

If Any Man Sin

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Now, this being a communion morning, it has been in recent years my practice, not to intrude into the communion service a long sermon, but to try to lay the emphasis where I believe it properly belongs on a morning like this, on the communion service itself. So that, I want merely to bring a meditation from the Scriptures.

In the book of John, the first chapter, that is, the first epistle of John, the first chapter over into the second, these familiar words. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Here are the words of the sin-hating John whose epistle bristles with condemnation of everything evil. And by no stretch of the imagination can it be said that John is excusing sin. But John, along with all other Bible writers, was a realist. And he took things as he found them and dealt with them as they were, rather than as he liked to have seen them. And his experience with human beings, even redeemed human beings, taught him that there would never be a time when there would not be at least a possibility of sin. So, in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He here gives us the truth about this. And if there's any time we ought to consider it, it is on a Communion Sunday when we partake together of the body and blood of our Lord.

He tells us here that if we walk in the light as our Lord is in the light, that we have fellowship one with another. And the translators do not know whether that "another" means with God or with people. I believe it means with people. The "we" is the antecedent, probably we, if we walk in the light, the pronoun "we." And then we have fellowship, one with another, property the "we." But we also have fellowship with God as he tells us earlier in his epistle, and says that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth isn't in us. But if we confess our sins, He's faithful and He's just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And then says that he writes this epistle in order that His children, God's children, may not sin, but that if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father.

The great factories have clinics or hospitals. They do not put those hospitals in there as an encouragement to accidents or illness. But knowing humanity, they put them in there because experience has taught them that for so many 100 people working for them at a given time, there will be a certain percentage that will either get injured or need medical attention. So they have their hospitals for the sake of the accidents.

Now, in the kingdom of God, these verses are not here to encourage sin. But they're here as a kind of spiritual clinic that says, watch out and do not sin. But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the Righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sin. And then he adds more or less as in parentheses, not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Now, I read earlier in the meeting this morning, a passage from the fourth chapter of Leviticus. And I want to connect the Old and the New Testament together here and show how the same Holy Spirit inspired them all the same. Christ walks through their corridors, never knowing the difference between the Old and the New.

I'm sure that in the fourth chapter of Leviticus, there was provided for Israel this clinic were injured Christians Jews, in the case of the Old Testament, were where believers who got into an accident where congregations that became infected with wrong, might find an immediate and efficacious remedy. Notice what they did about sin in the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament, as revealed in the Book of Leviticus. It says Moses said, and the Lord spoke to Moses and told him to say to the children of Israel, if a soul sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord. Now don't allow that word "through ignorance" there to picture for you a starry-eyed, honest-hearted person who sinned, but sinned accidentally, or through ignorance, as it says here. Think rather, that here is a careless soul who has neglected the Scriptures and neglected to hear the Word of God and who has followed more or less his own heart and has sinned against the commandments of the Lord concerning anything that ought to be done, and shant do them, there's a remedy for that man. It says later on, that when the thing becomes known, that is, when his conscience awakes to the fact that he has sinned.

Now, he divides up Israel into four or five categories here. He says, if the priests that is anointed do sin. Now I wish this wasn't here. I wish it didn't have to be here. I'm glad it is, but I wish it didn't have to be here. I remember that it was St. Teresa who said that she felt that she was the least of them all because she remembered reading about the great saints of the past, that as soon as they were converted to God, that ended their sin. And they didn't any more grieve God by sinning. And she said, I can't say that. I can't say it. I have to admit that I grieved God after I was converted, and that makes me less than they, she said. A very modest, very humble way to put it. But I think if the truth were known about any of the saints, St. Teresa's confession, would be their confession too.

I wish it were possible to anoint the head of a preacher so that he would never sin again while the world stands. It would be a most convenient way to deal with the whole thing. But if it were, then you would not have a man before you. You would have an automaton run by pulleys, wheels, and push buttons, morally incapable of doing evil, and by the same token, morally incapable of doing good. For I have insisted here in my preaching, that if man's will is not free to do evil, it is not free to do good. That freedom of will is necessary to the concept of morality. That if we are not free to do good, then we are not free to do evil. And if we are not free to do evil, then we cannot do good in the very definition of the term. That is why I have never accepted the doctrine that our Lord Jesus Christ could not have sinned. If he could not have sinned, then the temptation in the wilderness was a grand hoax, and God was a party to it. Certainly, as a human being, He could have sinned, but that He would not sin was what made him the holy Man that He was.

