

THE OLD BONDAGE
AND
THE NEW SERVICE

The Substance of an Address

ON

Romans v. 19—vi. 17

by

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THE OLD BONDAGE AND THE NEW SERVICE

(The Substance of an Address on Romans v. 19—vi. 17)

It is upon my heart this evening to speak a little to you concerning our relation as believers to sin that dwells within us, and also to God Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. In both cases our obedience or disobedience is involved. As the sin or sinful nature dwelling within us leads to the terrible result of disobedience to God, so the new life which we have in Christ displays itself in loving obedience to God and His written word. The divine truth regarding these relations to sin and to God is set out clearly and fully in the Epistle to the Romans, especially in the passage just read to you.

It is idle, and evil too, to suppose that we who are born anew by God's Holy Spirit and justified from all things through our Lord Jesus Christ are not required to be in our manner of life entirely different from those not born again and not justified by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact is that the whole tenor of our lives should distinguish us easily from those who are in the sinful state in which we ourselves were until the mercy and goodness of God delivered us. It is deplorable, however, that many believers are not diligent enough to establish, nor even to seek to establish the details of their lives in accordance with the plainly-stated precepts and principles of God's word. The reading and study of God's word is commonly confined to certain parts of it which seem more attractive and easier to understand. It is assumed that such a partial reference to scripture for daily instruction and guidance will be sufficient for the well-being of the soul, and no more is needed. But God has given us all the scriptures in a single volume for our instruction in wisdom

and righteousness (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17). Every portion is divinely inspired, and the whole is profitable for our development as men of God. If we neglect only a small part of God's word we are to that extent the poorer spiritually, less able witnesses for Christ, less faithful, less devoted, less useful as His servants. We shall fail to become "complete, fully fitted to every good work."

The Truth about a Believer's Sins

Referring now to Romans, we have in it truth which is vital and fundamental to our normal life as Christian believers. When a sinner is awakened from his slumber and neglect of God to a sense of his personal responsibility for his sins, the first desire of his heart and conscience is to obtain some relief from the guilt he has begun to feel. He knows he is under the just condemnation of God, because of the long catalogue of sins against which the wrath of God from heaven is revealed (Rom. i. 18). Where can he find relief? Then the gospel of God comes to him, and points to Christ as the Substitute for sinners, the Saviour of sinners, the Lover of sinners, the Seeker of sinners, the One Who by His sacrifice has satisfied the righteousness of God in respect of every believer. The sinner hears and believes this gospel, and rejoices in such a deliverance from his sins. He learns on divine authority, which he believes, that all his sins are forgiven, and that he himself is justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

The first part of this Epistle, to chap. v. 11, deals with the subject of the remission of sins, and of justification by faith through Christ Jesus. It shows that the believing sinner receives absolute pardon from his guilt through the blood of Jesus. Moreover, through the grace of God the believer is not only freed from his guilt, but is reckoned to be righteous because of his faith in God (iv. 5). He looks believingly to the Lord Jesus Christ Who was delivered for his offences and raised again for his justification (iv. 25), and he receives the grand truth of the gospel that though he once was responsibly under the full weight of his sins, he is now delivered from that

burden, and is accepted by a just God as a justified person (iii. 26). And what is the effect upon the believer of this great discovery? He joys in God Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ by Whom he has now received the reconciliation (v. 11).

To rejoice in the God of his salvation might seem to the believer to be the very climax of divine blessing. If he is now so full of joy, what more can he contain or require? But the young believer soon finds his joy in God interrupted. He experiences something within him that does not respond to the abounding grace of God. He fails to appreciate the possessions of faith. He looks back to the country from which he came out, to the present age from which he was redeemed. He finds evil thoughts and desires arising, increasing in intensity, and multiplying till he is sorely distressed and bewildered by the unexpected anomaly. He clings to the belief that Christ suffered and died for his sins, yet he still has a disposition to commit sin, and he discovers that the wrong act is not distasteful to him while doing it. Afterwards he is sorry; he regrets what he has done; he resolves that it shall not occur again, but it does! Why is he so powerless to prevent the recurrence? Is there no remedy for the proneness of a believer to sin against God? This Epistle answers such questions.

