

Spiritual Death.

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(Concluded.)

In some present-day churches Christ is not lifted up from the earth so that all may look unto Him and be saved. Another gospel, which is not another Gospel, has usurped the throne of the Gospel. Certain leaders in their churches have relegated to oblivion the three R's of preaching — ruined by sin, redeemed by Jesus, regenerated by the Spirit. Even some doctors of divinity proclaim those doctrines of devils: doing the right thing, keeping the Ten Commandments, the assurance of salvation by a life "by the level and on the square." "The recovery of Jesus Christ to religious

thought," says a liberal Presbyterian, "has changed the emphasis from 'What do you believe?' to 'How do you behave?' If it has resulted in our thinking less of personal sin as an individualistic offense against God, it is because it makes us think more of our relation to the social sins which constitute an offense against humanity." "The Spirit that is called the Holy Ghost can only be a synonym for that same Spirit that we know as God Almighty." (Unitarian.) "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."

The fear of losing a lucrative position has driven some leaders, outside of the Unitarian denomination, to become artful dodgers. Church and Biblical terms are employed by these men; but they are emptied of their true and original meaning. Some church announcements appearing in the newspapers bear mute witness to this juggling of terms. The average advertised sermon apparently would be appropriate also in Lutheran churches. However, the excerpts of sermons published in the newspapers on Monday mornings usually thoroughly disabuse one's mind by showing that all distinctively Christian terms and phrases have been emasculated. For example, Jesus is often hailed in substance as the Savior of mankind, as the Chief among ten thousand — in the sense in which George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were leaders and saviors. To many sincere Christians who attend services with the prayer, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth," such and similar statements of their preacher must be about as intelligible as were the oracles of Delphi. We may apply to the sermons of diplomatic preachers what some one has said of "the average metropolitan daily." "I am invariably reminded of Joseph's coat of many colors — with no Joseph inside the coat."

Strange to say, men who make the cross of Christ of none effect are attracted toward physical corpses. Reference has already been made to the efforts of the Ephesians to get into communication with the physically dead. Jesus said to the Pharisees: "Ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous." Matt. 23, 29. In a letter to the *Christian Register*, June 15, 1922, our attention is called to "the astonishing number and growth of benevolent orders like the Odd-Fellows and Masons, whose charitable activities are largely devoted to the farewell and mortuary services of their members." The pastor of a community church in one of our Western cities writes: "Relative to our movement for a cooperative mortuary, we are trying to get

the churches to finance this enterprise. We have a fine undertaker here, who furnishes casket and complete funeral appointments at about \$100, for which other undertakers charge from \$300 to \$500. We are trying to purchase his business and raise the money by twenty-year bonds, to be paid for from the business. At the end of twenty-years the mortuary will revert to trustees appointed by various public organizations and will then be run absolutely without profit." (*Ib.*) Are the dead burying their dead?

Paul's statement that the Ephesians had exhibited the spiritual deadness of their hearts by doing the works of the flesh, the world, and the devil is true also of the spiritually dead of modern times. Present-day outcroppings of dead hearts differ outwardly, but not fundamentally, from those in ancient times. But outwardly physical corpses also present different appearances. The disemboweled Judas Iscariot must have been a horrible sight. But Dives, whose body, in accordance with Jewish custom, was washed, anointed with sweet spices, and wrapped in fine linen, perhaps appeared as one who had laid himself down in peace to sleep. Likewise the differences in the manifestations of spiritually dead hearts are only superficial. In God's sight every sin of the spiritually dead Ephesians still flourishes in city and country. Therefore men are not overstating the case, neither are they twisting Scripture, when they apply descriptions written in the first century to spiritually dead men of the twentieth century. Eph. 2, 2. 3.

IV. Spiritual Death Is a State of Wrath.

Paul says: "*We were by nature the children of wrath.*" Those who are spiritually dead are children of wrath. God has no fellowship with death. "In the days of Noah the dove found no place for the sole of her foot on all the carcasses in the vast watery waste. A raven might remain, but not the dove. Likewise the heavenly Dove finds no place of repose in a spiritually dead heart."

