Psalms - Commentaries by William John Hocking, Editor

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H.B.— Please explain “if we sin willfully” (Heb. 10:26). The sin referred to is not a mere stumble, but a course of conduct persistently pursued. The apostle is speaking of those who after knowing the truth of the sacrifice of Christ deliberately renounce it, and he is addressing particularly those among the Jews who professed faith in the Lord Jesus. “Sinning willfully “is an allusion to what is called “presumptuous” sin in the Old Testament. In such cases the offender was cut off without mercy (Num. 15:30, 31; Deut. 17:2-6). These cases were in contrast with “sins of ignorance,” for which sacrifice was provided and the transgressors forgiven (Lev. 4; Num. 15:27-29). On this score the Lord prayed for the Jews, “Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Peter alludes to this ignorance in Acts 3:17, and Saul of Tarsus was an example of a Jew who sinned ignorantly, but was forgiven (1 Tim. 1:13). Here the apostle contemplates any who abandon the sacrifice of Christ after receiving the full knowledge of the truth. He solemnly affirms, as he did before (verse 18) that no other sacrifice is or can be offered for sins. Judgment only awaits such apostates. Here we have those who despise the sacrifice of Christ, and in Hebrews 6, those who despise the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth (see B.M.M., vol. 1, p. 158). It must be borne in mind that it is to willful renunciation of Christ’s sacrifice that verse 29 refers so solemnly.

W.C.— Did the Lord appear to the disciples generally, or only to the ten apostles, on the occasion referred to in John 20:19-23? The same appearance is recorded in Mark 16:14 and Luke 24:33-36; and from the latter passage we gather that others were present besides the apostles— “the eleven and them that were with them.” “The eleven” is the term used for the apostolic band, though only ten of them were actually present. In the same way, “the twelve” is used in reference to this occasion (1 Cor. 15:5). The ten present represented the whole company, and therefore received the Lord’s commission (John 20:21-23).

W.T.— Was the place where the saints came together called the church (1 Cor. 11:18, 22)? In scriptural language the word “church” is never used for a place or a building, but for the assembly of saints meeting together in one place, whether a house or a city. Please explain 1 Corinthians 11:27. The text is, “Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” The apostle is referring to the levity of the Corinthian assembly when partaking of the Lord’s supper. Instead of the Lord’s supper, it had become their own supper. They ate and drank with no more thought of the solemn character of the feast than if they were at their own tables at home (verse 21, 22). This the apostle calls eating the bread and drinking the cup unworthily, and he states solemnly that such are guilty as to, or in respect of, the body and blood of the Lord. The bread and wine are figures of truths of the most affecting and solemn import, — the bread, of the Lord’s body given for us, and the wine, of His shed blood. Forgetfulness of this constituted the apostle’s charge of eating “unworthily,” and was the cause of judicial chastening among them, some having died, and some being weak and sickly (verse 30). “He that eateth and drinketh worthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [judgment] to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” There is no ground to suppose that the apostle is speaking of unworthy persons, such as the unconverted or backsliders. On the contrary, he refers to the saints partaking in an unworthy manner. It is an admonition that every believer does well to take to heart. See also B.M.M., vol. 2, page 190.

E.H.B.— Please explain the difference between “sins,” “iniquity,” and “transgression.” We suppose our correspondent alludes to Psalms 32:1, 2, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Each term has reference to the operation of man’s own will in opposition to God’s. “Transgression” specially applied to Israel, as it means the violation of a known command. They had the law but disobeyed it (Rom. 2:27). “Where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). “Sin” is the evil principle in the heart, that loves to do wrong (Rom. 7:8, 9, 11, 17, 20). “Sins” are the fruit proceeding from this root of evil. “Iniquity” includes injustice and perversion of the truth, committed against man as well as God. Thus the selling of Joseph as a slave by his brethren is owned by Judah as “iniquity” (Gen. 44:16). It may be pointed out that in 1 John 3:4, “Sin is the transgression of the law” is more correctly translated, as in the R.V., “Sin is lawlessness.” There are many varying terms in scripture denoting the multitudinous forms that evil takes; but it is an immense blessing to know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from every sin, whatever form it may assume (1 John 1:7).

