

Salvation from the Pleasure of Sin

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

IT is here that God begins His actual application of salvation unto His elect. God saves us from the pleasure or love of sin before He delivers us from the penalty or punishment of sin. Necessarily so, for it would be neither an act of holiness nor of righteousness were He to grant full pardon to one who was still a rebel against Him, loving that which He hates. God is a God of order throughout, and nothing ever more evidences the perfections of His works than the orderliness of them. And how does God save His people from the pleasure of sin? The answer is, "By imparting to them a nature which hates evil and loves holiness." This takes place when they are born again, so that actual salvation begins with regeneration. Of course it does: where else could it commence? Fallen man can never perceive his desperate need of salvation nor come to Christ for it, till he has been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

"He hath made everything beautiful in his time" (Ecc 3:11), and much of the beauty of God's spiritual handiwork is lost upon us unless we duly observe their "time." Has not the Spirit Himself emphasized this in the express enumeration He has given us in "For whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom 8:29-30). Verse 29 announces the Divine foreordination; verse 30 states the manner of its actualization. It seems passing strange that with this Divinely defined method before them, so many preachers begin with our justification, instead of with that effectual call (from death unto life, our regeneration) which precedes it. Surely it is most obvious that regeneration must first take place in order to lay a foundation for our justification. Justification is by faith (Act 13:39; Rom 5:1; Gal 3:8), and the sinner must be Divinely quickened before he is capable of believing savingly.

Does not the last statement made throw light upon and explain what we have said is so "passing strange"? Preachers today are so thoroughly imbued with free-willism that they have departed almost wholly from that sound evangelism which marked our forefathers. The radical difference between Arminianism and Calvinism is that the system of the former revolves about the creature, whereas the system of the latter has the Creator for its centre of orbit. The Arminian allots to man the first place; the Calvinist gives God that position of honor. Thus the Arminian begins his discussion of salvation with justification, for the sinner must *believe* before he can be forgiven; further back he will not go, for he is unwilling that man should be made *nothing of*. But the instructed Calvinist begins with election, descends to regeneration, and then shows that by being born again (by the sovereign act of God, in which the creature has no part) the sinner is made capable of savingly believing the Gospel.

The Unbeliever's First Step: A New Nature

What multitudes of people would strongly resent being told that they delighted in evil! They would indignantly ask if we supposed them to be moral perverts. No indeed: a person may be thoroughly chaste and yet delight in evil. It may be that some of our own readers repudiate the charge that they have ever taken *pleasure* in sin, and would claim on the contrary, that from earliest recollection they have detested wickedness in all its forms. Nor would we dare to call into question their sincerity; instead we point out that it only affords another exemplification of the solemn fact that “the heart is *deceitful* above all things” (Jer 17:9). But this is a matter that is not open to argument: the plain teaching of God's Word decides the point once and for all, and beyond its verdict there is no appeal. What, then, say the Scriptures?

So far from God's Word denying that there is any delight to be found therein, it expressly speaks of “the *pleasures* of sin”; it immediately warns that those pleasures are but “for a season” (Heb 11:25), for the aftermath is painful and not pleasant; yea, unless God intervenes in His sovereign grace, they entail eternal torment. So too, the Word refers to those who are “*lovers of pleasure* more than lovers of God” (2Ti 3:4). It is indeed striking to observe how often this discordant note is struck in Scripture. It mentions those who “*love* vanity” (Psa 4:2); “him that *loveth* violence” (Psa 11:5); “thou *lovest* evil more than good” (Psa 52:3); “he *loved* lies” (Psa 62:4); “scorners *delight* in their scorning” (Pro 1:22); “they which *delight* in their abominations” (Isa 66:3); “their abominations were according as they *loved*” (Hosea 9:10); “who hated the good and *loved* the evil” (Mic 3:2); “if any man *love* the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1Jo 2:15). To love sin is far worse than to commit it, for a man may be suddenly tripped up or commit it through frailty.

The fact is, my reader, that we are not only born into this world with an evil nature, but with hearts that are thoroughly in love with sin. Sin is our native element. We are wedded to our lusts, and of ourselves are no more able to alter the bent of our corrupt nature than we could change our skin color or the leopard his spots. But what is impossible with man, is possible to God (Luk 18:27), and when He takes us in hand this is where He begins—by saving us from the pleasure or love of sin. This is the great miracle of grace, for the Almighty stoops down and picks up a loathsome leper from the dunghill and makes him a new creature in Christ, so that the things he once loved he now hates, and the things he once hated he now loves. God commences by saving us from ourselves. He does not save us from the penalty until He has delivered us from the love of sin.

