

The Straying Sheep and the Sin-Bearing Shepherd

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our sinful nature and the need for a sin-bearing Shepherd to bring us back to the fold.

Scripture: Psalm 103:3, Ezekiel 34:6, Luke 15:3, Acts 20:28, Galatians 6:14, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "Christ's Sacrifice", "Spiritual Restoration"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the profound significance of Christ bearing our sins in his own body on the tree and the healing we receive through his stripes. He delves into the imagery of sheep going astray, highlighting the reasons for their wandering and the need for the Shepherd to bring them back. Philpot emphasizes the folly, silliness, and hankering after sinful desires that lead us astray, but ultimately, it is the grace of God that enables us to return to Him. Through Christ's sacrifice, we experience a death to sins, a life unto righteousness, and a return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

Transcript

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"Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness- by whose stripes you were healed. For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." 1 Peter 2:24, 25

In endeavoring to lay lay the text open before you, I shall-

First, direct your thoughts to what is said in it of our going astray as sheep.

Secondly, the bearing of our sins in his own body on the tree by the blessed Lord, and our being healed by his stripes.

Thirdly, the effect and consequence of a knowledge of this- that we become dead to sins and live to righteousness, and return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

I. Going astray as sheep. I need hardly observe how continually in the word of truth the people of Christ are called sheep; nor need I point out the various reasons which make that figure peculiarly descriptive of their character and condition. There can, therefore, be no difficulty in understanding that by the word "sheep" in our text the people of God are intended, and chiefly the living and regenerated people, those for whom not only the Lord laid down his precious life, but whom he has quickened by his Spirit, and called by his grace, and whom he will eventually bring home to glory.

But you will observe, that they are here spoken of as "going astray." They were sheep before they went astray, for the straying of a sheep in the literal figure does not destroy its nature as a sheep, or turn it into a goat. That it should leave the fold and go astray is its folly and misery; but however far it may wander upon the dark mountains, it can never lose its original character or change its nature. It needs, indeed, to be brought back that it may not be devoured by the wolf, or perish of hunger; but even in its furthest wanderings, when it has most lost its way, and is least able to return, its heart is toward the fold, the flock, and the shepherd.

A. But let us examine more minutely the expression of the apostle, "going astray," and see what meaning we may gather up from the idea thus presented to our mind in harmony with the Scriptures and the experience of the saints. And perhaps it may help us to understand the figure better if we look at the various reasons through which the literal sheep often goes astray; for most likely we shall find some, if not all, of the same causes acting in some analogous way upon the minds of the Lord's family when they go astray.

1. One cause, and that not the least frequent or the least prevalent, is silliness; their downright silliness, actual foolish stupidity. Sheep often go astray not from maliciousness; not from a natural desire to live like the goat; not from a weariness of the fold or of their companions; not from any sudden antipathy to their shepherd, but from sheer stupidity. Is not this true also with the Lord's sheep? Have you not often gone out of the path through sheer stupidity, through actual silliness of heart? Some silly lust, some stupid folly, some miserable, wretched trifle of no more real weight or importance than a straw, has drawn you aside. You have got out of the path and fallen into some evil which has produced great guilt, and it may be all your lifetime a source of inward compunction, through some stupid folly by which you were overtaken in some heedless moment, so as to say or do something unbecoming or inconsistent, which you never can forget, and which, if it has come abroad, has grieved friends, put a reproach into the mouth of enemies, tarnished your Christian character, and brought upon you misery and vexation.

You did not do it wittingly, willfully, or wantonly, but if I may use the expression, blundered into it through sheer silliness of mind and mere stupidity, as being off your guard and caught in a snare before you were well aware. When we look sometimes at the in-and-out path which we have trodden since we made a profession, and what silly, foolish things we have often said and done, how humbling is the review, what shame covers our face; what a low place we are forced to take among the family of God; and how every one of them seems to be wiser, holier, more consistent, more sober, prudent and godly, more spiritual and heavenly-minded than we feel ourselves to be. We seem to see how much more they have been kept by the power of God; preserved more tender in his fear, and have lived more to his praise and glory than we have done. It is this continual sight and sense of what we have been and are as sheep that have gone astray, which causes us to esteem others better than ourselves, and makes us daily feel that we are the chief of sinners and less than the least of all saints.

2. Another cause of the sheep's going astray is a hankering after a fresh pasture, even though there are poisonous herbs in it. The sheep seems to get weary of so small a territory, grows tired of being always penned up closely in a fold, and ever treading up and down the same narrow ground. In looking over a pasture or a field of turnips fed down by sheep, we generally observe that the shepherd keeps them, as it were, to the last bite. Sheep food is too costly to be wasted. They must eat up all and leave nothing. Now, we may well understand that when the sheep sees near at hand a richer pasture, it is easily tempted to leave the fold and the flock to get a fuller feed. And yet what danger there may be in it. A friend of mine lost a good part of his flock through disease, brought on, it was supposed, by the shepherd's getting out the flock upon the frosted clover before the sun had thawed and dried it.

