

VENIAL AND MORTAL SINS.

ANY violation of divine law is sin; whether committed willingly or unwillingly. – 1 John 3:4; James 2:10.

The terms "venial" and "mortal" as relating to sins are seldom used outside of the Church of Rome, the great counterfeit of the true Church; yet by the use of these terms two classes of sins are distinguished, properly and Scripturally, although in a way which the Church of Rome fails to recognize.

A "venial sin" is one which may be forgiven or pardoned – a pardonable sin.

A "mortal sin" is one which is not forgivable. It is a deadly sin: one incurring the penalty of death – everlasting death.

The apostle John (1 John 5:16,17) refers to both of these sins, saying, –

"There is a sin unto death [a mortal sin]: I do not say that he shall pray for it [to ask or expect its forgiveness]....And there is a sin, not unto death [a venial sin]."

There is but one penalty expressed against sin by the Creator and Lawgiver. "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:4.) But the great and just Judge never sits in judgment upon a case in which the one on trial has not a full and fair opportunity to know and do his duty. Thus it was in Adam's trial: he was created a perfect man in his Creator's image and placed amid a favorable environment where obedience was both possible and reasonable; and he was fully advised that the penalty of transgression would be death. (Gen. 2:17.) And thus in every case tried before the

Supreme Judge of the universe and found guilty, the only penalty is death; – hence all sin is mortal sin at his bar.

But God purposed a redemption for Adam and his race through Christ. He therefore provided for the *ransom-sacrifice* – the sinless Jesus for the sinner Adam and the race condemned in him. Thus the race of Adam was bought by Jesus with his own precious blood; divine law was vindicated (Rom. 3:26), and the race by God's will was in new hands for trial; for thus justly God committed the judgment of all to the Son (John 5:22; Acts 17:31), under the conditions of the New Covenant. All who come to know of the grace of God in Christ and the New Covenant, and who accept it, are reckoned as lifted out of the mortal sin of Adam and its consequences, and granted a new trial for life under the New Covenant, which takes cognizance of their fall and imperfection, and treats all their sins and shortcomings as "venial" or forgivable sins, except such as are committed intentionally or wilfully.

All true Christians will of course seek to avoid every form of sin, and in all things will seek to do that which is pleasing to the Lord. But all, soon or later, find that they have the treasure of the new nature, the new will, [R1984 : page 119] in an earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4:7); and that the imperfections of the earthen vessel (our human bodies) more or less mar all our efforts to please and serve God. Consequently, even the most devout find that they need to go repeatedly to the throne of divine *grace*, that they "may obtain mercy [forgiveness], and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16.) And knowing that there are some sins that are not forgivable, [R1984 : page 120] it becomes important to all the saints to know just what is the difference; not that we may continue in (venial) sins that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1,2); for so to do would be to sin wilfully, which would change the sin from venial to mortal; but that we may be the more upon our guard against all sins; and that, on the other hand, those who have tender consciences may not unjustly accuse themselves of the sin unto death and become hopeless.

Because we are imperfect in our judgments by reason of the fall, we all need divine instruction and "the spirit of a sound mind." Otherwise some would err in one direction and others in the opposite. For instance, some are of a humble, self-accusing mind, constantly disposed to judge themselves too harshly, and to forget that God "knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust"; and that, had it been possible for us to have commended ourselves to God by our works and words and thoughts, judged by his standard or law, then there would have been no redemption necessary, no sprinkling of our hearts with the precious blood, no imputing of the justification or righteousness of Christ, through faith. Of this class, usually, are those who are oppressed with a fear that they have committed mortal sin, while those who seem to commit the sin unto death are generally quite self-satisfied and have no suspicion of the penalty upon them. This latter class, like the Pharisees of old, have so much self-esteem and self-satisfied assurance that they often estimate their errors, weaknesses and imperfections as graces. Quite a few of them even go to the extreme of boasting perfection and believe, or at least profess to believe, that they have not for years come short of God's perfect standard. Of course, in such a frame of mind they cannot come to the throne of grace to obtain *mercy*; for perfection needs no mercy. They, on the contrary, more and more, lose their appreciation of the redeeming blood; and when in course of time the Adversary sets before them the doctrine that Christ was not our Redeemer, but *merely* our pattern for holy living, many of them are ready to deny the Lord that *bought* them, to count the blood of the covenant a common thing, and to do despite to the spirit of divine favor and mercy – relying upon their so-called "perfect" works; – which really are "filthy rags" of unrighteousness, in God's sight. Their trouble is that they have not before them the perfect standard by which to know their own imperfections.