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N.H.— “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him” (Psa. 25:14). What does this mean? The Lord reveals His hidden counsels and purposes to those who walk before Him in the fear of His holy name (Prov. 3:32; Amos 3:7). He made known His ways to Moses, but only His acts to the children of Israel (Psa. 103:7). Abraham, but not Lot, He told of the coming judgment of the cities of the plain (Gen. 18:17); for he was the friend of God. See also John 15:15 for the believer now. It is true as a general principle that the more we advance in practical holiness and obedience, the more we learn what the mind of God is. In a difficulty how is one to know which is the right step? There is the very plain promise, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:6). This the Lord will always stand to. Hence it behooves us to wait patiently upon Him in prayer and supplication, also diligently searching the scripture for light. Then the voice will come, “This is the way; walk ye in it.” But we must wait, and let patience have, her perfect work. Those who act in the greatest hurry in the things of God commonly make most mistakes. You will be sure to know the Lord’s direction when you receive it. You know His voice (John 10:4).

W.T.— Does baptism wash away sins (Acts 22:16)? Certainly not; for Simon Magus was baptized, yet his sins were not washed away or forgiven (Acts 8:20, 21). Baptism is only the figure of remission of sins (Acts 2:38), as it is also of death to sin (Rom. 6:3). Is baptism a saving ordinance (1 Pet. 3:20, 21)? No; for this very passage declares as much. The baptism spoken of is “not the putting away of the filth of the

flesh," that is, not a ceremonial act of washing. There is a comparison between the waters of the deluge and the waters of baptism. As the eight souls were saved through water, so baptism is a like figure and saves us, for baptism typifies our death with Christ (Rom. 6:4). But (reading without the parenthesis) we see that our salvation rests not on baptism only (Christ's death), but on the resurrection also. "Baptism doth also now save us... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The parenthesis chews (1) that the apostle does not mean baptism in the sense of carnal washing by water; (2) that he does mean that real deliverance from sins which every exercised conscience requires, and of which baptism is the appointed sign. For "answer" read "demand," or "inquiry." A man's conscience, when "good," always denounces him for his sins until they are forgiven. In this sense baptism is the request of a good conscience. Compare Acts 2:37, 38. This passage is somewhat difficult, as we may expect many parts of God's word to be. We hope that with patient consideration the above may he of some service. If more is wanted please write again.

F.B.— Why was not Daniel put in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Probably because the accusers of the three Jews (Dan. 3:8) hardly dared to accuse a man recently elevated to a position of such high rank as Daniel had been. He was ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon (Dan. 2:48). Daniel had performed a great personal service to Nebuchadnezzar, which could not be said of the others. Why were these three not with Daniel in the lions' den? This event was many years later, and after Babylon had been taken by Darius the Mede. Nothing is said of the three companions after their deliverance out of the fiery furnace. It is impossible even to say whether they were in Babylon.

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W.T.— Please explain "For as in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). The apostle is sheaving in the context that mankind is divided into two families—Adam being the head of one, and Christ of the other. And as Adam brought in death for all his family, so Christ brought in resurrection from among the dead for those who are His. Hence we have this contrast stated, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." What is the meaning of 1 John 2:28? The little children (meaning, in this verse, the whole family of God) are exhorted to abide in Christ. The reason given is that at His appearing or public manifestation with His saints (Col. 3:4) "We" (that is, the apostles) "may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming." Thus the apostle was anxious that the saints who were the fruits of his labor might continue in the ways of godliness, love, and truth, so that he might have no reason to be ashamed of his own work in the day of Christ. He was the workman; they his work; he wished they might then be his "glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19, 20) rather than his shame.

M.N.— Please explain the difference between "raised up Jesus" and "raised up Christ" (Rom. 8:11). The difference appears to be that in the former part the Lord's own resurrection as a Man is referred to, "Jesus" being His personal name (Matt. 1:21), while in the latter part His resurrection is looked at as virtually embracing our own, "Christ" or "Christ Jesus" being the official title used of the Lord when our association with Him is named (See Eph. 1 and the epistles generally). "In Jesus" is an unscriptural expression, but "in Christ" is a term used in regard of every believer. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies. Compare the phrase "dead in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16).

T.A.— Who or what does Christ allude to in Psalms 22:20 as "my darling"? It is difficult to speak positively; but the expression seems a figurative refence to His life which He laid down. Some, however, from comparison of Psalms 35:17, where a similar expression occurs, see a reference in it to the faithful Jewish remnant with whom Christ identifies Himself. We shall be glad of further tight on this passage. Is there any reference in John 1:51 to Matthew 4:11? We hardly think there is any connection. The angelic ministry to the Lord after His temptation in the wilderness was of the nature of personal attendance upon Him during the days of His flesh (Matt. 4:11; Luke 22:43). But in John 1:51 The angels are witnesses given to a reverential world of the glory of the Son of man, fulfilled particularly of course in the millennium. The angels will then be seen attending the Son of man. Not only earth below but heaven above will serve the Son of man. Is He not worthy? "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb. 1:6). That sight will be the "greater thing" of which the Lord spake to Nathanael.

