

## VENIAL AND MORTAL SINS.

**"There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it [to ask its forgiveness]. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." – 1 John 5:16,17.**

The Apostle here clearly teaches that there are two sorts of sins: one that may be repented of and reformed from, and for which forgiveness and reconciliation may be prayed for and expected, the other a sin that "hath never forgiveness" (Mark 3:29), while those who commit it, "it is impossible to renew again unto repentance." (Heb. 6:4,6; 10:26.) It is a sin unto death, and none need pray for or expect its forgiveness. The latter is sometimes called a death-sin, or "*mortal* sin," while the former is termed a "*venial* sin," or one which may be forgiven.

These distinct sins are recognized by these names by Roman Catholics. But this should be no reason why we or others should reject a thought which we see to be Scriptural. The ideas lying at the foundation of the distinctions we shall find not only reasonable, but older than Roman Catholicism, which had no existence as a system prior to the third century. The distinctions themselves, though not the names of those distinctions, Romanists received from the early, undenominational church. We must beware, however, of Papacy's definitions of what would constitute a venial and what a mortal sin. She classes as mortal sins such as require [they say] confession to a priest and his preparation and offering of a special *sacrifice of mass* as a cancellation of such sins; while under the term *venial* she classes all those unintentional sins which Christ's sacrifice covers, which need no confession to the priest, nor his sacrifice of the mass for their cancellation. It is not difficult to see that love of money as payment for masses had much to do with this classification of mortal and venial sins. When we, then, Scripturally divide sins

into two classes, death-sins or mortal sins, and forgivable or venial sins, let us leave Papacy's classification of these and seek the Scriptural classification.

First, then, let us see that there could be no such division of sins into two kinds aside from the New Covenant. Under God's law (aside from the New Covenant) any transgression of his law is sin, whether intended or not intended. God's law calls for *right* and nothing less, in deed as well as in thought; and every human being is sentenced to death, as unworthy of life, by that perfect law, because all (by reason of inherited weaknesses through the fall) are sinners, *i.e.*, not perfect in deed and in thought. Under that absolutely just, perfect and good law of God, all sins, no matter how slight, would be sins unto death – mortal sins.

The fact that God's law is thus *strict*, exacting perfection and depriving all imperfect beings of life, might seem cruelly severe to us fallen ones who find weaknesses within and temptations without, until we see that this very strictness and severity of God's law is designed for the benefit of his creatures who desire harmony with him. God's perfect law is suited exactly to perfect beings, and he never made and placed under it any others than perfect creatures – creatures in his own likeness – except Israel, typically. Thus we see that God did not create us imperfect and sinful and weak in mind and body and morals. The man whom God created was our father Adam. It was our fallen progenitors that brought us into being in their likenesses after they had long lost the god-likeness of perfection.

But God had benevolent designs with reference to the race of Adam. He saw beforehand that some of us would gladly be his children, and servants of righteousness, if permitted. But his just, perfect law, so proper for his perfect creatures, stood firm. To change that law to suit the fallen creatures would be to recognize

a lower standard than *perfection*, would make God a party to sin and imperfection, and would unsettle the principles and precedents of a government designed to be lasting and unchangeable and a universal blessing. So God provided for his fallen creatures in another way.

In his plan Christ Jesus became the redeemer or purchaser of Adam and all his family and effects, by paying the full penalty that stood against him, which was – death. Then, still working through this Redeemer, on whom he bestowed the gift of a higher nature, even the divine, God, without dealing directly with the sinners, and without allowing them to come under the judgment of his perfect law made for perfect beings, but dealing only with Christ who bought them, in him establishes a court of justice and a new trial for the fallen race.

In this special trial of those whom he bought, by the Redeemer, he will be the judge, and the perfect law of God will be the *standard* of judgment or trial. But this trial will be more merciful and lenient than if conducted otherwise, (not because Christ Jesus is more loving than Jehovah, for he is merely the co-operating agent in the development of Jehovah's plan, but) because during the trial of each the Judge can make *allowance* for all the weaknesses and errors of men which result from the degradations traceable by him directly or indirectly to the fall of Adam. And he will have the *legal right* to make such allowances *because* he himself paid the penalty for that whole transgression and its direct and indirect results in satisfaction of this very perfect law of God.