How needful it is for us to be kept within the fold and under the eye of the Shepherd who will make no such mistake as that, even if the food is sometimes scanty, and we may seem to long for a change of pasture. It is in this way that men so often get entangled with error. It seems to offer to them some fresh pasture, some new food, a lively and agreeable change from that round of doctrine and experience of which they have got almost tired, and of which, were it manna itself, they would say, if you could read their hearts- "Our soul loaths this light bread." The restless desires of the human heart are as innumerable as they are insatiable. What silly baits will sometimes entangle our vain mind. What a hankering often is there after some gratification which, if we got it, would be but a momentary indulgence, and, even that spoiled by guilt and shame at the very moment of obtaining it. How easily, too, we get entangled and drawn aside by some of those "deceitful lusts," of which I was speaking this morning, and which well may be called deceitful as promising much and performing nothing, and indeed worse than nothing, for all they can perform is bondage and misery.

3. But sometimes sheep go astray, drawn aside by the example of others. You know how prone sheep are to follow each other, and if the lead sheep does but direct the way, how first one and then another rushes almost madly after him. An old Puritan writer, if I remember right, relates an incident which he himself witnessed at Shrewsbury, where there is a bridge that crosses the river Severn, there tolerably wide. A flock of sheep was passing over the bridge, and one of them took it into his head, as we should say, to leap off the road upon the parapet, which I suppose in those days was of a lower character and of a cruder structure than in our modern bridges. The next sheep followed suit, and the third followed him. But they had got a very narrow spot to stand upon. Down, then, goes the first sheep into the water, the next follows, the third imitates his example, until the outcome was that the whole flock fell into the river.

And even in London, there is a familiar example of this following propensity in the device by which a poor sheep is sometimes enticed into the slaughter-house by a stuffed sheep being drawn in before him. How great is the influence of example; and but for God's grace how the river or the slaughterhouse might have been our end, and would be if we followed some examples set before us. How often God's people have been drawn aside by the bad example of this or that professor, or even sheltered themselves under the sins and infirmities of good men. If they see one going before them who is generally received as a saint or servant of God, they think they may safely follow; and yet he may only go before them to lead them into evil.

Bunyan, who has left few things untouched, has beautifully hit off this temptation in representing Vain Confidence going before Christian and Hopeful in By-Path Meadow. "Look," said Christian, "Did not I tell you so? By this you may know we are right." But when night came on, Vain Confidence fell into a pit and was dashed to pieces by his fall, and the two pilgrims soon got into the Castle of Giant Despair. It is not the example of good men or bad which is to guide or lead us, but the precepts of the gospel and the

example of Christ. Directly you are beginning to justify your inconsistent or unbecoming conduct by the example of some good man, you are falling into a snare. Has God told you to be covetous because it is this good man's besetting sin? or to be peevish and passionate because this other worthy man has a hasty temper? or to be light and trifling because this minister has dropped from the pulpit some quaint saying which, perhaps, smote his conscience with a pang as soon as it had gone out of his lips? But I have spoken enough on this point if you will listen to my warning voice.

B. There is one marked characteristic, however, of sheep going astray which I must not pass by. They never come back by themselves. They are so silly, stupid, and ignorant that when they stray they never can find their own way back to the fold. The shepherd must himself go after them and bring them back, or never, never will they come back of themselves. Have you not found it was easier to go out of the way than to get back into it; easier to stray, wander and get upon the wild mountains, or fall into some pit or hole and there get smeared with mud and mire, than it was to get back or get out, and return to the fold? No, we never shall get back unless the Lord himself comes out after us, searches for us in the dark and cloudy day, lays us on his shoulders, and himself carry us all the way home.

How beautifully and how touchingly is this spoken of by the Lord, in the words of the prophet- "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill- yes, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them." (Ezekiel 34:6.) And what tender care he manifests towards his sheep thus scattered through all the mountains and upon every high hill- "For thus says the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." (Ezekiel 34:11, 12.)

And do not the Lord's own words sweetly correspond with the promise thus given in the prophet? "Then Jesus told them this parable: Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." (Luke 15:3-6.) If ever, then, the sheep that has gone astray returns to the fold, it is because the good Shepherd himself brings it home. And O how tenderly and graciously has he shown himself to be this good Shepherd. "The good Shepherd," he himself has declared, "gives his life for the sheep." (John 10:11.) But this leads us to our second point.

