

"I ACKNOWLEDGE MY SIN
UNTO THEE."

Although it is a Divine appointment, for which it behooves us to give thanks, it is nevertheless difficult for us, sinners, to realize that in the end even sin is compelled to become a means of leading us into deeper knowledge of God, and of making the majesty of the Lord to shine upon us more brightly. That as the tempter of men, Satan abuses this appointment of God, that in a heaven-defying way he may mingle sin and religion, does not in the least darken the glory of this appointment. Neither can anyone say, whether, in case Satan first, and after him Adam, had not fallen, the Lord God would have opened another way, unknown to us now, by which to lead us into an equally deep, if not a still more intimate knowledge of his Name and Being.

All these reflections however do not advance us a single step. We have been born in a sinful world. We have to count with it. And this being the case it is meet for us to thank God, that he makes good to come out of evil, and that he uses even sin to enrich the knowledge of his Name and Being in the inner perception of his child. Grace, compassion and mercy, as revelations of Divine love are more profound, than Divine blessing in prosperity and Divine help in time of need. But the knowledge of this grace and compassion can only be known by him, who has tasted the sweets of reconciliation, and who can count himself not only among God's crea-

tures, but also among the redeemed. In Christ there has come to us a knowledge of God's name and being, such as has never been known outside of him, but Bethlehem as well as Golgotha find their cause alone in the salvation of sinners.

Even the knowledge of the Almighty power of God has been greatly enriched by sin. Does not the apostle say that the "exceeding greatness of his power, according to the mighty working of his strength (Eph. 1:19) was only revealed to us in the resurrection of Christ and in the regeneration of believers." In the re-creation there was a greater exhibition of majesty and of almighty power than in the creation. In causing Christ to rise from the dead there was a mightier unfolding of Divine strength than in the first call from nothing into being. But there would have been no resurrection without death, and no re-creation without fall, and since both fall and death find their starting point in sin alone, this higher revelation of the Almighty power of God, which shows itself in resurrection and in re-creation would never have come to us in this way, had we not sinned. And in order to get the full meaning of what this implies we must go down still one step more, and come to acknowledge, that in the hand of God sin becomes the means to heighten, and make more clear, our inner perception of the holiness of God.

Of course they who in their unconverted state still walk in the way of sin, are here left out of count. We only speak in this connection of the redeemed, of those who have found eternal life itself in knowing God. And how did the history

of sin in their case run? How runs it now? Two classes of persons should here be kept apart. Those who broke out into sin in an offensive way, and the others who remained within the bounds of an ordinary sinful existence. Mary of Magdala and Salome do not stand in one line. Peter, who thrice denied his Master, passed through an entirely different inward struggle from John, who remained faithful to his Savior. The spiritual experiences of the two differ in this respect, that the sinner who went far astray can sometimes in his conversion arouse the jealousy of the sinner who remained within bounds. The inner tumult of the first is far greater, his struggle in the transition far more heroic. His glorying in grace, when at last the burden of his guilt falls from his shoulders, is much more abundant. The prodigal who returns has something, which the son, who remained at home, lacks.

He who deems however that the calm, ordinary sinner can not drain the cup of grace to the bottom, if we may so express it, is mistaken. Even he who is guilty of the heinous sins of drunkenness, immorality or dishonesty, runs the great risk of counting these extravagant dissipations as his real, actual sin, and of ignoring the sinful nature back of them. It is repeatedly seen, that such sinners who have been converted from their former evil practices, entirely get away from them, while for the rest they continue in sin, without making any advances in sanctification of heart and life. On the contrary they who have continued unblameable before the eyes of men, have after their conversion, a much keener eye, for the refined, hidden sins of the heart, and

as fruit of their faith they unfold a much richer Christian life. The convert from gross sins frequently counts all his life long with the weight of pounds alone, while the quiet convert weighs with the assay-balance.