It is therefore of great importance that we all should form our judgments according to the revealed mind of God on this subject, as upon all others.

Under the Law Covenant given to Israel, no such distinction obtained respecting sins: there were no venial sins; all sins were mortal sins. Hence the Apostle, speaking of that Law, and of himself as under it, says, "The commandment which was ordained unto life *I found to be unto death.*" Under that Law the wages of sin was *death*; and nothing short of that. – Rom. 7:10.

True, Israelites were granted a typical Atonement Day, on account of which sins were covered for a year; but the necessity for repeating their sacrifices yearly proved that the sin was not actually canceled, but remained. (Heb. 10:11.) Thus the penalty of the Law Covenant upon all Israelites would have been death, everlasting death, just as in Adam's case, had it not been that our Lord, by the one sacrifice, did a *double* work. He not only redeemed the world by becoming Adam's substitute, but he was born under the Law that he might [also] redeem those that were [condemned] under the Law Covenant. – Gal. 4:4,5.

As all the world were *actually* in Adam and could be redeemed by one sacrifice, so all Israel were represented in one man, Moses (1 Cor. 10:2), the Mediator of their Law Covenant; in order that in due time the antitype of Moses might meet all the requirements of the Law Covenant, and fulfil it, and supplant it with the New Covenant. Thus Christ is become "the end of the Law Covenant for righteousness to every one [every Israelite] that believeth." (Rom. 10:4.) Thus Jews under the New Covenant find their unavoidable imperfections no longer mortal [deadly] sins but venial [forgivable] sins. – Heb. 9:15.

It is the Gospel, under the New Covenant, sealed with the precious blood of Christ, that speaks pardon and mercy to believing (and penitent) sinners in respect to all manner of sin and blasphemy, except one, which can never be forgiven; neither in the present age nor in the age to come. – Matt. 12:31,32.

The sins and blasphemies which may be forgiven are such as are committed in *ignorance*. The sins which cannot be pardoned are the *wilful sins*. Our race, because of the fall, is greatly under the

dominion of weakness, ignorance, blindness, etc., *inherited* from Adam and augmented by all of our progenitors. And our Lord Jesus, having paid the penalty of Adam's transgression, can justly remit and forgive for his people all responsibility for such defects as they do not endorse but are striving against.

The sins and blasphemies which cannot be forgiven are such as were not covered by the *ransom*. While God's grace of forgiveness in Christ is for "*many offences*" (Rom. 5:16), it is because those many offences are directly or indirectly the result of the first offence – Adam's disobedience – which was fully offset by the obedience and sacrifice of Christ on behalf of Adam and all his race. Hence, all those who come to a clear comprehension of right and wrong, righteousness and sin, and who then deliberately choose the sin, the wrong, not because of inherited weaknesses, physical, [R1984 : page 121] mental and moral, but *of preference for unrighteousness*, – such cannot claim that their fault was of ignorance, nor of heredity; and hence it would be a fresh and wilful sin like the first; and is not covered by the ransom which redeemed from the first transgression. It is therefore a fresh sin unto *death* (a mortal sin), for which Christ did not die; and "Christ dieth no more." Only one redemption is provided. Such a sinner must die for his own sin; his life is forever forfeited; he can do nothing to recover it; and it is not God's will that Christ or any other creature should redeem such again, seeing they chose sin, after they clearly comprehended its character and knew that they had been redeemed from its power. You need not pray for such, says the Apostle John. We must pray in harmony with the divine plan and arrangement if we would have our prayers answered.

Thus we have before our minds, in a general way, the fact that the only *mortal* sins are those committed against considerable knowledge, and of evil intention, wilfully. It is not, we think, unreasonable to suppose that, in comparison with the whole world of mankind, these intelligent, wilful sinners are now comparatively few; just as the saints are a "little flock"; and in part for the same reason, – because, as it

requires the light of the knowledge of God to permit us to choose the right and accept Christ and be justified by faith, and to be sanctified through the truth, so it requires light to reject Christ and his righteousness and to choose wilful sin, unrighteousness. However, the fact that comparatively few during the Gospel age have had light and opportunity sufficient to permit them to be of the "little flock," the "few chosen" to be the kings and priests in the Millennial Kingdom, and the fact that few for the same reason could commit full mortal sin, does not prove that only a few will ever commit mortal sin. When, during the Millennium, the conditions are favorable for all for the attainment of Everlasting Life, the same favorable conditions will make it possible for all to commit mortal sin, whose penalty is the Second Death. We have no assurance that the "sheep" will outnumber the "goats." (And although in Europe and America the flocks of literal sheep do outnumber the goats, yet in the land of Palestine, where our Lord spoke the parable, their numbers even at this day are about equal.)

