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God's Way Is in the Sea (2)

God's way with the church and the believer is "in the sea" (Ps. 77:19) because we are not privy to the contents of His eternal decree. The incomprehensibility of God's decree is itself a reflection of the incomprehensibility of God. His ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:9) for we can not know the Almighty unto perfection (Job 11:7). Full, exhaustive knowledge of Jehovah's decree is as impossible as full, exhaustive knowledge of God Himself. Thus the apostle extols God's deep riches (Rom. 11:33): "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (36).

As if puny, puffed up man, with false views of his own wisdom and importance, could know God's inscrutable ways! The Almighty is not to be put in the dock by the grasshoppers and worms of the earth to answer for His doings!

This vital distinction between the omnipotent Creator and the impotent creature also means that God's way is in the sea for Satan, too. Formally, he knows more of the Lord's way than we do, being much older and more clever than we are, but he is still only a creature. Even for the holy angels, God's footsteps are not known. Michael, Gabriel and the heavenly host learn from Jehovah's dealings with His church (Eph. 3:10; I Pet. 1:12), for, though they dwell in heaven, they are decreed not decreers.

It is no wonder, therefore, that frequently we do not know the details of God's plan or why He does what He does. Sometimes, with hindsight, we understand later; in heaven, we will understand a lot more. For now, the Bible gives us the broad framework of God's work on earth with His church in Jesus Christ. We have biblical principles to understand Jehovah's dealings with us and this is one principle: God's way is in the sea! Scripture is clear but specific events in Jehovah's providence are not always so.

All this means that we must never give way to despair. Elijah lamented that "the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (I Kings 19:10). Elijah wanted to resign his prophetic office, but the Lord informed him of the remnant of 7,000 in Israel (18). God's way is in the sea!

Jacob protested to nine of his sons, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). The patriarch's faith was weak here, since "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31) and God was working all things for good (Gen. 50:20).

Remember Asaph's anguish: "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies" (Ps. 77:9). Do not despair, beloved. God's way is in the sea. You do not know what good He is working. Do not try to second guess the Almighty!

Instead of despairing, in all circumstances (especially the most difficult) our calling is to trust Him (Ps. 37:3-5; 46:1-3). We can rely on His goodness, wisdom, faithfulness and covenant mercies to work all things for His glory and our good.

If you seek guidance and support in a difficult situation, do not act according to mystical intuitions or any sinful feelings. Remember your calling, the role in which God has placed you. Apply the ten commandments, the summary of His moral will for your life. Seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

The truth that God's way is in the sea means that it is not only an unknown way (Ps. 77:19) but that it is also a redemptive way, as the context teaches (14-16, 20). By a redemptive way, we do not mean that our struggles redeem us, as if we paid the price for our delivery from sin. Rather, God applies the benefit of our redemption in Jesus Christ by faith through our various struggles.

God's way with us is designed and results in our sanctification, His bringing us more and more out of the bondage of our sin. Through his afflictions, Asaph was brought to holy meditation (10b-12) and restored to God's worship (13). This is Jehovah's goal in His dealings with us, too. Bearing this in mind is half the battle.

When we encounter difficulties, we must not think, "But I am a good person and I don't deserve this!" Remember that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). All that we deserve or merit of ourselves is hell, but by God's grace our earthly afflictions are not punishments but trials, to test and purify us.

Just as Israel had to go through the Red Sea to reach the promised land, so too we must tread this unknown, sanctifying way as the only way to glory—Thy way is in the sea! God leads His "people" (Ps. 77:20) through the sea and to the blessedness of heaven *in the church*. Israel journeyed through the wilderness together. This is the way—God's way—for His people to keep us on the right path.

Moreover, God leads His "people" through the sea and to the blessedness of heaven in the church guided by *faithful church leaders*: "Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (20). These two Old Testament office-bearers are examples to church office-bearers today. We must follow the teaching and example of faithful church leaders as they guide us on God's way in the sea (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). Through the preaching of His Word and biblical guidance from church overseers, our heavenly Father applies His redemption to us and guides us to glory.

The truth that God's way is in the sea also involves the ungodly. Pharaoh misunderstood this, thinking that he too could pass through the Red Sea, but Pharaoh's way was in the sea in a different sense! Just as the Egyptians were crushed at the Red Sea, so reprobate wicked men and angels are destroyed by Christ's cross. *Rev. Stewart*

The Unpardonable Sin

A brother from Brazil asks, “What is the unpardonable sin?”

