

**THE LAW OF
LIBERTY IN THE
SPIRITUAL LIFE**

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The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life by E. H. Hopkins

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E. H. HOPKINS

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SIN.



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"Sin is the transgression of the law."—1 *John* iii. 4.

"All unrighteousness is sin."—1 *John* v. 17.

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."—*Rom.* vi. 12.

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."—*Psa.* li. 2.

"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."—*Tit.* ii. 14.

"Heal my soul ; for I have sinned against Thee."—*Psa.* xli. 4.

"I will heal their backsliding."—*Hos.* xiv. 4.

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers ; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."—1 *Pet.* i. 18, 19.

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."
—*Jude* 24, 25.

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SIN.

EVERY heresy, it has been said, has its root in defective views of sin. What we think of the Atonement depends greatly upon what we think of the evil which made that Atonement necessary. The converse, no doubt, is also true. But if we would rise towards a full appreciation of the value of that infinite sacrifice, we must seek to understand, as perfectly as possible, the true nature of sin.

What then is sin? So widespread and universal is the existence of evil, that we are apt to regard it as an inseparable adjunct to our human nature. But sin is not an essential element in the constitution of our humanity. We know that it was not in man originally, nor will it be in man as finally glorified; neither did it exist in the Man Christ Jesus. And yet there is scarcely a fact of which we are more conscious than the presence of evil. It meets us on every hand. Its desolating influence is seen and felt by all. Sin is no mere figment of the imagination; it is a terrible reality. It is no vague, indefinite shadow; it is a real and specific evil.

Nor again are we to regard sin as a necessary constituent of our moral progress. That it is overruled for our good, and that it is made to serve in the process of our spiritual discipline, is undoubtedly true; but sin is not an essential element in our moral training or spiritual advancement. We need not sin that grace may abound; we need not be under its power, nor defiled by its taint, in order to be advancing in knowledge or growing in humility.

To learn its true nature we must look at it, not only in relation to ourselves, but in relation to God; we must regard it in connection with His infinite justice, and holiness, and love.

It is only in that light that we shall understand its real character.

We must consider it, moreover, in more than one aspect. It is such a vast evil, that we can form no adequate conception of its nature unless we look at it from various points of view. Sin has many aspects.

But from whatever side we contemplate it, we shall see that the characteristic feature of each aspect is met by a corresponding fitness in the remedy which God has provided for sin.

SIN AS AN OFFENCE AGAINST GOD.

It is one thing to recognise the effects of sin on

mankind, it is another thing to see it in its essential character, as rebellion against God. Man through sin has, not only become "wounded and debilitated," he has become alienated from God; he has been brought into an attitude of positive antagonism to God. Sin therefore is not something which appeals to pity only, a mere misfortune; it is that which deserves punishment, for it is rebellion against the purity and goodness and majesty of God.

If sin were not an offence, we could conceive of the mercy of God forgiving sin without any sacrifice; but the necessity of a sacrifice teaches us that sin is a violation of God's law. This necessity is set forth with unmistakable clearness in the Old Testament, and with equal emphasis in the New.

"Sin is the transgression of the law."¹ By the law we are to understand, "not only the Mosaic law of the Old Testament, but also the law of the New Testament in Christ, and by Him explained in the word and exhibited in the life, as the law written in man's heart for his special direction; it embraces the whole complex commandment."²

Man feels within himself just what God has revealed in His word—that sin needs something more than the mercy of God. In this respect the doc-

¹ 1 John iii. 4.

² Pearson.

trine of the Bible and the witness of the human heart are one.

It is a true instinct of man's nature that teaches him that guilt needs compensation; but the mistake into which he falls, if left to himself, is that he seeks to make that compensation by means which he himself has devised. This is the history of all heathen sacrifices.

Sin is an offence, because it is rebellion against the sovereignty of God, a contradiction to His nature, an insult to His holiness. It stands related to law—not merely to the law of reason, or of conscience, or of expediency, but to the law of God. Sin consists essentially in the want of conformity to the will of God, which the law reveals; it is *lawlessness*—a breach of law. And thus, it is the law that reveals the sinfulness of sin. "The crookedness of a crooked line may be seen of itself, but is still more evident if compared with a perfect standard of straightness."

While the voice of conscience tells us that some amends is needed for the guilt of our sin, it is only revelation that shows us how that amends can be made; it is only there that we learn *what* sacrifice is sufficient to atone for human guilt. This view of sin leads us to see the meaning of Christ's death on the cross. It was the death of a con-

demned criminal: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities";¹ He died, "the just for the unjust."²

Freedom from sin as a transgression, as an offence against God, consists then in this—that through Christ's atoning death it is so "put away" as "to make it as though it had never been." "No power in earth or heaven can make that not to have been done which has been done; the only imaginable and conceivable alteration is, that it should be as *though* it had never been done, that all bad effects of it should be destroyed and obliterated, and that the sin should be nullified by compensation." (*Mosley*.) This freedom from sin as an offence we enter into as a present privilege. It is the first aspect of liberty which we are brought to experience through a saving view of Christ's death upon the cross.

SIN AS A RULING PRINCIPLE.

Sometimes the term sin is used in Scripture as having reference to *acts* of sin. This however is not the only sense in which sin is spoken of. It is also referred to as a power, dwelling and working in man.

When we speak of *sinning*, we imply of course

¹ Isa. liii. 5.

² 1 Pet. iii. 18.