

THE WORD OF GOD
AND
THE LIFE OF HOLINESS

by

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CHAPTER TWO -
THE WORD AS THE REVEALER OF SIN

I WOULD BEGIN with a statement from Dr. Graham Scroggie's masterly survey of Romans: "News which is good implies a state which is bad; supply presupposes want; salvation implies sinfulness." With that statement I would like to read something else which reveals a tragic reality which we must acknowledge to-day that there is practically no consciousness of sin in our present world.

In a recent volume entitled *The Development of English Theology in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Elliott Binns says this - I am quoting, only because it expresses exactly what I believe - "We have thus the beginnings of that spirit of indifference which has reached such terrible proportions in our own day, when sport and the cinema have almost completely displaced more serious matters in the minds of the average man and woman. People will not be bothered by such matters as their sins and short-comings . . . A grave consequence of the loss of authority of Christianity and the Church was a progressive decline in morals. There were those who found in the uncertainty of our Christian truth a welcome excuse for throwing off this moral restraint which they had resented . . . "

The situation is far more grave to-day than it was then; and before I go into this subject from the Word of GOD I would like to ask, Why is there such a terrible absence of sense of sin? This is true in the world, and I believe it is also true in the Church. I hear very few people talking about sin to-day; and in most of the meetings that I attend, even where an invitation is given, I seldom see any weeping or sobbing or brokenness for sin. Why is this? May I name some causes without any elaboration at all, and then we will look at the blessed Word of GOD?

First, there is a sense of relativity in ethics. The great moral ethical standards are gone; everything now is relative - in fact, that which is bad might be good, modern ethics says, in certain circumstances. There is no such thing as real wrong; there may be a relative wrong, but if a lie is told for the State, then it is good; if deception is carried on in the name of totalitarianism, it must not be condemned - it is the object for which one is striving which determines whether a thing is right or wrong. The grave reality of what is wrong and what is right, slips away in this strange compromise. There is an anemic diluting relativity in ethics, until to-day people almost think that under certain circumstances immorality can be excused, and may not be condemned by

GOD Almighty.

Secondly, we have in our world around us an increase of lawlessness, as our Lord foretold in Matthew 24:12. When we are in an environment of rebellion against GOD, and of lawlessness, we breathe its atmosphere, we read its books; we absorb its concepts; we are living in this world, and the spirit of this world seeps into our own inner life, Christians as we are. Unconsciously it may, be, we lean towards the world in which we live, and even we as believers are affected by this diabolic, sin-denying spirit in which we are living.

Thirdly, this is an age in which man is exalted. I do not know how we can do it, after two world wars! The ideal in our modern philosophical thinking reaches no higher than the head of a man! We are not bringing GOD into our thoughts, and man becomes the measure of all man thinks. In our American Declaration of Independence, if I may be allowed to mention it in this country, we say that GOD created man free and equal; but in the new Declaration of Human Rights, by the United Nations, GOD is never mentioned. If GOD is out of our thinking, sin is denied.

Then the opportunities for sin are so much greater to-day than they ever were before. Our automobiles, our hotel life, our travel, and sending our boys all round the world: all these things create opportunities for sin, which mean temptations to sin; and therefore the sensitiveness to sin goes down on the thermometer of our hearts.

Next, there is the loss of the sense of Heaven and hell, and judgment to come. In the *Oxford History of England*, Volume 1870-1914, the writer says that the reason why the world in the nineteenth century acknowledged that the British merchant was the most honourable merchant in the world, was because he had a sense of Heaven and hell and judgment to come. That is an astonishing statement; he was honest because he knew there was a hell and a Heaven. That day, alas, has gone.

All these and many more reasons which I could name make for a dullness and an apathy to these questions. Before we consider how the Word diagnoses sin, may I outline six ways in which the Bible deals with sin; six ways in which the Word of GOD faces this sin-question?

First of all, in its names for sin - and that is a subject I am going to leave alone at the moment; but there are probably twenty names for sin. I do not mean kinds of sins, but the names of sin - evil, unrighteousness, lawlessness, and so on.

Secondly, the Bible reveals man's state and nature, as in Ephesians 2:1, 5 - "**dead in trespasses and sins**." Let me illustrate this. In 1914 -, when I was a student, the greatest authority in the world on the life of Paul and the archaeology of Luke and Acts came to Chicago to lecture, and he used the phrase, "the divine spark in every man." The President of the Moody Bible Institute was Dr. James Gray, a polished Bostonian Christian and gentleman. When the meeting concluded Dr. Gray rose and said, "I am sure our learned guest would not wish that anyone should leave this room to-night under any misapprehension or error. There is no divine spark in every man; we are all dead in trespasses and sins until the life of CHRIST comes into our hearts." He did not get that out of some other book; he was not matching Greek mythology with American mythology: the only way you could contradict such a phrase was from the Word of GOD.

