

Discerning Life in Its Effects
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 Text: 1 John 5:12
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He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son, has not life.

In summary, we have learned to discern our “life” in three causes: the will of God, the word of God/Promise, and the grace of God. All of these expressing His good pleasure and His sovereign free will. These are the first sort of signs. We proceed now to the second sort of signs (the effects and fruits of life) noting that the principal part of our spiritual life is to have our sins forgiven us. The word by which that goes is “justification.” Justification occurs when God accounts, or reckons us (an old fashioned word) righteous (on the basis of the finished work of Christ). The “pardon of our sins” is our life. If we consider the matter, a sinner, a spiritual malefactor, who is condemned by the Law—is by Law a dead man—his punishment being suspend momentarily. While awaiting execution, still in prison, the sinner receives news of his pending pardon. The King has mitigated his punishment; he deserves death, but receives reprieve and is allowed to “live.” So it is we come to the conclusion that for the condemned, pardon is the life of one’s soul! The rush of relief, the joy of pardon, the resurgence of hope which comes when pardon restores one’s future and allows the reintegration of oneself with that network of connections Friends, associates and family) testify to the discovery of “life,” granted us by reprieve.

The first effect that flows from pardon is “peace.” Something of inward refreshment, or “breathing room” as what has occurred in the sight of God is being made manifest to me—something outside of time penetrating into time. **Being justified by faith we have peace with God.** (Rom. 5:1) This is a *peace of conscience*—a manifestation of pardon in some measure. We are past fear of divine displeasure and our former disquietness (the insecurity bred by the thought that God could never pardon so great a sinner as I have been). On such a scale the thought that “our sin could exceed His grace” may say more curiously about our pride than God’s capacity! *It cannot be that sin should outweigh grace!* The weight of regret, we know, is considerable, especially when the guilt is unaddressed until much later. The “want of pardon” becomes an enormous burden—rather like Pilgrim’s backpack. “But now if God come and say, “Your sins are pardoned,” there follows a sweet tranquility of peace on the soul.” (Cotton, p.173)

Take that as contrasted with drugs and remedies that benumb the senses and stupefy the soul—as as the philosophers and physicians offer day prescribed—or for that matter “talk therapy, reframing one’s narrative” can alleviate the heaviness for a while but leave the burden unlisted, untreated. Such palliatives ignore the spiritual purpose of guilt, and its burden—which are to bring one back to God, to force one to his knees in prayers of supplication. However, one is not cured if one only feels better—the better thing is to be free of the guilty, to be forgiven entirely. That God alone can do in **unspeakable measure** (Phil. 4:7).

The way of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance (trust) forever. (Isaiah 32:17)

The righteousness pictured here is that which one possesses before a righteous king—which standing the righteousness of Christ imputes to us, *the **cause** of that peace!* “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine . . . Oh what a foretaste of glory divine!” Only those who have Christ have that assurance what an argument for knowing whether or not that is the case—we are discerning that assurance as evidence of “life” as well as of pardon.

Some may object, saying, “I’ve known that peace but it is a fleeting thing.” Consider, the permanence of our pardon may not actually be the matter here. Instead, what we may be experiencing is an obscuring of it *for want of watchfulness, and that due to lack of experience in godliness*, our new habit since salvation. And the buffetings of Satan also must be taken into consideration. Plus desertions from the hand of God by our own walking away. Buffetings, desertions may come our way and over-cloud our peace, and remove us from any sense of its existence (separate from our journeyings here below). Then it is crucial to remember, pardon is among the treasures that are also stored for us in heaven—beyond rust, rot, corruption and theft. If we know that pardon brings peace, then we seek help to remove hindrances instead of further pursuit of pardon! When Jesus declared to various sinners, **Your sins are forgiven you**, the pardon was instant, immediate and like an extended warranty it should have secured their peace indefinitely. The paralytic walked home from Jesus’ house. He might have been crippled again later, from some other cause, but his cure from the original paralysis was never revoked. We have that of logic, but there is no scriptural indication otherwise. The scenario in John 5 differs: **Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”** (v.14) Yes, stop sinning lest something worse than your prior paralysis befall you. Develop some new habits, friend. The habitual nature of sin is a weightier matter than incidental sin; sin is something avoidable and consequential but the habit of godliness does much to neutralize its power and decrease its frequency.

