

SIN AND DEATH.

"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 15: 56, 57.

Sin is called a *sting*, because of its effects upon the human soul. As the sting of a poisonous serpent or insect, infuses poison and pain into the physical system, so sin infuses its virus into the soul, and produces pangs peculiar to itself. A thousand things may afflict the body to produce disease and suffering and hasten death, but there is but one source of disease and pain to the Spirit, and that is sin. It is the bane of this present life; and, unless removed by the healing which flowed from the wounds of the dying Savior, its direful effects through eternity will be "a worm that will never die—a fire that will never be quenched."

In this passage it is called the *sting of death*—a sting pertaining to death. The apostle is not speaking of moral death, or of the second death—but natural death. The subject of this chapter, from first to last, is, death and the resurrection. Only one sort of death is spoken of. To call sin the sting of death, then, is to affirm that its awful effects are not confined to this life, but that they are realized in the state of death. Nay, in calling it the sting of death, rather than the sting of this life, (although its effects are so seriously realized in this life,) is an emphatic declaration that the worst results of sin are felt and known beyond this mode of being. Where there are no time-pleasures to allure away the mind from its real condition—where there are no present pleasure, and no hope for the future, the pangs which sin inflict must be felt to a much larger extent than they can be felt in the present life.

"The strength of sin is the law." Sin being only and simply the violation of law, the nature of the law violated, determines the enormity or strength of the crime. The higher the source from which law emanates, the more enormous the character of the transgression. The violation of a human, temporary law justly brings upon the guilty temporary, human punishment. But the violation of the eternal law of God merits punishment eternal and divine. The strength of sin is not *human infirmity*, as some allege, but the law of God. If God has spoken to men, in the language of men, and so as to be understood by men—if he has come down to their capacities, it matters not how weak they may be, they are under obligations to obey him; and to disobey him is to commit an offence which shall prove an eternal bar to the divine presence, unless it be mercifully pardoned through the atoning blood of the Son of God.

Sin is the sting of death to none but the sinner. The saint of God enters death's portals freed from sin, and to him "death has no sting since the Savior has died." For the health of the mortal body, which, at furthest, must soon decay, fortunes have been expended, physicians have been sought, and journeys to other climes and countries have been undertaken. What have men not given and expended for the sake of health and life! Yet bodily ailments are small things compared with the disease of the human spirit. Bodily ailments end with the dissolution of the body; but the spirit exists for ever, and without self-recuperative powers; and hence, this disease of the spirit will exist forever, without the intervention of the great Physician of souls.

And now what does it cost to receive healing from the soul's Physician. Ah! there is nothing which mortals have to pay. No money is required; none of the goods of this life; no journey to a foreign clime—nothing of this sort is required in order to spiritual health. "Come unto me," says Jesus, "and I will be your health." It is but to believe in him, repent of sins, and take upon one's self his government. And his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

The apostle, in the passage quoted, speaks of a *victory* which the saints shall achieve, "through our Lord Jesus Christ." This victory is consummated in the resurrection, when saints shall sing—"Hades, where thy victory! Death, where thy sting!" But with all saints, the conquest begins, and victory is won, in part, before they leave this world. The warfare with sin is prosecuted and ended in this life; but the victory over death is in the resurrection. Sin and death are all that obstruct the way to life eternal. Remove these, and nothing remains to be removed. They are the great enemies to our race.

We shall obtain the victory over both *through Jesus*, if obtained at all; for he alone overcame both these enemies before us. He warred against, and overcame, sin in his life, and conquered death by dying and rising. His first victory armed him for the second victory. And now those who obtain the victory over sin, through him, must obtain it "through the word of the testimony and the blood of the Lamb." Through the word; because it directs the soul to him, points to his blood as the healing balm, tells how to approach him to enjoy the merits of his healing, and teaches us how to abstain from sin in the future. Through his blood; because none of us have lived sinless; hence the need of expiation. Jesus overcame by the "word" alone; but we who have sinned, and do sin, stand in need of his blood to wash away our guilt. And thus, through faith and penitence, continued watchfulness and obedience, we may overcome our worst enemy at last, and be crowned victors through the worthiness of our Lord and Saviour.

Let no christian be afraid of death. Sin should be his only dread. Let us go to the abode of the dead without its fearful sting, and what is there to afflict! Nothing. Jesus has blest the death-passage, and made it pleasant for all his followers. He has made it possible for the saints to say, "To die is gain—to depart is better than to abide in the flesh. Thanks to his holy name. Death is no terror, then, for he makes it a season of happiness and rest from labor, till he summons his blood-bought jewels to rise from the state of death and enter upon their everlasting inheritance. Death, then, is the christian's; because made subservient to his good—a gate to brighter joys.

Can I, when lying on the couch of death, repose that confidence in my Savior which says, "My Lord is mine, and I am his," with profoundest joy, methinks, I could bid earth and its dearest associations adieu; for my rest should be sweeter than that of the first pair reposing on couches of roses in paradise—it would be innocence reposing on the tender bosom of Jesus.

"Yet the mandate eternal shall burst the cold tomb,
And virtue in beauty arrayed,
Shall start into life and eternally bloom
Where the roses of hope never fade"

A. C.—N.

—Evangelist.