

XV.

Our Unrighteousness.

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

273

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.

274

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*.

The fathers have always strongly emphasized this point. They taught that Adam's original righteousness was not accidental, supernatural, added to his nature, but inherent *in his nature*; not another's righteousness imputed to him and appropriated by faith, but a righteousness naturally his own. Wherefore Adam needed no substitute; he stood for himself in the nature of his own being. Hence his status was the opposite of that which constitutes for the child of God the glory of his faith.

Teachers of another doctrine are moved, consciously or unconsciously, by philosophic motives. The Ethical theory says: "Properly speaking, our salvation is not in the *cross*, but in Christ's *Person*. He was God and Man, hence divine-human; and this divine-human nature is communicable. This being imparted to us, our nature becomes superior in kind, and thus we become the children of God." This is a denial of the way of faith, and a rejection of the cross and of the whole doctrine of Scripture—a fearful error indeed. Its conclusion is: "First, even in sin's absence the Son of God would have become man; second, of course sinless Adam lived in the God-man."

Without assenting to these errors, others imprudently teach that sinless Adam lived by the righteousness of Christ. Let them be careful of the consequences. Scripture allows no theories which obliterate the difference between the Covenant of Works and that of Grace.

But maintaining the approved doctrine of Adam's original righteousness as *inherent in his nature*, and of the divine image as being *in-created*, the important question arises: Was the fellowship of the Holy Spirit enjoyed by Adam the same as that now possessed by the new-born soul?

The answer depends upon one's opinion concerning the nature of the original righteousness. Adam's righteousness was intrinsic. He stood before God as man ought to stand. He lacked nothing but *debt*. He rendered the Lord all that he owed momentarily; for how long is unimportant. One second is long enough to lose one's soul forever, and equally long enough to get into the right position before God. Hence Adam possessed a perfect good; for righteousness implies holiness, and both were perfect. Even the least unholiness would have created an immediate deficiency in Adam's returns to God. And when that unholiness became a fact, that righteousness was immediately damaged, rent, and broken; the least unholiness causes all at once the loss of *all* righteousness. Righteousness has no degrees. That which is not perfectly straight is *crooked*. Right and perfectly right are exactly the same. Not perfectly right is *not* right.

The question "*How Adam was perfectly good*" received clearest light from the conflict of the Lutherans Flacius Illiricus and Victorinus Strigel. The former maintained that man was essentially righteous.

One's opinion of sin necessarily depends upon his view of *goodness*, and vice versa. A realistic nature is inclined to conceive of sin and goodness as material; sin in his opinion is a sort of invisible bacterium, almost perceptible by a powerful microscope. And virtue,



goodness, and holiness have equally a tangible, independent existence, measurable and apportionable. This is not so. We may compare the spiritual to the material. What else is symbolism? The Scripture sets the example, comparing sin to a running sore, to a fire, etc.; and goodness to drops of water quenching thirst, becoming a fountain of living water in the soul. Let symbolism retain its honorable place in this respect. But symbolism is the comparison of things *dissimilar*, hence their identity is *excluded*. Sin is *not* something substantial, hence virtue and goodness are not essentially independent.

And yet Flacius Illiricus felt that in this respect there was a difference between sin and virtue. Evil is unsubstantial, because it is the lack, the default of goodness. But goodness is not the lack, the default of evil. Loss indicates that which ought to be, but which is lacking. Evil never ought to be, hence never can be a lack. But regarding goodness the question is different, viz., whether goodness as an extraneous and independent element was added to the soul, so that it might be said, "Here is the soul, and there is goodness." And this can not be. As a ray is unthinkable without light, so is goodness without a person from whom it proceeds.

And this tempted Flacius Illiricus to teach that originally man was *essentially* righteous. Of course he was wrong. What he wanted to attribute to man can be attributed to God alone. Goodness is goodness. God is goodness. Goodness is God. In God being and goodness are one. There is and can be no difference between the two, for God is perfectly good in all respects; hence the faintest separation between God and goodness is utterly unthinkable.

God alone is a simple Being; not as Professor Doedes interprets in his criticism on the Confession, as tho in God there can be no distinction in *persons*, but that in God there can be no distinction of *essence*, as between Himself and His attributes. But this is not so in man. We are not simple, and can not be, in the same sense. On the contrary, our being remains, tho all our attributes are changed or modified. A man can be good and ought to be, but without goodness he remains a man; his nature becomes corrupt, but his being remains the same.

