

A.W. Pink:

We are rather afraid that its title will deter some from reading this article: we hope it will not be so. True, it does not treat of a popular theme, nay one which is now very rarely heard in the pulpit; nevertheless, it is a scriptural one. Fallen man is "vile," so vile that it has been rightly said "he is half brute, half devil." Nor does such a description exceed the truth. Man is "born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12), and he is "taken captive by the devil at his will" (2 Tim. 2:26). Perhaps the reader is ready to reply, Ah, that is man in his unregenerate state, but it is far otherwise with the regenerate. From one viewpoint that is true; from another, it is not so.

Did not the Psalmist acknowledge, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was a beast before Thee" (Ps. 73:22) unteachable, untractable, kicking against God's providential dealings, not behaving like a man, much less like a saint! Again, did not Agur confess, "Surely I am more brutish than any man" (Prov. 30:2). True, we never hear such lamentations as these from those who claim to have received their "Pentecost" or "second blessing," nor from those who boast they are living "the victorious life." But to those who are painfully conscious of the "plague" of their own heart, such words may often describe their case. Only recently we received a letter from a dear brother in Christ, saying "the vanity and corruption that I find within, which refuses to be kept in subjection, is so strong at times that it makes me cry out 'my wounds do stink and are corrupt.'"

Does the reader object against our appropriation of the Psalms and Proverbs, and say, We in this New Testament age occupy much higher ground than those did. Probably you have often been told so by men, but are you sure of it from the Word of God? Listen, then, to the groan of an eminent Christian: "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). Do you never feel thus, my reader? Then we are sincerely sorry for you. As to the other part of the description of fallen man, "half devil": did not Christ say to regenerate Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense unto Me" (Matthew 16:23)? And are there not times when writer and reader fully merits the same reproof? Speaking for myself, I bow my head with shame, and say, Alas there is.

"Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4). This was not said by Cain in a remorseful moment after his murder of Abel, nor by Judas after he had betrayed the Saviour into the hands of His enemies; instead, it was the utterance of one of whom God said, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect (sincere) and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8). Was Job's language the effect of extreme melancholy, induced by his terrible afflictions? If not, was he justified in using such strong language of self-deprecation? If he was, are Christians today warranted in echoing the same?

In order to arrive at the correct answer to the above questions, let us ask another: when was it that Job said, "Behold, I am vile?" Was it when he first received tidings of his heavy losses? No, for then he exclaimed, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). Was it when his friends reasoned with and reproved him? No, for then he vindicated himself and boasted of his goodness. Then when was it that Job declared "Behold, I am vile"? It was when the Lord appeared to him and gave him a startling revelation of His own wondrous perfections! It was when he stood in the all-penetrating light of God's immaculate holiness and was made to realize something of His mighty power.

Ah, when a soul is truly brought into the presence of the living God, boasting ceases, our comeliness is turned into corruption (Dan. 10:8), and we cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa. 6:5). When God makes to the soul a personal revelation of His wondrous perfections, that individual is effectually convinced of his own wretchedness. The more we are given to discern the ineffable glory of the Lord, the more will our self-complacency wither. It is in God's light, and in that only, "we see light" (Ps. 36:9). When He shines into our understandings and hearts, and brings to light "the hidden things of darkness," we perceive the utter corruption of our nature, and are abominable in our own eyes. While we measure ourselves by our fellows, we shall, most likely, think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3); but when we measure ourselves by the holy requirements of God's nature, we cry "I am dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). True repentance changes a man's opinion of himself.

Is, then, a Christian today warranted in saying "Behold, I am vile"? Not as faith views himself united to the One who is "altogether lovely"; but as faith discerns, in the light of the Word, what he is by nature, what he is in and of himself he may. Not that he is to hypocritically adopt such language in order to gain the reputation of great humility; nay, such an utterance is only to be found upon our lips as it is the feeling expression of our hearts: particularly is it to be owned before God, when we come to Him in contrition and in confession. Yet is it also to be acknowledged before the saints, even as the apostle Paul cried publicly, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24). It is part of our testimony to own (before those who fear the Lord) what God has revealed to us.

"Behold; I am vile": such is the candid and sorrowful confession of the writer.

1.) I am vile in my imaginations: O what scum rises to the surface when lusts boil within me. What filthy pictures are visioned in "the chambers of my imagery" (Ezek. 8:12). What unlawful desires run riot within. Yes, even when engaged in meditating upon the holy things of God, the mind wanders and the fancy becomes engaged with what is foul and fetid. How often does the writer have to acknowledge before God that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" in him, "but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (Isa. 1:6). Nightly does he avail himself of that Fountain which has been opened "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1).