The Truth about a Believer's Sin

From the middle (ver. 11) of the fifth chapter of Romans, where we read of the believer rejoicing, joying, boasting, exulting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle takes up the subject of the sin within the believer. We may commit sins. If we do so it is because something exists within us from which these sins proceed. From our natural birth we possess an irrepressible disposition to sin. This evil tendency is inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. It was "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (ver. 12). With the single word "sin," God points His finger to the seat of the trouble in the believer. Sin is in the

heart. From that root, all varieties of evil fruit spring. The fountain is poisoned at its source. This is true, not of one person only, but of all men alike. All share in the possession of sin and in its consequence and penalty, death. And although a believer's sinful acts are forgiven and he himself justified, there remains within him the inherited disposition to sin.

But there is no need for despair. Grace has appeared and brought a remedy against the dominion of sin as well as for the guilt of sins. God has provided not only for my sins but also for the evil heart of unbelief abiding within me. And the deliverer in both cases is the same Blessed One, Christ Jesus. As by Adam sin came into the world and spread its dominating power over men everywhere, so by Jesus Christ grace came into the world and God's act of favour is freely extended to men everywhere, irrespective of race, colour, or country. This grace has found righteous means not only to pardon the believer, but to enable him to rise above the domineering power of his indwelling sin and instead to do the will of God with fidelity and delight.

It is sometimes said that deliverance from sin is a matter of personal effort, and that evil habits can and should be overcome by one's own firm resolution and perseverance. But this advice overlooks the fact that although the wicked deed may be checked by will-power alone, the sinful desire fills the heart beforehand. And divine holiness uncovers the secret source of inward evil. In God's sight, the thought of foolishness is sin. Our Lord condemns alike the lustful look and the adulterous act (Matt. v. 28). The evil thought defiles the whole man, as well as the evil word and the evil act (Mark vii. 21-23). We should habitually govern our words and our deeds, but who can govern the imagination of the heart which God beholds? If we are walking with God, we are with One Who knows our thoughts even before we recognise them ourselves. The holiness of God is very pure, infinitely above any human standard, and in order to act rightly with regard to that standard, we

must attend to the words of scripture concerning the "sin which doth so easily beset us."

Two great correlated truths relate to Christian living—(1) sin dwells in the believer, and (2) grace has overcome the power of sin and provided a way of escape from its tyranny. Many honest and true-hearted believers who desire to live according to God are most anxious to discover some means of avoiding the repeated failures which they deplore. They say: "I have to go again and again to seek pardon for sins of which I am ashamed. How can I live more consistently?" Yes, by the supply of God's grace, you will be enabled to fashion your life according to the instructions of His word. Simply, the way of faithfulness is the obedience of faith. The same faith that clings to Christ for the forgiveness of sins, must cling to Him for power to obey God even as He obeyed. The secret of a victorious life is the renunciation of self and the determination to do everything by the faith of the Son of God. Looking in faith to Him, sin is suppressed, and holiness attained. The reign of grace in the new life of the believer is "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Law of Sinai Caused Man's Offences to Abound

In verses 19 and 20 the effects of sin and grace are summarised, and also that of the law. "Sin abounded," not only numerically by its multitudinous acts, but overwhelmingly by overcoming all human efforts to subdue it. Sin's power to overcome man exceeds man's power to resist sin. Man is unable to extinguish the solicitations of the evil nature within him; but, thanks be to God, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." While sin has a power to lead me captive, grace by its stronger power delivers me from its thralldom, and that power is exercised by our Lord Jesus Christ.

God gave the law to man not as a means of deliverance from sin, but as a test of his moral standard. The law was not given

until Moses, twenty-five centuries after Adam. The Israelites were held responsible to observe it in their national life. The result was a complete failure under this test. Disobedience to God was ingrained in the soul of the people. Under the law, Israel became worse than the surrounding nations to whom the law was not given. As the apostle writes, "the law entered that the offence might abound." The law magnified the guilt of those under it, for they knew the will of God but deliberately disobeyed it. Thus the law proved to be "the strength of sin" (1 Cor. xv. 56), and not a means of deliverance from it.

But Israel did not understand their own weakness and failure in serving God. From the first, they deceived themselves with the notion that it was easy for them to fulfil all Jehovah's commands. They were a self-satisfied and self-deceived people. They nursed a lie and comforted themselves with a falsehood. They needed to learn the truth about themselves; and "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20). So God gave them the ten commandments with His statutes and judgments also to keep. The people's response was unanimous, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Exod. xxiv. 7). But they were not obedient; sin within them was too strong. The law told them to worship God only, to love Him with all their heart, and to love their neighbour as themselves; but this law only provoked them to do the very opposite. God said, "Thou shalt have no other gods." They said, "We will have them. Aaron, make us a golden calf." This they worshipped, proving how completely they were ruled by their innate spirit of disobedience to the known will of God.

