

Sins, Infirmities, and the Atonementsins, Infirmities, and the Atonement

by Daniel Steele

The sermon explores the critical distinction between infirmities and sins, emphasizing their implications for spiritual life and the necessity of atonement through Christ.

Scripture: John 3:18

Topics: "Sin And Atonement", "Gods Forgiveness"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the distinction between infirmities and sins, emphasizing that while infirmities are involuntary failures stemming from our imperfect nature, sins are deliberate offences against God's commandments. He clarifies that infirmities, though regretful, do not sever communion with God, unlike sins which cut off communication with heaven. Steele highlights the importance of recognizing the difference between inadvertent faults and intentional sins, stressing the need for atonement for both. He echoes John Wesley's belief that even involuntary transgressions require the atoning blood of Jesus, emphasizing the continuous need for God's forgiveness and grace in our lives.

Transcript

IN many minds the perfection of spiritual life required by the Gospel is eclipsed by confounding infirmities and sins. What God has, in His word and in the human conscience, put asunder, some people are perpetually joining together. Then they confidently assert that holiness of heart and life is a state too high for men dwelling in earthly tabernacles.

Many times has this distinction between infirmities and sins been pointed out by theologians, but so blind or so wilfully obstinate are multitudes that they fail to see the dividing line. We desire to disentangle these confused ideas, hoping that we may help someone to a solution of a difficulty in the way of his full salvation.

1. Infirmities are failures to keep the law of perfect obedience given to Adam in Eden. This law no man on earth can keep, since sin has impaired the powers of universal humanity.

Sins are offences against the law of love, the law of Christ, which is thus epitomized by John, "And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (I John iii. 23). Hence the Spirit convinces the world of sin, "because they believe not on Me." The sum total

of God's commandments to men with the New Testament in their hands, is faith in Christ, attested by its proper fruits, good works. However dwarfed and shattered by sin that poor drunkard is, so long as he is this side of the gates of hell he is under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, Who imparts to him the gracious ability to repent of sin, and to trust, love, and obey the Lord Jesus. His refusal is sin. So long as he has any capacity for love, however small, that capacity is called his whole heart. The law of love says to him in tones of authority, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Hence every one is under obligation to be evangelically perfect. Refusal to love with the whole heart is the ground of condemnation, and not inevitable failures in keeping the law of Adamic perfection.

2. Infirmities are an involuntary outflow from our imperfect moral organization. Sin is always voluntary. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "Men love darkness rather than light."

3. Infirmities have their ground in our physical nature, and they are aggravated by intellectual deficiencies. But sin roots itself in our moral nature, "springing either from the habitual corruption of our hearts, or from the unresisting perversion of our tempers."

4. Infirmities entail regret and humiliation. Sin always produces guilt.

5. Infirmities in well-instructed souls do not interrupt communion with God. Sin cuts the telegraphic communication with heaven. The infirmities of unenlightened believers, being regarded as sins, may produce condemnation and sunder communion, by destroying confidence in God. Thousands are in this sad condition.

6. Infirmities, hidden from ourselves, are covered by the blood of Christ without a definite act of faith, in the case of the soul vitally united with Him. On the great day of atonement the errors of the individual Hebrew were put away through the blood of sprinkling, without offering a special victim for himself. "But into the second (tabernacle) went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people" (Heb. ix. 7). Sins demand a special personal resort to the blood of sprinkling and an act of reliance on Christ.

7. Infirmities are without remedy so long as we are in the body. Sins, by the keeping power of Christ, are avoidable through every hour of our regenerate life. Both of these truths are in Jude's ascription, "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling [into sin, or, as the Vulgate reads, sine peccato, without sin], and to present you faultless [without infirmity, not here, but] in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy," etc. Jude understood the distinction between faults, or infirmities, and sins. In his scheme of Christian perfection faults are to disappear in the life to come, but we are to be saved from sins now.

8. A thousand infirmities are consistent with perfect love, but not one sin, "who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret [unconscious] faults. Keep back Thy servant, also, from presumptuous [wilful, high-handed] sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright [Hebrew, perfect], and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Here the psalmist expects to fall into errors and unconscious faults, and he prays to be cleansed from them, but he prays to be kept from known and voluntary sins.