That brings us to the second effect: quietness. If we discern our spiritual life aright, we observe in natural life that no man has received life but he is eager to preserve it, “to save his own skin.” **Skin for skin, and all that a man has he will give to save his life.** (Job 2:4) He will expose himself to danger aplenty rather than to lose his life. Therefore there is a serious effort to maintain and keep one’s peace as a result of God’s gracious pardon. One preserves that peace above all the blessings of the world (friends, goods, lands and trades, health and liberty), one is willing to hazard them all for that peace. We have located something better than life (Ps 63:3) *Therefore, if you see God incline your hearts to be tender and chary of our peace—(that is) solicitous over it—then God has bestowed peace and pardon upon you.* (p.176) This same dynamic acts as a check on running into sin—Jesus is not likely to pardon any sin that we determined to pursue during and after pardon. The smart of playing the prodigal lies ahead for such persons. The pardoned know they are pardoned because they know the cost of the pardon, and because they resolve to walk more carefully—more holily. “This is the constant care of every Christian man: he is fearful of every sin.” (p. 176)

We say this despite notable examples of the pardoned turning grace to wantonness through sinful lusts—namely David and Peter—caving to some corruption or other. They sinned terribly. However, it is also the case that afterwards they repented mightily. in much affliction of soul! They would rather have died than repeat their transgressions. “The blotting out of the sense of pardon has been more bitter to them than death itself.” (p.177)

They shamed, loathed themselves “for all the evil they had done in God’s sight.” And, were it otherwise, their spiritual life would have withered, evaporated. At which point we might well wonder if it was ever true and sincere, the faith that they held! What a terrible price is exacted for carelessness over our peace! Again, our passion to keep that peace vouches for its existence, veracity, validity. “If we fly sin, as from the grave to hell, then surely those sins are pardoned which we do abhor and that peace and reconciliation is proceeded which we desire; that is the nature of spiritual life.” (p. 178)

As the stomach will not tolerate anything noxious, or poisonous and will vomit it out, so the enemies to our life will meet resistance and rejection. Our spiritual life cannot let sin in. “Therefore if God gives us hearts to be fearful of sin and careful to maintain our peace; it is an evident sign of the truth of our spiritual life.” (p.178) So, how stands your care to preserve your peace? To avoid the loss thereof? Such things are certainly good and true.

The third effect is assurance. **Her sins are forgiven her, which are many, for she loved much.** (Luke 7:47) In this passage there is a shout out. It is found in Jesus’ question: Simon, **“Do you see this woman?”** Jesus makes the conspicuous sinner even more conspicuous. Obviously, Simon has seen her. He has seen her and judged her to be unclean—shall we say, beneath contempt. He is revolted by her, and by what she represents (and that would be his own repugnance, his own sinfulness!). Simon’s answer is unrecorded. And remember he has seen her actually adore, even worship Jesus in front of them all. How could Jesus even let himself be touched by such a notoriously compromised woman?! No self-respecting rabbi would tolerate that! But let’s suppose for the purpose of expositing this passage, that Simon was a godly man, then his response might have run something like this. “No, Lord, I do not see this woman. How can I “see” her unless you show her to me?” Jesus sees her as justified, as righteous and represents her thus to us! Does she now incite contempt, or inspire worship?!

Now, stereotypically, we see this woman as a poor, wretched thing. I want to suggest, contrariwise, that she was actually a woman of substantial means—after all she brought a gift of expensive ointment to anoint Jesus’ head with. Bring that into focus! Perhaps her wealth secured her entrance into Simon’s home and allowed her to position herself behind Jesus, who, we may suppose, despite the carelessness of his welcome (no water, no oil, no kiss), may have occupied the seat of the invited guest of honor. She is standing behind, but front and center. This imputation of wealth (and hence standing in the Pharisaical world ironically) is supported by the force of the first few verses of the next chapter. There Luke notes the sponsorship of Jesus’ ministry by **Mary called Magdalene, Joanna . . . and Susanna, and many others** (vv. 2-3)—immediately following this incident at Simon’s house. Therefore what she does, washing his feet with her tears, kissing them, wiping them with her hair, is shockingly amplified.