Thirdly, the naming of specific sins. I cannot name these, but I will take one moment to give you the location of Paul's catalogues of sins: Romans 1:28-32; I Corinthians 5:9-13; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:25 and 5:12; Colossians 3:5-9; 2 Timothy 3:1-13. We need often to hold these up as a mirror before our eyes.

Fourthly, the Bible makes clear the consequence of sin. It has been said that the greatest sin of modern fiction is that it records the lives of wicked men and women as though there was some final pleasure, satisfaction and success in a life of sin, whereas sin only leads to tragedy, disillusionment and disappointment. There is an immediate consequence, and our prisons and insane institutions reveal them. There is, moreover, the ultimate consequence - **"For because of these things cometh the wrath of GOD. . ."**

Fifthly, sin is seen in relation to Calvary, in a double way - the sin that put our Lord upon the Cross (yours and mine); and the sin atoned for there.

It is an interesting study to take one of Paul's catalogues of sins, especially 2 Timothy 3 (the picture of mankind at the end of the age, which will, I think, concentrate in antichrist himself - he will be the incarnation of all these sins), and match them against our Lord at Calvary; you will find that more than half of them were involved there. There were lies; a love of money played a part; there was murder - there are nine different words used in the Book of Acts alone for murdering the Lord JESUS, nine different terms for killing the Holy SON of GOD. But more than that: on the tree He died for sin. There never would have been a Cross, there never would have been the death of JESUS, had it not been for the awfulness of sin. He did not die because He thought there was sin, a mystic of Judaism; He died because sin was so awful that man could never be brought to GOD unless He died for their sins. If we want to know what GOD thinks of sin, we can look at our blessed Lord hanging on a tree for our sins.

Finally, the Bible reveals sin in that it shows us the kind of life that we ought to live; and when we see that life, then our sins are exposed to us.

I have sketched this in brief outline; now I would like to make three major statements regarding the diagnostic properties of the Word of GOD. The Word of GOD approaches the sin question in three different ways.

First, it is a Word of reproof. **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"** (II Timothy 3:16). The first word is "**doctrine**" or "teaching," and the first thing this book does is to teach us the truth of GOD, of man, of the world, of the age to come, and so on.

The next word is a word meaning conviction.

This is the word that our Lord used in John 8:46 - **"which of you convinceth me of sin?"** The word "reproof" here is a little weak; it means more than reproof. You give a little job to your boy to do after school, and you say, "Now, son, I want you to clear out the ashes."

I do not know how your children are over here, but sometimes in our country boys would sooner

play baseball than carry out the ashes, so after school the boy has a light remembrance of what father says, but a very strong urge to go out and play. The urge overcomes the remembrance, and he goes out to play. The father comes home for supper, and goes down in the basement to see if everything is cleaned up - and there is the whole mess just as it was in the morning. He says to his son, "I told you to clear out the basement." "When did you tell me that?" "I told you that last night, and I reminded you of it this morning." "Oh, yes. Well, dad, I forgot; I will do it tomorrow; I got to playing; I am ever so sorry I forgot." "All right, do not forget to do it tomorrow." That is the way it goes. Down in his wicked little heart he is laughing, and he says, "I certainly got away with that." He has been rebuked, but he has not been convicted of any wrong at all. One can scold and criticize and rebuke, but that is not what the Word of GOD does; the Word of GOD convicts of sin, so that the person comes under a sense of having done wrong; and no other book in the world can do this.

I want to take another word for rebuke - I John 1:9, "**If we confess our sins . . .**" The Greek word is *homologeō*. "*logeō*" is the word from which we get "ology", meaning knowledge; *homo* means "the same." In geometry, "homologous side" means the same, or equal. Thus the word translated "confession" means "to say the same thing." That does not mean going along the street saying the same thing to yourself; it means two people talking and saying the same thing.

Let us say that a friend of mine and his wife are driving along from London to Southampton. On the way they want to visit some friends out in the country. So they turn off a side road and come to a fork, and there is no sign. My friend says, "Dear, I think we go to the right," and she says, "I know we ought to go to the left." Now, there is only one thing to do, of course; that is to go to the left! They are not saying the same thing, are they? They drive down the road, and have gone eight miles when they see a sign, and it is the sign they were looking for; and the friend says, "Dear, you were right." What has he done? He is now saying what she said; they are agreed.

Now, this Bible is the book in which GOD speaks, and when you and I begin to say the same thing as the Bible regarding sin, then we are confessing sin. We are taking GOD's side. Heinrich Meyer says that the plural in this verse means specific sins. When we are down on our knees before GOD, we need to call the sins of our life as GOD calls them. You can say, "Lord, forgive my sin," and still not name it; but when you say, "O GOD, I told a lie this morning, and I want that lie forgiven and washed out; Lord, I had an evil thought this morning" - and you can name it to GOD, and you want it dealt with - now, you are going to do one of two things as the days go and come. If you are going to talk to GOD, and He is going to talk to you, and you are going to say the same thing with GOD, either you will stop that sin, or you will stop praying: one or the other. You will not keep on calling yourself a liar before GOD; you will not talk about adulterous thoughts very long before GOD; you will not confess embezzlement long before GOD: you will either stop that sin and have it washed away, or your prayer-life will cease.

