

Old Testament Stumbling-Blocks Removed.

by Daniel Steele

The sermon addresses the misinterpretation of Old Testament texts that seem to support the inevitability of sin, emphasizing the possibility of living a sin-free life through God's grace.

Scripture: 1 Kings 8:46, Job 9:20, Psalm 14:1, Psalm 37:23, Psalm 119:96

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Daniel Steele addresses the misunderstood passages in the Holy Scriptures that seem to justify an unholy life, emphasizing the misinterpretation of texts suggesting sin is necessary and Christian perfection is unattainable. Through a detailed analysis of various Bible verses, Steele clarifies that the Scriptures do not support the idea of sin as a norm for believers, but rather highlight the possibility of sin due to human fallibility. He challenges theological misconceptions and encourages a deeper understanding of God's Word to enhance one's faith.

Transcript

There are several misunderstood passages in the Holy Scriptures which seem to justify an unholy life; texts which apparently teach that sin is necessary to the present state, and Christian perfection, or deliverance from inbred sin through the Holy Ghost shedding abroad the love of God in its fullness in the heart, is a chimera. It is the object of this chapter to show that no word of the Holy Scriptures, properly interpreted, upholds, or in the least extenuates, sin as an act, or as a state or tendency.

1 Kings 8:46. In his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon represents various future national exigencies for which he implores the intervention of Jehovah bringing deliverance. Among these is national sin followed by national captivity. "If they sin against thee (for there is no man that sinneth not), and thou be angry with them," etc. Here the stumbling-block is in the parenthesis, which seems to declare, with the Westminster Catechism, that every man, after all that grace can do for him, is continually sinning. If this is man's normal condition, there is no pertinency in the supposition, "If they sin." It is very much like the governor of Massachusetts at the laying of a corner-stone of an insane asylum, being reported as saying in the dedicatory address, "If any citizen of this commonwealth becomes crazy, and there is no citizen who is not crazy, let him come here and be cured of his mental maladies." All the readers would say that there is a contradiction in the speech, through the blunder of the reporter or the printer; and they would immediately correct the parenthetical clause, and make it read thus: "For there is no citizen who may not be crazy." Now an examination of this text in the original Hebrew develops the fact that the word for

"sinneth" is in the future tense, the only form in the Hebrew for expressing the potential mood. (See Nordheimer's Grammar, §993, Green, §263, Rodiger's Gesenius, p. 238 d.) The corrected rendering then would be. "For there is no man who may not sin"; i.e., there is none impeccable, none that is not liable to transgression. Thus the alleged criminal imperfection is not a declared fact, in any sense whatever, but only a declared possibility. The text properly translated gives no support to the doctrine of the necessity of sin in a believer. Accordingly the Latin Vulgate, the standard of the Roman Catholic Church, has non peccet, "may not sin," as also the interlineal translations in the Antwerp, London, and Paris Polyglots; and in the latter two we have the same rendering of the Syriac and Arabic versions.

The same criticism and correction apply to Ecc. 7:20. which should read thus: "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and may not sin," the verb, to sin, being future, to denote a contingency, a possible, not a positive, future event. A little scholarship applied to these texts would greatly improve the theology of some people.

Job 9:20, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." This verse lies just as strongly against justification as against entire sanctification. In the evangelical sense, in which God is the justifier and the sanctifier of the believer in his Son, this verse contradicts neither. Job disclaimed justification by works and absolute perfection. That he had evangelical perfection, unfaltering faith, unquestioned loyalty, and perfect love, the root of all obedience, God's testimony ought to be conclusive, "Hast thou considered my servant Job . . . a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth [is shy of] evil?"

The true state of the facts is this: Job's professed comforters were three universalists of the old school, who viewed the present life as the sphere in which perfect justice is displayed, and rewards and punishments are exactly meted out. Hence, the greatest sinner must be the greatest sufferer in this life, and vice versa, the greatest bodily sufferer must have been the greatest criminal on earth. Job, the greatest sufferer, must therefore be the greatest sinner. This logic Job resented, and he refused to plead his perfect integrity upon any such platform of theological errors. He believed that afflictions befall good people for disciplinary ends and not for punishment solely. Hence, should he prove his own spotless purity, his own sufferings would not shake his demonstration, or militate against God's absolute justice, because he has other reasons than penalty for inflicting physical suffering. For Job to adopt the theology of his three friends and then declare his own perfection would have been an impeachment of the divine administration which would certainly "prove him perverse." Nevertheless, we are not left in uncertainty respecting his consciousness of inward and outward holiness:

"My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit; till I die I will not remove mine integrity [moral wholeness] from me, my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." -- Job. 27:2-6. This is certainly what Dr. Whedon would call a very tall profession of spiritual perfection, not made to impeach God's righteous administration, but to confound and put to eternal silence the wretched errors of his three professed friends.

Psalms 37:23, 24, is quoted as implying that every good man will fall into sin at times, and that God in his great mercy will not utterly cast him away. The truth is, there is no hint of sin in these verses. None of the versions intimate that a falling into sin is meant, but rather into adversities, distresses, and troubles, out of which God will at last give him a happy issue.

In Psalm 14:1-3 God looks down upon the human family aside from divine regenerating grace, and sees every one by nature and by practice corrupt and sinful. St. Paul, in Rom. 3:10, quotes this passage to prove the universal depravity of our race as proving the necessity for that scheme of universal redemption in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which he is proceeding to unfold in this theological epistle. No one has a right to pervert this text into proof that there are none righteous in the kingdom of grace.

Psalm 119:96, "I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad." No text in the Old Testament is more frequently quoted against Christian perfection, usually with an air of triumph, as though that doctrine is pulverized by the crushing momentum of this verse. Let us examine it. The original word for perfection in this passage is a once-used word in the Hebrew Bible. Hence its meaning is with scholars a matter of dispute. But many of them agree that it is the complete ending and vanishing away of anything. Thus Martin Luther renders it, "I have seen an end of all things, but thy law lasts." Hence, the word perfection not being in their version, the Germans have no difficulty with this text. All earthly things end, but the Bible lasts. This rendering makes the text concordant with Isa. 40:6-8 and 1 Pet. 1:24, 25. "All flesh is as grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever." That the idea of this text in the alphabetic psalm is the evanescence of the earthly and the eternity of the spiritual, especially of divine revelation, is proven by the Septuagint version, "I have seen the end of every finishing up, but thy commandment is very wide," while the Vulgate reads, *Omnis consummationis finem vidi*, literally, "I have seen the end of every consummation." We confidently make the assertion that no candid scholar, however strong his prejudices against evangelical perfection, or loving God with all the heart, after a thorough study of this text, will ever again hurl it against this precious scriptural doctrine and blessed conscious experience of myriads of his saints.

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