But Simon doesn’t “see” her in the present, in the act of worship, because he is blinded by her reputation, in his mind, derived from her past. So, we might offer another version of Simon’s answer to Jesus’ **Do you see this woman?** It would run like this, “Well, Lord, I see this woman engaged in public passionate worship of you. She is a worshipped and she is worshipping you. What’s with that? We should only worship God. How is this justified?” Both hypothetical responses display genuine humility, an admission of spiritual blindness and perhaps more than a slight nod towards social prejudice or personal bigotry.

It is very obvious that Jesus “sees” her quite differently from others in the room. He accepts her worship and receives her as a worshipper. He confirms rather than condemns. Thereby he is acknowledging the truthfulness of her actions. He publicly affirms, in the process, his own divinity (i.e. the appropriateness of his being worshipped). This is very apparent in his words, **Your sins are forgiven**. Everyone in the room believed that only God could forgive sins (including Jesus) and thence came the response from the table guests: **Who is this** (“man” is sometimes supplied), **who even forgives sin?** The dinner party at Simon’s house is instantly transformed into a “coming out party.” she comes out as a saint (a fully pardoned sinner) and Jesus comes out as her Savior, as the one true God. So, the incident is not about the quirky behavior of **a woman of faith** only—it is a picture of the kind of worship Jesus desires much more widely: loving adoration, rooted in forgiveness and inaugurated by grace. Here is a God who suffers us to touch him, who welcomes our kisses, our tears, and our offerings such as the ointment which she brought to put upon his head. So **Do you see this woman?** is pertinent to us as well as Simon. “How can we see her, Lord, unless you reveal her to us?” Are we worshipping God as those who love God, **heart, soul, mind and might?** Or, is the Lord’s third question to Peter, **Are you even my friend?** (John 21:17) more apt for us than for her?

Does anyone imagine that he can please God apart for loving, trusting and adoring God, apart from affection towards God? I say, **love of God** can win you from sin. I am quite sure nothing else is powerful enough to do that—remembering, of course, that God is love.

This “worship” is so public, so out in the open, that it calls into serious question the whole notion that religion, say, our Christianity, is a private, personal matter! She came freely to worship Jesus and she didn’t care who saw, who heard, or who witnessed. She was emboldened by her love of God and she was determined to manifest her great love by the measure of all she had been forgiven (**her sins are many, but are forgiven her**, v. 47) regardless of what people thought of either her past or present, or even of her adoration. She bore a saintly indifference to public opinion, and to public reaction. She would, at all cost and in the face of all opposition, shamelessly worship her Lord and Savior. She had grace imparted grit. Pray for more grit. Hallelujah, she had been set free from the very shame wherewith they sought to still shame her!

Love of God, like this, signifies that our sins are pardoned, and our possession of “life” is real . . . our love of God is proportionable and suitable, *according to the greatness of our sins that have been forgiven and pardoned to us.*” (p.179) ***This is not a dead and a lifeless pardon . . . But God’s pardons do convey life into the soul, and it has this work in it . . . a great and manifold love of God.*** The woman in question was very wicked, very notorious for uncleanness, immorality . . . an Exhibit A “public sinner.” She was contagious with lust, filthy and best avoided. But Jesus is undefiled by her touch, he overcomes her wickedness and depravity and allows her to minister to him: **to wash and kiss his feet, and to wipe them with the hair of her head, and to anoint Him with precious ointment.** (Luke 7:38) Jesus follows up with the question about the creditor who forgives two debtors, one of much and the other of little, and says to his host, Simon, **Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with (common) oil, but she has anointed me with (precious) ointment.**

Therefore I tell you, her sins which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. Who did she love much but Jesus, even God?! **But he who is forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”** (vv. 44-48)

This is an episode bristling with offense: Jesus frankly calls out the lovelessness of the host, the failure of his hospitality so great that the sinner he holds in contempt has to cover for him? She lovingly, freely, boldly offered what it was his (Simon's) duty to perform, but wouldn't! The chasm between his welcome and hers could hardly be vaster! She outdid herself in honoring Jesus—and that counted for more than his proud contempt. He judged her and his behavior judged him—and he lost. He is exposed as loveless, inhospitable, censorious and unkind *for all his moral uprightness*. His “goodness” didn't count for much, his observation of the Law did even less for him. But this woman by loving God mightily came by the blessing of forgiveness—for underneath all the trappings of her sin, her garments of wickedness and depravity of life-style, there beat a purer, more loving heart than Simon's heart. The woman had faith, saving faith! **AND SHE BROUGHT THAT FAITH WITH HER THAT EVENING¹ WHERE IT FLAMED INTO WORSHIP! Jesus says so.**

