

1585m  
La W 144

(2), 585 m) La W 144

LIBRARY OF THE  
GOSSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached at Scaynes Hill by Mr J W Walder on Lord's Day afternoon July 27<sup>th</sup> 1980

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. Psalm 32:1-2.

The Psalmist could well speak with authority with regard to the blessedness of the character whom he described in this text under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for we have more than one record of David having received the forgiveness of his transgressions. In the Psalm we read together he declared that by the help and grace of the Holy Spirit he was determined to acknowledge his sin and confess it. "I said, I acknowledged my sin unto Thee...I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." (Psalm 32:5) So he was favoured to prove the justice and the faithfulness of God in forgiving those sins he was enabled to confess, which pardon was freely given. For it is not because we confess; there is no merit in confession, but it is a preliminary experience to receiving forgiveness, which is unmerited, as the Psalmist proved in his own experience. In the Proverbs it reads like this: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Well, that is the way to the blessing. The experience of the blessedness of the man is through the preliminary experience of conviction and confession. And this not once only, but in the experience of a child of God he is brought to desire to confess daily his transgressions before God.

Now I feel we must go on further, for there are a number of things in the text which are inseparably connected. The next thing he says about this man is that his sin is covered. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." What are we to understand by that statement? That they are covered up, smothered over, so that they are not detected? No, not that at all; this is not what we have in the text. It is not an unholy covering and hiding of sin, but a covering of that which has been discovered, sought up, and searched out. I want to try and look at it in the uncovering, and then at covering. To use a simple illustration, we all know that the honour and glory of all administrators of the law is to uncover sin. It is the duty of an officer of the law, the judge, the police, to detect trespasses and bring the criminal to justice. The more clever they are to search into crime, the more they honour the law. Just so in the matter of a spiritual nature. The glory of the law is to make sin abound and appear exceeding sinful, to search out the hidden evils, secret sins, and secret faults, discovering them to the sinner, but not to God, for He already knows them. This goes on throughout our experience. More and more as we get older there is an ever increasing knowledge of the abominations of the heart, something discovered we never discovered before, finding in the heart such evils we never dreamed of in early days, causing one to confess with the hymn writer:

*My crimes are great, but don't surpass  
The power and glory of Thy grace;  
Great God! Thy nature has no bound,  
So let Thy pardoning love be found.*

There will be an uncovering, there will be a searching, a probing. This is the lawful use of all that which is appointed for the discovering, the detecting of crimes and sin, and bringing them to light. But now it is God's glory, grace, goodness, and mercy to cover sins. Those crimes that are detected,

discovered, brought to light, it is His glory to cover. It does not mean that God in any way condones sin, or covers it inconsistent with His holy law, but He does so through the precious, meritorious, substitutionary, vicarious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this there is a covering of sins. I want to try and describe it a little. One part of covering of crimes is when the Lord causes the soul to know himself a transgressor in God's sight, and what it is for Moses, or the law, to come along and take them by the throat, and say, "Pay me that thou owest," the demand being accompanied with a threat of prison and death. And the poor soul begins to find he cannot keep the law, or meet its demands. His guilt and transgressions are such that he finds himself to be a five hundred pence debtor, and has nothing to pay with. Then the Lord brings him to see his sins are covered.

*'Tis perfect poverty alone  
That sets the soul at large;  
While we can call one mite our own,  
We have no full discharge.*

When the conceited, self-righteous Pharisee Simon, sought to entertain the Lord Jesus Christ in his house, there came at the same time the poor woman who washed the feet of Christ with her tears. Simon looked on with scorn, and said: "This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him." But Jesus knew the thoughts of his heart, and said: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most?" The Pharisee answered Him rightly: "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged." Jesus said to Mary: "Thy sins are forgiven." Which showed her sins were covered, her debt was cleared, that all she had incurred by way of debt by the transgression of the holy law was closed, payment had been made, and she was given a receipt: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins."