God is not the God of the dead. By two ordinances this awful truth was made plain to the people of the Old Covenant.

1. The ordinance concerning corpses. According to Num. 19 contact with a corpse, or even a bone of a dead man, or with a grave, rendered an Israelite ceremonially unclean. The unclean were not allowed, upon pain of death, to worship in the Temple. Their hearts were not made glad with the invitation, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." God expressly said: "Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead and purifieth

not himself defileth the Tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel." This stringent law concerning the contraction of defilement by contact with a corpse was not a sanitary regulation for the safeguarding of the health of the Israelites. This becomes evident when we recall the fact that contact with the carcass of an unclean beast rendered an Israelite unclean only till evening (Lev. 11, 26), while one who had contracted uncleanness by touching a corpse was adjudged unclean for the space of seven days. Moreover, the former uncleanness required only common water for its cleansing while the latter uncleanness necessitated a twofold purification, and that with the specially prepared waters of separation.

Why did God make a corpse such a defiling thing? Because death is the wages of sin. It follows, therefore, that the purpose of the ordinance concerning pollution by the touch of a corpse was to remind the Israelites of God's hatred of spiritual death whereby temporal death made its entrance into the world.

2. The Lord's attitude specifically toward spiritual death is even more plainly revealed by the ordinance concerning lepers. A leper "was himself a dreadful parable of death. He bore about him the emblems of death (Lev. 13, 45); the rent garments, mourning for himself as one dead; the head bare, as they were wont to have it who were defiled by communion with the dead (Num. 6, 9; Ezek. 19, 27); and the lip covered (Ezek. 24, 17). In a restoration, too, of a leper, precisely the same instruments of cleansing were in use, the cedar-wood, the hyssop and scarlet, as were used for the cleansing of one defiled through a dead body, or aught pertaining to death; these same never being employed on any other occasion (cf. Num. 19, 6, 13, 18 with Lev. 14, 4—7). When David exclaims, 'Purge me *with hyssop*, and I shall be clean' (Ps. 51, 7), he, looking through the outward to the inward, even to the true blood of sprinkling, contemplates himself as a spiritual leper, one who had sinned a sin unto death, needing therefore to be restored to God from the very furthest degree of separation from Him. And being this sign and token of sin, and sin reaching to, and culminating in, death, it naturally brought about with it a total exclusion from the camp or city of God. God is not a God of the dead; He has no fellowship with death, for death is the correlative of sin; but only of the living. But the leper was as one dead, and as such was shut out of the camp (Lev. 13, 46; Num. 5, 2—4) and the city (2 Kings 7, 3), this law being so

strictly enforced that even the sister of Moses might not be emptied from it (Num. 12, 14. 12); and kings themselves, as Uzziah (2 Chron. 26, 21; 2 Kings 15, 5), must submit to it; men being by this exclusion taught that what here took place in a figure should take place in the reality with every one who was found in the death of sin — he should be shut out of the true City of God. Thus, taking up and glorifying this and like ordinances of exclusion, St. John declares of the New Jerusalem: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." Rev. 21, 27." (*Trench.*)

However, God's hatred of spiritual death is revealed not only in figures, but also in words written so plainly that he who runs may read. There are scores of passages. Rev. 21, 8 we read: "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Let us note that Paul says: "We were *by nature the children of wrath.*" Not from the fact that the Ephesians had formerly walked according to this world, the devil, and their own flesh, does Paul draw the conclusion that they were the children of wrath. In this passage the wrath of God is not represented as a consequence of *actual* sin. The words form a coordinate clause. By birth all men are children of wrath. Overt acts, transgressions of the Law, only heighten the degree of punishment. Not the number of manifestations of the spiritually dead heart, but the spiritually dead heart at birth in itself, merits condemnation.