There is a great illustration of this in II Samuel 12, where Nathan is dealing with David.

First he tells a parable and awakens David's interest. Then David is angered, and says, "**The man that hath done this thing shall die.**" Then Nathan says, "**Thou art the man**" (v. 7), an accusation. Now notice what he says: "**Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of**

Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things." What is he doing? He is reviewing the goodness of GOD to David. I do not know how it is with you, but the thing that breaks my heart is this matter of the goodness of GOD. I often find myself these days aware anew of the goodness of GOD, and, beloved, does not the goodness of GOD lead thee to repentance?

Then Nathan begins to reason with David: **"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord . . ."** He talks to him of the judgment of GOD: **"the sword shall never depart from thine house . . . I will raise up evil against thee."** Now notice! **"I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun"** - I will bring you into disgrace: that would frighten the life out of me! Then he says, **"The child... shall surely die"** - the innocent are going to be punished. And David said, **"I have sinned against the Lord"**; he confessed his sin: that is what the Word of GOD does.

The second way in which the Word of GOD deals with sin is that it is a mirror - James 1:21-25, **"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."**

As I was thinking about the word "mirror," it occurred to me that I can wash my hands ten times a day without looking into the mirror.

When I undress at night, I do not look in the mirror to see if I have accumulated dirt on my feet; I do not need a mirror to take a bath. But the most important part of my body is my face - all you see of me is my face, my hands, and a suit of clothes! I look at people, I speak, I listen, and this is my face; and it is the only part of my body that I cannot see! I have never seen my own face - I have seen it in pictures; but this part of me which everybody sees, I do not see; so I need a mirror.

A lot of things can happen to your face unconsciously to you. You can be working with tools and rub your face with greasy hands, and you get a big streak of dirt across it - and you will never know unless you look in a mirror. You could have a defect, and know that it is repulsive. Any blemish of the face is repulsive to someone else; and you would be ashamed to go through the streets if you were told that you had a streak of dirt down your face.

Now, beloved, this Bible is the mirror of GOD, and as we look into it we see what we would never see otherwise. This is a mirror which reveals our sins. Could I take two passages, one of evil, one of good? In Ephesians 4, we have a catalogue of sins; let us begin with v. 25, **"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another"**: I do not know about you, dear people - if nothing happens I am going away with a wonderful picture of British life: there are many things here which warm my heart; you have a courtesy and a thoughtfulness, and I must say you have a reverence, which we do not have at the present time in our country. But I am finding that a lot of Christian people can

tell lies to-day without batting an eyelid; and a lot of ministers, too, can tell lies about their own work.

I remember talking to a dear friend of mine about his father, a noble Bible teacher, in Heaven now; he loved his father, but he said to me, "My father had an optical defect; he always multiplied his audiences by three." If you say you had 3,000 people and you had 1,000, it is a lie. If you say you had calls to two churches, but could not make up your mind which to take, and you did not have any calls, it is a lie.

A lot of things are being told that are not true; and when we indulge this kind of sin we can pray all night and we shall not have the blessing of the Spirit of GOD.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

"**Corrupt**" means rotten; to tear down, to disintegrate. "**Edify**" means to build up. My dear people, you and I should never, as children of GOD, allow anything to pass our lips that will sow seeds of corruption in the lives of other people - no evil story, no smart remark, no garbage. I remember a great scholar from these shores coming to our country once; his books are in my library, and in yours, too. He was at a lunch where I was, and he told a story which was crude and coarse, and I can never take down a book of his without thinking of that story which was corrupt. **"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."**

Let me tell you something more. In II Corinthians 6:3-10 we read: ". . . **giving no offence** [occasion of stumbling] **in anything, that the ministry be not blamed:**" - this is for you and me - "**But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering,**" - That is a hard one for me - "**by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.**"

When I look at that piece of the mirror of GOD, I see some shortcomings of my own. I think I have read this passage fifty times in the last two years, and I am still seeing blemishes in my own life.

The third word is "sword," the sword of surgery - Hebrews 4:12, 13. "**For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor**" - the word is *criticos* - "**of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.**" The word translated "**opened**" refers to a wrestler taking his opponent by the throat and pushing back his head until the whole neck is exposed. It is a picture of the Word pushing back the layers of encrustation until the SPIRIT of GOD gets at that cancerous disease

and cuts it out.

Beloved, movies are not convicting, novels are not convicting, newspapers are not convicting, education is not convicting, crime reports do not convict. If we are to have a revival, if we are to come to Calvary, to be delivered from sin and the wrath of GOD, we will need a baptism of a consciousness of sin before GOD - which will come from the Word of GOD, and the prayer, **"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"** (Psalm 139:23, 24).

~ end of chapter 2 ~