This Scripture refers to the Jewish practice of giving a receipt, for when a bill was receipted by the Jews, it was completely blotted out, it was covered so that the amount of debt could not be read. Those then whose sin is covered will know that the surety has paid, and payment will not be demanded twice. The other way sin is covered is by that way spoken of in the Scripture: "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." What is this sea but the bottomless, shoreless ocean of the merit of Christ's blood? The church's sins are covered by Christ's efficacious sacrifice and blood. That is the sea; and they are covered, never to be seen again. There is a point here I find good to bring forward. Many of God's people who hope and believe they have received pardon are troubled because guilt once removed seems to return, and remains, so they say: "How is this? If God has cast all my sins into the depth of the sea, how is it they come up against me again?" There was a time in my own experience when this did greatly trouble me, for I felt: "How is it my sin seems to return, and past offences pain my eyes, so that though my sins were forgiven I cannot forget them myself?" This grieved me for a considerable period, until I read a sermon by Mr Popham, in which he made a statement to this effect: "If God has forgiven your sins, He has also forgotten them, for He says He has cast them into the depths of the sea, and they shall no more be remembered." But he said: "Satan will remind you. It is his business to bring into bondage and fear by reminding of former transgressions; and your own heart will condemn you, but God is greater than your heart. It is not

God that reminds us, but conscience may, and Satan may, but God has cast them all into the depths of the sea.

May I ask this question: Do we know something of the blessedness of this man? Have we received the receipt? Have we seen our debts blotted out by the Surety? Do we know what it is for the Lord to take our sins, and to really take them away, so that we feel they are really gone? Though we were burdened with them, and our horizon seemed to be blackened by the sight of the mountains of our transgressions, a range of mountains perhaps, and one particular peak seems to reach up almost to heaven, but as it says in Zechariah: "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" – levelled, and no more to be seen.

"Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sins are covered." It is God's glory in the manifestation of His grace, mercy, power, and goodness to cover sin, and that in perfect harmony with His own righteousness, holiness, glory, and inflexible justice and beauty. Here "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." All of God's perfections are exercised in beautiful harmony in the covering of His people's sin. Well now, the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt, and through the Red Sea, all their enemies were dead. They thought they would never see them any more. Ah, but how a poor child of God finds there still dwells in him his old man, this wicked heart, that ever brings up all the filth and mire and mud and foulness of evil. Therefore there is ever fresh need to come before God in confession, repentance, and true acknowledgement of these trespasses that we may know they are covered. Ah, these fresh discoveries, the bringing up, and fresh manifestation of these new crimes that are felt, how we need to see them covered, put away, the debt paid!

There is just one more thought before we go on to the next part that is the parable of the poor man who fell among thieves, and the good Samaritan. The point on my mind is to speak of the good Samaritan. They came to the inn; he left him in care of the host. All was so free and unconditional; he paid the whole debt, the charge was to the good Samaritan alone. He said that when he came again, if a further debt was incurred, he would pay the same. The hymn-writer said:

*Here's pardon full for sin that's past...  
For sins to come here's pardon too.*

This precious Surety promised to pay all debts that might be incurred by His people. It is a wonderful thing to feel our interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, the surety of His people, our debts being paid, our sins covered by His blood, and all to His own glory.

We must go on to look at the next matter in our text: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.' What a wonderful thing that is! Let us try and look at the cause, the blessing, and the effect. How is it at all possible that, when a person is so abundantly and so evidently guilty of sin, this is not put to his account, or to his charge? God does not impute it to him. The answer respecting that wonderful thing is the substitution of Christ, and the imputation to Him of the sins of the church.

