

“What Covering Doth It Take?”

Pastor Sam Richards

Sermon for 9 February 2025

Texts: Psalm 32; 1 John 2:15

When God created man, man was fleshly but without sin. It was only after his fall from grace, that temptations arose from the world, the flesh and the devil. And it was only at that time that a separation between man and God on the grounds of holiness occurred. Such was the condition of man, sinful, import and defiled, that it became necessary to consider what kind, or manner of “covering” is required to hide the filthiness of our sinful flesh from God. The corpulent fatness of fleshly sin became an offense, Man was not merely degraded, but he wallowed in it, reveled in it and relished it. It is an obscenely gross matter of horrid deformity. But, being accustomed to it, and so by normalizing it by defining our humanity in terms of it that we are baffled by the opening of Psalm 32: **Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile.** (vv. 1-2) Therein hangs the whole tale of man's sinful condition—or, rather, the whole tale of fallen man's sinful condition. This is the moral dilemma which it turns out is a problem of character—the problem of a compromised and contaminated character.

Before we proceed, with this morning's message, let's pluck some observations from these introductory verses of King David's 32nd Psalm. There are four realities here named: transgression, sin, iniquity and guile. And between these four we have suspended as it were a world of **cozening**. Cozening is an old-fashioned word for thievery. It is because of the prevalence of cozening that we have the eighth and tenth commandments: **Thou shalt not steal** and **Thou shalt not covet**. In the Oriental rhetoric, last place is the place of greatest emphasis, or prominence—the third parable is third on purpose. This practice lingers on in some curious places. Sometimes, not always the third point in a three-part speech, message, or oration carries this weight of greatest significance. In a play of five acts, the third act, the climax, is accorded such significance.¹ In “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” Falstaff declares, “I would the whole world were cozened . . . for I have been cozened.” This is massively antisocial! Such ill will befits a bitter, sinful heart—or, the curse of a sin-infested and reprobate mind. David is proof that sinful man can be redeemed and that character transformation though difficult is real, a real possibility. In the plays of Shakespeare, the paunchy, frolicking villain Falstaff suffers a great fall—his tragedy is that he proves irredeemable. And that intractability explains the separation between Falstaff and Prince Hal, the soon to be anointed King Henry V. The deep sadness of this rift between a reprobate man and his sovereign lord and king resonates with themes of demonic captivity, worldliness, and the temptations of the flesh.

It was not so from the beginning. In the beginning, when man was first lovingly created by God, our flesh was not saddled with sin. We existed in a state of moral perfection, synonymous with innocence and the human condition was blessed. As a consequence of sin, and our fall from grace, we were forbidden return to the conditions of paradise which prevailed in Eden. And we were condemned to live under the curse of the law, and to be subject to darkness, sickness, evil and death. From which state we, as a race, were in need of rescue, in need of redemption, we needed to be reconciled to God, and saved.

¹ The five acts of a play are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. www.scribophiile

Furthermore this rescue had to originate with the God of all creation: would His grace, His mercy, and His love instigate such a profound reversal? So, as we say, therein hangs the tale. Can we be changed? Can our characters undergo transformation so as to escape the world of cozening guile, sin, iniquity and transgression? Allow me to summarize these:

Transgression covers all forms of prevarication, all forms of violation of boundaries, all law breaking.

Iniquity, which entails the violation of equity and justice, is often underestimated. Equity and justice are joined at the hip—a just society is a sinless society; or it is a moral order such that immoral beings, pursuing justice, are in actuality seeking the end of their lives as sinners. They know not what they do!

Sin is missing the mark as in misguided, going wide, or falling short. It is something that cries out to be covered, or hidden from God through shame, guilt as Adam and Eve were moved to hide from the divine presence. Sin exposed them, made them feel naked.

Guile is cunning, fraud, deception and thievery. Guile is the chief characteristic of our Adversary and a major component of our sin nature.

Recently, I had occasion to share some of the foolery that I was acquainted with in my youth. I shared with the inmates the incidence of chaining a state trooper's car to a stump in response to that trooper's abuse of office/power; another incidence of storefront vandalism wherein some local lads shattered the glass windows and a third incidence of snowballing some unsuspecting girls as they walked home from school. Now I hasten to add that which I was an observer of these events by my peers, my cohorts. And although I was suspected of the first, and punished for the third—I had nothing to do with the vandalism downtown! However, and this is the reason for relating the foolery—none of those who heard of it failed to see how dumb, stupid and foolish those activities had been. No one failed to see how disastrous the consequences could have been. So the question of the hour is this: how did we come to be so careless, stupefied and dumb? Did we act foolishly? Did we act ignorantly? Scripture says, **foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child**. And it takes discipline, interaction and, oft times, punishment to drive it from us. It is a fact, our sin condition stupefies us. Part of regretting that we got caught, unfortunately, is the assertion that if only we had been smarter, cleverer, ***we would have gotten away with it***. No, it is not a matter of cleverness, a subset of guile(!), it is sin in us and the only remedy is for it to be annihilated. That Christ came and accomplished: he defeated Satan, destroyed the power of sin and accomplished the blessings of Psalm 32.

**Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose
spirit there is no guile.** (vv. 1-2)

Falstaff is hardly a child. He is a victim of bad affections, fearful, and driven spiritual cowardice. He sedates himself with food (a glutton) and drink (a drunkard). He is charged with being an Epicurean whose motto is "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die." For these flaws/faults, he is punished roundly by nearly drowning, being beaten and by being publicly humiliated. Is he corrected? Straightened? Is he converted? (You must read the play, or see the play to form your own opinion!) Minus these outcomes, Falstaff's treatment (like his abandonment by the prince) seems cruel and hurtful if not malicious.

What is clear is that ***foolishness is bound up in him. Very bound up, sin like addiction is tenacious!*** Who, or what can extract it?! The answer is Christ. Yes, Christ alone can enter in, expel and alter his character. The God who made man can, and does remake man. God has done so through the work of His Son and now by grace imputes to us, through no work or merit of our own, the righteousness of Christ and the power of Christ. The power that allowed Christ to be sinless, to avoid prevarication (that is, to always tell the truth and never lie), to live with the lines which is walking the way of the God, to always hit the mark, and to annihilate guile—its cunning, its wiliness (craft), its bent towards deception and fraud.

The expulsoy power of the indwelling Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, ***or the love of God***, is what changes things up!

THE EXPULSIVE POWER OF A NEW AFFECTION

By Thomas Chalmers

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” - 1 John ii. 15.

THERE are two ways in which a practical moralist may attempt to displace from the human heart its love of the world - either by a demonstration of the world's vanity, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon simply to withdraw its regards from an object that is not worthy of it; or, by setting forth another object, even God, as more worthy of its attachment, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon not to resign an old affection, which shall have nothing to succeed it, but to exchange an old affection for a new one. My purpose is to show, that from the constitution of our nature, the former method is altogether incompetent and ineffectual and that the latter method will alone suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart from the wrong affection that domineers over it.

This is the covering that it takes to reduce the sinner and redeem the man—the atoning work of Christ, his blood and sacrifice—these things suffice for any and all who would be saved.

Amen