

## XIV.

**Our Guilt.**<sup>7</sup>

“Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”—*Rom. v. 12.*

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Sin and guilt belong together, but may not be confounded or considered synonymous, any more than sanctification and righteousness. It is true guilt rests upon every sin, and in every sin there is guilt, yet the two must be kept distinct. There is a difference between the blaze and the blackened spot upon the wall caused by it; long after the blaze is out the spot remains. Even so with sin and guilt. Sin’s red blaze blackens the soul; but long after sin is left behind, the black mark upon the soul continues.

Hence it is of the greatest importance that the difference between the two be clearly understood, especially since confounding sin and guilt must lead to confounding justification and sanctification, much to the injury of the earnestness of the Christian life.

If there were but one man on earth, he might sin against himself, but he could not be in debt to others. And if, in accordance with modern theology, there were no living God, but only an idea of good, he might sin against the idea of good, and be exceedingly bad, but he could not owe God anything.

Men owe God because He lives, exists, never departs, forever abides; and because from moment to moment they must transact business with Him. With men we open accounts at will; and the firms in town with which we do so we will owe, but those with which we do not deal we will never owe. Many apply this to God, under the mistaken notion that if they have no dealings with God they can not owe Him anything and have nothing to do with Him. To them He is non-existing; how, then, could they be in debt to Him?

But He does exist. It is not left to our choice to have dealings with Him or not. No; in *all* our affairs, *at all times* and under *all* circumstances, we must deal and do deal with Him. There is no business transacted from which He is excluded. In all things whatever we do, He is the most interested. In all our dealings and enterprises He is the Preferred Creditor and Senior Partner, with whom we must settle the final account. We may bury ourselves in Sahara, or go down to the bottom of the ocean, but our account with Him never ceases. We can never get away from Him. Working with head, heart, or hand, we open an account with God; and while we can deceive other partners and withhold part of the accounts from them, He is omniscient, He knows the most secret items, He keeps account of the smallest fraction, charging it to us; and before we have begun our reckoning, He has already finished it and laid it before us.

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<sup>7</sup> The Dutch word “*schuld*,” literally, “debt” includes the ideas of *guilt* and of *indebtedness* in general.—Trans.

Considering this, we realize what it is to be debtors to God; for while at every moment, under all circumstances, and in all transactions we are obliged to pay Him the whole profit, we never do it, at least not in full. Hence every act of head, heart, or hand creates an item of debt, which we withhold from Him through being either unwilling or unable to pay.

If God were not, or we were not related to Him, we would be *sinner*s, but not *debtors*. If a few years ago the floods at Krakatoa had engulfed all Java, as was feared, would it not have canceled all our debts to Java firms? Or suppose that the Patriotic Party in China once more came into power, and the Emperor decreed to close the empire against all nations, so that during a whole lifetime it was impossible to settle business with Chinese firms. Would this not cancel all the debts owing to China? Hence if God should cease to be or dissolve every tie binding us to Him, all our debts would at once be obliterated. But this is impossible; the tie that binds us to Him can not be broken. Our debt to Him remains; we can not cancel it; and our thinking that we can cancel it does not alter the fact.

God created us for Himself, and that creates our indebtedness to Him. If He had simply created us for the pleasure of creating us, as a boy blows soap bubbles for his entertainment, and for the rest did not care what became of us, there could be no debt. But He did create us for Himself, with the absolute charge, in all things, at every moment, and under all circumstances, to lay *life's gain* upon the altar of His name and glory. He does not allow us to live three days out of every ten for Him, and the rest for ourselves; in fact, He does not release us for a single day or moment. He demands the gain of our existence for His glory, unconditionally, *always* and *evermore*. He planned and created us for this. Thus He claims us. Hence, being our Lord and Ruler, He can not forego the last farthing of life's gain; and since we *never* have rendered Him, the tribute, we are *absolutely* His debtors.

What money is among men, *love* is to God. He says to you and me and every man: "As you thirst for gold, so do I thirst for love. I, your God, want your love, your whole heart's love. This is My due. This I claim. This debt I can not cancel. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." The fact that we do not render Him this love, or render it unholily and fraudulently, makes us His debtors perpetually.

We know that this is called the *juridical* conception, and that in these effeminate days men desire to escape from the tension of the right; wherefore the ethical conception is lauded to the skies. But this whole sentiment springs directly from a lie. This opposition against the juridical conception sets God at naught or ignores Him. Even without believing in God, one can dream of an *ideal* of holiness, according to the ethical conception, and strive against sin with inward thirst after holiness. But with only an *ideal* to incite him, there can be no room for right, no debt to God; for one can not owe an ideal, but only a *living person*. But when I acknowledge the living God, and that always and in all things I have to do with Him,



then He has righteous claims upon me which I have *violated*, and which must be satisfied. Hence the juridical conception comes *first*.

The ethical idea is: "I am sick; how can I become well?" The juridical idea is: "How can God's violated right be restored?" The latter is therefore of primary importance. The Christian must not first consider *himself*, but *God*. It wounds the very heart of the Reformed confession when the pulpit aims at sanctification without zeal for justification. Dr. Köhlbrugge's chief merit lay in this, that for God's sake he grieved over this neglect, and with powerful hand stemmed the tide of despising God's right, saying to church and individual: "Brethren, justification first."