So that it is not the inability to sin, but it is the unwillingness to sin that makes a man holy. The holy man is not one who cannot sin. A holy man is one who will not sin. A truthful man is not the man who can't talk. He is a man who can talk and could lie, but won't. An honest man is not a man who is in jail where he can't be dishonest. An honest man is the man who is free to be dishonest, but will not.

So, it says here that the priest that is anointed, if he do sin. And the priest that stands before you and ministers to you in any given church. If that man of God, I mean of course here, it's the minister. We don't use the word priests. We're all priests of God in one sense. But this man was especially set aside to serve publicly. And if he could not have sin, then he could never have understood his people, never. He never could have known of their difficulties and troubles. A physician that never felt a pain could never sympathize with a patient. But if the priests do sin.

And what is that priest to do? Go into discouragement and gloom and lie down and say I am not like Wesley and Simpson and Augustine, therefore, I give up and quit? No, it says, then let him bring for his sin which he has sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering. And he shall bring the bullock into the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head and kill the bullock before the Lord. And the priest that is anointed, shall take of the bullock's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation. The preacher should dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the veil of the sanctuary. The priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar and sweet incense before the Lord which is in the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Now, there you have atonement. There you have God dealing in a work-a-day, day by day, dealings and remedy. You have it here. Then it says in the 13th, And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, if there is sin in the

assembly someplace. And there never was a lovelier word invented than the word "assembly." It's been taken more or less by one or two small denominations. And we don't use it much, but it's a beautiful word. It is the assembly of the saints. And if the whole congregation of Israel sinned through ignorance, that is, they don't know it's there, and the thing be hidden from the eyes of the assembly. And they have done somewhat this assembly has, or someone in it, against the commandment of the Lord, concerning the things which should be done and are guilty, when the sin which they have sinned against it is known.

Then the congregation shall offer a young bullock and they go through the same process here as they did before. And the priest shoved up his finger in some of the blood and sprinkled it seven times before the Lord, even before the veil. And he should take all its fat and so on. It is an explanation I'll not go into. And the priest shall make an atonement for them and it shall be forgiven them. In verse 22, it tells about the rulers and says, if any ruler has sinned and done somewhat against the Lord. Then in verse 27, it comes to the loveliest of them all. Priest and ruler, those words I don't take too kindly to. Priest, because of its association with Romanism, and ruler because of its association with swords and crowns and dictatorial conduct.

But this I enjoy. And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance while he does somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done and be guilty. If his sin which he had sinned comes to his knowledge, like the man who went into the far country and at last came to himself. Before he had just as been as deep a sinner. But now he came to himself and recognizing, it came to his knowledge. And here we're dealing with a common people. I love the common people. I don't necessarily love ugliness or ignorance nor crudity nor vulgarity. And if when we say common people, we mean the vulgar people, the dirty people, and I certainly don't say that I enjoy being among common people. But if when we say common people, we mean people like you and me that aren't known very far abroad and aren't having very great gifts. And we'll never get probably in the halls of fame, or many of us in who's who. Why that's what I mean. The plain people who aspire, but will never be knighted and will not win the Pulitzer Prize, nor the Nobel Prize likely, just that great multitude of people that God made.

When we look at a chrysanthemum in a show window, or in a vase, were astonished at the beauty of it. But God had a lot of help in making a chrysanthemum. People helped out on that. And for simple, plain people, I recommend a field of daisies or a field of goldenrod, nodding in the balmy autumn sun. Those are common flowers, the plain, simple flowers. The flowers that cost so much and require nurses and attendants and teachers and somebody to be always working over them, jockeying them around, they're not to my mind much worth the trouble.

But a goldenrod doesn't require anything but God's spacious heaven above and His bright sunshine and a little room. And it'll nod there in all its beauty. And the daisies that bloom and the

Black-Eyed Susans that nod, they will be there and they were there 500,000 years ago, and they will be there another 500 or 1000 years if the Lord tarries and things go on in the time to come. They don't require much there. They're the common flowers. And I believe there's more joy in coming on to a common flower in the Spring when you're scarcely expecting it, than there is in going and paying several good dollars for some flowers that have been carefully tended by horticulturalists. Now, that's not to speak against nice flowers. I like them too. But sometimes I think that they cost more than they're worth. But the common flower costs you nothing but an eye to see it, that's all. It just costs you an eye to see it. God has His chrysanthemums, I guess.