Now, there are two most wonderful and blessed doctrines I want to dwell upon for a moment. An amazing thing it is that God should allow a substitute. Has that beautiful subject ever been glorious in our eyes – a Substitute appointed for us, One who actually came and changed places with us, came and stood in our place, came as our representative, our surety, and bare the punishment we deserved? How indebted we are to Christ for doing this so willingly in love! Sometimes the affection of parents for their children, and a husband for his wife, are strong enough to make them willing to change places with them when they are in distress – a thing we cannot do, though we would if we could. But the Lord Jesus could, and did, change places with us. He really came and stood in our place as a Substitute. God allowed this, and not only allowed it, but also appointed the Substitute, and that none less than His beloved and co-equal Son. When the Lord Jesus condescended to be our Substitute, He was made sin for us, for God took all our transgressions and laid them on His Son, actually and substantially. He really did lay them upon Him with all their awful and tremendous weight, guilt, and filth, and then punished Him for what we did. He suffered that we might go free. He died that we might live. If we are among this people, our sins were imputed to Him. And as that is the case, God will not impute them to us. In the ceremonial dispensation, we have this taught us on many occasions, but one comes to my mind which is very blessed. When the transgressor came to the door of the tabernacle, he was to bring a sacrifice, a substitute for himself. And we read this: “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.” And that indicated that his sins were transferred from him to the substitute, that his sins were imputed to the substitute. “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Now have we not sung together of the act, and blessed, holy enjoyment of God given faith?

*My faith would lay her hand  
On that dear head of Thine;  
While like a penitent I stand,  
And there confess my sin.*

If we are favoured to do that, we have the experience of the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of the merit of Christ's sacrifice to us – it is both ways – the transferring of our sin to Him, and His merit to us. That is the cause and the ground of the non-imputation of sin, though we are guilty of it. And "Blessed is the man unto whom God imputeth not iniquity."

I want to look a little further at this, because there is a strong inference in our text that there are things which do impute it, but God does not. The law will accuse us of it justly, very justly; conscience can justly and rightly accuse us of it; we cannot stand before conscience when it condemns, we have to plead guilty. We cannot stand against the witness of conscience. When it accuses us we know the accusation is just, and we must fall before it. So conscience imputes it. Satan solemnly and justly enough accuses us too, though there are many times when he unjustly accuses, many times he falsely accuses us. One of Satan's dreadful devices is to be a powerful tempter – and how subtle and powerful are his temptations! He will do his best to tempt God's people to sin, and then immediately turn round and be the accuser. He is the accuser of the brethren, and finds ground to turn round and accuse of iniquity. It is a wonderful thing to find that, when our own heart and conscience impute sin to us (and plenty of persons, godly as well as ungodly, do so) yet God does not. He does not impute it. He does not lay it to our charge, does not accuse us of it.

How then shall we look at this non-imputation of sin? I have already spoken of the ground upon which it is possible, that is, because sin has been laid upon Christ, imputed to Him, put to His account, and He suffered, bled, and died to atone for it. He suffered all that was necessary for our justification. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (of Christ) that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

I want to look at this precious matter in the proof and experience of it as recorded in one of two Scriptural narratives. Take first the case of those two characters, David and Ahithophel. Now, my friends, was David any less a sinner than Ahithophel? Were his crimes any different? Two characters and both went up to the house of God together, took sweet counsel together. David said that at one time Ahithophel was a close friend to him, his counsellor. To one God imputed sin, and the poor man in desperate sorrow took his own life and sank down into the pit. But to the other, God did not impute sin; He justified him, and that through Christ's precious blood and obedience; and it was proved in the experience of it by simple faith. You see how sovereign, how free, how discriminating God's grace is. David did not deserve the goodness of God. Ahithophel was no worse a sinner; but sin was imputed to one, and to the other it was not. "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Take the case of those other characters in God's Word: Peter and Judas. Peter's sin was just as heinous as that of Judas. Peter's crimes were not less. Sin, in whomsoever it may be found, is just as hateful in God's sight as another. Peter's sin was no less heinous; Peter was given repentance, but not Judas. God imputed sin to Judas, and he hanged himself. He acknowledged he had committed a great transgression; he betrayed his Lord, and that with a fixed determination to do so. What an alleviating consideration that is concerning the matter in the case of those who are tempted they have done the same. We read that Judas sought opportunity. He was not taken by surprise; it was a determined intention; his heart and soul was in the matter; he sought opportunity to do it, and that sin was imputed. Poor Peter denied his Lord thrice, and that with oaths and curses! I suppose, if we had been there, we should wonder if he had grace or not. But God did not impute the sin to him. Peter went out and wept bitterly. He was given repentance, and was pardoned; it was not laid to his charge, for a little later Jesus said to Mary, "Go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father, and your Father; to My God, and your God."