It is evident, therefore, that as the vast majority of our race (heathen and imbecile), dying and dead, have not yet been enlightened by "that true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), they cannot have committed mortal sin, and hence are not under sentence of the Second Death, however ignorantly wicked they may have been; because under the New Covenant no sin is mortal (deadly), of which ignorance or inherited weakness is the cause. And this New Covenant was made available for all, "for every man," and must be "testified in due time" to all. This opens before us the blessed thought that, though these heathen billions are yet in their sins, which cannot be blotted out except by *faith*, under the terms of the New Covenant, they are nevertheless not doomed to the Second Death. Their sins, judged by the New Covenant, would be venial and may be pardoned by their Redeemer; and themselves may be prepared for eternal life by certain experiences in purification in the great Purgatory – Christ's Millennial Kingdom – so different from the unscriptural Purgatory of Roman Catholic theology. Praise God for the worldwide redemption from Adam's mortal sin; and for the gracious

provision that none of the ransomed race, except intelligent, wilful sinners, will be remanded to death, – the Second Death. [R1985 : page 121]

MIXED SINS – PARTLY WILFUL.

If it were merely a question of wilful or not wilful sins, it would be comparatively easy to decide respecting our own shortcomings and those of others; but it is a more difficult question. The Christian may be considered in some respects a dual being: he not only has his natural body, depraved by inherited sins and weaknesses, and his natural mind also depraved, and in sympathy with the weaknesses of the flesh, but he has also his renewed mind or will, which desires to serve the law of God. These two minds or wills are contrary: they cannot be harmonized; and the man who endeavors to recognize both, and to make the two joint-rulers of his mortal body, is the "double-minded man," "unstable in all his ways," described by the Apostle James (1:8). The "lukewarm," neither cold nor hot, neither for sin nor against sin, are failures in every sense of the word. (Rev. 3:16.) God wants positive characters, and others will not be approved or accepted.

In every case, then, the new mind must be in control, and the depraved, fleshly mind must be subjected to it for destruction. But here comes the difficulty. The natural mind ("heart") is deceitful above all things, and desperate as well as wicked (Jer. 17:9), and the various members of our bodies in their depravity sympathize with the natural mind and favor it; so that when the new mind battles with the old mind and pursues it to destroy it, the latter feigns to be dead, and hides quietly for a time, only to come forth more craftily later.

So then, with the Apostle, we can realize that even when the new mind is enthroned as the ruler of these mortal bodies, the old mind or will, favorable to sin, although dethroned and reckoned dead, is not actually dead, and will not be as long as our mortal bodies are [R1985 : page 122] defective – *i.e.*, until death. Hence we must daily mortify [deaden] the will and deeds of the flesh. But sometimes the deadened

will of the depraved flesh (selfish, or impure, or in any event despicable to the new will, "the mind of Christ"), encouraged and helped by the influence of the "spirit of the world" or by the devil (perhaps as a messenger of light to deceive), rises up to ensnare and destroy the new will and its new hopes and aspirations. In such cases how many have suffered at least partial and temporary defeat, until they have remembered to call for reinforcements of strength from Him who has promised to never leave nor forsake us, and to give grace and strength for every time of need. Then we realized that greater is he that is on our part, than all them that be against us, – within and without. – Rom. 8:23,31.

And when such a battle is ended, and the new will sits down to reckon the damage inflicted by the raid of the old will, there must be some self-crimination – "Oh! why was I not more watchful? I knew from experience that I was quite vulnerable at the point from which the attack came. Nor did I repel the attack with proper diligence. I almost fear that I was willing to have the attack, and that I encouraged the enemy, Sin; and if so, was it not disloyalty to the Lord? And was it not also a wilful sin, since the new will did not repel it with sufficient energy?"

Was this a venial or a mortal sin?

Such a case as we have described would not be a mortal sin. This is shown by the fact that the new will eventually holds the field of battle, and that so far from having pleasure in the wreck of good resolutions and hopes and prayers, etc., etc., it feels chagrin, shame and contrition for failure to have done all that could have been done to oppose the depraved will. On the contrary, those who have sinned wilfully and with full intent, and whose sin is mortal, do not feel penitent; but afterward approve their sin, and boast of it, generally as greater light and liberty. (See Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31.) In the latter text (verse 27), the "fearful looking for of judgment" does not refer to the wilful sinner, who is bold, defiant and self-satisfied, but to the people

of God, who realize the fearfulness of the position of those who "count the blood of the Covenant a common thing," despising God's favor therein extended, and preferring to stand in the filthy rags of their own unrighteousness.

