, it will be the same—you will certainly fall through and perish. So there is only one safe method left: *Set both your feet upon the new plank.*'"

Brethren, the rotten plank is your own unclean self-righteousness. He who trusts in it must perish without remedy. The new plank is the eternal, saving righteousness of Christ, which came from heaven, and is given to every one who believeth in Him. Trust on this righteousness, and you shall be saved; for the Scripture saith, "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed."

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