This is not true of all. Alas, there are not a few who turn the fact itself that they remained free from great sins, into a cloak in which they make a fine appearance, and with their ordinary sins of pride and quiet selfishness go on to life's end, without ever putting up a serious fight against them. But if we take the redeemed in the narrower sense, the tenderness of conscience with respect to sin even goes so far, that they distrust their own examination of heart, and always end with the prayer that God will also make known to them their secret sins, and forgive them. For when the heart does not condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows all things, even those that hide in the innermost recesses of the soul.

But in whatever way and measure the inner struggle against sin awakens, it always begins with a troubled conscience. And that which disturbs us in this is always the voice of God upbraiding us for sin. This is partly the case with people of the world whose conscience at first is never entirely extinguished. But with them the voice of God in the conscience is not recognized. They take it either as a troublesome resistance on the part of their spiritual nature against the things which their carnal nature craves. So they sear the conscience in order to go freely on in sin. Or, they take it as an impulse of their

better self, and dream that they train themselves in virtuous living. This results in a good deal of social respectability and praise-worthy self-control. But it bears no fruit for eternal life, inasmuch as they claim the honor of it for themselves, and withdraw themselves from God, with whom they refuse to reckon.

The operation of the conscience is altogether different with the redeemed. With them the first effect of the troubled conscience is, that they start back; that they become angry with the sin which they have committed; that for all the world they wish that they had never done it, and that now they stand embarrassed and ashamed before God. This gives rise to prayer. Amidst the cares and labors of the day they are aware that God opposes their sin, but there is much diversion in general intercourse with people and in work, and so they easily get away from the sense of it. In distinction however from the people of the world, they still pray. And at the close of day when before sleep they are about to bend their knees before God, they feel disturbed, they shrink from prayer, they are conscious that something lies in between their heart and God, and they scarcely dare to appear before his face.

And then comes the moment of decision. If they shrink back and omit to pray, the conscience takes the soporific drink. And unless God intervenes, they are lost. Psalm 32 describes what follows: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring." But David did not faint. He struggled on. However deeply ashamed he was of himself, he bent his knees before God.

Verse 5 of this same Psalm contains the record. "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." And so: I acknowledged my sin unto thee. . . . And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" When thus the soul holds on, and before God on bended knee mourns sin, the blessing is sure to follow. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found. Floods of great waters may come. But they shall not come nigh unto him."

And in this contrition of soul there is a recognition of the holiness of God with an intensity such as has never been experienced before. It is no longer a holiness of God which was reasoned out and inferred from the given commandments; neither is it a holiness which loses itself in vague admiration of its own purity. It is the Holy One who in our conscience presses himself upon us, and who upbraiding our sins by his holiness, makes us to test and to taste the same in the bitterness of our self-reproach and penitence. The holiness of God then presents itself in the light which of necessity is formed by the striking contrast with the shadow of our sin. It reveals itself as a power, which quick and quickening has antagonized the death of our sin. In its absolute judgment of a definite, concrete sin, it assumes a definite, concrete form. And after it is understood by us in this definite, concrete form, it lights up as an immeasurable realm of holiness, over-against the dark background of our sinful nature, from which the particular sin sprang. This holiness does not hover, as it were, over us. But it cleaves unto us. And thus convicted of sin, and

under sentence of death, our soul comes into direct contact, and immediate touch with the holy God. It brings us living and striking knowledge of him, with whom we have to do. The sin was terrible. But God used it for this end: that through it we should come to a better understanding of his holiness.

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“WHEN GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN.”

They who conscientiously devote a portion of their time to God, and try to know him, are few. Prayer, church-attendance and good works can be practiced without actual engagement with God. In many prayers the soul fails of appearing before God, and of having God appear to the soul. Many people go to church and come home again, without having met the Lord, or having been met by him. Even though during sermon time the mind was engaged with Divine things, by itself, this was not being busy with God. And as to good works, it needs scarcely be said, that we can fill up an entire day with them, without so much as devoting one thought to him, who inspired us to do them. O, there is little, actual business done with the Living God.

Thus far we only had in mind confessing, believing Christians, who practice prayer, who live for their church, and do good works. Think now of the unchurched multitudes, who are not worldly in any bad sense, but rather cultivate seriousness of thought, who honor virtue and admire higher