Man's being is either deceitful or truthful, not because his soul is inoculated with the matter of falsehood or of truth, but by a modification of *the quality* of his being. Inherent goodness has no reference to our *being*, but only to the *manner* of its existence. As a joyous or sorrowful expression of countenance is not the result of an external application, but of inward joy or sorrow, so is the soul either good or bad according to the manner of its standing before God.

And this goodness was Adam's direct inheritance from God. God alone is the overflowing Fountain of all grace; Adam never wrought a particle of good of himself on the ground of which he might have claimed a reward. Eternal life was promised him not as a prize or inherent element, but by virtue of the conditions of the covenant of works. Just as strongly as



we oppose the application to sinless Adam of the conditions of the Covenant of Grace, as tho he lived in Christ, so strongly do we oppose the representation that any virtue, holiness, or righteousness proceeded from Adam not wrought by God in him. To deny this would make sinless Adam a *little fountain of some good*, and oppose the confession that God alone is the Fountain of *all* good.

Hence we arrive at this conclusion, that in Adam all goodness was wrought by the *Holy Spirit*, according to the holy ordinance which assigns to the Third Person in the Trinity the inward operation of all rational beings.

However, this does not imply that before the fall the Holy Spirit *dwelt* in Adam as in His temple, as He does in the regenerated child of God. In the latter He can only *dwell*, since the human nature is corrupt and unfit to be His *vehicle*. But not so with Adam. His nature was created and calculated to be a *vehicle* of the Holy Spirit's operations. Hence Adam and the regenerated are similar in this respect, that in both there is no goodness not wrought by the Holy Spirit; but dissimilar, in that the latter can offer only his sinful heart for the Holy Spirit's *indwelling*, while Adam's being underwent His operations without His indwelling, organically and *naturally*.



XVI.

Our Death.

“You who were dead in trespasses and sin.”—*Ephes. ii. 1.*

Next in order comes the discussion of *death*.

There is *sin*, which is deviation from and resistance against the *law*. There is *guilt*, which is withholding from God that which, as the Giver and Upholder of that law, is due to Him. But there is also *punishment*, which is the Lawgiver’s act of upholding His law against the lawbreaker. The Sacred Scripture calls this punishment “death.”

To understand what death is, we must first ask: “*What is life?*”

And the answer in its most general form is: “A thing lives if it moves from within.” A man found in the street, leaning against a wall, perfectly motionless, is supposed to be dead; but if he turns his head, or moves his hand, we know that he is alive. The motion, tho almost imperceptible and so feeble that it requires the practised fingers of the physician to detect it, is always the sign of life. The muscles may be paralyzed, tendons and sinews rigid, yet so long as the pulse beats, the heart throbs, and the lungs inhale the air, life is not extinct. In the doubtful cases of drowning, trance, or paralysis, the doubt is not removed, if removed at all, until motion has been observed. Hence we may safely say a body lives if it moves from within.

This can not be said of a clock, for its mechanism lacks inherent, self-moving power. By winding, energy may be stored in its mainspring, but when this is spent the clock stops. But life is not a force added to a prepared organism, mechanically and temporarily, but an energy that inheres in the organism as an organic principle.

Hence it is plain that the human body has no vital principle in itself, but receives it from the soul. The arm is motionless until moved by the soul. Even the functions of circulation, breathing, and digesting are animated by the soul; for when the soul leaves the body all these functions stop. A body without a soul is a corpse. As physical life depends upon the union of body and soul, so is physical death the result of the dissolution of that bond. As in the beginning God formed the human body out of the dust of the earth and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, so that it became a living being, so is the dissolving of that bond, which is death to the body, an act of God. Death is therefore the removal of that wonderful gift, the bond of life. God withdraws the forfeited blessing, and the soul departs in separate disembodiment; while the body, freed as a corpse, is delivered unto corruption.

But this does not finish the process of death. Life and death are awful opposites, embracing body and soul. “Dying thou shalt die” is the divine sentence, which includes the entire person, and not the body only. That which possesses creaturely life can also die as a creature. Hence the soul, being a creature, can be dispossessed of its creaturely life.

We admit that in another aspect the soul is immortal; but to prevent confusion, we beg the reader to put this fact for a moment out of his mind. Presently we will return to it.