II. "Who, his own self, bore our sins in his own body on the tree."

A. The sheep of whom our text speaks have gone astray. This was not only their misery but their sin. To depart from the Lord is not merely to wander away from the fountain of all happiness, but it is a crime of high and exceeding magnitude. The prophet therefore says, "Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backslidings shall reprove you; know, therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and that my fear is not in you, says the Lord God of hosts." (Jer. 2:19.) To forsake the Lord our God is not only a bitter thing, and the cause of all misery, but an evil thing and the cause of all wickedness. The Lord, therefore, calls upon the heavens to be astonished and to be horribly afraid at the wickedness of departing from him. "Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be very desolate, says the Lord. For my people have committed two evils- they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water." (Jer. 2:12, 13.)

And is there one here who must not plead guilty to this charge? Is there one here who has not committed the two evils which astonished the very heavens? Have we not again and again wickedly and wantonly forsaken the Fountain of living waters, and wickedly and wantonly hewn out for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water? Can we look back without seeing the broken cisterns almost filling up the road, strewing it in all directions, and every one of them dry? And are we not in our vain imaginations, if not in our lives, still doing the same work- hewing out this and that cistern, and finding, when hewn out with great care and labor, it holds no water? Alas! when Adam strayed away from God and godliness, it was as Deer speaks- "He ruined all his future race;" and the infection of his blood makes us wander like him, and that, to our ruin, but for preventing and saving grace.

Now these sins of ours must be atoned for, that they may be effectually put away. And O what a wondrous way was that by which they were blotted out from the sight of God. The Son of God took flesh, that by laying down his precious life and offering his pure humanity, in conjunction with his Deity, as a sacrifice for sin, he might forever put it away. This is expressed in our text, in the words- "Who, his own self, bore our sins in his own body on the tree."

How distinctly does our text speak of the imputation of our sins to Jesus. It was "his own self"- his very, his true self, and none but himself, for no one else could have done it; no one else in heaven or earth could have borne the load; no one else have had sufficient dignity of Person; no one else be the only begotten Son of the Father in truth and love; and, therefore, none but his own precious self could have borne our sins in their imputation, in their guilt, in their weight, in their condemnation, and in the wrath of God justly due to them. And it was "in his own body"- not excluding his soul; that is, in the whole of his pure humanity which he offered upon the tree.

But now let us look at this bearing of our sins a little more experimentally, for in that way we come best to see how the Lord Jesus Christ made atonement for them.

When sin is charged home upon our conscience by the work of God's Spirit upon the heart; when we begin to feel its burden and know what it is by painful experience to have sinned against a holy, just, and righteous God, we are made to know a little of the real nature of the sin, and with what a heavy load it presses upon the heart of a truly convinced sinner. Now if each individual thus convinced of sin, feels, in his measure, the weight of his own transgressions, what must it have been to the Redeemer when he bore the whole weight of imputed transgression, and had to atone for the millions of sins committed by his elect people, by bearing them all in his own body on the tree? What must he have suffered in body and soul when the anger of God, due to these myriads and myriads of the vilest transgressions, and the curse of the law attached to disobedience met in his sacred bosom, and he hung upon the cross laden and bowed down with the heavy burden of all the sins and iniquities of his chosen family?

When our blessed Lord undertook to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, he undertook to bear all the guilt and punishment which were due to them. We, therefore, read, "The Lord has laid upon him (in the margin, made to meet on him) the iniquities of us all." "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities;" yes, "it pleased the Lord himself to bruise him;" his own Father to put him to grief, and thus to make his soul an offering for sin. But would we especially see something of what the Redeemer felt and suffered in his holy soul, when he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, we must have recourse to those Psalms, sometimes called the Messianic Psalms, such as Psalms 22, 40, 69, in which he pours out his soul unto God under the heavy strokes of his bruising hand. How we hear him crying in one of these Psalms- "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? why are you so far from

helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent." (Psalm. 22:1, 2.) And again, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint- my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and you have brought me into the dust of death." (Psalm. 22:14, 15.)

That this Psalm expresses the very language of Christ we know from his own words upon the cross, when, in the depths of his dolorous agony, he cried out in the words I have already quoted- "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" How truly were the words fulfilled in him, "All those who see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." (Psalm. 22:7, 8.) And has not the Holy Spirit expressly declared that the words, "they part my garments among them and cast lots for my vesture" (Psalm. 22:18) were written that that Scripture might be fulfilled in him? (John 19:24.) The gospels are for the most part very silent on the sufferings of Christ, both of body and soul. Nor is this surprising. They are chiefly a simple narrative of actual events, and therefore a description of the personal experience of Christ would have been out of place. Nor, indeed, was it necessary, as the Holy Spirit had already made it known in the Psalms, by previous anticipation.