The law was a provisional institution. Yet many Christians turn back to the law of Moses, assuming that its observance is necessary for a pure and holy life. But when they say that the law ought to be kept as a rule of life, they overlook the revealed truth that the sin that dwells within them, the mind of the flesh, "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). There is enmity in the mind, not

submissive obedience. What God commands the flesh disobeys.

On account of this inborn dislike of the will of God, many who have been most zealous for the law have become the greatest sinners. For example, who in the days of our Lord were more zealous for the law than the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii)? They carefully observed all its ceremonial requirements. They tithed even their garden herbs. They fasted twice in the week. To the law of Moses they added the tradition of the elders. All these law-works, they did in the sight of their fellows to ensure their admiration and applause. But when the Lord Jesus looked upon them, He saw that the phylacteries upon their foreheads and the wide hems upon their garments were evidence of the pride of their hearts, not of their obedience to the will of God. The outside of the cud and platter was clean, but within He saw corruption and wickedness. The Lord told the scribes and Pharisees plainly they were but hypocrites, like whited sepulchres, good to look at outwardly, but inwardly full of uncleanness. Proud of their own fancied attainments, they despised and hated the piety of our Lord. None among the Jews was more zealous for the crucifixion of Christ than the Pharisees. They long plotted to put Him to death, even uniting with their rivals, the Sadducees, to gain this end. They made use of the law in which they boasted to secure a death-sentence from Pilate. "We have a law," they said, "and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God" (John xix. 7). No, the law cannot save from the power and penalty of sin, but by the law is the knowledge of sin, and by it sin becomes exceeding sinful (Rom. iii. 20 ; vii. 13).

The law says to the one under it, "Thou shalt"; and to the disobedient, "Curses be upon you." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10). Thus the law brought a curse, not a blessing to man. It revealed sin in the heart, but did not remove it nor cure it. But grace reveals a remedy. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, that as

sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." So we are brought to the feet of our Lord for our deliverance from the reign of sin in us. He Who was able to endure God's wrath against my guilt is able to supply power over the sin that dwells within me and that is too strong for me. In Him and through Him deliverance comes. By looking to Christ Jesus, by trusting in Him, by occupation with Him, I get away from my own evil desires and my own natural inclinations. With the eye of faith upon the Lord, grace, not sin, reigns in my heart, and I walk before God in His love and in His fear.

Will God's Abounding Grace Excuse my Continuance in Sin?

The evil nature is likely to abuse the truth of God in the scripture we have been considering, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," and regard it even as an excuse for a believer's sin. The apostle deals with such an attempt: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound" (ver. 1). Shall we take advantage of the abundance of grace, and by our self-indulgence make a fresh occasion for its display? The more we sin, the more grace will bestow. God is infinitely gracious, and the worse our behaviour is, the greater will be the supply of God's grace to cover our sin. Those who talk or think in this strain, whether intentionally or not, are liable to turn, as we read, "the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). And history shows that many gross evils have arisen in Christendom from such abuses of God's abounding grace.

But the snare is ever spread for our feet, into which without constant vigilance we may stumble at any time. Take, for example, our attendance at the Lord's table for the commemoration of the Lord's death. There we are in the presence of the Lord Jesus, Who said, "Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them." Is there not a tendency within us, in spite of the solemnity of the occasion, for our attention and our thoughts to wander

into irrelevant matters? Instead of being absorbed with the contemplation of Christ Himself and with the recollection of His death upon the cross, we become engaged with something trivial and improper. Thus, even in the sanctuary of the Lord's presence, sin raises its horrid head within us, seeking to carry us away in spite of ourselves.

Here lies the danger of abusing the abounding grace of God and regarding such failures as of no consequence. A dulled conscience may begin to make excuse, and say that such lapses in attention are inevitable, and do not matter; Christ died for our sins! But such a failure does matter. It is a disregard of the presence of our Lord. It is sin in the holy place. "The thought of foolishness is sin." It needs God's forgiveness, our confession, and Christ's cleansing. And God has made that provision for His children, who still possess an evil nature. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9). Confession shows that such lapses are neither under-estimated nor ignored by us. The inward motions of sin are rebuked and deplored. And there is no desire within us to "continue in sin that grace may abound."