I must not stay too long on this, but another example comes to my mind: that of the two thieves, one an outstanding example of the imputation of sin, and the other of the non imputation of it. What was the difference between them? Both were the same, were they not? Both of them were crucified for the same crimes, and hung on the cross as their punishment for transgressing of the law of the land. They were both thieves. Both took part in the insurrection against the ruling power. Both were equally guilty, and one bore, and is bearing, his own just punishment, and now is in hell. To the other God did not impute his sin, did not charge him with it, but freely forgave him. How was it that one thief was thus blessed, blessed indeed with forgiveness, having his sins covered, and his iniquities not imputed to him? I say, how could it be? It was simply this: because the Lord Jesus was dying for him. What wonderful faith was given to the thief, as he was hanging there on the cross next to Christ, and looking upon the Man dying next to him; he saw Him, and believed Him to be Christ the Saviour, and trusted in Him for salvation, confessed his sins, sought for mercy, and was

favoured with the blessedness in our text; his transgressions were freely forgiven, and Christ promised that he would be with Him in Paradise that day. Here we have a great illustration of the nature of forgiveness, that it is sovereign, free, unmerited, undeserved, and yet absolute and complete. There was not one sin that the thief had ever committed but what was freely and fully forgiven. In these places, among many others, we have illustrated in God's Word how one's sins were taken away, but not another's. Who can quarrel with God's justice in condemning one sinner for his sins, and in His grace forgiving another whose sins were not imputed, though clearly guilty?

We must look at the last part of our text: "And in whose spirit there is no guile." Here is a blessed character described; and we must try and look a little at what it is to be truly among them; to look at the cause, and the proof, and the effect of this great matter. First, let us try and look a little at the opposite, then notice what will bring about this great change, being the real and true cause of such a change? Well, what is man by nature? He is nothing but guile, he is nothing but a lie. Man through the fall has a heart that is deceitful above all things, says the Word of God. You will never find anything to compare with it. It is worse than anything else. It is more deceitful than anything, and full of guile. Therefore it is utterly impossible for man by nature to do anything that is honest, guileless, sinless, or upright. Man by nature is full of guile, and at his best state is altogether vanity. What is vanity in one aspect of it? It is that which seems to be something when it is nothing; it is that which has the appearance of good, but when examined is hollow, vain, unsubstantial; it is all that which is flattering; it looks very good, but when put to the test is found to be worthless and valueless and empty. Such is man; he is altogether full of guile; he is nothing but a pretence, nothing but a deceiver altogether. Then if this vain man is religious, what kind of a religion has he got? He is nothing but a hypocrite, nothing but a pretence, nothing better than a Pharisee. His whole profession, his very prayers, all of his religious doings, are absolutely abominable in God's sight. He is no better than the greatest Pharisees. "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." Such have a great and wonderful semblance of religion and godliness, but they deny the power; it is only form. The Pharisee stood on street corners, and disfigured his face, made long prayers, wanted to be seen of men, coveted to be well thought of. But what was all that? Jesus said they were whitewashed sepulchres, that it looked very good on the outside, and deceived many; but inside were dead men's bones, nothing but corruption and death, all was hypocrisy. How solemn to live and die in such a state! I am sure there have been people religious enough in the head, and ready with the tongue, who have deceived God's people, and yet know nothing of godliness in the heart. That is an awful state. No words can possibly describe the dreadfulness of being a hypocrite. What a solemn awakening when such a person passes into eternity and finds all his religion was nothing but flesh, and being flesh, is as grass which fadeth and passeth away. But how blessed is the man who is without guile, "in whose spirit there is no guile."

