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# The Bible and the Sins of the Saints.

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*(Concluded.)*

Indeed, the narrations of the transgressions of the saints illustrate the truth of these words of the psalmist (Ps. 5, 4): "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with Thee." They reveal to us the corruption of human nature and demonstrate that even the holiest and most highly favored men of God are still tempted by their sinful flesh and are liable to fall into the most deplorable sins if they are not constantly on their guard, do not use the Word of God as a weapon and guide, fail to pray unceasingly and to flee the temptations to evil. These transgressions also make it clear to us that no one in this present life will arrive at a stage of sanctification where he can truly say, I have reached perfection; I am safe now and no longer in need of the forgiveness of sins, no longer in need of a Savior from sin. A prating and boasting enthusiast may do this; but a prayerful contemplation of those Biblical stories would teach him that, in order to attain to the true enjoyment of the salvation wrought by Christ, it is necessary for him, above all, to repent of his blasphemous pride and vaunting in sackcloth and ashes. In a solemn and impressive manner the sins of the saints are held up to us as in a mirror, in which we are to behold our own image; and a close examination of ourselves before this mirror will disclose to us the undeniable fact that, even if heretofore we have, by the grace of God, been kept from the grossest outbreaks of sin, we nevertheless have sinned often in a similar, though more refined way,

that all the sins and crimes which those men in the Bible became guilty of, are dormant in us, in every man's heart, and that sometimes only a spark from outside is needed to cause us to commit the most horrible sins. Indeed, "Scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Gal. 3, 22. Moreover, while these narratives show the necessity and need of a Savior for every one, whether saint or sinner, they also constitute the most forceful, the most emphatic, and the most impressive words of warning against sin ever written by pen or ever uttered by the tongue of man. We know that men like Noah, David, and Peter repented of their sins and were pardoned by the Lord; they were not cut off from the people of God forever, and every true believer is assured that he will meet them in heaven, in the true land of the living. But look at the temporal consequences of their transgressions and remember how severely God, as a true Father, chastised them to deter them from future infringements upon his holy Law, as well as to warn others. For instance, through what agony of soul did not David and Peter have to go before they came to the full assurance of the forgiveness of their sins! Scripture and experience teach us that the memory of their sins comes back to men and ever harasses them again, even after they have been assured of the remission of their sins; for which reason David, even when in a state of grace, prays, Ps. 27, 5: "Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions; according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord." And how heavy did the hand of the Lord lie upon these men by all kinds of external and temporal misfortunes in order to discipline and correct them! What a gloom did the sin of Noah cast over his whole remaining lifetime we pointed out before. Could there be a more bitter disappointment than that which Moses experienced when he was told by the Lord that on account of his unbelief he must not enter the Land of Promise, but was doomed to die at the very border of it? What a host of plagues fell upon David and his house because in the hour of temptation he had forsaken the Lord's commandments and given great offense to Israel and to the enemies of the Lord! How bitter were Peter's tears after his denial, how great his grief and sorrow, so that he needed special and repeated consolations from the lips of the risen Savior to quiet and overcome his agonizing doubts and fears and to restore to him the joy of his heart and his peace with God. The way of the transgressor is hard, even if the transgression is followed by true, genuine repentance. In the

light of these and similar considerations we are constrained to say that the man who sees in the narrations of the sins of the saints an encouragement and inducement to commit the same sins either does not know what he is speaking of, having only the most superficial knowledge of these Bible-stories, or he has set himself purposely and deliberately against the truth, totally ignoring and suppressing the voice of his own conscience. On the other hand, whosoever tries at least to set aside his prejudices and reads these stories carefully will soon admit, even if he may still be unconverted, that they contain the strongest warning possible against sin and crime, and he cannot altogether shut his eyes against the evident fact that a book which speaks in such a manner of the sins of its great men and heroes of faith, a book which discusses their sins so thoroughly with respect to their origin, their performance, and their fatal consequences, without showing any partiality and bias, must come from a better source than other books, in other words, that it must come from God Himself, that God who said when He gave the Ten Commandments: "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." And as to us, who, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, believe the Word of God, every renewed and repeated perusal of these passages confirms and strengthens the conviction in us that *all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is truly profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim. 3, 16.

### III.

People who are scandalized at the account which Scripture gives of the sins of the saints also ignore and misjudge the main purpose of Holy Scripture. This purpose is to offer to sinful and mortal man, doomed to eternal perdition as he is by nature, the sweetest, the most precious comfort, the comfort of which he stands in need more sorely than of his daily bread, namely, the solace and assurance of pardon, of the remission of sins, and of life eternal. Holy Scripture states this purpose in various words. Ps. 119, 104: "Through Thy precepts I get understanding." Ps. 19, 8: "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." St. Paul says of Scripture that it maketh wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. His fellow-apostle Peter calls it a light that shineth in a dark place, until the Day-star arise in