The Believer's Death to Sin

Clearly, the evil of allowing sin to be active within us without let or hindrance is manifest in scripture. Death itself is declared to be the barrier to the activity of sin. The apostle writes, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (ver. 2). To do so is a contradiction in terms. Carefully note what is said, for the text is often misunderstood because it is misquoted or misread. Paul does not say that sin itself is dead, nor imply that the evil nature has disappeared altogether. It is we ourselves who have died to sin; how then can we go on living in sin? It is a dangerous deceit to suppose that sin itself is extracted from believers. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8).

The truth that should be in us is that we have died unto sin. Through Christ Jesus we have taken the place of death, where sin can no longer exercise its dominion over us. This revealed truth we are called to believe. It only becomes a practical reality to those who do believe it. Lack of faith hinders deliverance from the authority and power of indwelling sin, but faith in Christ Jesus gives us the joy of victory. On the testimony of the scripture, we accept the truth that we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son; on that same testimony we are called to accept the truth that "so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ, were baptized unto His death" (ver. 3). Both truths rest upon the same immutable foundation—the death of Christ.

We believe, therefore, not that sin is dead, but that we died out of its clutches. Between ourselves and sin, there is the barrier of the river Jordan; sin is on one side, and we are on the other. We have no communication nor connection with sin, our former master. Sin has no authority nor right over us, to issue orders or make suggestions regarding our conduct. We now give ear only to the voice of the Living One, Who became dead, and Who is alive for evermore. We listen for and hear only the voice of the risen Shepherd of the sheep, for in Christ is that "newness of life" in which alone we are to walk (ver. 4). In this new life, we can communicate continually with our new Lord in prayer and service and have communion with Him in praise and worship. But if we deny our standing, and meddle with sin, we bring defilement upon the heart and conscience. Let us abhor the evil and cleave to the good. If at the breaking of bread or at prayer-time evil thoughts should arise, we must remember we are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. And in His bright presence exclusively, our new nature rejoices, and needs naught else.

The believer's death to sin is an integral part of the Christian profession, and it is here associated with the initiatory rite of baptism. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into (unto) Jesus Christ were baptized into (unto) His death ?

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into (unto) death" (vers. 3, 4). The apostle reminds them of what their baptism signified. It outlined their profession. They declared in figure that they had been baptized unto the death of Christ. They, as it were, announced to the whole world that they were associated with the Christ Who died, and Who by His death disappeared entirely from the world, for the world last saw Christ upon the cross. Christ in heaven has no link with the world. As an institution or system, He has no relations with it, nor will have, until He comes to judge the habitable world in righteousness (Acts xvii. 31). Christ by His own death is separated from the world and its sin. And because of the believer's association with the death of Christ he also is separated from the world and from sin, its governing principle. Hence the believer's death to sin is, so to speak, the A.B.C. of the Christian profession, as the rite of Christian baptism testifies. And by our faith in our death and burial unto Christ, we obtain our practical deliverance from sin and its tyrannical power over us. This new kind of living characterises believers because, as the apostle says, "We are buried with Him by baptism into (unto) death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so also we should walk in newness of life" (ver. 4).

In passing, we may notice that the apostle while stating that we have died with Christ, avoids saying that we have risen with Him, as he teaches plainly in other Epistles. Here we are shown that we have part with His death, but not with His resurrection, for baptism symbolises only our death with Christ, and not our present imputed resurrection with Him. But we do read here of our future share in the first resurrection because of Christ. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (ver. 5). This is "the redemption of the body," which will take place at the coming of the Lord for His saints (Phil. iii. 20, 21). Meanwhile we are in a sort of divided state. The spirit and soul are already redeemed, but we are in the body, and the body is not yet redeemed. Now the body is the instrument through which indwelling sin

operates in the believer. In a later passage (ver. 12) Paul calls it our "mortal body," or body of death, because it is in our present body that sin seeks to reign unto death (see chap. v. 21).

Our Old Man Crucified with Christ

In the next verse a new term appears—"our old man": "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed (annulled) that henceforth we should not serve sin" (ver. 6). The apostle here speaks, not of sin being dealt with, but of "our old man." This term is sometimes alluded to as "our old nature," that is, the root of evil within us. This is not correct. The old man is not a personification of sin itself, but is the old self, the old person, the seat of our former personality and responsibility before our new birth. Thus, in Gal. ii. 20, the apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ"; he means the old I, Saul the persecutor of Christ, the enemy of those who confessed Christ's name, the one who described himself as a blasphemer and injurious, the chief of sinners. That old man, Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I"—not that old I—"but Christ liveth in me." The new I, the new man, is he who inwardly delights in Christ, and outwardly conforms to the life of Christ in his everyday words and deeds.