We write the stories of the great saints, and I'm a great admirer and lover. And McAfee here is a perfect worshipper of the great of the past. But I don't know. I think maybe in the long run, I'm more at home with God's common daisies than I am with the great, carefully cultivated chrysanthemums that are showpieces for the centuries.

Wouldn't it be tragic if we had to say, now God, we just have a few people in the world, just a few. We'll give you Paul and Chrysostom and Augustine and Francis and we'll give you Knox and Luther and Wesley. And that's about all we can muster. God would smile and say, no, those are my chrysanthemums. They are the great fellows that had somehow more potential and they're all right and I'm glad for them. But I'm not so poverty stricken for spiritual things that I'm going to have to tie myself up and say I have no others. Behold, gaze, look, an innumerable company that no man can number. The nodding, common flower of field and meadow that just somehow grew and nodded in the sunshine and looked heavenward and gathered the rain and the dew and loved God for His own sake. Their hands may have been grimy, and they might not have known all the learned allusions of the hyper-learned preacher. And maybe they have no degrees to their name, but there are a lot of them, and they've got upon them the marks of the family. The family resemblance is upon them. They belong to God. And maybe they didn't grow up in an atmosphere where they could cultivate themselves as others, but they were true in their day; plain people about which Gray writes in his "Elegy," the simple mute, unknown; and Milton and the plain people that shed their fragrance on the desert air.

That's my crowd. All the time, that's my crowd. I go around among the big preachers and I speak with them a little and sit down and talk with them if they want to, the big leaders and college presidents and the rest of them. And if we can talk about God or books, why, we're at home for a while, but I wander off and end up with some butcher from Atlanta or some carpenter from Detroit or some rubber worker from Akron or machinists from Minneapolis or small time farmer from Ottumwa. I feel more at home among them, because they're God's plain people, God's common people, and there's so much more of them. If you want to cultivate quantity, cultivate the plain people, the common people. And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance says the Holy Ghost, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty.

Now, here we are this morning, and I don't know but it could be that some of us common people have sinned. And I trust this morning that before we receive the Lord's body and blood, that it'll come to our knowledge, that we won't be careless about this, that it'll come to our knowledge. And if it comes to our knowledge and we know that we have sinned somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things that ought not to be done and be guilty, then what shall we do? Bow our head, like the bulrush and go to pieces and say, I can't be a Christian. It isn't possible. This is too tough. The world is too full of temptation. I am too weak. I'm too busy. I can't get anywhere. It's alright for you to talk about the great, but I can get anywhere.

Well, do you know what you're to do Brother? It says, let him bring his offering. Let him bring his offering. That offering has already been made. It doesn't mean bring your money? No, no, I wouldn't trick you like that. God help you. I'd live on rolled oats the rest of my life before I would identify giving to the church with this. Keep your money, but bring your offering. And what is your offering? Your offering has already been made, the kid of the goats or a bullock or a lamb. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his sin offering and slay the sin offering in the place of the burnt offering. You're not to quit. You're not to give up and say it's no use. I'm worse than other people. No, you're not. We're just God's common people. We believe in His Son. But it's just now maybe coming to your notice that you've sinned somewhat and are guilty.

Well, I repeat and I exhort. Don't lie down and quit. When you fall on the ice, you don't lie there. You scramble around, look a bit sheepish and get up and dust the snow off and go ahead. And if you're so badly hurt, you can get up if somebody helps you. And that's what Paul meant in the sixth chapter of Galatians when he said that if there was anybody that was hurt out a joint. I have used the word out of joint, for that's what it really is, so much that I forget what the King James version calls it. But if there's anybody that's sinned, you know, then bear one another's burdens. And if any man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such a one. It means out of joint like a bone. If you merely bruise yourself, you can get up and go away on your own power, but if the bone breaks or goes out of joint, you have to have help. That's why the Scripture says let other people pray and help you.