our hearts. In order, however, that nobody might take exception to the passages under discussion, the Apostle Paul, after having dwelt at length on the sins and rebellious acts of the Israelites in the wilderness, writes Rom. 15, 4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The comfort we are to obtain from the account of the sins of the people of God — whether committed collectively or individually — is the comfort of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. For not only Peter knew that there is no salvation, no grace, no pardoning of sin, no hope of eternal life, without Christ, but also the people of God in the Old Testament were aware of the fact that their "salvation," forgiveness of sins, hope of a blessed life in the world to come, is based upon the Woman's Seed, the future Messiah, and His work of redemption. This even the Gospel primeval shows, likewise the words of Eve at the birth of her first-born and the name which Lamech, the father of Noah, gave to his son, though both Eve and Lamech were mistaken as to the person. This comfort, then, which every man needs in order to escape the wrath to come, is also offered and imparted to the terrified and contrite sinner in these narratives either directly or indirectly. Of course, the selfsame priceless comfort is offered to the sinner in a multitude of other passages, plain, unmistakable, but nevertheless powerful and efficacious statements of the grace of a reconciled God and Father in heaven. But, alas! the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; if the conscience is frightened by the thunders from Mount Sinai, if Satan shoots his fiery darts into the heart of the terrified transgressor, it is sometimes exceedingly hard even for one who has a fair and even profound knowledge of the Good Book, to lay a firm hold on these promises. The troubled heart will object and say: Yes, I know God is gracious; I know what He says in Ps. 32, 1, Ezek. 33, 11, Is. 1, 18, 1 John 1, 7, etc. But my sin is too terrible, my transgressions are too numerous; these words are for such as are not loaded down with a guilt like mine, but they are not meant for me. Even men of a strong faith may be troubled thus, and not even because of gross offenses and misdeeds, but at the recollection of sins which seem to be insignificant in the eyes of men. One such sin may terrify them to such an extent that the whole wide world seems too narrow for them. But in those Bible stories men are placed before our eyes who committed great and dreadful sins and lost the grace of God and made shipwreck of their faith, but who, upon

repenting, received the divine assurance of the forgiveness of their sins, also of most shocking transgressions, and thereupon rejoiced again in the Lord and His salvation. Think of the penitential psalms and of Peter. In one respect these men were the greatest of all sinners. These selfsame men had even before their fall received more abundant grace than the average believer, more knowledge, more light and understanding, more strength to overcome temptations, more opportunities and gifts of the Spirit to build the kingdom of God. Theirs was the greater responsibility. Christ says, Luke 12, 48: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Their fall was therefore the more grievous and inexcusable and the harm they did to the Church and her great cause the more detrimental. If we, then, read in the Bible that these men were received again into the grace and favor of the Lord and that, after they had risen from their fall, God was pleased to use them again for building the walls of Zion, it cannot be gainsaid that these Bible stories, so often criticized, laughed at, misconstrued, and made the targets of foul jests, are in reality the most effective and powerful Gospel-messages, showing that also the greatest sinners, even adulterers, murderers, blasphemers, are not barred from the pardoning grace of God, not shut out from the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, if they but truly repent. Experienced pastors are able to tell us that in not a few instances where the troubled and conscience-stricken sinners would not be comforted by other passages of the Bible, the application of these Bible stories has restored peace to the sinners' heart, silenced the harassing accusations of their conscience and the threats of the Law, and filled their souls anew with the joyous hope of eternal life. Even unbelievers have sometimes an opportunity to see and perceive this, for example, in the case of criminals who repent before their execution and meet death with composure, yea, even with joy, because such examples of Holy Writ as David, Peter, and the thief on the cross give them abundant comfort and the certain hope of life everlasting.

Such comfort and hope human wisdom and human works cannot impart. Natural man knows nothing of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Human wisdom leaves the sinner in despair, as the high priests did with regard to the traitor Judas Iscariot, or gives him the advice to reconcile an angry God and to appease a terrified conscience by his own efforts, especially penances, without ever being able to tell him whether he has done enough. But man is unable to expiate even one sin, no matter what sacrifice

he may bring. "Miserable comforters are ye all," this word of Job, Job 16, 2, applies to all who use man's wisdom to comfort the sinner. But if the Bible, especially the narratives of which we speak in this essay, gives to the sinner knowledge, comfort, and consolation, which all philosophical systems are unable to offer, — no religion outside the Christian faith, none of the otherwise beautiful myths of Hellas, not the entrancing tales and sagas of the Northern world, because they are totally ignorant of God's plan of the salvation of a sinful world, — how can any man be so presumptuous and overbold as to claim that on account of the narratives of the sins of Noah, David, Peter, and others the Bible cannot be the Word of the Most High. Just the opposite is true. The sins of the saints as recorded in the Bible are one of the many evidences of the divine origin of the Bible. The message of boundless grace proclaimed to some of the worst sinners on earth for the sake of Christ cannot be the product of a human genius, cannot be of human invention. If you read the masterworks of classical literature, they will tell you much of human guilt and human expiations. If these Biblical stories are nevertheless a poison and an offense to the ungodly and self-righteous, it is because in their pharisaic pride they do not want to be rebuked or do not wish to be disturbed in the enjoyment of their carnal lusts, loving darkness more than light. When the Church Father Augustine was still a young man, a skeptic and given to debauchery, he one day heard from an adjoining room the voice of a child repeating the words: "*Tolle, lege*" (Take and read). These simple words made the deepest impression upon him. He began to read the New Testament carefully and found the precious pearl, which is better than all the wisdom of the wise and infinitely more valuable than all the treasures of this perishable world. Oh, that all those who object to the Bible as the inspired Word of God would, like Augustine, heed this voice, "*Tolle, lege*," echoing through many centuries since the days of Augustine, yea, rather since the day when the first book of the Bible was completed! Oh, that all would lay aside their foolish prejudices, carefully read the Bible, and thoughtfully study the narratives at which they take particular offense! Then the grace of God would also enlighten them, and the selfsame Bible stories which formerly they were scandalized at and which were used by them as an argument against the Bible, to deepen the blindness of the blind, would prove to them a power of salvation. They would finally be led to see the heavenly wisdom and comfort exhibited and offered in them and with all true Christians

thank God for the Bible, also for the narratives in which the sins of the saints are recorded, as the most precious and most valuable gift to sinful man. God grant that we all may rely on the grace which Noah, Moses, David, and the thief on the cross received and enjoyed and take comfort in it in life and death! Then all will be well in time and eternity.

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