But O what an unspeakable mercy it is to the Church of God, that the blessed Redeemer did so interpose, as to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that we might not bear them forever and ever ourselves; took them upon himself, that they might be dealt with as if they were actually his; for, in a sense, they became his by imputation as much as if he himself had committed them. Is not this true in human affairs? If I undertake to pay a man's debts, and pledge myself by some written contract to that effect, I am as much responsible for them, as if I had myself incurred them. And you will observe, that when the debt is transferred from him to me, he is no longer responsible for it. The law cannot demand double payment for one debt. When, then, our Lord undertook to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, the debt due by us was transferred to him. It was by this vicarious obedience that sin was atoned for, put away, blotted out, and propitiation made; for it was by his precious blood shedding and death upon the cross, that sin was entirely removed from the sight of God, so that his people might never come under its condemnation.

Now, nothing but a sight of this atoning sacrifice by living faith, can ever bring relief to one truly convinced of sin by the power of the Spirit, and who sighs and groans beneath it as a heavy burden too great for him to bear. Nothing but the application of the atoning blood of the Lord the Lamb can purge the conscience of a truly convicted sinner from filth, guilt, and dead works to serve the living God. We may try and try again to purify our own conscience, and to speak peace to our own troubled heart. We may try in a thousand ways to assure our hearts before God, but it will be labor in vain. It will be with us, as Job speaks- "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands ever so clean; yet shall you plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me." (Job 9:30, 31.)

We beg of the Lord, sometimes, to give us a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a tender conscience, and a humble mind; but it is only a view by faith of what the gracious Redeemer endured upon the cross, when he bore our sins in his own body with all their weight and pressure, and with all the anger of God due to them, that can really melt a hard, and break a stony heart. No sight, short of this, can make sin felt to be hateful; bring tears of godly sorrow out of the eyes, sobs of true repentance out of the breast, and the deepest, humblest confessions before God what dreadful sinners and base backsliders we have been before the eyes of his infinite Purity, Majesty, and Holiness.

O, what help is there for our guilty souls; what refuge from the wrath of God so justly our due; what shelter from the curse of a fiery law, except it be in the cross of Jesus? O, for a view of him revealed to the eyes of our enlightened understanding, as bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. O, to see by the eye of faith, all those dreadful sins which have caused us so much inward grief and trouble, all those fearful backslidings and sad entanglements on which we can but reflect with shame and grief; O, to see all we have said and thought and done, which conscience testifies against, and all those innumerable evils that we have never seen or conscience has forgotten; to view them by the eye of faith taken off our guilty head, and put upon the head of the Lord the Lamb.

Where, oh, where can we get relief from any other source or by any other way? There is no relief anywhere else. Where can you find pardon sealed upon your breast, forgiveness manifested to your soul, or any expectation of gaining heaven and escaping hell, except in the cross, and some testimony in your own bosom of your saving interest in that precious blood and righteousness, and the knowledge for yourself that the dear Redeemer bore your sins in his body on the tree? I know, indeed, full well, that it requires special faith, a faith of God's own giving and raising up to believe this- an especial manifestation of salvation by the blood of the Lamb to the soul; a blessed bringing in of the power of Christ crucified to the heart. But I believe I do but speak the inmost conviction of every heart touched by the finger of God when I say, that until this is in some measure done, there is no solid relief; no true peace with God; no firm, abiding foundation on which we can stand, as if for eternity; nothing strong enough to banish the fear of death and open the gates of heaven.

But how both the need and the enjoyment of this salvation through the blood of the Lamb, puts an end forever to all creature merit and creature righteousness, and every expectation which is founded and grounded upon the works of the law. How it leads us to see that our sins were of so deep a dye, of so black a hue, and so merited the eternal wrath of God, that nothing but this sacrifice could suffice; that his own Son, his co-equal, co-eternal Son, must come and take our nature into union with his divine Person, and bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that they might be put away forever from the sight of God; cast behind his back; drowned in the depths of the sea; so that when sought for, they may no more be found.

B. But we pass on to another portion of our text, holding forth and enforcing much the same truth- "By whose stripes you were healed."

You will doubtless recollect, that a reference is made here to a passage in Isaiah 53, where we read- "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah. 53:5.) Let us see, then, if we can gather up the meaning of being healed by Jesus' stripes.

