

Human Anodynes

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon highlights the dangers of relying on human appliances for spiritual healing, instead of seeking divine remedies.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15:22, 1 Samuel 16:14, Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 11:28, Romans 7:24-25, 1 Corinthians 5:5, Galatians 5:7, 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 3:5, James 1:22

Topics: "Obedience to God", "The Consequences of Sin"

Description

Horatius Bonar reflects on the tragic decline of Saul, who began his reign with promise but fell into disobedience, leading to his rejection by God. He emphasizes that Saul's sin was not merely misrule but a failure to obey God's command, highlighting the importance of obedience over personal reasoning. The consequences of Saul's disobedience were severe: the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and he was tormented by an evil spirit, illustrating the dual nature of divine judgment. Bonar warns against relying on human solutions, such as music or rituals, which may provide temporary relief but fail to address the deeper spiritual needs of the soul. Ultimately, he calls for a return to God's true remedy for healing and peace, rather than superficial comforts that leave the soul unfulfilled.

Transcript

1 Samuel 16:14-23

OF Saul we may say, "Thou didst run well, who hath hindered you?" He began well, but ended ill. His first days and works were better than his last. So with Demas; so with the church of Ephesus; so with the Jews, whose following Jehovah at first was belied by their last apostasy. So is it still with souls, churches, nations, ages.

I. Saul's sin. For the root of all was sin. This sin was simply disobedience to a command of God. He was bidden slay Agag and his people. A cruel command, some would say, to which disobedience was better than obedience. But it was a divine command, whether the wisdom, or the justice, or the mercy were visible. God had His reasons for it, and that was enough. Saul's sin was not misrule, nor oppression, nor wickedness, but simply disobedience to a command which some might call arbitrary, if not harsh and stern. Such stress does God lay on obedience, simple obedience, unreasoning obedience. His will must be done; for He is Sovereign, and He is the God only wise. Saul's sin was the preference of his own will and wisdom to God's. Let our consciences be tender as to this; and let us beware of acting on our own reasons or ideas of fitness, or doing our own will. "To obey is better than sacrifice."

II. The consequences. (1.) His crown is taken from him; he is rejected from being king. (2.) Samuel leaves him (1 Samuel 15:35). But the two special things mentioned here are these:--

(1.) The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. I do not take up the question as to whether Saul were a true child of God; this passage does not determine the point. He might be so; and these words might be like Paul's: "Whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20); "deliver unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Corinthians 5:5). But certainly "the Spirit which departed from Saul" was good, not evil. It was the reversal of what is said: "God gave him another heart,"--a heart for governing, which He now takes away. The good Spirit is grieved, and departs. Saul's last act of disobedience has quenched Him; he is left without heavenly guidance.

(2.) An evil spirit from the Lord troubles him. He is not left alone; for as one Spirit departs, another enters. (a.) He is troubled. His soul is now the abode of darkness and fear. He becomes moody and sad; he is vexed, perplexed, desponding. This is the fruit of sin! (b.) He is troubled by an evil spirit. The clean spirit goes out, and the unclean spirit comes in,--comes in to torment, and sadden, and vex. (c.) He is troubled by an evil spirit from the Lord. God lets loose Satan upon him. The unclean spirit returns with others more wicked than himself, and his last state is worse than his first. These words are very awful: "I will choose their delusions;" and "God shall send them strong delusion! "

Thus is his chastisement double--negative and positive; a departure of the good, and the arrival of the evil. And this affliction is Jehovah's doing. Not chance, nor disease, nor natural depression of spirits, but a visitation from God; judgment for disobedience, judicial punishment.

III. Human appliances. Here is music, religious music,--the music of the harp, the harp of David. This is soothing but it does not reach the seat of the disease. It is something human, something external, something materialistic and earthly, something that man can originate and apply. It is effectual to a certain extent; it drives away the evil spirit, and restores temporary tranquillity; thus possibly deceiving its victim. In like manner we find the human spirit afflicted in every age, sometimes more and sometimes less. And in all such cases man steps in with his human and external appliances. I do not refer to the grosser form of dispelling gloom,--drunkenness and profligacy, in which men seek to drown their sense of want, and make up for the absence of God. I refer to the refined appliances; those of art, science, music, gaiety, by which men try to minister to a mind diseased. What is Romanism and ritualism, but a repetition of Saul's minstrelsy? The soul needs soothing. It is vexed and fretted with the world, its conscience is not at ease, it is troubled and weary. It betakes itself to forms, something for the eye and ear, to chants, and vestments, and postures, and performances, sweet sounds and fair sights, sentimental and pictorial religion, which is but a refined form of worldliness. By these the natural man is soothed, the spirit tranquilised; the man is brought to believe that a cure has been wrought, because his gloom has been alleviated by these religious spectacles, these exhibitions which suit the unregenerate soul so well. They but drug the soul, filling it with a sort of religious delirium. They are human sedatives, not divine medicines.

IV. The results. A partial and temporary cure. It is said that the evil spirit departed, but not that the good Spirit returned. Saul's trouble was alleviated, but not removed. The disease was still there. The results of David's harp were only superficial and negative. So is it with the sinner still. There are many outward applications, which act like spiritual chloroform upon the soul. They soothe, and calm, and please, but that is all. They do not reach below the surface, nor touch the deep-seated malady within. Men try rites, sacraments, pictures, music, dresses, and the varied attractions of ecclesiastical ornament; but these leave the spirit unfilled, and its wounds unhealed. They cannot regenerate, or quicken, or heal, or fill with

the Holy Spirit. They may keep up the self-satisfaction and self-delusion of the soul, but that is all. They bring no true peace, nor give rest to the weary. They do not fill, they merely hide our emptiness.

Our age is full of such appliances, literary and religious, all got up for the purpose of soothing the troubled spirits of man. Excitement, gaiety, balls, theatres, operas, concerts, ecclesiastical music, dresses, performances,--what are all these but man's appliances for casting out the evil spirit and healing the soul's hurt without having recourse to God's one remedy? These pleasant sights and sounds may "take the prisoned soul and lap it in Elysium," but what of that? They do not bring it nearer to God, they do not work repentance, or produce faith, or fix the eye on the true cross. They leave the soul still without God, and without reconciliation. The religion thus produced is hollow, and fitful, and superficial, and sentimental. It will not save nor sanctify. It may produce a sort of religious inebriation, but not that which God calls godliness, not that which apostles pointed out as a holy life, a walk with God.

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