

SELF REVEALED AND PROFESSION SLAIN BY GOD'S LAW

"For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" Romans 7:9.

MANY churches across the land are pastored by so-called ministers that speak words of peace, comfort and consolation to dead, worldly professors who know nothing of conviction of sin and their ruined state before God. Such preachers are deceivers, knowing nothing of conviction of sin and corruption in their own hearts or their ruin thereby. They preach their easy gospel to multitudes of poor deceived church members who are comfortable with their profession, rocked to sleep by the lips of this preacher as he utters, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

The true man of God, having known and felt the work of God in his own soul, is true to his Lord's truth and the souls of men, and his preaching separates the precious from the vile. We beseech our blessed Lord for His leadership as we seek to write, to the convinced and unconvinced, upon this verse of God's holy Word.

I wish to open this text under three heads: I. Good opinion of self in a religious profession is a terrible delusion; II. Ignorance of God's holy law is the reason for this deadly delusion; III. When spiritual life enters the soul all legal hope is slain in the sinner.

I. Good opinion of self in a religious profession is a terrible delusion.

Paul says, "I was alive." What did he mean by this? He's speaking of his profession before his conversion, so how could he say he was alive? Why, he was alive in his own opinion, alive in his own conceit, alive in his confidence, alive in his comforts, alive in his joys, alive through his own performances. He was alive in the same way that vast multitudes claim to be alive, though deceived in their professions. They rejoice in this false hope of eternal life and they become angry with the minister who tells them they are dead in sin. Like Paul, who had a high, lofty, proud opinion of himself, so are these professors so sure of themselves. They may be very strict in their religious practices and activities, often saying in word, attitude, or action to those nearing them, "Make room for me, for I am holier (better) than thou."

Paul at one time, like multitudes of professors, thought he was alive while he was actually dead; thought that he was regenerated, converted, and on the high road to heaven, when he was actually in the most hopeless condition, traveling the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

Paul is writing of his own condition, as well as that of all professors under the delusion of false hope while unconverted, but when he enters into his experience of being convicted by the Holy Spirit, he is bringing in all the saints of God for all time. Religious people, before conversion, think as Paul did proudly of their lives and who they are —

their religious duties, their (better than others) blameless walk, and external privileges. They believe themselves to be alive, alive to God although dead in trespasses and sins.

Paul tells us that when this terrible delusion and false profession took place it was, as the text notes, when he was “without law.” What did Paul mean? He was bred a Pharisee and was early made acquainted with the *letter* of the law. He had thoroughly studied it and boasted of his strict observance of it. No man is absolutely without the law, but Paul, as well as all unregenerate men, was without a knowledge of it in its exceeding breadth; without knowledge of its spirituality; without understanding its extent; holding to the letter in outward living without feeling its power in the inward parts. Thus he, along with all men, was ignorant of it in this respect until conversion.

Oh, dear reader, are there not multitudes in our day who are just where Paul was when he was alive in his own opinion? It is spiritual blindness that excludes from the mind just apprehensions of the holiness, strictness, extent, and spirituality of God's holy law. Are there not countless multitudes of confessing professors of religion (ministers, elders, deacons, musicians, etc.) thinking as highly of themselves, their duties, their doings, their prayers, their church programs, their decisions, etc., as Paul did when he was alive *without law*? Are there not many of you who are as totally ignorant of your sin and ruin as ever poor Paul was when professing to be alive; like him, you are spiritually dead Pharisees!

Oh, this terrible, miserable delusion! Your being without fear, without misgivings, without trouble of heart and mind, is a clear proof that you are dead, while thinking yourself to be alive. While the trembling, struggling, seeking sinner sees himself as a chief-sinner, trembling with remorse over his wicked heart and evil nature, the unconvinced religionist continues on in his delusion.

II. Ignorance of God's holy law is the reason for this deadly delusion.

The young ruler in the gospels who came to Christ was equally totally ignorant, along with Paul, of the true meaning of the law of God. This young man was amiable, sincere, and highly religious. He was very careful about every detail of his behavior in keeping the letter of the law; but he did not know its meaning in God's sense of it; and, notwithstanding his religion and his piety, he was in a hopeless spiritually dead state. He and Paul were thus ignorant of the law, and so “without law,” and so without God!

Paul thought murder was only the act of taking one's life; idolatry to him meant doing homage to a graven image; adultery meant nothing but overt impurity; stealing meant overt robbery; lying meant nothing but deliberate falsehood, etc. And he was quite happy with himself, for he had never done any of these things. Oh, how many there are in our day as thoroughly ignorant on these matters as Paul was! Because they lead a so-called clean life by keeping the letter of the law, they imagine themselves alive; there is no fear in their souls and they have no doubt of their salvation. Oh my reader, are you one of these? Are there some of you who are ready to say with the Pharisees of old, “I thank God I am not as other men! I live a good clean life, never stole anything, have

never taken a human life, never lied, never got drunk, never committed uncleanness, etc., and so I'm in no danger!"

Oh, friend, you are alive only in your own opinion, while in reality spiritually dead, thinking you live. You go regularly to church, listen to sermons with attention, but nothing will convince you that you are a sinner. You are without of the spirituality of God's holy law. Christ dealt with this in His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. You think that you are fine because you've never murdered anyone nor committed overt acts as just mentioned. But our Lord said that we *are guilty* of murder in our heart, for we've been angry with someone, and although we did not take their life, in our evil hearts, we wanted to. Our Lord said just a look of lust showed our corruption inwardly. You may be a whited sepulchre — a wicked wretch, with paint and pretty decoration on the exterior, while your inside is total corruption in the sight of a holy God.

