

Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children

by H.J. Vine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of departing from iniquity and following God's order and truth, as stated in the Bible.

Scripture: Exodus 34:7, Numbers 23:21, Malachi 3:16, Acts 20:30, Romans 5:14, Ephesians 2:19, 2 Timothy 2:19, 1 John 3:4

Topics: "Righteous Living", "Separation From Sin"

Description

H.J. Vine delves into the distinctions between iniquity, transgression, sin, lawlessness, and offense as outlined in the Word of God. He emphasizes the importance of departing from iniquity and following righteousness, faith, love, and peace with a pure heart. The sermon highlights the need for believers to contend for the faith, maintain God's truth, and separate from any form of perversion or disobedience, looking forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ when all will be in accordance with God's perfect order and truth.

Transcript

These words have often produced painful and even rebellious thoughts in the minds of the uninstructed, principally because of their being almost invariably misquoted, for both books and speakers in general say, The Lord visits "the sins" of the fathers upon the children. That is not what the Word of God says.

When Jehovah declared His gracious Name to Moses, giving him a partial view of His glory, it was iniquity, and not transgression, nor sin, which He said would be visited upon "the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. 34:7). Various arguments have been launched against this truth--too many even to notice in this short paper--and any show of reason in any one of them has its foundation in the misquotation we have mentioned, for they confuse things that are to be distinguished; which, when discerned, proves clearly the inspiration and perfection of the Scriptures on the one hand, and the fallacy of these unjust attacks on the other.

In the same verse from which we have quoted, the Lord Himself differentiates when He speaks of, "Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Three distinct things are here named by Him. Elsewhere we also read of lawlessness and offence. Let us seek in holy fear and lowly confidence to obtain the Spirit's teaching as to these things so that we may intelligently avoid them, and walk before God in truth and love,

looking forward to the day when the universal order which He has designed shall prevail, when the Spirit of Truth shall characterize all, and the Lord Jesus Christ shall be honoured to the glory of God the Father.

We will therefore take these things first in the order they are mentioned, and consider them in a concise way.

1. INIQUITY. This is often spoken of as unrighteousness in other parts of the inspired writings. We read in 1 John 5:1, "All [or every] unrighteousness is sin". It may not, however, be said that every sin could be Scripturally designated iniquity or unrighteousness. We will follow this out more in detail later on. Meanwhile, it may be said, Iniquity has to do with perversion in relation to any system or order established by God, and the truth which He has made known. The Hebrew word used is *avon*, which means perversity.

2. TRANSGRESSION. This also is sin, but it is to be distinguished from iniquity. We know that death reigned from Adam to Moses, even upon those who had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression (Rom. 5:14). It was necessary for a definite command to be broken for the sin to be called transgression, so we read, "Where no law is there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). Sin may be there in various forms nevertheless. When God's people, Israel, to whom the law was given discover in a later day this truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, that it was because of their transgression He was stricken (Isa. 53:8), as well as for their iniquities and their sins, it will greatly enhance their estimate of His sacrificial work upon the cross, and enrich their notes of thanksgiving and praise.

3. & 4. SIN and LAWLESSNESS. These may be placed together, for God has told us in 1 John 3:4, "Everyone that practises sin practises also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." This is the accepted rendering of the verse. The latter clause tells us what sin actually is, and the former that the one who is characterized by practising it is lawless as to all that God orders and favours. When Christ bore our sins and was made sin upon the tree, He cried in the darkness: "My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). This shows the awfulness of sin. Great indeed was the love of the sinless One to endure this for us, and to sustain the claims of holiness and justice against sin that we might be saved eternally and God be glorified.

5. OFFENCE. When the Gentiles--to whom the law was not given--are addressed, this general term concerning sin is more often used; so in Romans 4, we are told Christ "was delivered for our offences." Adam's transgression is spoken of as "the offence of one" in verse 15. In 2 Corinthians 5:19, the word "trespasses" should be "offences." It is the same in Ephesians 2:15, and Colossians 2:13, where we read of God's great love towards us even when we were "dead in offences," and having quickened us and saved us by His grace, He has "forgiven us all offences." Anything which is contrary to the pleasure of God may be embraced in the word offence. Somewhat like evil, wickedness, and trespass, it is a general term. "Peace like an even river flows" when we know that all has been met for our eternal blessing and for God's glory by the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification therefore as a consequence, being justified on the principle of faith, we have peace with God through Him.