Let us look at the cause of it. This can only be accomplished by renewing the will, and changing the heart. We must be born again. We must be converted and become as little children, or else we shall be full of guile. We must be given by the power and influence of the Spirit that which is called in God's Word the new creature. We must be born again. And if we are born again, we shall possess the heart that is described as the good and honest heart in God's Holy Word. This does not mean that such a character does not still retain their old nature, but they will hate their old man, and evil of every kind.

I want to look at this character in whose spirit there is no guile, one who is evidently and manifestly a partaker of the grace of God. Born again he must be, and therefore must be a blessed man. If he is born again, that in itself constitutes a blessing, as well the effects of it. There are two sides to it. On the negative side: "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no guile." He will tremble at the thought of hypocrisy. O he fears it greatly, and will say to God, 'I would rather be searched than deceived. I do not want to be a self deceiver, and I do not want to deceive others. I want to be right and real. Therefore, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'" That is the prayer of a sincere soul. O you will tremble for fear at the thought of being a hypocrite. Well now, do you tremble? Do I? That is the point. I know this: no real hypocrite is ever troubled about hypocrisy, but a child of God is, and he prays, and wants to be delivered from all that is not the work of the Spirit. His prayer will be: "Detect, destroy, what is not Thy own."

Secondly, this guileless character will dread presumption. "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins." His prayer will be: "Lord, do keep me from ever claiming something that is not mine. O I fear lest I should take Thy word to myself when it does not belong to me." You will be afraid of stealing and pilfering. You want to be honest before God, and never, never dare what you are not to say you are. "Let us" says the hymn-writer:

*"Never, never may we dare,  
What we're not to say we are."*

That is the negative side of it. These characters are made honest; they tremble and fear at the thought of hypocrisy, and presumption, and pilfering, and thieving.

On the other hand, wherever there is a man in whose spirit there is no guile, there will proceed from his heart pure desires after pure things. He will hunger and thirst after righteousness. He will have honest desires that are unmixed in the longings of the soul after God. Also there will be supplications and confessions that are heart-felt. Again, see how this character will, and does, fear formality, and dreads that which is just customary. These things are a real exercise to him, and he does want to be right and sincere. How he loathes lip confession and lip service. He wants his heart to be in the matter. He wants his heart to go with his prayers; wants his desires to come forth out of a feeling heart. He does not want to be left to say he is sorry for his sin; he wants to feel it; which is very different. He does not want to be left to put up long unfelt prayers as the Pharisees do. I must just quote to you the Scripture which sets this forth in a very clear and plain way. There were two who went up into the temple to pray, one was a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee was full of guile, nothing right or honest about him. He was only a nominal professor. He had only a pretence to religion, no want felt in his heart, no need, therefore he did not ask for anything; his prayer was no prayer at all. He only told God how good he was, and despised the publican. He did not ask for anything. Why? Because he had no felt need. But what of the publican? His was a sincere desire, such as the hymn writer speaks of:

*The soul that with sincere desires  
Seeks after Jesus's love,  
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires  
With breathings from above.*

Every word the publican spoke was meant. It was heart-felt. It was real; no guile about it. And what about him? He went down to his house justified. His sins were forgiven. There was no sin imputed to him. His sins were covered. All which things were proved in that he was justified by God. Well now, may you and I be caused and brought by the teaching and power of the Holy Spirit to be like the publican, and not like the Pharisee. "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no guile."

Just one more last word, and I must leave it. We are all familiar with the case of Nathanael, who was under the fig tree. The Scripture does not say what he was doing, but it is safe to say he was seeking God's mercy, and confessing his sin. "Now Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses and the prophets did write." And so he was encouraged to come; and as he was coming Jesus looked at him, and said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Here is a man that is a true seeker; he is not pretending at it; not making out he is something which he is not; but he really needs salvation, and is seeking that he might find it; which he did. He is another who is blessed in this text. "Blessed is the man 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."

May the Lord the Spirit make the truth of it out to us, and give us the experience of it, that we may know, and know increasingly, how blessed this man really is. Amen.