It is probably best that I quote the three main passages in Scripture on this sin. The first text is Matthew 12:31-32: “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” It is important to understand that Jesus spoke these words in response to the wicked claim of the Pharisees that He cast out demons in the name of the prince of demons.

Hebrews 6:4-6 also speaks of this sin: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

Finally, there is I John 5:16-17: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.”

On the basis of these texts, we may come to some conclusions. Jesus does not accuse the Pharisees of the unforgiveable sin. But He warns strongly against it, because they had come very close to committing it. They had blasphemed Christ when they accused Him of casting out devils in the name of Satan. Jesus says that that sin can be forgiven. But the danger was real that the Pharisees would not only blaspheme Christ, but would blaspheme the Spirit of Christ, whom the Lord poured out on the church at Pentecost. Thus the unpardonable sin is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 6 teaches that the sin against the Holy Spirit is committed by someone in the church and under the preaching, for the Spirit works in connection with the preaching. In fact, those of whom Hebrews 6 speaks lived for some time in the church and enjoyed, though only outwardly, the blessings the Holy Spirit gave to the church. They had experienced in some measure the blessedness of heaven. They knew not only what the blessings of salvation are, but had even seen how great and wonderful they are. They knew of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and how He brought the blessings of Christ’s work to the church. They could see the priceless value of this blessedness. They spoke of their own participation in the work of Christ’s Spirit and joined the church in worship, prayer, singing and confessing the faith.

So close were they to true and full salvation that Arminians have used this text as proof for the falling away of real saints. But the Arminians are mistaken, even though the text tells us how close to the blessedness of salvation people can come, such as those who have been born and raised in the church, and have lived in it for many years.

The sin of those who leave the church and repudiate their profession is a terrible one: “they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.” Christ was once crucified on Calvary. He was crucified because neither the Jews, nor Herod, nor Pontius Pilate would confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the only Saviour.

Those who commit the unpardonable sin do not leave a faithful church for a less faithful church. They do not leave the church to live outside the church. They leave the church and openly speak against what they once confessed. They deny that Jesus Christ is God’s eternal Son. They deny that salvation is only to be found in Him. They ridicule the faith of the saints, mock Christ, speak sarcastically about salvation, laugh at the “foolishness” they once professed, and even persecute God’s people if they have opportunity. They want everyone who knows them to understand that they want nothing to do with the Christ preached in the church. That is crucifying the Son of God afresh.

John tells us that we may not pray for one who has committed the unforgiveable sin. The admonition implies that it is possible to tell when one commits this sin. Other sins committed by those from the church may be brought to God with the prayer that the sinner repent. But from this sin there is no repentance.

That is understandable. Confession of sin is the way of repentance and fleeing to the cross of Christ. But vilifying a Saviour whom they once confessed as their Lord is to shut the only path that leads to repentance and forgiveness. No man will go for forgiveness of sins to the One whom he mocks as an imposter.

The Scriptures are even stronger. The Scriptures tell us that it is “impossible” for such a man ever to come to the knowledge of his sin, see its horror, repent of it and flee to Christ for pardon. God does this. He makes repentance impossible for such a one.

This too is in keeping with God’s way of working. When people who once confessed Christ fall away from the faith, God cuts them and their generations out of His olive tree (Rom. 11:17-21). God does not return again and again to apostate people, apostate families and apostate nations.

One more remark must be made. There may be times in the lives of Christians when, in moments of distress and depression, they lose their assurance of salvation and wonder whether they have committed the unforgiveable sin. Some can become very agitated over this question. But they

must not despair, nor live in fear and doubt. One who commits the unpardonable sin is not one who is agitated about the question, nor concerned about the answer. The very anxiety that some experience when asking themselves this question and the very fear that they may have committed the sin is, paradoxically, the proof that they have not done so. If they had, they would be cold and hateful about the matter. They would not be consumed with worry and terror. They would laugh at their former foolishness. They would have no concern about the question.

When doubts and fears assail our soul, it is good to confess our sins, humble ourselves beneath God's mighty hand, confess also the sin of doubting (for sin it is) and flee to the cross for refuge. God, in His own time and way, will take His trembling child into His everlasting arms and speak peace to his soul. *Prof. Hanko*