But such a sin as we have described would not be *wholly* a venial sin if the will *consented* to it in any degree; – if only to the extent of not resisting it. If there was anything that could have been done and was thought of to resist it, but was not done, preferring to taste again "the pleasures of sin" only for a brief season, it would seem to contain a measure of wilful sin. Such is a mixed sin. Chiefly it originates with the weakness of the flesh and inherited weakness, aggravated by outside temptations, all of which are elements of venial sin, forgivable upon repentance, confession and restitution to the extent of ability, through the merit of the sin-offering presented by our great High Priest. "If any man [in Christ] sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"; "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 2:1; 1:9.) But to the extent that the will consented to sin, even for a moment, it was *unforgivable*; and for that measure of responsibility we must expect to suffer "stripes"; *i.e.*, chastisements. This is dangerous, too, for every such raid by the old nature encourages and strengthens it for fresh attacks, and weakens and discourages the new nature, and tends to grieve the holy spirit whereby we are sealed; and, if encouraged, the new will would soon expire, the old will obtain complete mastery, and soon we would be walking after the flesh and not after the spirit; and "the end of those things is death" – the Second Death. It is evident, therefore, that the tendency of mixed sin is toward mortal sin.

Whenever we find that we have been overcome of evil, we should "judge ourselves:" we should scrutinize our own course, and not only feel contrite toward God, and resolved to be more vigilant and more faithful in the future, but we should right the wrong to the extent of our ability, and humble ourselves before the Lord. The Apostle says, "If we

would judge [reprove, correct] ourselves, we should not be judged [reproved, corrected, by the Lord]; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord [punished with "stripes"], that we should not be condemned with the world." – 1 Cor. 11:31,32; 1 Tim. 5:24.

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT.

A brief definition of sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would be, – Any transgression, or words of evil disdain, against the light of truth, the spirit of truth, when clearly discerned. Such a sin contains at least a measure of wilfulness, and that measure cannot be forgiven. It must be expiated. If there were no extenuating circumstances, of weakness, blindness, temptation, etc., its expiation would cost the life of the transgressor, and constitute his share in the Second Death. But if, as generally now, there be extenuating circumstances, the transgressor, by availing himself of the terms of the New Covenant, may have *forgiveness to the extent of the ignorance* or other extenuation, and may expiate the wilful elements of the transgression by suffering "stripes," – chastisements. These chastisements [R1985 : page 123] may consist in the natural consequences of a wrong course, or in special retribution or discipline by means of adversity, sickness, etc.

Sometimes the light may be very clear and the wilful wrong-doing very pronounced, as in the case of the Pharisees who heard the Lord's teaching and saw him cast out a devil, and said, He casteth out devils by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of devils. They were at least partly blinded by Satan and ignorance (Matt. 15:14; Acts 3:17); hence had they rejected Jesus and denied that he was the Messiah promised by the Lord through the prophets, had they called him a fraud and a hypocrite, all this might have been attributable to their blindness, and might have been forgivable as venial sin, under the gracious terms of the New Covenant. But when they blasphemed the holy power, the holy spirit of God, operating through Jesus, to good works and never to evil works, they were overstepping their ignorance, and stating

wickedly, *wilfully*, what they could not have believed. To that extent, therefore, they were guilty of more than venial sin. Because of this wilfulness their blasphemy became a sin which could never be forgiven, "neither in this world [age], neither in the world [age] to come." No provision has been made (nor ever will be made, as we understand the divine plan), for forgiving any wilful sin, except Adam's first transgression. All other wilful sins must be punished.

But as the blasphemy of the Pharisees was more than a venial sin, so it was less than a mortal sin, because they did not sin against a clear understanding: they were "blind leaders of the blind," as our Lord testified (Matt. 15:14); and they did considerable in ignorance, as Peter testified. (Acts 3:17.) This unpardonable sin of the Pharisees, therefore, was one of the "mixed sins" which must needs receive a just penalty, proportionate to its wilfulness, in the Millennium, when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory and judge the world in righteousness.

It would have been a very different matter, had these Pharisees been disciples, and had they witnessed all of his mighty works and heard all of his precious words, and had they been privately instructed as were the twelve Apostles (Matt. 13:11), and with them made partakers of Christ's holy spirit, so that, in his name and power, they themselves cast out devils and healed diseases. In this respect – that they sinned against partial, not complete, evidence – consists the difference between **[R1986 : page 123]** their sin and the sin of Judas,* by which his and not theirs was mortal sin.