A terrible awakening awaits those men who die depending on their good deeds, who find comfort solely in the fact that they are departing this life "with malice toward none, with charity for all." They are overlooking the words, "We were by nature," etc. And while such men imagine that they have made a covenant with death, that they are at agreement with hell, and that now they shall rest in their chambers, hell from beneath is moved to meet them at their coming, and their covenant with death will be disannulled, and their agreement with hell will not stand. "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night." Rev. 14, 11. "Then," saith the Lord, "shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me, for that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of My

counsel; they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices." Prov. 1, 28—31. The inscription over the gate of hell reads, "All hope abandon, ye who enter here!" Cp. Luke 16, 26.

V. Vivification of the Spiritually Dead.

Scripture not merely states that men are dead in sins and therefore children of wrath, but it also directs men to the Fountain of Life. Paul says, Eph. 2, 4—6: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

The idea that man by his own strength can raise himself from spiritual death is as preposterous as a resurrection of the physically dead by their own strength. Of the departed, Scripture says: "Neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun." Eccl. 9, 6. Regarding his dead child, David said: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam. 12, 23. "There is no man that hath power in the day of death." Eccl. 8, 8.

The spiritually dead are in parallel circumstances. The absence of a saving knowledge of the Triune God is an everlasting bar to a mortal's establishing a connection between himself and God. Jesus says: "No man knoweth who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." Luke 10, 22. Men have a knowledge of the existence of a Divine Architect. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." Rom. 1, 19, 20. God is not far from every one of us. Even heathen poets have said, "We are also His offspring." Moreover, in all ages all sorts and conditions of men have been seekers after God. Speaking in general of all men, Paul said on Mars Hill: "They should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him." In every place men have also given utterance to sentiments similar to those of Job, chap. 23, 8, 9: "Behold, I go forward, but God is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where

He does work, but I cannot behold Him. He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him." In vain has been the quest made by even the wise and mighty and noble after the flesh with merely the aid of human reason. God lives in another realm. "The world by wisdom knew not God." 1 Cor. 1, 21. The result of man's search for God was recorded on an altar in Athens: "To the Unknown God." But "this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." John 17, 3. Now, "how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Rom. 10, 14.

Again, men may have an enviable historical knowledge of the character of God such as Adam retained after the Fall, or as the priests at Herod's court had by applying themselves to a study of the Sacred Roll, or as the Athenians had after hearing Paul's declarations concerning God; yet no man is able to establish a connection between himself and God. Without the work of the Holy Spirit such knowledge is a savor of death unto death.

Moreover, man may find no satisfaction in his mode of life and set out on a search for a purer and holier life. Thus the Queen of Sheba felt the need and longing for better wisdom than she possessed when she made a journey to Solomon's court. Past misdeeds may loom up black, as in the case of Cain, Pharaoh, Judas, Felix, and many more. Men may have a sincere desire to amend their sinful lives, such as many of those certainly have who make resolutions on New Year's Day. But in itself this sorrow has no quickening virtue. "The sorrow of the world worketh death," say the Scriptures.

Neither can mortals with their own wisdom devise means and methods of quickening the spiritually dead. In the presence of physical death normal men realize their impotence. When Naaman, the Syrian captain, came to Jehoram to be healed of leprosy, the King of Israel exclaimed, "Am I God to kill and to make alive?" 2 Kings 5, 7. The spiritually dead, however, men seek to quicken. One writes: "Certain responsible agents of the London Missionary Society in Bangalore, India, last year [1920] prepared a hymn and prayer-book for the use of India students who have not accepted Christianity and deliberately omitted any appeal to the name of Christ. The object of the compilers was to lead Hindu and Mohammedan students to the practise of prayer to God the Creator and Father, in the hope that in this way they will make religious progress and be brought nearer to Christ." (THEOLOGICAL

MONTHLY, Vol. I, 370.) Essentially the same idea was given expression to by a distinguished member of the Church of Scotland in 1776. We read: "To spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel among barbarous and heathen nations seems to me to be highly preposterous, in as far as it anticipates, nay, as it even reverses, the order of nature. Men must be polished and refined in their manners before they can be properly enlightened in religious truths. Philosophy and learning must, in the nature of things, take the precedence. Indeed, it should seem hardly less absurd to make revelation precede civilization in the order of time than to pretend to unfold to a child the *Principia* of Newton ere he is made at all acquainted with the letters of the alphabet." (Report of Southern District, 1916, 27.)