To say, "Oh, if I were only holy, my indebtedness to God would not much trouble me," sounds very nice, but is deeply sinful. God's children desire to be holy as the children of vanity, desire riches, honor and glory—*i.e.*, it is always a desire for ourselves, our own ego, in ourselves to be what we are not. And the Lord God is left out. It is the Pelagian regulating his relation to God according to his own satisfaction. In fact it is sin, tho gilded, against the first and highest commandment.

Surely the soul's deep longing after holiness is good and right, but only after the question is settled; "How can I be restored to my right position before God, whose rights I have violated?" If this is our chief concern, then and then only do we love the Lord our God more than ourselves. Then the prayer for holiness will follow as a matter of course; not from the selfish desire to be spiritually enriched, but from the soul's deep longing nevermore to violate the divine right.

This is deep and far-reaching, and many will deem it harsh. Yet we may not hold it back. The unmanly and sickly Christianity now vaunted is not that of the fathers and of the godly of all ages and of the apostles and prophets. The Lord *must* be First and Highest; instead of being honored, His law is dishonored when, in the pursuit of holiness, God's *right* is forgotten. Even among men it is called dishonest when, with debts unpaid, a man goes to America only to make his fortune; and we would say to him: "Honestly to pay your debts is more honorable than merely to be successful. And this applies here. God's child does not enter the kingdom with a cry for *success*, but *to balance his accounts with God*."

And this explains the difference between *sin* and *guilt*. A burglar repents and returns the stolen treasure. Is he now entitled to freedom? Surely not; but if he fall into the hands of the law, he shall be tried, sentenced, and suffer in prison the penalty of the violated right. Let us apply this to sin. There is a *law* and God is its *Author*. Measured by it, transgressions of omission and commission are called *sin*. But that is not all. The law is not a fetish, nor the formula of a moral ideal, but *God's commandment*; "God spake all these words." God stands behind that law, maintains it, and lays it before us. Hence it is not enough to measure our act by the law and call it *sin*, but it must also be accounted for to the Lawgiver and acknowledged to be *guilt*.

*Sin* is non-conformity of an act, person, or condition to the divine *law*; *guilt*, encroachment by act, person, or condition upon the divine *right*. Sin creates guilt, because God has a claim upon all our acts. If it were possible to act independently of God, such acts, tho deviating from the moral ideal, would not create guilt. But since every man's act in every condition stands in account with God, every sin creates guilt. Yet they are not identical. Sin always lies *in us* and leaves our relation to God untouched; but guilt does *not* lie in us, but always refers to our *relation* to God. Sin shows what we are in our antagonism to the moral ideal; but guilt refers to God's claim upon us and to our denial of that claim.

If God were like a man, this guilt would be compromised. But He is not. His claims are as pure gold, perfectly right; not arbitrary, but based invariably upon a firm and unchangeable foundation. Hence nothing can be deducted from that guilt. According to the strictest measure the whole remains forever charged for us.

Hence the *punishment*. For punishment is but God's act of resisting the encroachment upon His rights. Such encroachments rob God, and would, if persisted in, detract from His divinity. And this can not be if He be God indeed. Hence His majesty operates directly against this encroachment. And this constitutes punishment. Sin, guilt, and punishment are inseparable. Only because guilt pursues sin, and punishment prosecutes guilt, can sin exist in God's universe.

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## XV.

## Our Unrighteousness.

“My Spirit shall not always strive with man.”—*Gen. vi. 3.*

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Before discussing the work of the Holy Spirit in the sinner’s restoration, let us consider the interesting but much-neglected question whether man stood in fellowship with the Holy Spirit *before the fall*.

If it is true that the original Adam returns in the regenerated man, it follows that the Holy Spirit must have dwelt in Adam as He now dwells in God’s children. But this is not so. God’s word teaches the following differences between the two:

1. Adam’s treasure was *losable*, and that of God’s children unlosable.
2. The former was to obtain eternal life, while the latter already possess it.
3. Adam stood under the Covenant of *Works*, and the regenerated under the Covenant of *Grace*.

These differences are essential, and indicate a difference of *status*. Adam did not belong to the ungodly that are justified, but was sinlessly just. He did not live by an extraneous righteousness which is by faith, as the regenerated, but shone with an original righteousness truly his own. He lived under the law which says: “Do this and thou shalt live; if not, thou shalt die.”

Hence Adam had no other faith than that which comes by “natural disposition.” He did not live out of a righteousness which is *by faith*, but out of an *original* righteousness. The cloud of witnesses in *Heb. xi.* does not begin with sinless Adam, but with Abel before he was slain.

If *every* right relation of the soul is one of faith, then original righteousness necessarily included faith. But this is not Scriptural. St. Paul teaches that faith is a temporary grace, which finally enters that higher and more intimate fellowship called “sight.” Faith as a means of salvation is in Scripture always faith in Christ not as the Son of God, the Second Person in the Trinity, but as *Redeemer, Savior, and Surety*—in short, faith in Christ and *Him crucified*. And since “Christ and Him crucified” does not belong to unfallen man, it is incorrect to place Adam in line with the justified sinner as regards faith. Even in the state of righteousness Adam did not live in Christ; for Christ is only a *sinner’s* Savior, and not a sphere or element in which man lives as *man*. In the absence of sin, Scripture knows no Christ; and St. Paul teaches that, when all the consequences of sin shall have ceased, Christ shall deliver the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all.

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Hence Adam and the regenerate are not the same. The difference between their status is most obvious in the fact that out of Christ the latter lies in the midst of death, having no life in himself, as St. Paul says, “Yet not I, but Christ who liveth in me, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (*Gal. ii. 20*); while Adam had a natural righteousness *in himself*.