

Salvation from the Pleasure of Sin

[A. W. Pink](#)

It is here that God begins in His actual application of salvation unto His elect. God saves us from the pleasure or love of sin before He delivers from the penalty or punishment of sin. Necessarily so, for it would be neither an act of holiness nor of righteousness were He to grant a full pardon to one who was still a rebel against Him, loving that which He hates. God is a God of order throughout, and nothing ever more evidences the perfection of His works than the orderliness of them. And *how* does God save His people from the pleasure of sin? The answer is, "By imparting to them a nature which hates evil and loves holiness." This takes place when they are born again, so that actual salvation begins with regeneration. Of course it does; where else could it commence? Fallen man can neither perceive his desperate need of salvation, nor come to Christ for it, till he has been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

"HE hath made everything beautiful in his time" (Eccles. 3:11), and much of the beauty of God's spiritual handiwork is lost upon us unless we duly observe their "time." Has not the Spirit Himself emphasized this in the express enumeration He has given us in, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29-30). Verse 29 announces the divine fore-ordination; verse 30 states the manner of its actualization. It seems passing strange that with this divinely defined method before them, that so many preachers begin with our justification, instead of with that effectual call (from death unto life — our regeneration) which precedes it. Surely it is most obvious that regeneration must first take place in order to lay a foundation for our justification. Justification is by faith (Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:8), and the sinner must be divinely quickened before he is capable of believing savingly.

AH, does not the last statement made throw light upon and explain what we have said is so "passing strange"? Preachers today are so thoroughly imbued with free-willism that they have departed almost wholly from that sound evangelism which marked our forefathers. The radical difference between Arminianism and Calvinism is that the system of the former revolves about the creature, whereas the system of the latter has the Creator for the center of its orbit. The Arminian allots to man the first place, the Calvinist gives God that position of honor. Thus the Arminian begins his discussion of salvation with justification, for the sinner must *believe* before he can be forgiven; further

back he will not go, for he is unwilling that man should be made *nothing* of. But the instructed Calvinist begins with election, descends to regeneration, and then shows that being born again (by the sovereign act of God, in which the creature has no part) the sinner is made capable of savingly believing the gospel.

SAVED from the pleasure or love of sin. What multitudes of people would strongly resent being told that they delighted in evil! They would indignantly ask if we suppose them to be moral perverts? No indeed; a person may be thoroughly chaste and yet delight in evil. It may be that some of our own readers repudiate the charge that they have ever taken *pleasure* in sin, and would claim, on the contrary, that from earliest recollection they have detested wickedness in all its forms. Nor would we dare to call into question their sincerity; instead, we point out that it only affords another exemplification of the solemn fact that “the heart is *deceitful* above all things” (Jer. 17:9). But this is a matter that is not open to argument: the plain teaching of God's Word deciding the point once for all, and beyond its verdict there is no appeal. What, then, say the Scriptures?

SO far from God's Word denying that there is any delight to be found therein, it expressly speaks of “the *pleasures* of sin,” yet it immediately warns us that those pleasures are but “for a season” (Heb. 11:25), for the after-math is painful and not pleasant; yea, unless God intervenes in His sovereign grace, they entail eternal torment. So, too, the Word refers to those who are “*lovers of pleasure* more than lovers of God” (II Tim. 3:4). It is indeed striking to observe how often this discordant note is struck in Scripture. It mentions those who “*love* vanity” (Ps. 4:2), “him that *loveth* violence” (Ps. 11:5), “thou *lovest evil* more than good” (Ps. 52:3), “he *loved* lies” (Ps. 109:17), “scorners *delight* in their scorning” (Prov. 1:22), “they which *delight in* abominations” (Isa. 66:3), “their abominations were according as they *loved*” (Hos. 9:10), “who hated the good and *loved* the evil” (Mic. 3:2), “if any man *love* the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). To love sin is far worse than to commit it, for a man may be suddenly tripped up or commit it through frailty.

THE fact is, my reader, that we are not only born into this world with an evil nature, but with hearts that are thoroughly in love with sin. Sin is our native element. We are wedded to our lusts, and of ourselves are no more able to alter the bent of our corrupt nature than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots. But what is impossible with man is possible to God, and when He takes us in hand this is where He begins — by saving us from the pleasure or love of sin. This is the great miracle of grace, for the Almighty stoops down and picks up a loathsome leper from the dunghill, and makes him a new creature in Christ, so that the things he once loved he now hates, and the things he once hated he now loves. God commences by saving us from ourselves. He does not save us from the penalty of sin until He has delivered us from the love of sin.