1. I think we may understand the word "stripes" in two senses. First, it seems to mean literal stripes; for this was a part of the cross. All people on whom death by crucifixion was to be inflicted according to the Roman law, were scourged before they were crucified. We thus read of our gracious Lord- "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him." (John 19:1.) Thus, our gracious Lord had his back mangled with stripes, before he was taken to the cross. In that sense, the scourging was a part of the cross; in that sense, by his stripes we are healed; for holy virtue comes out of those stripes to heal the guilty conscience, and speak peace to the troubled heart.

What a wonderful view does it give us of the infinite condescension of our gracious Lord, that when he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, he took, as a part of the cross, that scourging which was always preparatory to, and connected with it. It was not merely the excruciating pain; for the Roman scourge was, to use the language of a Latin poet, a "horrible" instrument of punishment; but the shame and ignominy attached to it was so great, that no Roman citizen was ever allowed to be exposed to it. A great Roman orator, in a celebrated oration, thus breaks forth on the subject- "It is a heinous sin to bind a Roman citizen; it is wickedness to beat him; it is next to patricide to kill him; and what shall I say to crucify him?" We find, therefore, Paul claiming this right of Roman citizenship, when they were about to scourge him- "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25.) And yet, all this cruel indignity and shame, from which the lowest and lowest Roman citizen was exempt, the eternal Son of God, the glory of heaven, by whom and for whom all things were created, who is before all things and by whom all things consist, bore for our sakes. It seems at times a sight too great for us to look at, either in its depth or in its height. Our very soul seems to shrink back with horror, when we look down into its depth, and see the Redeemer's back mangled with the cruel scourge. What a view meets our astonished sight, when we realize in the language of the hymn-

"His back with hardy stripes is hewed,
Until flakes of gore, and streams of blood,
Besmear the frightened ground."

And we are as much amazed when we gaze up into its height, and view by faith that he, who suffered such pain and indignity, was with it all and in it all, the Glorious Son of God.

2. But these were not the only stripes which the gracious Lord endured. We may, therefore, take the words in another sense; and this seems to have been the view of that deeply taught man of God, Mr. Deer:

"His back's with knotted scourges lashed,
But sharper scourges tear his heart."

And do we not read, that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief?" We may, therefore, view the stripes, not only as the literal stripes which fell upon his sacred back from the cruel Roman scourge, but the inward stripes of God's vindictive wrath, with which it pleased the Father to bruise his holy soul and body as he hung upon the tree in agony. Here was the severer, more deeply, more poignantly felt stripe. Here was not the brawny arm of the Roman soldier, but the heavier, weightier hand of God upon him in the wrath of the Almighty made manifest in his conscience, and his anger, due to sin, discharging itself into his holy soul. Here he was bruised; here was the stripe. It came from a Father's hand, which made it all the heavier. Thus, every manifestation and display which God gave in and upon the cross of his anger against sin; every frown that darted agony into the Redeemer's soul; every hiding of his Father's countenance which distressed his inmost mind, and made him writhe and cry out in agony and sorrow; we may view, as a part of the bruise with which it pleased the Lord to bruise him.

Even in our experience of the things of God, what is pain of body to pain of soul? Martyrs have rejoiced upon the rack, and the love of God, shed abroad in, and ravishing their souls with unutterable delight, has made them even glory in their sufferings. But how a soul, truly convinced of sin, writhes under the felt displeasure of the Almighty; for as the soul is greater than the body, as eternity is greater than time, as

God is greater than man, so are the sufferings of the soul greater than the sufferings of the body. And if this be true in us, how much more was it true in the experience of the gracious Redeemer.

Now, by these stripes we are healed. If God bruised Christ for our sins, he will never bruise us for those sins. Sin has been atoned for, and as atoned for, is fully put away; for the blessed Lord "was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

But observe the expression- "By whose stripes you were healed." Sin is here compared to a disease. It is, indeed, the disease of the soul- a disease whereby it is sick unto death. We often find, therefore, in the word of truth, sin spoken of as a disease. "Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases." (Psalm. 103:3.) So expressing the feelings of his soul under the stroke of God's hand, the Psalmist says- "My sore ran in the night and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted." (Psalm. 77:2.) And again- "My wounds stench and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh."

But the Lord, in tender mercy, has appointed a sovereign balm; for there is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there. The stripes of Immanuel, that is, the sufferings of the Son of God, including his blood shedding and death, and what he endured in body and soul as the crucified one, form this balm; and God has mercifully appointed, that our guilt, our sin, our shame, our condemnation should be all healed by the application of the precious blood of the Lord the Lamb to the conscience of all who are sick of sin.

III. But I now pass on to show what are the EFFECTS of the gracious Lord bearing our sins in his own body on the tree; and of our being healed by his stripes.