J.D.— Kindly explain the expression "grace for grace" (John 1:16). Is there adequate ground for the translation "grace upon grace"? The sense appears to be that of grace succeeding grace being given to us, as upon the sea-coast we might speak of the sea coming in rapidly— "wave upon wave." Understood thus, it is a beautiful expression of the interminable succession of superabundant supplies of grace which is every believer's portion. "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace upon grace." The accuracy of this translation can only be, judged by those who are familiar with the Greek tongue. The phrase in itself is certainly a peculiar one, but similar constructions having this superlative sense occur in secular authors who wrote in the same language. There is therefore nothing arbitrary in the rendering. If required, a fuller communication on this point will be made privately to the querist.

W.R.K.— Are all who are chastened exercised by the chastening, or can one be chastened without being exercised? If "exercised" means (as it surely does) feeling we deserve the chastisement and determining to amend our ways, surely we are sometimes chastened when we see no reason for it, as a boy is slow to admit that he deserves his flogging. The passage is this: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). Chastening is the action of God our Father in bringing us into some circumstances of sorrow in order to correct some fault in us, or to remove some blemish in our ways. It is, in fact, the pruning of the branches of the Vine by the Husbandman that more fruit may be borne. His object is that we may become partakers of His holiness (ver. 10). Our part is to be duly "exercised thereby"— to inquire earnestly what folly in our hearts is the cause of this correcting sorrow. Paul was "exercised" as to his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12), for he besought the Lord thrice for its removal. But he learned (1) that he was liable to be "exalted above measure," and (2) the sufficiency of Christ's grace. These were "peaceable fruits." Are the "fruits" the general result of a course of chastening, or should we expect a present blessing from each chastening? The degree of chastening would depend upon the obstinacy of the child, or the gravity of the fault. If the chastening is despised (see verse 5) we may expect a "course," but the God of love will not chasten when the object of His chastisement is accomplished in us. We are not sure whether this will meet your difficulty or not.

M.W.— Please explain the Lord's words as to buying a sword (Luke 22:36, 38 and Matt. 26:52). The Lord was speaking figuratively of the increased difficulties that were before them when He should have departed to the Father. The verse you refer to in Matthew shows that the

words are not to be understood literally. For a fuller explanation see B.M.M., vol. 1, page 40.

Enquirer. — Is the Holy Spirit quenched in a meeting when the word “Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40) is not attended to? The apostolic command is that everything in the assembly must be done “decently and in order.” The question then arises what “order” is referred to. Clearly it is not the “order” of man, but that which results from the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit in the assembly according to the principles laid down in this chapter (1 Cor. 14). For only where He is allowed to work as He will can there be an order and comeliness well-pleasing to the Lord. God’s order cannot be confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), any more than man’s order can be God’s. Humanly-conceived plans and arrangements obstruct or quench the Spirit’s working; and equally, if not more so, does human disorder. The assembly, above all, is the sphere for the free operation of the will of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11), but never for the will of man. If the flesh works there, what room remains for the Spirit?

F.F.— Will you kindly explain “Him shall God destroys” (1 Cor. 3:17)? Is there any reference to 1 Corinthians 11:30? The reference is to false teachers rather than to erring saints (such as in Cor. 11:30). Any who taught in the church false doctrine which would destroy (or corrupt) the temple of God would be visited by the direct judgment of God, bringing them to naught (2 Peter 2:1) Compare the case of Hymenæus (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17,18).

F.B.— Please explain 1 John 4:20. The plain meaning of the text is that love to God and hatred of the children of God cannot co-exist in the same heart. A person pretending to love God, and yet disliking those who are His, the apostle calls “a liar.” It is a solemn test: the apostle John is always sweet, but always solemn.

A.M.W.— Dear Sir, Please explain Matthew 8:11. Those that come from “the east and the west” to sit down in the kingdom are Gentiles who would accept the mercy and grace that Israel was rejecting. Compare, for example, Acts 13:46. The same fact is shown in another way in Romans 11. by the figure of branches broken off from the olive tree of promise (Israel), and a wild olive (Gentiles) grafted in (Rom. 11:17).

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