

UP FROM SIN

The Fall and Rise of a Prodigal
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by

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CHAPTER TWO

WANDERING IN SIN

“And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living” (Luke 15:13).

In our last chapter we left our young hero starting in life. The ship of youth and young manhood was being launched. At present we take him out on life's proud ocean, battling with the breakers. We watch him as he sails.

Unfortunately for poor, sin-depraved man, this life is so crowded with sin that go where you will you are confronted with its temptations. And many being by nature a creature of sin in his unregenerate state cannot help engaging in its folly. Molded in a mold with fits nothing but sin, he would not help it if he could. Regeneration, fortunately for him, breaks up and destroys this sin-mold – recasts his nature in the foundry of God's love and infinite mercy, so that it henceforth is suited to truth and righteousness.

With unchanged heart and life, our young man ventured out in life. It was a very unwise and dangerous step to make, for upon life's sea there are so many breakers, so many storms to encounter, that no one is safe who is not under the guidance and protecting care of Christ Jesus.

But his launching was, from the standpoint of the “good-time hunter,” grand and glorious. I have seen a proud ship just leaving for a trip across the sea. She had a bright prospect. Her rigging was in handsome trim. Her timbers were stout and strong. Her flag was flapping in the gentle summer breeze. Her sails were new and bright. Her keel had never experienced a single storm. Her captain strutted with arrogant pride. O, how grandly, how proudly she cleaved the rolling waves and hurled them up on either side. But times are not always so hopeful. She encountered a storm. Her strong timbers strained and cracked. Her sails split in fragments. Her captain grew sick and heartless, and finally after a hard-fought night only succeeded in beaching his vessel on a friendly shore, wrecked and ruined.

This was our young prodigal. It was all smiles that morning when he proudly stepped out from the old home and entered upon life for himself. The sky of hope was never so clear to him. The sun of promise never shone so brightly. He had his money with which he was going to have a good time. He had the freedom which he had so long craved.

To him this was a grand start, an envious beginning. But alas, how sad the end! Soon the storm of temptation and sin is raging. He is being swayed to and fro. Like the handsome sails upon the proud vessel, his youthful expectations are split in tatters. The gaily-rigged boat of self-security and self-appreciation is shattered into fragments of ruin, and he lies upon the shores of life wrecked and ruined.

Now, there are three causes which operated upon his life just at this point, which we must consider.

IMPROPER CONCEPTION OF MONEY

First – had an improper conception of the value of money.

To him money was intended simply to give a man a gay time. This was evidenced by the fact that he spent his substance in riotous living. Alas, alas! It is too true that many of our young men regard money as having no higher value than giving a gay time.

Two young men came to the city from the same community. They obtained good positions. They received the same salaries. They roomed together. One of them decided to lay by a certain portion of his money every month; the other strayed off after “a good time” – that fiend which has destroyed so many noble young men. He frequently laughed at his room-mate for his stinginess. But it was not long before his stingy room-mate had a nice little home and a pretty little wife, and was as happy as he could be; while the society dude was a professional deadbeat, and no man cared for him. Money ought only to be valued for the good it can do. Do not forget this, it may help you some day.

BAD COMPANIONS

Second – The wrong kind of companions.

There is no doubt, when the prodigal started out with money in his pocket and a free heart, and began to spend his money, he was at once surrounded by a gang of professional deadbeats and bums. They are always such to take a young fellow who knows little about the ways of the world.

I was called once to the police headquarters on Monday morning, and told that a young man was there from Lynchburg, who wanted to see me. I went inside the jail, and found an innocent-looking young fellow. He was crying. I soon saw he was a novice in that business. An officer told me the story. He had left home and come to our city on Saturday afternoon to accept a position which had been tendered him. He had a few dollars given him by his widowed mother. Upon arriving, he fell in with the wrong crowd. They found he had a little money, led him into a dram shop, and from the dram shop into still worse dives, and then he was robbed. A fight and an arrest followed. I arranged to get him out, and shall never forget his parting words:

“I’m going home to my mammy.”

Boys, nearly everything depends upon your early associations. O, that you could be made to realize it as I know it.

Mr. Beecher tells of a large tree in his father’s yard. It had stood there for years. They noticed a very peculiar vine growing around it, but they paid little attention to it, as it grew very slowly. But after some years the tree died, and they dug up the old stump, and to their great astonishment they found that this old vine had so entwined itself around the roots of the old tree as to cut off circulation, and death was inevitable.

So, my young friends, with evil associations. They may be ever so flattering in their outward expressions, but beneath the surface they are constantly reaching forth to destroy you. Beware of them as you would the Python.