We must now point out in regard to the question raised at the beginning of this paper--in regard to that form of sin which is designated by the Holy Spirit as iniquity--every true believer is expressly told to depart from it. There is no escape from this if we are to be found true and loyal to the One we own as Lord--to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us, and surely we should not desire to escape from it! Paul, when

addressing the elders of the assembly at Ephesus, told them, "from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things" (Acts 20:30, N.Tr.); and later, when widespread perversion in regard to God's order as well as God's truth was plainly foretold, and indeed had already begun, then in words which come with unquestionable authority, yea, as the Word of God--distinctly he enjoins, "LET EVERY ONE WHO NAMES THE NAME OF THE LORD WITHDRAW FROM INIQUITY" (2 Tim. 2:19, N.Tr.).

That Divinely inspired instruction is surely sufficient for the one who desires to obey the truth. When disorder or fundamental perversion of the truth has become characteristic, and is beyond remedy among those who profess the faith, then it must be departed from by every one who owns the authority of Christ, by every one who names the Name of the Lord. Uprightness demands it! Faithfulness demands it! Truth demands it! Obedience demands it! Love demands it! Loyalty demands it! Wisdom demands it! "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). When the Word of God instructs us it is ours to understand and obey.

We are, moreover, told to "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). This is said to those who have been called of God, "beloved in God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ," for men who corrupt the things of God had "crept in unawares" or "unnoticed." They were therefore to follow together the positive good, and contend for the faith by building themselves up in it, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in God's love, as they awaited the coming of the Lord. The order which is according to God's revealed mind, and the truth which He gave at the beginning, are not to be given up as impracticable because of the abounding perversions of it, but that which was delivered of God at the first is still to be the pursuit of the elect. Indeed, where as we have seen, separation from iniquity is enjoined, we are at once instructed in verse 22, to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" A positive attitude is thus characteristic of those who answer to the mind of God at this time, and this will be so doubtless till the Lord returns.

When at Horeb Jehovah spoke to Moses of "visiting the iniquity of the fathers" upon the descendants, He was giving the order to be maintained in the nation of Israel and the truth to guide and sustain them. This was done in "the day of assembly" before all Israel. In the historical, poetical, and prophetic books which follow, we see the dreadful perversions of that which God then set up for the nation. Toward the close, however, Zephaniah speaks of a true and loyal remnant, "an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies" (3:12-13). Malachi also tells us of them, and how "they spake often together" and "thought upon His Name." Then, as if to recall them to the time when that Name was proclaimed; when Jehovah spoke the words at the head of this paper it is said "Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel with the statutes and judgments" (4:4). The iniquity of the fathers had indeed been visited upon the children! What an entail had been left behind! The very position of those who were true proved it! Nevertheless the real could rest in Jehovah, and rejoice that Israel shall yet be turned from her iniquities when the Lord shall come and reign over them, having been preceded by Elijah; when, as the last verse of the Old Testament says "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." Blessed time, indeed, to look forward to! Then shall it be truly said in their redemption--even as Balaam prophesied in view of it "Jehovah has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel, the Lord His God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them" (Num. 23:21).

It is the same now, after the long sad story of perversion and failure in "the assemblies," we are recalled to the Lord Himself and to that which was given at the beginning for "all saints," avoiding iniquity or

unrighteousness as those who name His Name we are to follow together what is right in every relationship established by God, along with faith, love, and peace, looking on to Christ's coming again.

The assembly is God's house, and it is the pillar and base of "the truth". The truth is there. Moses was over the house of Israel as a servant. Christ is over His house today as Son, and He abides faithful. He will not fail. It is to Him we are separated. It is upon the Lord Himself we are to call, Soon He will come with a shout, and call the assembly to be with Himself for ever. Perfect then, His bride shall behold His face, and rejoice in His love on high. There will be no iniquity to depart from there, thank God; but His order and truth subsisting in love and glory for ever, with Christ as its Head and Centre and the assembly with Him as His body and His bride, all shall resound with the praise of God's grace and glory. There shall be no perversity nor perversion any more All shall be to the pleasure of God His rest shall be no more disturbed.

"There shall His love find perfect rest,

Where all around is bliss."

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