We cannot miss the object of her great love: God himself. In loving Jesus, she was actively, publicly, openly loving God. **AND THAT IS THE POINT!** The Jews knew only God could forgive sins, so what Jesus says, to the one they held in contempt, **Your sins are forgiven**, he was pardoning her. He was doing “a God thing” and that also **WAS THE POINT**. That dinner was the woman's coming out party and she, who entered a repentant sinner and a forgiven saint, emerged a true worshipper . . . she left imbued with “eternal life,” free and clean and pure. She is an example to us all! There can be no doubt that her career of sin ended that night, seated behind her Savior and our God. You have to wonder what great things came to her, or came of her moving ahead. It is a story that cries out for follow-up. So, when you get to heaven, make sure you ask for her. She will be there, seated fairly high up! It is marvelous to consider that the measure and multitude of our sins may be the measure and magnitude of our love to God! And those content to stoop and serve the Lord may be sure of their future exaltation—he will lift him up.

There is such a curious metric here. As we all know any sin is worthy of condemnation; it isn't just the big name sins that matter. So the forgiveness of any sin, whether as great as Simon's uninvited dinner guest (and a follower of Jesus), as little a “sin” as we might diminish our sins to, *the idea of “smallness” is ludicrous*. Any disqualification, for any reason is still a disqualification; and the disqualified do not enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, do you ever sense peace of conscience? Or do you adhere to thinking that you have never had any disquietude? That “peace” is no peace at all! It is shallow, rootless. It did not come from a word of promise! Nor from a work of grace! But is seated in you self-love and sinful stupor.

If you say that your sins are pardoned, what care do you evidence to keep that peace? Or, to preserve it! If sin befalls you is it an annoyance to your spiritual life? *And you cannot rest until you are shut of it, quit of it, done with it?* But if you find you may quietly

¹ I have a picture of a man, who intending to propose marriage, comes to his rendezvous with the engagement ring! He comes prepared. He has already committed, the ring is merely an emblem of his love . . . and desire for commitment.

live in known sins, and your soul is never troubled, this is the barren and false peace of a desiccated soul—dry as dust, lifeless. Many in such a state do descend to hell because the peace in them is rotten, distempered. What love do you manifest for such a peace? How great and manifold is it if it be so tepid a matter? If your love is wanting, if your care to preserve is wanting what you have is not very much—it is a barren, groundless and fruitless thing. Cursed for all it's wanting.

“But if God has been pleased, and your own heart can find it so, and bear witness to your soul that God has pardoned your sins, that peace, which is in your soul, will refresh you!” (p. 182) The resultant peace will be “unspeakable and full of glory.” If you have quiet in the midst of turmoil, when everyone around is losing their minds, and you find comfort in the ordinances of God, this, too, is indicative of true peace.

There is, or was, atop St. David's Head in Wales, a very tiny chapel (room for three). I went there, braving a storm, knocked and was let in. Although the walls were weeping from the wind-driven rain, the door shut out the loud roaring. The priest was there and we two shared communion! It was quite amazing really. The very picture of serenity and calm in the midst of a tempest! The candles were lit and hardly flickered. I felt secure, at peace . . . quieted by the liturgy, and by sacrament. “You do this every day?” “Every day?” “For such a tiny congregation!” “Here,” he said, “smallness has no meaning.” Thanks be to God. Afterwards, we chatted some; he was so content, alive. When the storm seemed to abate somewhat, and we descended together to the village. That is one experience I remember whenever I hear of peace **surpassing understanding**.

If when you feel this peace distant, muted, lost or decayed, do you undertake to have it renewed that you may recover it? . . . by repentance and fervent supplications ? . . . and do you take care to be above reproach before a watching world, then these things are indicative of that “life.” Do you gauge your love to God by his abounding mercies to you? And yet feel that any profession of that love must be lacking or deficient in measure, that is also a positive indication. And, finally, are you willing to serve anyhow, anyplace without regard to cost, or risk, or humiliation—then you may, by these effects know that justification has been conveyed to your own soul! “God has given you peace, and God has given you back a heart to love him” in return—so, friend, you know you are reconciled. And, as for that humiliation, you shall be exalted in heaven for it. Be sure that He will lift you up, exalt you.

Amen.