

Mis-Interpreted Scriptures

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The Bible teaches that we can live a sinless life through the power of Christ, and any doctrine that suggests the necessity of sin is contrary to Scripture.

Scripture: 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Christian Sanctification"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin addresses the opposition to the doctrine of holiness by highlighting the misinterpretation of certain Bible passages that are taken out of context or twisted to support the idea that living without sin is impossible. He specifically examines passages like Philippians 3:12, 1 John 1:8, Romans 3:10-12, and the seventh chapter of Romans, providing a deeper understanding of their true meanings and refuting the notion that sin is a necessary part of a Christian's life. Baldwin emphasizes the importance of aligning our beliefs with the overall message of Scripture, which aims to lead believers to righteousness and good works.

Transcript

There is a method of opposing the doctrine of holiness by quoting a few lonely passages of scripture that seem to warrant the assertion that no man can live without sin.

With scarcely an exception the force of the interpretation depends upon the isolation of the text -- upon the fact that it is wrested more or less from the context and given some other meaning from that which it would naturally assume if it were allowed to stand with its inspired surroundings. In other cases passages that students of the word admit are obscure are brought into requisition to prove so vital a point as the necessary indwelling of sin. Still others are driven to such extremes to prove their pet doctrine of necessary sinfulness that they drag up passages from the Old Testament that are as far from proving the point as the east is from the west. Let us notice a few of these passages. classifying them according to the interpretation generally given them by holiness opposers.

I. Passages taken from their context,

1. "Not as though I had already attained either were already perfect." -- Phil. 3:12.

This it is asserted, is a plain statement of the apostle that he himself was not perfect. But to what perfection does he refer? Turn to your Bible and read the preceding verse and you will see that the apostle

means the perfection of resurrected saints, for he says, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained either were already perfect: but I follow after, etc." It is clear that he does not mean Christian perfection for in the next breath he professes to have attained that grace. "Let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded." -- Phil. 3:15.

2. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." -- I Jno. 1:8. That this does not mean that it is necessary to commit sin is seen in the fact that both in the seventh and eighth verses the apostle asserts all that the holiness people claim. In the seventh verse he says "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," and in the ninth God is "faithful and just ... to cleanse us from all sin." The apostle never intended that such an unwholesome doctrine as the necessity of sinning should be read into his words for in the third verse after the one the objectors love so well (the Bible was not divided into chapters when it was written) he declares, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." -- Ch. 2:1.

For the common reader this would be sufficient but for fear some person may still be in doubt we will give the meaning of the passage. In John's day a class of men called Gnostics were making their appearance in the church and teaching that they were elected and had no sin and never did have any, for God did not impute sin to them. To rebuke them John says, "If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourselves. You are in error and never have been saved from sin; if you say that you have not sinned, you make God a liar." He uses the first person, plural number (see I Jno. 1:8-10) for the same reason that any preacher or public speaker uses it.

3. "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that doeth good, no, not one." -- Rom. 3:10-12. Read the following description of the characteristics of these persons, and if any one who calls himself a Christian wants to be classed with such characters he may do so, but some of us prefer better company. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes." -- Romans 3:10-18.

4. There is perhaps no other passage in the Bible that is more abused than the seventh chapter of Romans. As some one has said compromisers "come from the north, from the south. from the east and from the west, and find in this chapter a common solace." To give it a complete survey would be too much for our present design, we will simply suggest a few thoughts that may be helpful to a proper understanding of the most difficult portions.

(a) Paul professed deliverance from what he calls the flesh, not only for himself but for others both before and after the part of the chapter that is used to uphold sin. In the former part of the chapter he says, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Immediately following the seventh chapter he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are of Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the

righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." What could be more plain than this?

(b) Some of his statements are contrary to the possibility of saving grace.

"I am carnal, sold under sin." So was king Ahab; was he a Christian? -- I Kings 21:20-25.

"What I hate, that I do." Christians are constantly represented as persons who do right.

"It is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me." Christians are delivered from the old man that did dwell within. -- Rom. 6:6, 7, 11.

"Oh, wretched man that I am," etc. Christians rejoice evermore. I Thes. 5:16.

"For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." This is a heathen experience. Seneca, a Roman philosopher and writer, and a contemporary of the apostles, born 3 B. C., says, "What is it that draws us in one direction while striving to go in another, and impels us toward that which we wish to avoid?" Arian, a Stoic philosopher of Nicomedia, born about 100 A. D., "For truly, he who sins does not will sin, but wishes to walk uprightly; yet it is manifest that what he wills he doth not; and what he wills not he doth." Compare this with Rom. 7:18-19.

(c) But this was not Paul's present experience as he manifestly states elsewhere. We will show this by quoting what he says in Romans seven and over against this set his statements of experience as recorded in other places.

"I am carnal, sold under sin." "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Rom. 8:2. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." -- Gal. 2:20.

"What I hate, that I do." "Ye are witnesses, and God also. how holily, justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." I Thes. 2:10. Read also Acts 20:18-35.

"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. -- II Cor. 6:10. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." Rom. 6:6-7.

(d) Such an interpretation is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture. It declares, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (bad doctrine if it parallels heathenism), for reproof (bad thing for reproof if it upholds sin), for instruction in righteousness (but they make it instruct us in the necessity of sin): that the man of God may be perfect (in what? the common interpretation of Romans seven makes him perfect in sinning), thoroughly furnished (margin, perfected) unto all good works." -- II Tim. 3:16-17. Thus we see that the design of the Scripture is to perfect us in righteousness and good works, and any doctrine which tends to the opposite is heterodox.

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