Where there is anything done in and for the soul by the power of God, there will and must always be attending effects; for it is impossible for God to work a saving work in the heart by his Spirit and grace, and there to be no result. It would indeed reflect discredit upon the divine Workman, that all his grace and power should leave no effect behind, and that the soul should be just as it was before he wrought in it. The very word "work," implies something done. Now what is the result of God's working in the soul, both to will and to do of his good pleasure? There are several as traced out by the apostle which I shall now endeavor to lay open.

A. The first is, "That we being dead to sins, live to righteousness." We need something to kill, so to speak, the power of sin in us. We need a supernatural strength to mortify, crucify, and put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. We need something communicated to our soul, which we have not in ourselves, and which we are well assured none but the Lord himself can bestow; which shall give us the victory over the daily evils which manifest themselves in our fallen nature.

The power put forth to break up and break down the power of sin in us, produces, first, what is called in our text a being dead to sins. The figure is obvious enough; for as life implies energy, movement, activity, vigor, strength; so death implies weakness, powerlessness, inability, in a word, everything which is opposite to the idea of life. Thus, while we are under the power and influence of the old man, and of our evil heart, we are alive to sin; for sin lives and moves and works in us. Our eyes are going out after objects of sin; our ears are eager to hear something connected with sin; the thoughts of our heart, the imaginations of our roving fancy, are all engaged in the hot pursuit of something evil and sinful. We snuff it up, as it were, every gale of sin. Like a bird of prey in the air, looking round for a prey and ready at once to pounce upon it; or like a hound in pursuit of game, tracking it eagerly by its scent; so our corrupt nature is ever on the lookout, ever hunting on the track for sin; for sin is the darling food of the human mind, without

which it seems no life to live. To be in this awful state, and in it we all are, until called by grace, is for sin to live in a man's breast, and for him to be alive to it.

Do you not see, therefore, that what we need, and what God at times mercifully gives, is a divine power which comes into the soul and puts a death upon that strength and dominion of sin which lives in us, and in which we, but for the grace of God, would live? And thus we get through the cross of Christ not only a testimony in our bosom of what the Redeemer died to rescue us from in a view of the depths of the fall and the consequences of our transgression, but a deliverance from the dreadful dominion of sin. This is what the law never could do for us or in us, and can be effected by nothing else but grace. "Sin," says the apostle, "shall not have dominion over you." Why? Because you strive against it and succeed by dint of effort after effort in subduing and overcoming it? No, "for you are not under the law but under grace."

There is no other way- we may have tried thousands- there is no other way of getting an effectual death to sin but by coming under the power and influence of sovereign, super-abounding grace. Sin is so subtle, has so many lives, works in such unperceived and crafty ways, comes in at so many corners, is so mixed up with every thought and movement of our natural heart, is so strengthened by all we see and meet with both without and within that, unless we can find something as if lodged and placed in our breast which shall work against it in all its shapes and forms; meet it in all its subtle windings, and stand up against it with firm and dauntless opposition to all its movements, we shall be almost certain of being overcome by it.

We parley with our lusts until we get fairly, or I should rather say, foully entangled in them. We play with sin until sooner or later in the end it gets the better of us. One temptation, if we are entangled and overcome by it, makes a way for another until, but for the grace of God, we would walk altogether in the ways of sin and ungodliness; and concerning faith, make utter and open shipwreck. It is not, then, a common power that we need to help us in this terrible fight. We need something very strong, very powerful, very effectual to come into our breast to meet sin there in its stronghold, and counteract it in all its inward workings, secret wiles, crafty stratagems, and seductive allurements.

Now, this strength, this power, this victory over sin, can only be gained by a view of the cross, by some manifestations of a suffering Redeemer, by some application of his precious blood to the conscience, and some shedding abroad of his dying love in the heart. When, then, our eyes are a little opened to see, our hearts a little softened to feel, our consciences touched so as to be made tender, our affections wrought upon so as to be drawn up to heavenly things, and we get a view of the Lord of life and glory bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, this puts a death upon sin.

"What?" says the soul, with weeping eyes and broken heart- "Can I do this evil thing and sin against the Lord? Shall I trifle with the wounds of Jesus, trample upon the blood of Christ, do that which grieved the soul of the Redeemer, and walk in those ways of unrighteousness which brought, to put them away, such distress upon his body and soul?" Here is something to meet sin in its various turnings and windings, and to put a death upon it. This is a being crucified with Christ- a crucifying of the flesh with the affections and lusts. This is what Paul felt when he said- "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14.) And again- "I am crucified with Christ- nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives 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.)