In going into any community always look out for the best. Not “best” in the sense most people regard best. A great many think the term “best” refers to godless old colonels, captains and majors. Some are so reckless in the use of the term “best” as to make it apply to the withered crop of dudes that remains. A lady some time ago said to me:

“The best people dance.”

I said, “Beg your pardon; who are they?”

And when she had named them, she had called over a list of “would-be’s” – a list of old fobs and old maids, with only now and then a good couple, and they’ll have to quit, or they’ll be just like the others.

No, don’t hunt for that kind of “best.” Hunt for the young men who are moral, who don’t drink, play cards or dance, but who go to church and Bible school, and spend their leisure hours in legitimate recreation or at home. And thus selecting your companions, you’ll have no trouble with them.

THE NATURE OF SIN

Third – The greatest trouble with young people is to get them to have a proper conception of the nature of sin.

What is sin? God’s Word gives us but one definition of it: **“Sin is the transgression of the law.”** Obedience to the law of God is life to the soul; sin is the destroyer of soul-life.

The best definition outside of that given in the Bible is given by Mr. Spurgeon. He says sin is a cancer which eats up and destroys the soul’s prospect for immortal glory, and wrecks and ruins it for life. This is awful, if true, and I think by following the analogy a little way we shall see it to be true.

Notice, first, its insidiousness. Dr. D. Hays Agnew, than whom there has not lived upon this continent, in my judgment, a greater surgeon, says, in speaking of insidious diseases:

“Of the insidious diseases known to man, this we call cancer is the worst. We never know how, when or where it is going to make its attack upon the body. Whether in some of the less hurtful ways upon the surface, and submit for treatment, or whether in its ravaging thirst for human life, it will lay its dirty hand upon some internal organ and prove death.

These are the words of a wise man. The man who has in his blood the germ of cancer may never feel secure. Sooner or later it will assert itself upon him.

But not more insidious in its attack upon the physical man is the germ of cancer, than is the germ of sin to the spiritual man. Beginning, as it does, as but a small floating organism, so to speak, it courses through the various avenues of life in search of the proper time and place, and when it has found them it sends its dirty, slimy roots and rootlets into the vital principles, and soon claims its victim.

O, the insidiousness of sin! How it undermines and destroys bright hopes and good prospects!

How it steals the innocent babe from its mother’s breast, leads him on through the years of his development, promising bright things, but in the end placing him upon the hangman’s gallows!

PETER DEGRAAF, THE CONDEMNED CRIMINAL

When I lived in the city of Winston, N. C., a young man of twenty-one was convicted of the murder of a young woman. His name was Peter Degraaf. Great interest was manifested concerning the trial. I was his spiritual advisor. Just before his execution he said:

“Tell every young man to let whiskey, pistols and bad women alone. Once,” he continued, “I was innocent, but gradually I was led astray, until now what a spectacle!”

Young man, take warning. This is a mighty enemy with which you are contending.

But you say, “It will never get me.”

O, no certainly not! Whoever thought that it would master them? Did you ever know of one who expected sin to be their ruin? “Never get me”! Ah! Young man, you don’t know your doom. I know it is all smiles now; but listen! The day will not always be so bright. The sky will not always be so clear. The germ of sin will show itself, and its fruits you must reap.

Samson, when he fondly lay his head in the lap of Delilah, never dreamed of its consequences.

David, when he first looked upon the beautiful form of the wife of Uriah, never thought that it would lead on and on until he became an adulterer and murderer; and yet, David had doubtless much more power of resistance than you.

NO DANGER, NO DANGER

But you say, “No danger, no danger to me.” You are told about these things, but they make no impression upon you, there is “no danger” to you. Your bold self-satisfaction and determination remind me of an incident which occurred in a London theater.

A snake-charmer gave an exhibition. He had the stage decked with flowers and shrubbery till it resembled a flower garden. In this garden was a large anaconda snake, with which the performer would play as if it were a frolicsome, harmless kitten. He would appear on the stage, and when the applause that greeted him had ceased, he would tell the people not to be uneasy, as the snake was tame, so that there was no danger in handling it.

At one of these exhibitions the anaconda tried to entwine itself around its keeper's body. With a mighty effort he succeeded in unwinding the coils of the serpent, and dashed it to the floor. Some of the spectators begged him to cease – implored him not to dally with the dangerous monster; but he told them only to be quiet – that there was no danger, and that those weak-kneed, chicken-hearted people who were always afraid should shut up or leave the building.

The snake raised its head again, though its tail was motionless. The performer returned to it; but as he did so the monster suddenly began to entwine itself around his body. He again attempted to free himself, shouting, meanwhile, “Keep quiet, keep quiet, there is no danger – no danger whatsoever!”

But hardly had the words escaped his lips ere another sound was heard – a loud, wild, horrible cry of pain, succeeded by the noise of cracking bones and the weird death-rattle of the strangling victim of his own temerity.

