

Articles and Sermons :: Apples of gold

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I Kings XIV. 13
Chapter V

Quest. But here an apt question may be moved, viz., Whether at this great day, the sins of the saints shall be brought into the judgment of discussion and discovery, or no? Whether the Lord will in this day publicly manifest, proclaim, and make mention of the sins of his people, or no?

I humbly judge, according to my present light, that he will not; and my reasons for it are these, viz.:

1. The first is drawn from Christ's judicial proceedings in the last day, set down largely and clearly in the 25th of Matthew, where he enumerateth only the good works they had done, but takes no notice of the spots and blots, of the stains and blemishes, of the infirmities and enormities, of the weaknesses and wickednesses of his people, Deut. xxxii. 4-6. My,

2. Second reason is taken from Christ's vehement protestations that they shall not come into judgment: John v. 24, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.' Those words, 'shall not come into condemnation,' are not rightly translated; the original is, *ei' krisin*, shall not come into judgment, not into damnation, as you read it in all your English books. I will not say what should put men upon this exposition rather than a true translation of the original word. 1 Further, it is very observable, that no evangelist useth this double asseveration but John, and he never useth it but in matters of the greatest weight and importance, and to shew the earnestness of his spirit, and to stir us up to better attention, and to put the thing asserted out of all question, and beyond all contradiction; 2 as when we would put a thing for ever out of all question, we do it by a double asseveration, Verily, verily, it is so, &c.

3 Thirdly, Because his not bringing their sins into judgment doth most and best agree with many precious expressions that we find scattered, as so many shining, sparkling pearls, up and down in Scripture, as, First, (1.) With those of God's blotting out the sins of his people:

'I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' 'I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins,' Isa. xliii. 25, xlii. 22. Who is this that blots out transgressions? He that hath the keys of heaven and hell at his girdle, that opens and no man shuts, that shuts and no man opens; he that hath the power of life and death, of condemning and absolving, of killing and making alive, he it is that blots out transgressions. If an under-officer should blot out an indictment, that perhaps might do a man no good, a man might for all that be at last cast by the judge; but when the judge or king shall blot out the indictment with their own hand, then the indictment cannot return. Now this is every believer's case and happiness. (2.) Secondly, To those glorious expressions of God's not remembering of their sins any more: Isa. xliii. 25, 'And I will not remember thy sins.' 'And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more,' Jer. xxxi. 34. So the apostle, 'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more,' Heb. viii. 12.

And again the same apostle saith, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more,' Heb. x. 17.

The meaning is, their iniquities shall quite be forgiven, I will never mention them more, I will never take notice of them more, they shall never hear more of them from me. Though God hath an iron memory to remember the sins of the wicked, yet he hath no memory to remember the sins of the righteous. 3 (3.) Thirdly, His not bringing their sins into judgment doth

most and best agree with those blessed expressions of his casting their sins into the depth of the sea, and of his casting them behind his back: 'He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea,' Micah vii. 19. Where sin is once pardoned, the remission stands never to be repealed. Pardoned sins shall never come in account against the pardoned man before God any more, for so much doth this borrowed speech import. If a thing were cast into a river, it might be brought up again; or if it were cast upon the sea, it might be discerned and taken up again; but when it is cast into the depths, the bottom of the sea, it can never be buoyed up again.

By the metaphor in the text, the Lord would have us to know the sins pardoned shall rise no more, they shall never be seen more, they shall never come on the account more; he will so drown their sins, that they shall never come up before him the second time.

And so much that other scripture imports: 'Behold, for peace I had great bitterness, but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back,' Isa. xxxviii. 17. These last words are a borrowed speech, taken from the manner of men, who are wont to cast behind their backs such things as they have no mind to see, regard, or remember. A gracious soul hath always his sins before his face: 'I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me;' and therefore no wonder if the Lord cast them behind his back. The father soon forgets and casts behind his back those faults that the child remembers and hath always in his eyes; so doth the Father of spirits. (4.) Fourthly, His not bringing their sins into judgment doth best agree with that sweet and choice expression of God's pardoning the sins of his people: 'And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me,' Jer. xxxiii. 8. So Micah: 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passes by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage (as though he would not see it, but wink at it), he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy,' Micah vii. 18. The Hebrew word nose, from nasa, that is here rendered pardoneth, signifies a taking away. When God pardons sin, he takes it sheer away: that it should be sought for, yet it could not be found, as the prophet speaks: 'In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve,' Jer. 1.20; and those words, 'and passeth by,' in the afore-cited 7th of Micah, and the 18th, according to the Hebrew Vengober Gnal, is, and 'passeth over;' "God passeth over the transgression of his heritage, that is, he takes no notice of it As a man in a deep muse, or as one that hath haste of business, seeth not things before him, his mind being busied about other matters, he neglects all to mind his business; as David, when he saw in Mephibosheth the feature of his friend Jonathan, took no notice of his lameness, or any other defect or deformity; so God, beholding in his people the glorious image of his Son, winks at all their faults and deformities, which made Luther say, 'Do with me what thou wilt, since thou hast pardoned my sin;' and what is it to pardon sin but not to mention sin? Isa. xl. 1, 2. (5.) Fifthly, In his not bringing their sins into the judgment of discussion and discovery, doth best agree to those expressions of forgiving and covering: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,' Ps. xxxii. 1. In the original it is in the plural, blessednesses. So here is a plurality of blessings, a chain of pearls.