Now, with this death, there comes a life, which is a life unto righteousness. We need these two things, dear friends, in lively operation- a spiritual death and a spiritual life. We need death put upon the flesh, upon sin, upon everything which is ungodly, that it may not reign or rule; and we need also the communication and maintenance of a divine life which shall act Godwards; exist and co-exist in the same breast, and be in activity at the same moment. Here is sin striving for the mastery; but here also is a view of the cross of Christ- here is a testimony of bleeding, dying love. This puts a death upon sin. But as death is put upon sin and the lust is mortified, crucified, resisted, or subdued, there springs up a life of faith and prayer, of hope and love, of repentance and godly sorrow for sin, of humility and spirituality, of a desire to live to God's praise and walk in his fear.

The cross gives both. From the cross comes death unto sin; from the cross comes life unto righteousness. From the cross springs the healing of every bleeding wound, and from the cross springs every motive to a godly life. Thus, in God's mysterious wisdom, there is a way whereby sin can be pardoned, the law magnified, justice exalted, the sinner saved, sin subdued, righteousness given, and the soul made to walk in the ways of peace and holiness.

O what depths of wisdom, mercy and grace are here! Look where you will, try every mode, if you are sincere about your soul's salvation, if the Lord the Spirit has planted the fear of God in your heart, you will find no other way but this. There is no other way that leads to holiness here and heaven hereafter; no other way whereby sin can be pardoned and the soul sanctified. It is this view of salvation from sin not only in its guilt but also in its power, this deliverance from the curse of the law and well-spring of all holy, acceptable obedience, which has in all ages so endeared the cross to the souls of God's family, and made all of them more or less to be of Paul's mind, when he declared that he was determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

B. But the apostle goes on to show us another effect which springs out of Christ bearing our sins in his own body on the tree and giving us healing by his stripes. There is a returning unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our soul.

We have seen how the sheep went astray and how it would never return unless the Shepherd himself went after it. But when it sees the Shepherd it will come to him; it will not run away from him; it hears his voice and follows him. But O what an infinite mercy it is that we are allowed to return. We know that we have wandered, sadly wandered, grievously wandered, and have been almost lost upon the wild moor and dark mountain, almost sunk forever in the gloomy bog and in the thick night. But in the midst of all our wanderings, and perhaps when well near in despair of ever getting back, we get a view once more of the good Shepherd, and what he has done in laying down his life for the sheep. A view of his infinite condescension, tender pity, long-suffering mercy, compassionate heart and power to save even to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, is granted to the believing eye; and as a soft and secret influence gently steals over the soul and faith that works by love is drawn forth, penitential grief and sorrowful compunction are felt within, and many earnest desires are raised up with a longing willingness to return, to come back, to cease from wandering, to feel oneself once more under his kind care, to hear once more his heavenly voice, to see once more his lovely Person, and to be fed once more by his gracious hand.

How this endears the good Shepherd to a poor wandering sheep; for when once we have strayed how hard it is to return. All hope of return seems at times cut off, and it is as if we must sink down into despair and die. But with all our wanderings- and they have been many- with all our straying from good to feed upon strange pastures; with all our following bad examples, or going astray through sheer silliness; yet

from time to time the gracious Lord does touch the heart with his finger, does move and soften it by his grace, does melt it into contrition, compunction, and godly sorrow, and thus brings it back to his own bosom to find pardon, peace, and safety in him.

Now, it is this opening of his arms to receive poor, penitent, returning sinners, this willingness to forgive, this tender sympathy, and this compassion manifested to wanderers that make him so precious to believing souls. That he should so bear with us year after year, not get tired of us and not give us up to our own folly, to reap what we have sown; should not leave us to ourselves and cast us utterly off in wrathful displeasure, but should allow us and sometimes draw us and enable us to come to his feet, to confess our sins, mourn over our iniquities, look unto him, hang upon him, cleave to him, trust in him, believe in his name, and get some relief out of him- how this tenderness and goodness of the good Shepherd endear him to believing hearts. No one but he who has wandered knows the difficulty that there is to return; no one but he who has strayed from good pastures and got upon the barren mountain knows what it is for the good Shepherd to come out after him and bring him back; and none but he so much values the good Shepherd, or is so glad to return to be once more under his guiding eye, and within the reach of his bounteous hand.

And he is the Bishop of the soul as well as the Shepherd. The word means, properly, "overseer," and is so translated Acts 20:28- "Over whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers;" and it would have been as well if the translators had used the same word here, for the present rendering is somewhat misleading. The bishops in ancient times were the same officers of the church as the elders, and were overseers to watch over the flock- not having dioceses to be bishops at large, but having each his own flock as a shepherd has one. Indeed, as at Ephesus and Philippi, one church had often several bishops or overseers. Thus the blessed Lord, as an overseer of his flock, inspects, overlooks, narrowly watches, and takes very tender notice of the sheep that are of his pasture. They, too, are very glad to be under his oversight, that he may overlook and take care of them and deal with them with all the tenderness and care that a shepherd deals with his sheep, who goes about from sheep to sheep to watch over and attend to them. Some, perhaps, he sees struck with infirmity, some cast upon their backs, some afflicted with giddiness or other disease, and some with the wool half torn off their back. He has to look over the sheep very minutely, attend to and take care of every one of his flock without missing or passing by one. He has to bring food to each, to water them at convenient times, to pen them carefully in his fold, watch against prowling dogs and roving wolves, and keep guard over them night and day.