The life of Christ in us consists of a Christ-like behaviour, which while it is a profound performance, is a simple matter, but simple only in the sense that it is not intricate or complicated in attainment. For a likeness to Christ is found in a babe in Christ as well as in the young men and fathers of the family of God. The adoring admiration of Christ leads to an unconscious imitation of His words and ways. To delight in Christ is to become like Him spiritually. Walking with Christ, communing with Him, listening to Him, brings a moral conformity to His image and likeness. By this means the new nature is allowed to follow its instincts in a growing attraction by the aid of the Holy Spirit to the adorable Person of the

Lord Jesus Himself. And thus we walk "in newness of life," and not according to our former manner of life.

In the apostle's words, "Our old man is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed." "Destroyed" expresses the true sense less correctly than "annulled," or "rendered powerless," so that it does not assert itself. Because of our crucifixion with Christ, the body with its disposition to serve sin is kept in its rightful place of inaction. Thereby the new life becomes uppermost in practice, and takes charge of our ways, and our likeness of character to the Lord Jesus Christ is developed accordingly.

Then, the believer's complete detachment from the rule of indwelling sin is again emphasised: "For he that is dead is freed from sin." Our imputed death with Christ has procured for us a complete emancipation from bondage to sin. The metaphor, death, is conclusive, and should silence every doubt concerning our deliverance. All a person's obligations cease to be binding on him at his death. A purchased slave dies, and his owner can exact no further service from him. Death frees the slave from bondage. So, the apostle writes, "He that is dead is freed from sin." The believer by the death of Christ is made free from bondage to sin, seeing he died with Him.

Death with Christ Delivers from the Dominion of Sin

Next we read, "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God" (vers. 8-10). Here the apostle shows that the death of Christ is His victory over the power of sin; "in that He has died, He died unto sin once for all." Christ came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In Him there was no sin, nor could He commit sin. But the Lord in His ministry came in contact with sin and sinners; for He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to

repentance. The woman taken in adultery was brought to Him for judgment. He was here as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He came to serve in a world where sin reigned unto death, and where He was the Obedient One, even as far as death, the death of the cross. At His death, His work of propitiation was completed. "He has died unto sin once for all." Being raised from the dead He dies no more, death has dominion over Him no more. He became dead, but He is living to the ages of ages. Now He lives unto God. His sacrificial work for sin is behind His back ; He has not to repeat it, nor augment it. And when He appears the second time to those who look for Him, it will be "without (apart from) sin unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28).

At present, our Lord Jesus having died unto sin is living "unto God" in the Father's house, preparing for us a place there, where all is purity and holiness and righteousness, apart from the slightest taint of sin. Absolute separation from sin, from its dominion and defilement, is the character of the life of Christ, and this is to be the character of the lives of those who died with Him. Like Him, we are to have nothing whatever to do with sin. And so far as we live by faith in the truth that we have died with Christ, so far shall we live "in newness of life."

Reckoning Ourselves Dead unto Sin but Alive unto God

Our responsibility is bound up with what Christ has already accomplished. "For in that He died, He died unto sin once : but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through (in) Christ Jesus" (vers. 10, 11). Our responsibility is to "reckon" ourselves to be dead unto sin. All evil suggestions, cravings, impulses, arising from within are to be met by the recollection that we have died with Christ. This act of faith is the secret of strength to overcome. The courage of faith that counts ourselves to be dead unto sin but alive unto God conquers. Only in this manner can believers fulfil

the injunction of the apostle, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (ver. 12).

It may be noted that the word "reckon," is the same as is used in chap. iv, in connection with our justification by faith. It occurs eleven times in that chapter, being translated "counted" and "imputed," as well as "reckoned." There, it is God Who "imputeth righteousness" (ver. 6) to the believer. Such an act seems impossible to the natural mind. Many a believer looking at himself sees that he is not righteous, and cannot understand how he is made righteous. Yet there is the plain scripture that "his faith is counted (reckoned) for righteousness" (iv. 5). Abraham is an illustration of this great truth. He believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. He believed what was impossible in the ordinary course of human nature, because of God's word. When Abraham and Sarah were both physically impotent, God said that they should have a son. Abraham believed the promise of God, which was the right thing for him to do. And because he believed, God reckoned the patriarch to be righteous. Moreover, not he only but all believers have been given a righteous standing by God's counting, God's imputing, God's reckoning.