*See "Judas' Case a Hopeless One," in our issue of Apr. 15, '96

Their case differed, too, from that of the enlightened, consecrated and spirit-begotten sons of this Gospel age. Because of our greater enlightenment and clearer perception, such a sin on our part would mean more wilfulness because of greater intelligence. It would probably mean mortal sin to us. Even in their case the Lord saw such a wrong condition of heart that he said, "Ye hypocrites, how can ye

escape the condemnation of Gehenna [symbol of the Second Death]." The intimation clearly is, that many of them, having developed such perverse characters, so out of accord with righteousness, will, even when blessed with the fuller light and opportunity of the Millennium, be likely to come under the sentence of death. The lesson to us is, that even those who are not of the Church, now on trial, if they have come in contact with the light, have thereby come under some responsibility. Each one is either preparing and building a character or destroying one, getting more ready or less ready to benefit by the Millennial reign of righteous judgment. Our Lord's judgment (in the day of judgment, – the Millennium), as between those who knew and those who did not know his will, was expressed pointedly when he declared that, it shall be *more tolerable* for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for the city that rejected the Gospel messengers; because they sinned against greater light. – See Matt. 10:15.

Whoever has heard something of the Truth has a great responsibility. Whoever has opportunity to learn more, whether he uses it or not, has greater responsibility. He who sins (with wilfulness) against a little light shall suffer some "stripes" or punishment. He who sins with wilfulness against more light or more opportunity for light will receive "many stripes." He who sins with complete *wilfulness* against a clear understanding of the truth has committed a full sin in the full sense of the word, and will receive the full penalty of sin – death – the Second Death.

[R1986 : page 123]

A SERMON FOR CHILDREN.

– *Text* – ***The Rose.*** –

The roses are in bloom to-day!
Come, children, from your games away
A while to listen in the bower,
And learn from every blooming flower
Truths golden that shall evermore

Be garnered with the heart's rich store!

Within the garden meet our view
Roses of varied form and hue,
Unfolding now their graceful bloom,
Lading the air with sweet perfume;
From tiny buds to full blooms sweet,
They bend in clusters round our feet.

[R1986 : page 124]

Some robed in white are here displayed,
And dainty ones in pink arrayed;
Some in their golden glory shine;
Some wear the crimson hue of wine.

Charmed by their grace and beauty rare,
We cull some buds and blossoms fair.
Some that were once as fair and gay
We see now fading fast away.
Within the garden's blooming space,
Can we not here a semblance trace?
And read in this, the rose-crowned rod,
The love and power of nature's God?

Only a few short months ago,
The roses lay in death below;
In glad springtime the sun and rain
Aroused from sleep to life again;
Triumphant, they arose to bloom
In beauty o'er their winter tomb.

The buds seem like to childhood's day,
When happy children laugh and play;
The half-blown rose an emblem seems
Of youth, when life is sweet with dreams;
Youth slow expands in grace and power

Till, like the glowing, full-blown flower,
It zenith gains; then age draws on,
And soon the span of life is gone.

The roses spring to bloom their day,
Are early culled or fade away;
So, soon or late, all yield their breath,
Beneath the cruel hand of Death.
The God who clothes the roses fair,
Does he not for his creatures care?

Ah, yes! they'll rise from out death's gloom.
He by whose law the roses bloom
In love devised a wondrous plan
To save from death his creature, man:
His Son for all a ransom gave; –
Suffered e'en death our souls to save,
And rose to life on high again
Eternal life to give to men.
He holds the key of Death's closed gates;
The due time only he awaits.

In all of nature's wide domain,
There law and order ever reign;
Just so within the realm of grace:
For all things there's a time, a place;
When, as around its seasons roll,
They bring a springtime for the soul,
Christ will unlock their silent tomb,
And bid them rise again to bloom;
Then all who love the right and truth
Shall flourish on in fadeless youth.

Here let us pause. Again behold
The roses – how their leaves unfold:

The bud, unfolding hour by hour,
At length displays the perfect flower;
Slowly its petals all unfold;
Then do we see the heart of gold.

So, too, unfold God's plans of grace;
His scheme, deep-laid, no man could trace,
Till time the mystery unsealed;
The hidden riches stood revealed.
The roses their sweet sermon preach,
Graving it deep as any speech.
Does not each glorious blooming flower
Proclaim the wisdom and the power
Of Him who, from his throne above,
Watches o'er all his works in love?

MARY E. PENNOCK.