He is not merely a shepherd over the flock generally, but is an overseer to every sheep of the flock specially. So the gracious Lord is not only the Shepherd of the sheep in a general manner, but is the Overseer of each particular individual. As such he has to examine their complaints, see what is the matter with each and all of them, attend to them carefully, and deal with each as if there were no other to deal with.

Now it is a mercy when they can bear his inspection; when they are seeking to hide no sins from his sight, or cloak over any hypocrisies; or doing things that they know his soul disapproves of. It is an unspeakable mercy when they can put themselves under his overseeing eye, and say, "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." It is a blessed thing to be able to open one's breast to the Lord and say, "Look here, Lord; you see what a heart I carry in my bosom; you know what a desperate sinner I am and have been; but, Lord, I would not offend you willingly; I would not sin against you wantonly. I would desire to walk in your fear and live to your praise. Make me right, Lord, and keep me right. If there be any hidden lust, let me not indulge it; any entanglement, let me

forsake it; any temptation, deliver me from it; any snare, mercifully break it."

Now this is knowing the Lord to be the Shepherd, the watchful Overseer who can take us as the shepherd takes the sheep, lays it upon its back, finds out where the maggots lie, cuts out any diseased place or cuts off those long pieces of filth and wool and mud, which so much cripple its movements as they make it unsightly.

O, that we might be thus enabled to lay our souls at the Lord's feet and let him take and examine us to see where we are sick and sore- to be willing to submit to his hand as a patient under an operation submits to the hand of the surgeon and yields himself up to the keen knife. O, to be able so to walk and act with all our temptations, and all the evils of our heart, and all our hidden iniquities, as to lay ourselves under the Lord's eye and the Lord's hand, and be willing that he should search, try, examine, and see what there is in us which he can subdue by his grace, as well as pardon by his mercy, and wash away by his blood. This is no small favor. If you were a hypocrite, you would be sorry to submit your case to the Lord. You would not dare to come and lie under his eye, lay your bosom bare to his heart-searching gaze, and beg of him to make you right and keep you right. There would be some evasion, some shrinking, some mincing, some slipping away- there would be some mask, some veil, something deceptive- you could not come out honestly with it.

But if the fear of God is in your breast, your conscience tender, and the Lord the Spirit has wrought with a divine power upon your heart, though you feel yourself to be one of the vilest and worst of men, one of the basest of all base wretches, yet there is that honesty, uprightness, godly fear, holy tenderness, and spiritual longing to be right which will bring you in sensible experience under the eye of the overseer.

Now try yourself by this test. It is not your sins which will damn you, for they may be repented of, forsaken, and forgiven, but it is your hardness, impenitence, and unbelief; your lack of a saving knowledge of Christ. Those who are lost under the sound of the gospel, are lost because from them it is hid in its efficacy and power. (2 Cor. 4:3.) Those that perish under the preached truth, are those who receive not the love of it, but have pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thess. 2:12.)

Don't be frightened at seeing your sins. They are bad enough, God knows; and they are a thousand times worse than you have ever seen yourself or ever will see them. God knows a deal more of you than you know of yourself, and has seen more sin in you than ever you have seen in your own breast. Don't be frightened, I repeat it, at your sins. If you can confess and forsake them, cry for mercy, and have a view of Jesus bearing your sins in his own body on the tree, your sins won't damn you. Conviction of sin is the beginning of divine life; the springing up of the work of God upon the soul; the first effect of the communication of a new nature. These are the movements of the blessed Spirit upon your heart. Confess that you have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek to return; beg of the good Shepherd to find you out; place yourself under his overseeing eye; fall down before him; confess your sins, and he will manifest his mercy sooner or later to your soul.

Some perish through self-righteousness, and some through unbelief or despair. God's people shall perish by none of these things. They shall never perish in self-righteousness, for God will strip them of all boasting in the flesh. They shall never perish in unbelief or despair, for God will give them faith and manifest his dear Son to their souls. Thus sooner or later the good Shepherd will bring every sheep unto himself, and make it manifest that he loved them and gave himself for them, that by virtue of his death and of his life, they might live for evermore.

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