AND how is this miracle of grace accomplished, or rather, exactly *what does it consist of*? Negatively, not by eradicating the evil nature, nor even by refining it. Positively, by communicating a new nature, a holy nature, which loathes that which is evil and delights

in all that is truly good. To be more specific: First, God saves His people from the pleasure or love of sin by putting His holy awe in their hearts, for “the fear of the Lord is to *hate* evil” (Prov. 6:16), and again, “the fear of the Lord is to *depart* from evil” (Prov. 6:16). Second, God saves His people from the pleasure of sin by communicating to them a new and vital principle: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5), and where the love of God rules the heart, the love of sin is dethroned. Third, God saves His people from the love of sin by the Holy Spirit's drawing their affections unto things above, thereby taking them off the things which formerly enthralled them.

IF on the one hand the unbeliever hotly denies that he is in love with sin, many a believer is often hard put to it to persuade himself that he *has been* saved from the love thereof. With an understanding that has been in part enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he is the better able to discern things in their true colors. With a heart that has been made honest by grace, he refuses to call bitter sweet. With a conscience that has been sensitized by the new birth, he the more quickly feels the workings of sin and the hankering of his affections for that which is forbidden. Moreover, the flesh re-mains in him, unchanged, and as the raven constantly craves carrion, so this corrupt principle in which our mothers conceived us, lusts after and delights in that which is the opposite of holiness. It is these things which occasion and give rise to the disturbing questions that clamor for answer within the genuine believer.

THE sincere Christian is often made to seriously doubt if he *has been* delivered from the love of sin. Such questions as these pain-fully agitate his mind. Why do I so readily yield to temptation? Why do some of the vanities and pleasures of the world still possess so much attraction for me? Why do I chafe so much against any restraints being placed upon my lusts? Why do I find the work of mortification so difficult and distasteful? Could such things as these be, if I were a new creature in Christ? Could such horrible experiences as these happen if God had saved me from taking pleasure in sin? Well do we know that we are here giving expression to the very doubts which exercise the minds of many of our readers, and those who are strangers thereto are to be pitied. But what shall we say in reply? How is this distressing problem to be resolved?

HOW may one be assured that he has been saved from the love of sin? Let us point out first that the presence of that within us which still lusts after and takes delight in some evil things, is *not incompatible* with our having been saved from the love of sin, paradoxical as that may sound. It is part of the mystery of the gospel that those who be saved are yet *sinner*s in themselves. The point we are here dealing with is similar to and parallel with faith. The divine principle of faith in the heart does not cast out unbelief. Faith and doubts exist side by side within a quickened soul, which is evident from words “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24), In like manner the Christian may exclaim and pray, “Lord, I long after holiness, help Thou my lustings after sin.” And why is this? Because of the existence of two separate natures, the one at complete variance with the other within the Christian.

HOW, then, is the presence of faith to be ascertained? Not by the ceasings of unbelief, but by discovering *its own* fruits and works. Fruit may grow amid thorns — as flowers among weeds — yet it *is* fruit, nevertheless. Faith exists amid many doubts and fears. Notwithstanding opposing forces from within as well as from without us, faith still reaches out after God. Notwithstanding innumerable discouragements and defeats, faith continues to fight. Notwithstanding many refusals from God, it yet clings to Him, and says, “Except Thou bless me I will not let Thee go.” Faith may be fearfully weak and fitful, often eclipsed by the clouds of unbelief; nevertheless the devil himself cannot persuade its possessor to repudiate God's Word, despise His Son, or abandon all hope. The presence of faith, then, may be ascertained in that it causes its possessor to come before God as an empty-handed beggar beseeching Him for mercy and blessing.

NOW just as the presence of faith may be known amid all the workings of unbelief, so our salvation from the love of sin may be ascertained notwithstanding all the lustings of the flesh after that which is evil. But in what way? How is this initial aspect of salvation to be identified? We have already anticipated this question in an earlier paragraph, wherein we stated that God saved us from delighting in sin by imparting a nature that hates evil and loves holiness, which takes place at the new birth. Consequently, the real question to be settled is how may the Christian positively determine whether that new and holy nature has been imparted to him? The answer is, “By observing its activities, particularly the opposition it makes (under the energizings of the Holy Spirit) unto indwelling sin.” Not only does the flesh (the principle of sin) lust against the spirit, but the spirit (the principle of holiness) lusts and wars against the flesh.

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