The like expression you have in the 85th psalm, and the 2d verse: 'Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.' For the understanding of these scriptures aright, take notice that to 'cover' is a metaphorical expression. Covering is such an action which is opposed to disclosure. To be covered is to be so hid and closed as not to appear. Some make the metaphor from filthy, loathsome objects, which are covered from our eyes, as dead carcasses are buried under the ground; some from garments, that are put upon us to cover our nakedness; others from the Egyptians, that were drowned in the Red Sea, and so covered with water; others from a great gulf in the earth, that is filled up and covered with earth injected into it; and others make it in the last place an allusive expression to the mercy-sea, over which was a covering. Now, all these metaphors in the general tend to shew this, that the Lord will not look, he will not see, he will not take notice of the sins he hath pardoned, to call them any more to a judicial account.

As when a prince reads over many treasons and rebellions, and meets with such and such which he hath pardoned, he reads on, he passeth by, he takes no notice of them: the pardoned person shall never hear more of them, he will never call him to account for those sins more; so here, &c. When Caisar was painted, he put his finger upon his scar, his wart. God puts his fingers upon all his people's scars and warts, upon all their weaknesses and infirmities, that nothing can be seen but what is fair and lovely: 'Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee,' Cant. iv. 7. (6.) Sixthly, It best agrees to that expression of not imputing of sin: 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile,' Ps. xxxii. 2. So the apostle in that Rom. iv. 6-8. Now, not to impute iniquity is not to charge iniquity, not to set iniquity upon his score, who is blessed and pardoned, &c. (7.) Seventhly, and lastly, It best agrees with that expression that you have in the 103d Psalm, and the 11th and 12th verses: 'For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions.'

transgressions from us. What a vast distance is there betwixt the east and the west! Of all visible latitudes, this is the greatest; and thus much for the third argument. The

4. Fourth argument that prevails with me, to judge that Jesus Christ will not bring the sins of the saints into the judgment of discussion and discovery in the great day, is because it seems unsuitable to three considerable things, for Jesus Christ to proclaim the infirmities and miscarriages of his people to all the world.

(1.) First, It seems to be unsuitable to the glory and solemnity of that day, which to the saints will be a day of refreshing, a day of restitution, a day of redemption, a day of coronation, as hath been already proved. Now how suitable to this great day of solemnity the proclamation of the saints' sins will be, I leave the reader to judge.

(2.) Secondly, It seems unsuitable to all those near and dear relations that Jesus Christ stands in towards his. He stands in the relation of a father, a brother, a head, a husband, a friend, an advocate. Now are not all these, by the law of relations, bound rather to hide and keep secret, at least from the world, the weaknesses and infirmities of their near and dear relations? and is not Christ? Is not Christ much more? By how much he is more a father, a brother, a head, a husband, &c., in a spiritual way, than any others can be in a natural way, &c.⁴

(3.) Thirdly, It seems very unsuitable to what the Lord Jesus requires of his in this world. The Lord requires that his people should cast a mantle of love, of wisdom, of silence, and secrecy over one another's weaknesses and infirmities.

Hatred stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all sins, Prov. x. 12, 1 Pet. iv. 8. Love's mantle is very large; love will find a hand, a plaster to clap upon every sore. Flavius Vespasianus, the emperor, was very ready to conceal his friends' vices, and as ready to reveal their virtues. So is divine love in the hearts of the saints: 'If thy brother offend thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother,' Mat. xviii. 15. As the pills of reprehension are to be gilded and sugared over with much gentleness and softness, so they are to be given in secret; tell him between him and thee alone. Tale-bearers and tale-hearers are alike abominable, heaven is too hot and too holy a place for them, Ps. xv. 3. Now will Jesus Christ have us carry it thus towards offending Christians, and will he himself act otherwise? Nay, is it an evil in us to lay open the weaknesses and infirmities of the saints to the world? and will it be an excellency, a glory, a virtue in Christ to do it in the great day? &c.

A fifth argument is this: It is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression: 'The discretion of a man deferreth his anger: and it is his glory to pass over a transgression,' Prov. xix. 11, or to pass by it, as we do by persons or things we know not, or would take no notice of. Now 'is it the glory of a man to pass over a transgression,' and will it not much more be the glory of Christ, silently to pass over the transgressions of his people in that great day? The greater the treasons and rebellions are that a prince passes over and takes no notice of, the more is it his honour and glory; and so, doubtless, it will be Christ's in that great day to pass over all the treasons and rebellions of his people, to take no notice of them, to forget them, as well as to forgive them.

The heathens have long since observed, that in nothing man came nearer to the glory and perfection of God himself, than in goodness and clemency. Surely if it be such an honour to man, 'to pass over a transgression,' it cannot be a dishonour to Christ to pass over the transgressions of his people, he having already buried them in the sea of his blood. Again, saith Solomon, 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,' Prov. xxv. 2. And why it should not make for the glory of divine love to conceal the sins of the saints in that great day, I know not; and whether the concealing the sins of the saints in that great day will not make most for their joy, and wicked men's sorrow, for their comfort and wicked men's terror and torment, I will leave you to judge, and time and experience to decide. And thus much for the resolution of that great question. Having done with the motives that may encourage and provoke young men to be good betimes, to know, love, seek, and serve the Lord, in the spring and morning of their days.