

Man's Fig-Leaves.

by Horatius Bonar

Man's attempts to cover his sin through his own efforts are insufficient and do not deal with the root of the problem, which is the guilt and shame of sin before God.

Scripture: Genesis 3:7, Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 9:22

Topics: "Sin and Atonement", "Human Efforts vs. Divine Grace"

Description

Horatius Bonar explores the theme of shame and the inadequacy of human attempts to cover sin, as illustrated by Adam and Eve's use of fig leaves. He emphasizes that while they sought to hide their nakedness and guilt, their self-made coverings were insufficient before God. Bonar argues that true atonement requires divine intervention, as human efforts are merely fig-leaves that cannot address the depths of sin. He warns against relying on rituals or good deeds as means of approaching God, highlighting that only through the sacrifice of Christ can true shame be covered. Ultimately, Bonar calls for recognition of God's provision for sin rather than reliance on our own devices.

Transcript

"They sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons." - Genesis 3:7

They are alone, yet they are ashamed. They are in Paradise, yet they are ashamed. It is conscience that is making them blush. It not only makes cowards of them, but it works shame and confusion of face. They are ashamed of themselves; of their nakedness; of their recent doings. They cannot look one another in the face after their disobedience and recriminations against one another. They cannot look up to God now. Possibly too they shrink from being in view of the serpent who beguiled them. The feeling of happy innocence is gone. They must be covered. This is their feeling, the dictate of conscience. The eye must not see them, either of God or man. The light must not shine on them; the eye of the sun must not look on them; and the fair flowers and trees of Paradise must not see their shame. They love darkness rather than light. Covering is what they seek- covering from every eye. Thus, shame and guilt are inseparable. "I must be covered," is the sinner's first feeling- from the eye of God and man, even from my own. They cannot look on me, nor I on them! Thus far they are right. But now they go wrong.

Their mistake was twofold:

(1.) That they could cover themselves;

(2.) that they can be covered with materials from vegetable nature. Let us look at these.

I. Man thinks he can cover himself. He knows not the greatness of the evil; he does not calculate on the penetration of the all-seeing eye. He sets to work and makes himself a covering, and he says this will do. What sin is, or what the sinner needs, or what God requires, he has no idea of. Each sinner has his own way of covering himself; he weaves his own web, whatever may be the substance of which it is composed. He wishes to be his own coverer, the maker of his own clothing. He thinks he can do it himself. He has no idea that it is utterly beyond his power. He trusts to the skill of his own hands to provide the dress that shall hide his shame from the eye of God and man. He thinks it an easy thing to deal with shame, and fear, and conviction, and conscience. He will not believe that these can only be dealt with by God. This is the last thing that he will admit. He will try a thousand plans before accepting this. He will make and try on many kinds or sets of clothing before betaking himself to that which God has made.

The unbelieving man's whole religious life is a series of plans and efforts for stitching a clothing for himself, with which to appear before God and before men; no, with which he hopes to appear before the judgment-seat. It is with this manmade, this self-made clothing, this earth-made, or priest-made, or church-made religion, that he robes himself; with this he soothes conscience; with this he quiets fear; with this he removes the feeling of guilty shame. He can do all that is needful himself, or at the most with a little help from God.

II. Man thinks he can cover himself with leaves. He supposes that what will hide his shame from his own eye will hide it from God; that even such a frail covering as the foliage of the fig-tree will do. He has no thought of anything beyond this. The fig-leaf will do, he thinks. What more do I need? But he is mistaken; the fig-leaf will not do, broad and green as it may be. But why will it not do?

(1.) It is man's device, not God's. That which covers sin, and renders the sinner fit to draw near, must be of God, not of man. God only has the right, God only can, prescribe to man how he is to draw near. What then is ritualism but a religion of fig-leaves?

(2.) It is simply for the body, not the soul. It does not relieve the conscience, or satisfy the guilty spirit, or cover the whole man. It is utterly insufficient. It could not remove one fear, or quiet one pang of remorse, or make the man feel tranquil in the presence of God.

(3.) It is composed of life, not of death. That which is to cover man's sin, and deliver him from the sense of shame, must be something which has had the life taken out of it. The green fig-leaf will not do. It is no better than Cain's sacrifice- the fruit of the ground. The only thing that can relieve the sinner from guilt and shame is atonement; the only atonement is by blood; for without shedding of blood is no remission; and therefore the only sufficient covering must be one connected with atonement, one which represents death, one which tells of the payment of the righteous penalty and the removal of the righteous condemnation. The fig-leaf spoke of life, not of death; of the blessing, not of the curse. It had nothing in it which told of propitiation or substitution; nothing which spoke of God's anger turned away by means of the endurance of that anger by another. The truths here taught us for ourselves are not a few. They are of profound importance.

(1.) Man's devices for covering sin are useless. They may be easy or difficult- cheap or costly- still they are vain. They profit nothing. The covering is narrower than a man can wrap himself in. These devices are innumerable. Good, deeds, long prayers, fervent feelings, self-mortifications and penances; church-connection, rites, ceremonies, religious performances- such are man's ways for approaching God,

his coverings for a sinful soul. They are all fig-leaves!

(2.) Man's devices all turn upon something which he himself has to do, not on what God has done. Man misses the main point of importance. This was not wonderful in Adam, to whom nothing had been revealed; but it is amazing in us now, when God has announced that he has done all- that "it is finished!"

(3.) Man's devices assume that God is such an one as himself. He can conceal himself from his fellow man; therefore he thinks he can cover himself, so that God shall not see him. That which conceals him from a human eye, he supposes will conceal him from a divine.

(4.) Man's devices all trifle with sin. They do not fathom its depths of malignity in God's sight. They assume that it will be easily forgiven and forgotten. They overlook its evil, its hatefulness, its eternal desert of woe. What are fig-leaves as a protection against the wrath of God or the flames of hell!

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