

Infirmities

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon distinguishes between sin and infirmity, arguing that God removes our sins and the disposition to sin, but leaves infirmities that arise from human weakness.

Scripture: Romans 7:15, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 2:13, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Sin Nature", "Holiness Transformation"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin delves into the definitions of infirmities and sins according to Fletcher, emphasizing the distinction between involuntary weaknesses and willful abuses of light and power. He critiques Augustine's classification of sin, arguing against labeling innocent infirmities or natural human tendencies as sinful. Baldwin highlights God's promise to remove the moral curse of sin while allowing believers to still face infirmities and retain their natural dispositions, which God transforms to align with holiness.

Transcript

We will quote one of Fletcher's definitions of infirmities which was given for the purpose of reconciling the doctrine of Christian perfection with human weakness:

An infirmity is a breach of Adam's paradisiacal perfection, which our covenant God does not require of us now; and, evangelically speaking, a sin for a Christian is a breach of Christ's evangelical law of Christian perfection; a perfection this, which God requires of all Christian believers. An infirmity, considering it with the error which it occasions, is consistent with pure love to God and man; but a sin is inconsistent with that love: an infirmity is free from guile, and has its root in our animal frame; but a sin is attended with guile, and has its root in our moral frame, springing either from the habitual corruption of our heart, or from the momentary perversion of our tempers: an infirmity unavoidably results from our unhappy circumstances, and from the necessary infelicities of our present state; but a sin flows from the avoidable and perverse choice of our own will: an infirmity has its foundation in an involuntary want of light and power; and a sin is a willful abuse of the present light and power we have. The one arises from involuntary ignorance and weakness, and is always attended with a good meaning, a meaning unmixed with any bad design or wicked prejudice; but the other has its source in voluntary perverseness and presumption, and is always attended with a meaning altogether bad; or, at least, with a good meaning founded on wicked prejudices.

Since the days of Augustine the error of Calvinism has been to confuse sin with innocent infirmities or even with legitimate human tastes and dispositions. We are prepared to show that Augustine was the first Christian imperfectionist. Fletcher calls him the father of "the rigid imperfectionists;" and the Augustinian

method of classifying sin has been followed by imperfectionists since his day. We contend that such a classification has no warrant either in Scripture or human experience. As samples of his methods we note the following found in the "Confessions" of Augustine, Book X, beginning with the 30th chapter:

1. Impure dreams are sign of a corrupt heart. 2. He considers pleasure in the taking of food a sin, saying, "This much hast Thou (God) taught me, that I should bring myself to take food as a medicine." 3. He considers that love for music is a sin. 4. He considers that it is a sin that "the eyes delight in fair and varied forms, and bright pleasing colors." 5. He considers it a sin to watch a hound chase a rabbit, a lizard or a spider catching flies, because this is prompted by curiosity, which, according to the theology of Augustine, is always evil.

We answer: 1. Bad dreams are not always a proof of a bad heart any more than good dreams are of a good heart. 2. Our taste was given that our food might be pleasing, and we would pity the woman who had to cook for a man who took his food as medicine. 3. The love of music was born with us and in itself is as innocent as the faculty of hearing. 4. The delight in bright landscapes and symmetrical forms is as natural as our faculty of sight. 5. To eliminate all such curiosity would be to cease to learn.

God has promised to remove the moral curse, and after this is done the human subject is still compassed about by infirmities, and still retains his natural disposition and appetites. God removes our sins and the disposition to sin, but He only removes these infirmities in so far as their presence would show the existence of either actual or inbred sin; and He only changes (possibly we should say, controls) our dispositions to such an extent that they may conform to the law of holiness; and while He takes away unholy appetites and desires, tearing them out of the soul root and branch, He also gives grace that the remaining natural desires may, as nearly as possible, be caused to occupy their proper position and not usurp control of the life, or hinder the full manifestation of the Spirit of God.

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