Hence it is evident that sins are incompatible with David's idea of perfection; and that unnoticed and involuntary errors or faults, are not. This distinction is strongly confirmed by an inquiry into the facts of David's life, and God's verdict respecting his character. In I Kings xv. 5, we are assured that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him, all

the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah, the Hittite." From all "presumptuous sins," save one, David was kept. Notwithstanding his infirmities, he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, with one sad and solitary exception.

But, when God sums up the life and character of King Asa, he makes no exception to his perfectness, declaring that "the heart of Asa was perfect all his days" (2 Chron. xv. 17). Yet we find that he failed to perfect his reform by taking away all the high places of idolatrous worship: that he was angry with Hanani, who rebuked him for his lack of trust in God against Baasha, King of Israel, and that he put him in prison, and oppressed some of the people, who were probably regarded as factious and disloyal in their sympathy with the imprisoned prophet, whose rectitude of purpose Asa had entirely, yet innocently misapprehended. In addition, the sacred historian has recorded another infirmity, common with some of the holiest men now on the earth, who employ physicians for bodily ailments, and doubt that the gift of healing is still available -- "In his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (2 Chron. xvi. 10-12). Doubtless, many of his contemporaries saw great imperfections in these outward acts, these mistaken judgments and severities in administration, but the Lord, who looks at the heart, chisels on Asa's tombstone this enviable epitaph, "Perfect all his days." We aspire to no better. Is it impossible for us to achieve under the Gospel what it was possible to accomplish under Judaism? If so, what has Christ procured, and what has the Holy Spirit bestowed, which should make His dispensation more glorious?

When we look into the Gospel we find Jesus Christ making the very distinction which we have made in this chapter. Of the traitor who wilfully betrayed Him, He said. "It had been good for that man if he had not been born;" but to the sleeping disciples in Gethsemane He hinted no destiny of remediless woe in these tender words. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Judas had sinned; Peter, James, and John had been overcome by an infirmity. Paul makes the same distinction in these two precepts, "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may fear" (1 Tim. v. 20). "We, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom. xv. 1).

The moral sense of mankind makes a distinction not in degree, but in kind, between forging a note, and falling asleep in a prayer meeting, or forgetting to keep a promise, or disproportioning food to exercise, or indulging too long in sleep, or having an impure dream, or a wandering thought in church, or treating a neighbor coldly under a misapprehension of his worthiness. The universal conscience discriminates between a sin and a weakness or an error.

Ethical writers insist that the moral sense of mankind pronounces innocent the inadvertent doer of an act wrong in itself. They declare that there is a broad distinction between wrong and guilty, on the one hand, and right and innocent, on the other; and that guilt always involves a knowledge of the wrong, and an intention to commit it. Hence, in the light of the moral philosophies filling our libraries and taught in our colleges, a sin of inadvertence or ignorance needs no expiation. But this is a superficial view.

Notwithstanding the broad distinction between infirmities and sins, in one respect they are alike, they both need the atonement. This is shown by human laws. So great are the interests entrusted to men in certain positions that severe penalties are attached to carelessness, as in the handling of poisons by physicians and apothecaries, the involuntary sleep of a weary sentinel at his post, or in the case of the bridge-tender who through a faulty time-keeper has the draw open when the express train arrives. These are infirmities of judgment or memory which men regard and punish as crimes. Now, what the exigencies of human society require for its safety in a few cases, the perfect moral government of God demands in all cases -- satisfaction for involuntary sins. But there is a difference in God's favour. He always provides an

atonement for such sins, and never executes sentence till the atonement has been rejected. Where the expiation cannot be known and applied he forbears to inflict the penalty. "The time of this ignorance God overlooked." Hence the law of God is more merciful than the statutes of men, which, in the cases specified, make no provision for escaping the punishment of involuntary offences. The objection which some have raised against the Divine Government for holding errors and inadvertencies as culpable and penal, falls to the ground when we find the first announcement of this accompanied by the institution of the sin-offering. See Lev. iv.

Though a well-meant mistake does not defile the conscience and bring into condemnation, nevertheless when discovered it demands a penitent confession and a presentation of the great sin-offering unto the God of absolute holiness. The refusal to do this after the sin-offering has been provided involves positive guilt. Says John Wesley:

Not only sin, properly so-called, that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law: but sin, improperly so-called, that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown, needs the atoning blood. I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorances and mistakes inseparable from mortality. Therefore, sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to involuntary transgressions.

Hence Charles Wesley sings --

Every moment, Lord, I want

The merit of Thy death."

In view of this truth it is eminently appropriate for the holiest soul on earth to say daily. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Source:

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