But for yourself, don't lie there. At least call for help. And then bring your lamb. Bring your offering. There'll be none other than the offering that has already made forever, forever efficacious. Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altar slain could give the guilty conscience peace nor take away its stain. But Christ the Heavenly Lamb takes all our sins away. They sacrifice a richer blood and nobler Name than they. Instead, the old man of God, my faith would lay her hand on that dear head of thine, while like a penitent I stand and there confess my sin. My soul looks back to see the burden Thou didst bear while hanging on the accursed tree and knows her sins were there. So, it isn't the Jew that must go out and find a lamb. The Lamb has already been

offered. But the Old Testament Jew, he had to bring a lamb. To the New Testament Christian, the Lamb has already been offered.

But you only have to lay your hand upon the head of the sin offering. My faith would lay her hand on that dear head of Thine. Why? What does it mean? It means identification. In the New Testament, there is much said about the laying on of the hand. It was symbolic of identification and union. We lay our hands on the head of the young minister being ordained to identify ourselves with him and with those who laid their hands on our head on back to the apostles, apostolic succession, really apostolic succession. And when we lay our hands on the head of the offering there in the Old Testament, they did it to identify themselves with the offering.

And the common man who had sinned was saying, O God, I deserve to die. Through the mystery of atonement, I am going to live and this lamb is going to die. But I lay my hand on his head and confess my sin. My sins will go out of me into the lamb as it were. And then by slaying the lamb, God is saying, that's the way I'm telling you that there's a Lamb coming sometime that will not only symbolically take away sin, but actually take away sin, because His blood will be richer and His name will be nobler. So now we look back and lay our hands on that Head. All the sins of the world died that day when He died. And all the sins of the ruler and the priests and the common people, all were blotted from the face of God if we only will identify ourselves with Him by faith. Believe in Him this morning.

Let a man examine himself and if in self-examination it comes to you and is discovered that you have sinned somewhat, don't get up and leave. Don't softly pass the communion plate by and sit and stew in your sour juices. Don't be like that. Dare to believe in the sacrifice. Dare to believe in the blood. Dare to believe in the identity of the returning sinner with the dying Savior. You can be cleansed this morning, completely cleansed. No matter how you came in, you can be completely cleansed. The common man who sinned came in with sin on his heart, but he laid his hand on the head of the lamb. They slew it and sprinkled its blood and he went out completely clean. You can do the same this morning. So don't let discouragement and gloom and innate pessimism wear you out, beat you down, defeat you. He is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world.

Sometimes when I am alone with my Bible, I get on my knees and go to the 53rd of Isaiah, and for every pronoun there are put my three names in. Sounds silly and if you were to hear me you would wonder if I were right in my mind, but I am. I know what I'm doing. Surely he has borne our griefs, there's your pronoun, our, I put my three names in and read it aloud. And carried our sorrows and I put my names in. But He was wounded for "our" and I put my names in, transgressions. And He was bruised for our, and I put my name in. And that's laying your hand on the head of the sacrifice and identifying yourself with the dying Lamb. You can do that this morning.

Not the holiest man in all this wide earth has anymore right to the cup and to the bread than you this morning if you will lay your hand on the Sacrifice and there confess your sin. For the worth of the Lamb will be your worth and the merits of the blood will be your merits and the rights of the Holy Savior will be your right. No man, however much he fasts and prays, however holy he lives, has any more right than you, God's common people, you and me. Make no pretenses and ask for no big place in the sun, only the right to live and bloom among God's in God's meadow among others, like ourselves, always looking upward to the Lord.

Now, the communion service will be carried on from this point. And we want to tell you that if you're visiting us, you may feel perfectly free to partake without any thought of where your membership is, we never ask any questions about that.

Let a man examine himself, that's all. Only be sure that you do nothing carelessly. And be sure above all things, you do nothing cynically or in unbelief. Whatever you do, do it reverently and meekly. And your heart will give worth, by the grace of God, your act, and the precious blood will cover, and God will strengthen you in your spirit and your mind. Then, we'll gather to the front. We're going to sing this Isaac watt number, "Not all the Blood of Beasts." We're going to quietly wait while we sing that song after we've gathered here and while we're gathering, we'll sing. And then when we've gathered, we're going to sit and quietly sing that whole song. Sing it with meaning and prayer before we proceed further with the service.