

## The Penalty of Sin

"But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

- Ezekiel xviii,24

Ezekiel xviii,19-end

John viii,33-51

Psalm 101

New Book of Worship, Psalm 19, p.45

The Scriptures are written according to the doctrine of appearances, that is, according to how Divine things appear to us in our natural states. This means that we must have some principles from which we may judge, principles which will enable us to determine what sin is and what goodness and truth are in themselves. An immutable standard is necessary by which we can measure and determine questions concerning human conduct and character, and their good or evil results.

That standard is the Lord Himself. "The way of the Lord is perfect." He changes not. He is the way, the truth, and the life." We are created in His image and likeness. Here we must not think of outward form. The sculptor can cut an image of a man from a block of marble, but the likeness is only on the surface. The Divine qualities are finited in us. We are recipients of the Lord's love and wisdom. All our faculties and powers are from Him. But there is this difference: the Lord is infinite but we are finite. We are created, and have no underived life; the Lord is uncreated and is Life itself. We are so formed that we can continue to approach our Creator in the power and excellence of all our faculties and joys, but we shall always be finite and we can never be more than recipients of life.

What is required of us is that we use the life and power we receive as the Lord would have us use them. To the extent that one does this he is upright, just, and righteous, for he lives and moves in the currents of the Divine providence.

The methods according to which the Lord works are called laws. The laws of nature are the laws according to which the Lord works in nature, and the laws of the spirit are the laws by which our souls are developed. These laws are not arbitrary. They are not imposed upon man or upon nature from without. They are embodied in the subjects themselves.

The laws that men make may be good or bad, and men may change them, as they are concerned with external relations which may change from time to time. But the Divine laws cannot be changed or canceled. They have always existed, and everything is held in their embrace. The formulation of the law into words does not make the law; it only gives the expression of it.

Sin is the violation of these laws. It sets a man against the laws of the universe and results in malformations of the soul. It is a spiritual disease which weakens and destroys the inmosts in man.

But, specifically, what are the punishments of sin? The punishment of sin is not arbitrary, nor is it administered from without. It is not the sting of conscience. The more one indulges in any crime the more hardened he becomes, till at length he cannot distinguish between right and wrong and loses all moral sensibility and even all sense of shame.

One punishment of sin is the confusion of all one's mental faculties. Sin arrays man against the Lord and so against all those forces which are friendly and helpful to him, thus closing to him the joys of happiness and peace. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest... There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

Another penalty of sin is the fear of harm. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." "The sound of a falling leaf will chase them." They fear God because they think that He is their enemy, when He is the best friend they have in the universe. They fear men because they know that their selfish interests are hostile to them. They fear the loss of their natural possessions, because they know of no other good. They fear the future because they do not believe in a Divine providence. Fear is always inseparable from sin; it follows it in one's occupations, in his pleasures, and even into the privacy of the home. And, according to the law "like seeks like," the wicked avoid the good who would help them and seek the wicked, though they are hostile to one another. The result is constant apprehension, conflict, and struggle.

And there is a still greater penalty. By indulgence in sin we become the form of it. We were created to become the embodiment of all that is noble and beautiful in form, all that is pure and lovely in quality. Sin mars this faculty. The habitual indulgence in sin changes the face and the whole person. The process is slow but sure, and if the time is long enough, sin reveals itself not only in the face but in the whole body and its gestures. All the pains, disease, wars, and sorrows which have afflicted the world from the beginning are the penalties of sin. They come from no other source.

Yet severe as these consequences are, they are not the most terrible punish-

ment of sin. They are but incidental results. The real and greatest punishment of sin is spiritual death. This the Lord teaches in His Word in many ways. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." And Paul writes, "The wages of sin is death."

By death, when spoken of the soul, is not meant the cessation of its existence, but the loss of its higher faculties. All good comes from the Lord. He revealed His relation to us when He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." We know that a branch severed from the vine cannot bear fruit, because it is cut off from the sources of life. So the Lord says, "Without me ye can do nothing."

"The soul that sinneth it shall die." This refers to the higher planes of life. The Lord has endowed us with capacities for endless progress in knowledge and in happiness. He has given us not only natural but spiritual and celestial degrees of the mind, which are as much superior to the natural degrees in their power to know, to love, and to enjoy as the natural mind is superior to that of an animal. Sin prevents the development of these two higher planes of the mind and shuts a man off from their joys. No earthly values can measure this loss. We lose these means to happiness when we destroy the possibility of attaining them. We sell our inheritance for a mess of pottage.

When we put aside the body and enter into the spiritual world, we can see and enjoy what we have the power to see and enjoy. We shall enter into the society to which we are drawn by similarity of character, and with whose members we can associate. We can see any beauty that we have the capacity of seeing and enter into any field of activity which we have the capacity of entering. As natural death annuls our title to every earthly possession, so the death by sin annuls our title to the glory, freedom, joy, and peace of heaven. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The question arises, "How and by whom is the penalty inflicted? It is not inflicted by the Lord. Nothing goes forth from Him but the powers that give life and bless. He created the world for man that he might have happiness here, and the vastly greater spiritual world that he might have happiness to eternity. The commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all the heart, mind, and strength, and the neighbor as thyself is the fundamental law of human nature. If a man inverts this order of his nature by loving himself and the world supremely, and by so doing brings upon himself affliction, who is the cause of the affliction? Is it not the man himself?

Let us then put the cause of all our suffering where it belongs, and think of the Lord as our Heavenly Father, a Being of infinite love and wisdom, just in all His ways, and always doing everything in His power to save us from sin and its consequences, and to bless us with the largest possible measure of the purest and highest joys.

"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord."

Amen