But in relation to our sinful nature, we are exhorted to do the reckoning. We are to "reckon" ourselves "dead indeed unto sin." This "death" is not a matter of fact, ascertainable by our senses, but a matter of faith in what is stated by the Spirit of God in the scripture before us, which regards us as having died with Christ.

Does Deliverance from the Law Provide an Excuse for Sinning?

By grace believers are delivered from bondage to the law. Does this release give them the liberty to sin as and when they please? This is the second great question considered in the chapter. The question in verse 1 is, "Shall we continue in

sin that grace may abound?" Now the apostle after saying "Ye are not under the law, but under grace," immediately asks, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?" If we have been freed from the obligations of the law, we are also free from the penalties which the law inflicts upon the disobedient. Our perverse nature then inquires whether this deliverance from the prohibitions and commandments and punishments of the law entitles us to do as we like and to sin as we please. But the truth is that if we are freed from the yoke of bondage to the law and to sin, it is that we may put on the yoke of Christ, and to obey even as He obeyed. If we are no longer bond-slaves to sin, we are bond-slaves to God, Whose service is perfect liberty.

Some may imagine that this question is one not likely to arise in the practical history of believers; they think those no longer under the law are unlikely to sin. But God knows the subtlety of the heart. And we have the case of Ananias and Sapphira who seemed to have sinned because they were not under law as formerly, but under grace. It was soon after Pentecost and the preaching of the grace of God through the crucified and exalted Christ. Grace wrought in the hearts of believers so that they sold their goods and distributed the proceeds to the poor. Such generosity was not an ordinance of the law but an act of grace, done in the spirit of Christ Who "though He was rich, yet," as the apostle wrote, "for your sakes became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9). Ananias and Sapphira agreed together to imitate the generosity of their brethren and sell their possessions for the benefit of the poor.

Now here the husband and wife were tempted by Satan to sin because they were not under law but under grace. It was not a provision of the law that they should sell all that they had and give to the poor all they received. It was grace that set them the shining example of a complete surrender, but left them free to imitate it or not. Here the guilty pair saw an opportunity for deceit. They agreed to keep for themselves

part of the price, and to bring the remainder to the apostles as if it were the whole. By this pretence they took advantage of the liberty of grace to "lie to the Holy Ghost." Not being under the law, but under grace, they sinned unto death, and the judgment of God fell upon them both.

This solemn incident of sin under grace stands recorded on the first page of Christian history as a warning to all who are "under grace" lest they fall into sin in like manner. We must take heed lest we trespass upon the grace of God, and forget that grace reigns through righteousness. We have communion with the Holy One, and He knows our secret thoughts and intentions. And we ought to remember that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. xvii. 9). There the Lord looks, for He searches the heart, and tries the reins. He desires to see truth in the inward parts. Let us beware, therefore, lest we make our deliverance from the rigorous exactions of the law an excuse for secret sin.

Sin's Sure Wages and God's Gracious Giving

The great truths revealed in this chapter are concisely summarised in its final verse : "For the wages of sin is death ; but the free gift of God life eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord" (W.K.). The service of sin yields only barrenness and deadness as its wages in this life ; the judgment after death being outside the scope of this passage is not mentioned here. But God's act of favour yields an exuberant fulness of life in Christ Jesus. Many who through faith have eternal life fail to live that new life. Life eternal is not a mere static existence. It dwells in a sphere of which Christ Himself is the centre and the circumference, and from which sin is banished. Eternal life begins when the heart is attracted and attached to Christ Jesus. Henceforth, the Lord Jesus animates our thoughts and words and actions, and is the source and motive of all we think and desire and do.

This life eternal is not acquired by effort or purchase ; it is God's free gift, which He bestows where there is faith in His Son. It is not to be explained or defined. It is possessed by the believer, and that life is in God's Son. It is enjoyed most by the believer when its peculiar functions are in full exercise. Indeed, life eternal is the condition of continuous spiritual activity, for it is "in Christ Jesus our Lord." There is an abiding sense of the living presence of the Lord Jesus, Who is always with us. The consciousness of this presence remains in spite of the thousand-fold activities of secular life. Of this choice privilege the world cannot rob us ; for eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord is God's free gift to those whom He has justified by faith and delivered from bondage to sin by the death of Christ.