And how is this miracle of grace accomplished, or rather, exactly *what does it consist of?* Negatively, not by eradicating the evil nature, nor even by refining it. Positively, by communicating a new nature, a holy nature, which loathes that which is evil, and delights in all that is truly good. To be more specific: *First*, God saves His people from the pleasure or love of sin by putting His holy awe in their hearts, for “the fear of the Lord is to *hate evil*” (Pro 8:13), and again, “the fear of the Lord is to depart from evil” (Pro 6:6). *Second*, God saves His people from the pleasure of sin by communicating to them a new and vital principle: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit”

(Rom 5:5), and where the love of God rules the heart, the love of sin is dethroned. *Third*, God saves His people from the love of sin by the Holy Spirit's drawing their affections unto things above, thereby taking them off the things which formerly enthralled them.

The Believer's Struggle

If on the one hand the unbeliever hotly denies that he is in love with sin, many a believer is often hard put to persuade himself that he *has been* saved from the love thereof. With an understanding that has in part been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he is the better able to discern things in their true colors. With a heart that has been made honest by grace, he refuses to call sweet bitter. With a conscience that has been sensitized by the new birth, he the more quickly feels the workings of sin and the hankering of his affections for that which is forbidden. Moreover, the flesh remains in him, unchanged, and as the raven constantly craves carrion, so this corrupt principle in which our mothers conceived us, lusts after and delights in that which is the opposite of holiness. It is these things which occasion and give rise to the disturbing questions that clamour for answer within the genuine believer.

The sincere Christian is often made to seriously doubt if he *has been* delivered from the love of sin. Such questions as these plainly agitate his mind: "Why do I so readily yield to temptation? Why do some of the vanities and pleasures of the world still possess so much attraction for me? Why do I chafe so much against any restraints being placed upon my lusts? Why do I find the work of mortification (Rom 8:13) so difficult and distasteful? Could such things as these be if I were a new creature in Christ? Could such horrible experiences as these happen if God had saved me from taking pleasure in sin?" Well do we know that we are here giving expression to the very doubts which exercise the minds of many of our readers, and those who are strangers thereto are to be pitied. But what shall we say in reply? How is this distressing problem to be resolved?

The Believer's Assurance

How may one be assured that he has been saved from the love of sin? Let us point out first that the presence of that within us which still lusts after and takes delight in some evil things, is *not incompatible* with our having been saved from the love of sin, paradoxical as that may sound. It is part of the mystery of the Gospel that those who be saved are yet *sinner*s in themselves. The point we are here dealing with is similar to and parallel with faith. The Divine principle of faith in the heart does not cast out unbelief. Faith and doubts exist side by side with a quickened soul, which is evident from those words, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24). In like manner the Christian may exclaim and pray, "Lord, I long after holiness, help Thou my lustings after sin." And why is this? Because of the existence of two separate natures, the one at complete variance with the other within the Christian.

How, then, is the presence of faith to be ascertained? Not by the ceasings of unbelief, but by discovering its *own* fruit and works. Fruit may grow amid thorns as flowers among weeds, and yet it *is* fruit nonetheless. Faith exists amid many doubts and fears.

Notwithstanding opposing forces within as well as from without us, faith still reaches out after God. Notwithstanding innumerable discouragements and defeats, faith continues to fight. Notwithstanding many refusals from God, it yet clings to Him and says, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen 32:26). Faith may be fearfully weak and fitful, often eclipsed by the clouds of unbelief, nevertheless the Devil himself cannot persuade its possessor to repudiate God's Word, despise His Son, or abandon all hope. The presence of faith, then, may be ascertained in that it causes its possessor to come before God *as an empty-handed beggar* beseeching Him for mercy and blessing.

The Believer's Salvation from the Love of Sin

Now just as the presence of faith may be known amid all the workings of unbelief, so our salvation from the love of sin may be ascertained notwithstanding all the lustings of the flesh after that which is evil. But in what way? How is this initial aspect of salvation to be identified? We have already anticipated this question in an earlier paragraph, wherein we stated that God saved us from delighting in sin by imparting a nature that hates evil and loves holiness, which takes place at the new birth. Consequently, the real question to be settled is, "How may the Christian positively determine whether that new and holy nature has been imparted to him?" The answer is, "By observing its activities, particularly the opposition it makes (under the energizings of the Holy Spirit) unto indwelling sin." Not only does the flesh (the principle of sin) lust against the spirit, but the spirit (the principle of holiness) lusts and wars against the flesh (Gal 5:17).