2.) I am vile in my self-will: How fretful am I when God blows upon my plans and thwarts my desires. What surgings of rebellion within my wicked breast when God's providences displease. Instead of lying placidly as clay in the Potter's hand, how often do I act like the restive colt, which rears and kicks, refusing to be held in with bit and bridle, determined to have my own way. Alas, alas, how very little have I learned of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart." Instead of "the flesh" in me being purified, it has putrefied; instead of its resistance to the spirit weakening, it appears to be stronger each year. O that I had the wings of a dove, that I could fly away from myself.

3.) I am vile in my religious pretenses: How often I am anxious to make "a fair show in the flesh" and be thought highly of by others. What hypocrisies have I been guilty of in seeking to gain a reputation for spirituality. How frequently have I conveyed false impressions to others, making them suppose it was far otherwise within me than was actually the case. What pride and self-righteousness have swayed me. And of what insincerity have I, at times, been guilty of in the pulpit: praying to the ears of the congregation instead of to God, pretending to have liberty when my own spirit was bound, speaking of those things which I had not first felt and handled for myself. Much, very much cause has the writer to take the leper's place, cover his lips, and cry "Unclean, unclean!"

4.) I am vile in my unbelief: How often am I still filled with doubts and misgivings. How often do I lean unto my own understanding instead of upon the Lord. How often do I fail to expect from God (Mark 11:24) the things for which I ask Him. When the hour of testing comes, only too frequently are past deliverances forgotten. When troubles assail, instead of looking off unto the things unseen, I am occupied with the difficulties before me. Instead of remembering that with God all things are possible, I am ready to say, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:19). True it is not always thus, for the Holy Spirit graciously keeps alive the faith which He has placed within; but when He ceases to work, and a trial is faced, how often do I give my Master occasion to say, "How is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

Reader, how closely does your experience correspond with the above? Is it true that, "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19)? Have we been describing some of the symptoms of your diseased heart? Have you ever owned before God "Behold, I am vile"? Do you bear witness to the humbling fact before your brethren and sisters in Christ? It is comparatively easy to utter such words, but do you feel them? Does the realization of this truth make you "blush" (Ezra 9:6) and groan in secret? Have you such a person and painful sense of your vileness that often, you feel thoroughly unfit to draw nigh unto a holy God? If so:

1. You have abundant cause to be thankful to God that his Holy Spirit has shown you something of your wretched self, that He has not kept you in ignorance of your woeful state, that He has not left you in that gross spiritual darkness that enshrouds millions of professing Christians. Ah my stricken brother, if you are groaning over the ocean of corruption within, an feel utterly unworthy to take the sacred name of Christ upon your polluted lips, then you should be unfeignedly thankful that you belong not to that great multitude of self-complacent and self-righteous religionists of whom it is written, "They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down" (Jer. 8:12). Much cause have you to praise the God of all grace that He anointed your sin-blinded eyes, and that now, in His sight, you are able to see a little of your hideous deformities, and cry "I am black" (Song of Sol. 1:5).

2. You have abundant cause to walk softly before God. Must not the realization of our vileness truly humble us before Him, make us smite upon our breast, and cry "God be merciful to me, the sinner!" Yes, such a prayer is as suited to the mature saint as it was when first convicted of his lost estate, for he is to continue as he began: Colossians 2:6, Revelation 2:5. But alas, how quickly does the apprehension of our vileness leave us! How frequently does pride again dominate us. For this reason we are bidden to, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged" (Isa. 5 1:1). Beg God to daily show you your vileness that

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you may walk humbly before Him.

3. You have abundant cause to marvel at the surpassing love of the Triune God towards you. That the Eternal Three should have set Their heart upon such a wretch is indeed the wonder of all wonders. That God the Father should foreknow and foresee every sin of which you would be guilty in thought and word and deed, and yet have loved thee "with an everlasting love" must indeed fill you with astonishment. That God the Son should have laid aside the robes of His glory and be made in the likeness of sin's flesh, in order to redeem one so foul and filthy as me, was truly a love "that passeth knowledge." That God the Holy Spirit should take up His residence and dwell in the heart of one so vile, only proves that where sin abounded grace did much more abound. "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:5, 6).