So, then, the *right* by which the Lord Jesus, during his Millennial reign and judgment of the world, will pass over and forgive, and not impute as sins, such violations of God's perfect law as are the results of ignorance, inherited weaknesses and temptation, *lies in the fact that he has already paid* the penalty

for the sin which led to all those weaknesses. And as that age advances and the work of enlightening all men progresses, and as they are gradually restored, step by step, nearer to perfection, the *allowances* for actual transgressions on the score of the redemptive work will grow less and less; until, at the close of the Millennial age, those who have progressed to actual perfection, physical, mental and moral, with full knowledge of right and wrong, will be subject to the same exact requirements at the hands of Christ as at the hands of Jehovah under the same perfect law of God, because then there would be no longer room for the imputation, to such, of the merits of the ransom to cover *future* sins, since any sins they would then commit would be wilful, and entirely independent of the fall and its consequent imperfections, all of which (Adamic death) would by that time be [R1249 : page 5] swallowed up – destroyed, removed. The work of the Mediatorial Kingdom thus ending by the completion of God's intentions, those who shall have been under discipline and restitution will be tested (Rev. 20:7-15); the unworthy will be destroyed, and such as prove fully obedient will be turned over to the full administration of the Father, that he may be seen to be the great All in all – the head of Christ and of all things; and then the work of mediation will be at an end, having accomplished God's purposes to the full – the testing and perfecting of all of the fallen race who are friends of God. Now look again, this time more critically, at the sins which will be forgiven by our Redeemer when he sits as Judge of the world, associating his church in that work with him. There will be then as now *three* sorts of sins, but only *two* of them recognized as sins.

*First*, there will be the actual imperfections or errors of thought, word and deed, *entirely unintentional*. This class of sins would be worthy of death under the one and only law of God which condemns everything that is imperfect; but such ARE NOT COUNTED SINS AT ALL under the New Covenant, because the

Judge's sacrifice for the culprit family *covers* these unavoidable weaknesses and transgressions *fully and completely*.

*Second*, there will be sins in which the elements of weakness and ignorance will be but a partial excuse, because a measure [R1250 : page 5] of wilfulness blends with the weakness. Such sins will be excusable only to the extent that they are of ignorance, weakness and temptation. To whatever degree they were *wilful*, to that extent they are not forgivable, but *must be punished* – with many or few "stripes," as the Judge sees the degree of wilfulness to be. Our Lord Jesus applies in such cases the merit of his own sacrifice to cover the criminal, to the extent that the crime is the result of inherited weakness from the Adamic fall and the consequent depravity of the race since.

*Third*, "there is a sin unto death," and those who go so far as to commit it need not be hoped for, nor prayed for, because it will be impossible to renew again by bringing to repentance those who thus sin. – Heb. 6:4-6; 1 John 5:16.

This sin is *one*, though it may be committed in a variety of ways. Whenever a wrong course is adopted intentionally, with a full desire to have it so, against a clear knowledge of the right and wrong in the matter, and not from weakness – physical or moral – such, to our understanding, is the one sin that is unto death; it is wilful, intentional sin against clear knowledge. It is unto death and not subject to forgiveness because not *covered* by Christ's ransom-price. It is not covered by the ransom because it is not in any sense traceable to Adam's transgression and its consequences. Christ as Mediator stands between men and God's perfect and exact requirements, to shield them from the exactness of that law *to the extent* of their weaknesses, ignorances and evil besetments, and to instruct them until they shall come to a clear knowledge of the truth. But Christ's object and God's object, in this mediation, is not to spare and shield *wilful sinners* from God's just law and its

penalty, but to recover the unwilling captives of sin and to release and restore them out of their weaknesses. The mediation is extended to all, but permanently benefits only those who accept and conform to it. *Wilful* sinners are condemned to death – second death – by the Mediator's law as well as by Jehovah's law, for they are identical except that the Mediator applies the merit of his own sacrifice to compensate for the Adamic weaknesses of those seeking to obey him, while they are coming up to perfection, under his instruction and aid.

The Apostle teaches that this sin unto death can be committed now by the church, if, after clearly recognizing Christ as their Redeemer and Mediator, and enjoying the blessings of his ransom-sacrifice, they knowingly turn from this, God's plan, to commend themselves to him aside from that sin-offering which Christ presented once for all who would come unto the Father. Those who have been once enlightened and who have tasted of the heavenly gift [forgiveness of sins through Christ], and have been made partakers of the spirit of holiness, who have tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the coming age, and who then *sin wilfully*, are sinning on their own account, and intelligently, after having enjoyed their full share of the redemption and release from Adamic or "original sin" secured by God for all through Christ's atoning work. By such a *wilful* course of *opposition* they clearly say to God, Thy great plan of redemption and reconciliation of the world through Christ is a failure so far as we are concerned; we do not appreciate Christ's work as Redeemer, nor recognize his blood (death) as the seal of the New Covenant, though we recognize him as a very good man whose example is worthy of imitation; we see no purchasing power in his blood for us; he died for himself and we die for ourselves; he commended himself to God as worthy of life, and we shall commend ourselves to God as worthy of life by doing the same as he did – following his example. They say, Our case is

in *God's hands*; he will bring us through; we needed no purchase or ransom-price for our sins, and we recognize none.

