

The Root and Soil of Holiness

By Horatius Bonar

Every plant must have both soil and root. Without both of these there can be no life, no growth, no fruit. The root is “peace with God”; the soil in which that root strikes itself, and out of which it draws the vital sap, is the free love of God in Christ. “Rooted in love” is the apostle's description of a holy man. The secret of a believer's holy walk is his continual recurrence to the blood of the Surety, and his daily intercourse with a crucified and risen Lord. All divine life, and all the precious fruits of it, pardon, peace, and holiness, spring from the cross. All fancied sanctification which does not arise wholly from the blood of the cross is nothing better than Pharisaism. If we would be holy, we must get to the cross, and dwell there; else, notwithstanding all our labour, diligence, fasting, praying and good works, we shall be yet void of real sanctification, destitute of those humble, gracious tempers which accompany a clear view of the cross.

False ideas of holiness are common, not only among those who profess false religions, but among those who profess the true. The love of God to us, and our love to Him, work together for producing holiness. Terror accomplishes no real obedience. Suspense brings forth no fruit unto holiness. No gloomy uncertainty as to God's favour can subdue one lust, or correct our crookedness of will. But the free pardon of the cross uproots sin, and withers all its branches. Only the certainty of love, forgiving love, can do this.

The message, “God is love,” is like the sun bursting through the clouds of a long tempest. The good news “through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins,” is like the opening of the prisoner's dungeon-gate. Bondage departs, and liberty comes. Suspicion is gone, and the heart is won. “Perfect love has cast out fear.” “When faith hath bathed a man's heart in the blood of Christ, it is so mollified that it generally dissolves into tears of godly sorrow, so that if Christ but turn and look upon him, oh, then with

Peter he goes out and weeps bitterly. And this is true gospel mourning; this is right evangelical repenting” (Edward Fisher).

There is no spring of holiness so powerful as that which our Lord assumes: “Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). Free and warm reception into the divine favour is the strongest of all motives in leading a man to seek conformity to Him who has thus freely forgiven him all trespasses. A cold admission into the paternal house by the father might have repelled the prodigal, and sent him back to his lusts; but the fervent kiss, the dear embrace, the best robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, the festal song,—all without one moment's suspense or delay, as well as without one upbraiding word, could not but awaken shame for the past, and true-hearted resolution to walk worthy of such a father, and of such a generous pardon. “Revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries,” come to be the abhorrence of him round whom the holy arms of renewed fatherhood have been so lovingly thrown. Sensuality, luxury, and the gaities of the flesh have lost their relish to one who has tasted the fruit of the tree of life.

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