Oh! Young man, go on if you will in the enjoyment of the so-called pleasures of sin. You will feel it's cold and merciless coils some of these days fastening around you. It will be too late, then, to throw off those evil habits which you have been forming all through the passing years.

Notice, secondly, sin's loathsomeness. Not only is sin like unto cancer in the insidious manner of its attack, but also in the exceeding loathsomeness of its nature.

I once visited a poor woman suffering with a facial cancer. What a pitiable sight to behold! I shall not attempt to describe it – I would not if I could. In agony of pain she was awaiting her final summons. I have also visited the great cancer hospital of New York City, the greatest institution of its kind in the world. Hundreds of poor sufferers are there, and despite the great care taken with them, the strongest-nerved man, as he stands there and beholds them, will quiver and shake. But this thing in us we call sin is none the less loathsome in its nature than is this disease.

Can you imagine a sight more to be shunned than that of a young man who has been overcome by sinful habits to the extent that he has lost his manhood and now lives in gutters, in dens of infamy or in prisons?

“Don’t go near him for the world” was said the other day by a good mother to her little boy who came in and told her of a young man who had staggered up the steps and was asking for a piece of bread. What was the matter?

Ah, the poor fellow was loathsome. He had come out of a good home, had a godly father and mother, had at one time a good prospect in life; but he had fallen in with a bad crowd, and had contracted the habit of drink, until now he was a walking devil. Mothers are afraid to trust their children in his present while he eats a morsel of bread.

And it makes no difference at all how well you carry yourself in what is known as society. You may move in the very highest circles, so-called. Your person may be adorned with the most costly apparel. Indeed you may be the leader in all the social events in your sphere, yet with the germ of sin unforgiven and uncleansed by Christ, you are a man of putrefaction and decay; and all that is needed to bring to light this sad fact is time and opportunity.

Only a few months ago a passenger train with several passengers went down through a bridge into a broad, deep stream out west. An investigation was held, and the cause was found to exist in the construction of a beam. During its molding a bit of air by some means found its way into the center of the shaft, and a cavity was the result. The outside looked well. No sign of a flaw was observed, but finally, when under the pressure of a heavy burden it asserted itself, the shaft gave way and the great bridge with a mighty crash collapsed.

So are hidden flaws in the beam of life. That character, young man, may be imposed upon the public for awhile as sound. You may polish the outside. You may run upon family history and blood. But let me impress you with this truth: all that you need to be a wreck is the proper opportunity. That tautly spot, that unpardonable sin in your heart, will assert itself sooner or later. O, be wise; wait not for the test. Flee from sin to the atoning blood of Christ.

ITS DESTRUCTION OF LIFE

Thirdly, sin is like cancer in its destruction of soul life. Thus far we have been considering sin largely with reference to its blighting effects in this life. We have seen its insidiousness, its loathsomeness and now we come to deal with the most important point in our study – its destruction to soul life.

It would be bad enough if sin in its greed only touched this life – bad enough if only it robbed us of our bright prospects and our social position; but it will not, it cannot stop there. Like the insect that begins at the outside of the tree and is not content until he has penetrated the heart; or the panther, not content with simply mutilating and destroying the body, but must, in his thirst for human blood, go deeper and cut out the heart, the fountain of life; so is sin. It is not content with destroying the earthly life, but must go further and fasten its mighty grasp upon the heart-center of eternal life, and eat up and destroy its prospects of immortal glory.

O, that I could fire you with this thought – the culmination of all sin, when it must end at last. Will you listen to me, unsaved man? Wanderer in sin, will you not stop in your heedless march, and let ring in your ears for a moment the significance of this truth?

LOST! LOST!!

Some years ago a man was benighted in a mining region. He lost his way. The darkness was dense, the dangers were thick. The next step might precipitate him down some awful shaft, some gloomy pit and dash him bruised and shapeless upon its floor. He knew his peril, and he stopped, stood still and begun to cry,

“Lost! Lost!! Lost!!!”

A cottager heard the sound, and, grasping a lantern, hurried forth to answer the cry, “Lost! Lost!! Lost!!!”

The lost man saw in the distance the glimmer of his light. It came nearer, until, as its rays flashed through the surrounding darkness, he found that he was standing upon the very verge of death itself! Another step would have plunged him down a tremendous shaft, a crushed and mangled corpse! One step! O, think of it! So close to death and eternity!

Young man, you are lost tonight, wandering about in sin. O for some divine light to come into our midst, to cleave the darkness and show you the possible danger which lies before you. Stop! See the awful pit, out of whose mouth come the groans of agony of the lost souls in hell. Stop in your wanderings, lest another step plunge you in despair. O, see the light which God has given you through Jesus His Son. Come unto Him, and be saved.

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