Thus, they do despite to the one and only plan of salvation provided by God – the salvation which is in Christ Jesus through faith in his blood (death) – and fall into the hands of the living God; and by their rejection of the *mediation* for sin secured in Christ's death they expose themselves to the full blaze of the perfect law which surely condemns any of the fallen race of Adam not under cover of the one and only *ransom*. And as Paul declares, their position then, without a Mediator, is *a fearful one*. (Heb. 10:31.) For as in the type all who despised Moses, the typical Mediator, and attempted to offer to God incense for themselves and not through Moses, the Mediator of their typical covenant, and his appointed channel, which recognized the sin-offering as the basis of forgiveness, were dealt with *without mercy*, so those who despise the blood and the Mediator of the New Covenant and place their case thus in the hands of God direct, and not through his recognized channel, the Mediator, will be dealt with upon lines of strictest *justice*, without mercy (Heb. 10:26-31); God's mercy for sinners all being provided in Christ, so that there is none other name than his in heaven or in earth whereby we must be saved. And under that strict justice the verdict would be, Imperfect, unworthy of life; sentence, Death.

Yet we should carefully discriminate between the second and the third form of sins, as explained; even in judging of ourselves, our judgment might be too severe. The extent to which ignorance and wilfulness may blend is very great. By far the greater number who will accurately judge of themselves will find themselves sinners under the second class described, though all should strive to avoid even the first. Such are not counted sinners under the favor of God in Christ, under the New Covenant, though actually imperfect.

By far the smallest number, we believe, come under the third class as having committed wilful sin, unmitigated by ignorance or weakness – the sin unto death. Though the Apostle intimates that the "holy brethren" should be able to discern those cases in which wilful sin has been committed, so that they will not pray for such, yet there is evidently great room for patient forbearance and generous judgment in such cases. Many are blinded by sophistries and misled by the Adversary through false teachers to the rejection of the ransom covering, who are merely confused and bewildered by false teachings. Some who loudly deny that the Lord *bought* them, and that the Lord as the man Christ substituted his life for Adam's forfeited life (that thus he might justly set free from death by a resurrection all of Adam's race who will accept of the *gift* of life upon the conditions of the New Covenant), do nevertheless *trust* (though unintelligently) that somehow Christ did do *something* which they do not comprehend, which under God's arrangement secures a release from condemnation to everlasting death. Such are really trusting in Christ as a Redeemer, though the eyes of their understanding are sadly blinded by errors which may hinder them from winning the prize of the high calling, but which will be fully corrected and removed when the Millennial age is fully ushered in – when "the blind shall see out of obscurity."

Of these three grades of sins, then, we thus comment: Those who commit the first, if they should say, We are without sin, would be deceiving themselves and making God a liar; for he has declared that all are sinners, that there is none righteous – no, not one. Yet these who are subject to this first class of sins, when they accept of Christ's work as Redeemer or Ransomer, so that he is made unto them wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), are so fully cleared by the imputation to them of the merit of Christ's sin-offering on their behalf, that of such it can then be truly said, "Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not." [Such do not sin wilfully, intentionally, and other

imperfections are not reckoned sins to such]. "Whosoever abideth in him [Christ, the Mediator] sinneth not [maintains his justified standing before God]; whosoever sinneth [wilfully] hath not seen him, neither known him. He that committeth [wilful] sin is of the devil." So long as the begetting seed of the new nature abides, so long as the spirit of the truth rules in the heart, there can be no love of sin and no wilful sinning there. Where wilful opposition to God or to righteousness exists, it is an evidence either that the person never had been begotten of the spirit of the truth to newness of life, or else that he has become alienated. If the alienation and sin were but partly wilful it is "venial sin," and there is hope through repentance and chastisement of the recovery of such; but if the alienation and sin are wholly wilful, against full light and ability, it is "mortal sin;" and there is no hope of repentance or recovery; it is unto death, the second death – destruction without hope of recovery.

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