First, our salvation from the pleasure or love of sin may be recognized by sin's becoming a *burden* to us. This is truly a spiritual experience. Many souls are loaded down with worldly anxieties, who know nothing of what it means to be bowed down with a sense of guilt. But when God takes us in hand, the iniquities and transgressions of our past life are made to lie as an intolerable load upon the conscience. When we are given a sight of ourselves as we appear before the eyes of the thrice holy God, we will exclaim with the Psalmist, "For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me" (Psa 40:12). So far from sin being pleasant, it is now felt as a cruel incubus, a crushing weight, and unendurable load. The soul is "heavy laden" (Mat 11:28) and bowed down. A sense of guilt oppresses and the conscience cannot bear the weight of it. Nor is this experience restricted to our first conviction: it continues with more or less acuteness throughout the Christian's life.

Second, our salvation from the pleasure of sin may be recognized by sin's becoming *bitter* to us. True, there are millions of unregenerate who are filled with remorse over the harvest reaped from their sowing of wild oats. Yet that is not hatred of sin, but dislike of its consequences—ruined health, squandered opportunities, financial straitness, or social disgrace. No, what we have reference to is that *anguish of heart* which ever marks the one the Spirit takes in hand. When the veil of delusion is removed and we see sin in the light of God's countenance; when we are given a discovery of the depravity of our very nature, then we perceive that we are sunk in carnality and death. When sin is

opened to us in all its secret workings, we are made to feel the vileness of our hypocrisy, self-righteousness, unbelief, impatience, and the utter filthiness of our hearts. And when the penitent soul views the sufferings of Christ, he can say with Job, “God maketh my heart soft” (23:16).

Ah, my reader, it is this experience which prepares the heart to go out after Christ: those that are whole need not a physician, but they that are quickened and convicted by the Spirit are anxious to be relieved by the great Physician. “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up” (1Sa 2:6-7). It is in this way that God slayeth our self-righteousness, maketh poor and bringeth low—by making sin to be an intolerable burden and as bitter wormwood to us. There can be no saving faith till the soul is filled with evangelical repentance, and repentance is a godly sorrow for sin, a holy detestation of sin, a sincere purpose to forsake it. The Gospel calls upon men to repent of their sins, forsake their idols, and mortify their lusts, and thus it is utterly impossible for the Gospel to be a message of good tidings to those who are in love with sin and madly determined to perish rather than part with their idols.

Nor is this experience of sin’s becoming bitter to us limited to our first awakening—it continues in varying degrees, to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. The Christian suffers under temptations, is pained by Satan’s fiery assaults, and bleeds from the wounds inflicted by the evil he commits. It grieves him deeply that he makes such a wretched return unto God for His goodness, that he requites Christ so evilly for His dying love, that he responds so fitfully to the promptings of the Spirit. The wanderings of his mind when he desires to meditate upon the Word, the dullness of his heart when he seeks to pray, the worldly thoughts which invade his mind on the Holy Sabbath, the coldness of his affections towards the Redeemer, cause him to groan daily; all of which goes to evidence that sin has been made bitter to him. He no longer welcomes those intruding thoughts which take his mind off God: rather does he sorrow over them. But, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Mat 5:4).

Third, our salvation from the pleasure of sin may be recognized by the felt *bondage* which sin produces. As it is not until a Divine faith is planted in the heart that we become aware of our native and inveterate unbelief, so it is not until God saves us from the love of sin that we are conscious of the fetters it has placed around us. Then it is we discover that we are “without strength” (Rom 5:6), unable to do anything pleasing to God, incapable of running the race set before us (Heb 12:1). A Divinely drawn picture of the saved soul’s felt bondage is to be found in Romans 7: “For I know that in me [that is, in my flesh] dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do...For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin” (vs. 18-19, 22-23). And what is the sequel? This, the agonizing cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (vs. 24). If that be the sincere lamentation of your heart, then God has saved you from the pleasure of sin.

Let it be pointed out though, that salvation from the love of sin is felt and evidenced in varying degrees by different Christians, and in different periods in the life of the same Christian, according to the measure of grace which God bestows, and according as that grace is active and operative. Some seem to have a more intense hatred of sin in all its forms than do others, yet the principle of hating sin is found in all real Christians. Some Christians, rarely if ever, commit any deliberate and premeditated sins: more often they are tripped up, suddenly tempted (to be angry or tell a lie) and are overcome. But with others the case is quite otherwise: they—fearful to say—actually plan evil acts. If any one indignantly denies that such a thing is possible in a saint, and insists that such a character is a stranger to saving grace, we would remind him of David: was not the murder of Uriah definitely planned? This second class of Christians find it doubly hard to believe they have been saved from the love of sin.



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