

TRESPASSES AND SINS AND THEIR EFFECT ON CHARACTER

"All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."
– 1 John 5:17.

WE SHOULD recognize a distinction between trespasses and sins. A sin is that which is more or less wilfully and intentionally committed. A trespass is a sin in a certain sense, but one committed without intention. The fact that a sin is called a trespass would imply that it was not done wilfully. The Divine Law stands whether we are able to keep it or not; and every violation of the Divine Law is a sin in one sense. But those violations of God's Law which are wholly the result of our unavoidable weaknesses are not culpable sins, and hence not in the same category with sins more or less wilful.

So far as the world is concerned, it is already under condemnation for sin. Those who have accepted Christ and have received the forgiveness of their sins through Him, are spoken of by the Apostle Paul as those whose sins "are past, through the forbearance of God." (Romans 3:25.) Because of their consecration of their lives to be the followers of Christ these sins are forever gone, so far as responsibility for their transgressions is concerned. From this time on the Lord's people are counted no more as sinners, but as saints whose whole lives have been devoted to righteousness.

Nevertheless, we have this treasure of the New Creature in earthen vessels, our mortal bodies. The New Creature in Christ does not expect to *practise* sin any more; for if he should sin wilfully, this would mean his entire repudiation of the Covenant into which he has entered with the Lord. But notwithstanding this, he will commit trespasses; for he has merely the good intentions of

the heart, with only an imperfect body in which to operate. The Apostles recognized this fact. St. Paul declared that in his flesh dwelt no perfection. St. John says that whosoever says that he has no sin deceives himself, and the Truth is not in him. (1 John 1:8-10.) This same Apostle, in the same Epistle, declares that whoever sins is of the Devil. In this last text he evidently refers to the practise of sin, to wilful sin, not to unavoidable trespasses; for he has just said that all commit these unintentional violations of God's Law. St. James says that in many things we all offend. (James 3:2.) To *will* is present with every consecrated child of God; but how to *perform* is the problem.

OUR ATTITUDE BECAUSE OF TRESPASSES

According to the Scriptures it is sinful for the Lord's people to injure one another in word, act or thought. But many do not realize this high standard, even after they have come into the family of God. They may not learn until months, or even years afterward, the full measure of the Divine Law respecting every affair in life. Therefore there are many who for a time are guilty of evil-speaking and evil-thinking, but who are unconscious of having done wrong. These transgressions of the Divine Law are *trespasses*. This should be our attitude toward God: "Gracious Heavenly Father, we cannot do perfectly. We pray Thee, forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. We come with courage to Thy Throne of Heavenly Grace, asking for the covering of the merit of our Savior for these trespasses, and for grace to overcome as far as possible and to become holy in thought, in word, in deed."

But if any man *sin*, it is a different matter. In proportion as he *wilfully* violates the Divine Law, in that proportion he shall suffer stripes. Sins leave their mark on the character; for they are to some extent at least intentional violations of the principles of righteousness and of the Covenant with God by which every real Christian obligates himself to obey the Divine injunction. The

Scriptures clearly indicate that if one of these deliberately sins, he commits the sin unto death, for which no penalty will be sufficient except the extinction of the Second Death. [R5751 : page 251]

TRESPASSES NOT NECESSARILY A HINDRANCE

The text, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous," evidently refers to trespasses and not to deliberate, or wilful sins; for, as we have already noted, the same Apostle writes, "He that sinneth is of the Devil"; "that which is begotten of God sinneth not." Any one begotten of God, possessed of the Holy Spirit, could not, so long as he is in possession of this Holy Spirit, commit a sin with full intention. Except under the influence of strong temptation of the flesh, he could not sin knowingly; for if he *were* to commit such a sin, he would be manifesting that he had lost the Holy Spirit entirely. So long as the Holy Spirit abides in him he could not wilfully, intelligently, commit sin. He might be overcome by the weaknesses of the flesh, and thus might give a *measure* of consent to the wrong; but this would be only a partial sin. Yet for that portion which would involve the consent of his mind he would receive *stripes*, in proportion to the degree of wilfulness connected with the matter.

Our unintentional trespasses, properly striven against, evidently do not interfere with the development of character. The implication of the Scriptures is that the New Creature who is properly growing is striving against all kinds of sin and imperfection and is waging a good warfare. In the case of trespasses which are unavoidable on his part, instead of doing him an injury, these serve to show him what points in his character are weak and need to be strengthened. He learns of his weaknesses only by more or less falling into trespasses unintentionally, unwillingly. As he finds weaknesses in his character-development, it becomes his pleasure and earnest effort to fortify himself along

these lines, that he may become "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." – Ephesians 6:10.

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our Lord declared that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men except the blasphemy [R5751 : page 252] against the Holy Spirit. His thought here, we believe, is that because men are more or less imperfect in their judgment, on that account the Lord would be willing to forgive all such blemishes and trespasses; for they are unintentional. Hence there would be Divine forgiveness for some of the great trespasses and transgressions which they have committed. The crucifixion of our Lord was not really intentional. Speaking of those who crucified Christ the Apostle Peter says, "I wot, brethren, that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." St. Paul expresses the same thought, saying, "For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." – Acts 3:17; 1 Corinthians 2:8.

These statements imply that this act was more or less of a trespass on the part of the perpetrators. There was a *measure* of *sin*, a measure of *knowledge*. In proportion as they had knowledge they had responsibility, and proportionately received stripes, nationally and individually. Therefore the Scriptures tell us that there will be future opportunities of blessing to those who crucified the Prince of Life. Their eyes will be opened when they awake. We are glad of this. They did not sin with full knowledge and wilfulness, and are not, therefore, subjects of the Second Death. They will have a future trial. But we understand they will come up merely as members of the race of Adam. They will have no special favor as Jews, and may require, indeed, many stripes. Some may never be recovered.

What is it to sin against the Holy Spirit? We reply that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Truth, of righteousness. Whoever recognizes the Spirit of the Truth, the Lord's Spirit, and

intentionally does violence to it and to the *messengers* of that Truth, because they *are* its messengers, is sinning against the Holy Spirit; and to whatever extent one does this he is a wilful sinner. If his act be committed with full knowledge, full light, there would never be forgiveness for the sin, either in this life or in the life to come. And the end of that sin against full light and understanding would be the Second Death. While every intentional sin against the Holy Spirit, against the Truth, must have a punishment, whether in this Age or in the incoming Age, yet the punishment will not be the Second Death unless the knowledge, the sin, be a full, complete one.