III. When spiritual life enters the soul all legal hope is slain in the sinner.

"But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." The commandment is the law, and Paul meant that when the law came home to his heart and conscience in all its spiritually — when I was convinced by it that I was a guilty, undone sinner — when the Holy Spirit enlightened me to the perfection of God's law — then "sin revived, and I died!" No little general statement like you hear from the "good" religious folks, "Everybody is a sinner so I guess I am too." No! This was a traumatic experience that mere "little decision making professors" know nothing about. This is the experience of all truly converted sinners, known and felt only in the truly converted, as their eyes of understanding are opened by the Holy Spirit.

The fact is, sin is in every man but it is asleep. It is asleep in the self righteous and hypocrite — asleep, i.e., as to its awful nature, in all the unconverted; but when the Holy Spirit enters into a person, bringing God's holy law with Him, to prove and make real to the poor soul its desperate condition and circumstances, his hope of heaven dies, his supposed *worthiness* dies, his self esteem dies, his peace of mind leaves him, and all his false ideas of safety are slain. He now sees how all his thoughts, words, and deeds were at war with the true intent and just demands of God's holy law. Then "sin revived" or came to life — i.e., I became sensible of the number and evil power of my sins and the wretchedness of my wicked heart, and then "I *died*" as a legalist.

In a true experience of God's saving work in the soul, the Holy Spirit leads the sinner to see, feel, and be powerfully exercised by the truths of His holy Word. This begins when a sinner is truly awakened to see his sinful nature in the light of the holiness of God, and it continues throughout his lifetime, until he crosses over Jordan. The law of God, yea God Himself, chiefly looks at the heart. The corruption of the heart, which the law stirs up as it is applied by the Holy Spirit, exits before the law comes in the power of the Spirit, and it is not created by the law, but it is discovered or uncovered by it. Now the sinner sees and bemoans his wicked heart, and therefore his desperate, helpless condition. Paul says, "My mouth was stopped; I became guilty before God; I saw myself a sinner-chief; my former hopes all gave way; I was slain to them all. All my boasting is

at an end; all legal workings failed; I died to all my carnal expectations of saving myself by anything I might do.”

Every real Christian experiences this as soon as his blinded eyes are opened to discern the spirituality of God’s law; he sees in himself the fearful workings of that corruption in the heart, which having not seen before, gave him no uneasiness. Ah, but now that the mask falls off — the corruption of nature is seen — and his Pharisaical life is killed. At the moment that Paul died, in the sense of our text, he was really brought to spiritual life, that then he might live unto God (Gal.2:9)!

It is a vital issue with us, my friend, and therefore we must all ask ourselves the question, what do we know of this experience of being *slain to everything of self*? The Scripture is clear: in bringing a sinner to salvation in Christ, the Holy Spirit shows that sinner himself (his corruption in God’s sight) and then He shows the sinner the glory of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. You that are so “*sure*” of yourself: if your lives and actions were a million times better than they are, you must still perish everlastingly, except you die to all your legal hope.

Paul’s spiritual condition before this was all delusion and so is yours. Oh may the Spirit of God awaken you! He alone can do it.

To you that have died to all legal hope, you may bless God for being slain by the work of His holy law in the hands of the Holy Spirit. He has graciously wounded you, that He may mercifully heal you! Oh, bow before Him that He may raise you up! But you often complain of the iniquity and corruption within you. Bless God that you are brought to the knowledge of yourself and wrought in your innermost being is the God-given desire to be rid of all corruption of heart. This is a sure sign of the life of God in the soul. A dead man (with no spiritual life) does not and cannot, complain of his need. Look at the godly complaints of the apostle Paul 25 years after his saving encounter with Christ, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24); that of the God-fearing man Job, “I am vile!” (Job 40:4); the man after God’s own heart, David, saying, “Create in me a clean heart, O God!” (Psa. 51:10); the evangelical prophet Isaiah, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips!” (Isa. 6:5). This is the language of those to whom “the commandment came” and now, by pure grace, it’s your experience of this work of God of showing you yourself, that brings this language from your new heart, to your lips. The “commandment” would not have come had it not been sent, and it came to accomplish that which is God’s good pleasure, no less than your eternal salvation. Bless His holy name!

When Paul said in verse 24 of the seventh chapter of Romans, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death,” he is speaking the heart-language of every regenerate child of God, and he continues in verse 25, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” No one ever sees by God-given spiritual eyes or knows, by inward God-wrought revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ in a saving way, until they have seen and felt that, in themselves, they are poor, and blind, and naked, and guilty, and vile, and wretched, and helpless. Thank God that in our distress He hears us

(Psa. 107) and gives us ears to hear, and eyes to see, and we are enabled to “see the Son and believe!” (John 6:40).

I close with this important truth. If your experience does not correspond with that of the people of God, as detailed in the Scriptures, you are not a Christian at all. Ponder that statement, dear reader. Oh, for the work of God in the soul, being brought to see ourselves, our dire need of Christ, and deliverance in Him.

– Lynn V. Connell