These and similar schemes sponsored by sincere men for the production of spiritual life in spiritual corpses produce Christians who, like the statues of Pentelican marble, are beautiful to behold, perfect in every line and detail, but in whose nostrils there is not the breath of life. Man cannot generate life in the spiritually dead, and the spiritually dead themselves have but one ability, and that is the ability Lazarus had in the grave: *ὄζει*.

Vivification is a divine work. "God quickeneth all things." 1 Tim. 6, 13. On page 140 we have shown what Paul says Eph. 2, 4—6. God raised Jesus from the dead. "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father." Rom. 6, 4. God alone has the power to raise the spiritually dead. He says: "I will restore health unto thee." Jer. 30, 17. "He redeemeth thy life from destruction." Ps. 103, 4. "When I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, 'Live.'" Ezek. 16, 6. And Eph. 1, 19, 20 St. Paul states that God employed the same power for our spiritual resurrection which He used for the raising of Christ: "We believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." This passage also contains the essence of spiritual life, *viz.*, faith in Jesus Christ. "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, does what neither herbs nor niter nor snow-water can do: it cleanses men from the scarlet stains of sin. And faith in the atoning blood of the crucified Christ is the silver cord which connects men with

God. John the Baptist said: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." John 3,36. Cp. John 6, 40. 53.

The omnipotent God operates through means: the Word and the Sacrament of Baptism. These means of grace may be regarded as the blessed trysting-place of the merciful God and of spiritually dead men. But only in God's Word, in the Bible, does the Lord reveal Himself as the Source of Life. God is everywhere. Since the invention of the radiophone "there's music in the air." But man can derive no pleasure from this music unless he possesses an instrument equipped with the proper contact points. In a superior sense God fills all things in heaven and in earth. However, the only contact points entrusted to mortals are the means of grace. He that despises preaching and God's Word remains in spiritual death.

The Word of God has the power of imparting life. The one loud command spoken into the silence of the grave at Bethany, "Lazarus, come forth!" restored to Lazarus the breath of life. Although the snows of nineteen centuries have fallen upon the "good seed" of the Word, it has preserved its power. In Phil. 2, 16 it is called "the Word of Life." "The Word of God is quick," Heb. 4, 12. Jesus says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life." John 5, 24.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.

Those who have been transferred out of the region and the valley of the shadow of spiritual death no longer have fellowship with death. "God hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Those who were dead in sins are now dead to sin. "We are buried with Christ by Baptism into death." Rom. 6, 4. Paul says of the quick that they are "dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world." Col. 2, 20. Christ's blood purges the conscience from dead works. Heb. 9, 14. "We, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." 1 Pet. 2, 24.

On earth the spiritually living walk by faith and not by sight. Their life is hid with Christ in God, and it doth not yet appear what they shall be. But when the last of God's elect has been raised from spiritual death, the Lord Himself shall descend from

heaven with a shout, with the trump of God, with the voice of the archangel, and with ten thousands of His saints. And before Him shall be gathered all nations. Then the book of life, which is the book of remembrance of those who feared the Lord, shall be opened, and all those who are written in the Lamb's book of life shall be clothed with white robes, and they shall eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Then shall they appear with Christ in glory. "They shall be Mine," saith the Lord of hosts, "in that day when I make up My jewels." Then shall they be like them that dream, for there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. Their mouth shall be filled with laughter and their tongue with singing: "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Amen.
