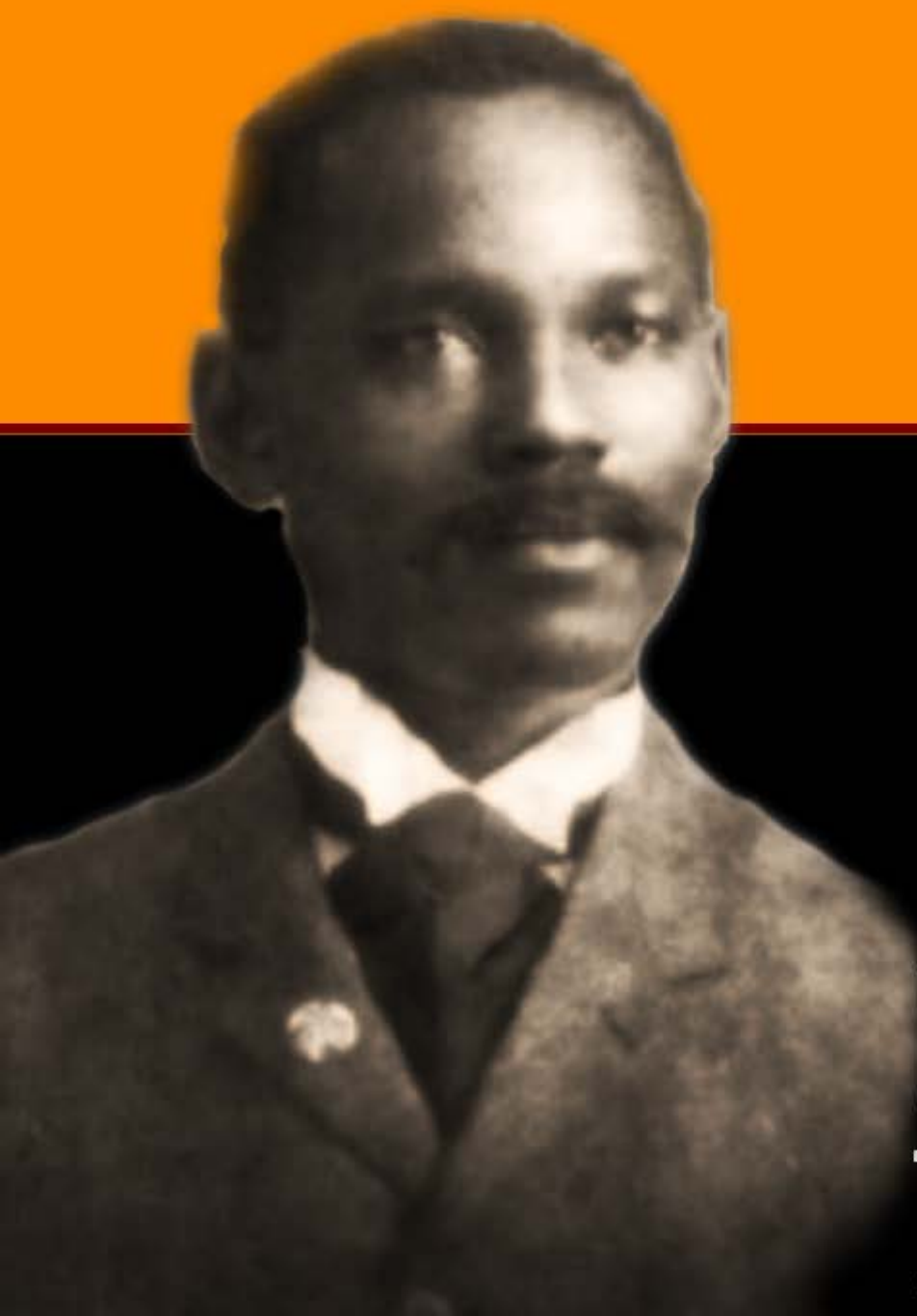


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Rev. Hargrave's Sermons



BLACK
IN
APPALACHIA

Having no hope, and without God in the world. Ep. 2:12.

Sin as Alienation from God.

These words, we are told, from a part of the description given by St. Paul of the state of his heathen converts before they accepted the Gospel of Christ. But though they were thus originally applied, it is, I think, quite allowable to see in them a description of the effect of sin generally. For the words are used of the heathen because they were sinners; it was as sinners, and in consequence of their sinful state, indeed we might say, as the essence of that state, that they 'had no hope, and were without God in the world.' I take them, therefore, as my test, when I consider the final and most fearful aspect of sin, its power of alienating us from God. 'Without God in the world.' The world translated without God, "a (illegible, MDS00303 #2), is capable, indeed, of other explanations. It might be taken to mean, as in our 'atheist' unbelievers in God. But this rendering is excluded by the qualification (illegible—possibly Greek? MDS00303 #2)- in the world, which clearly points to a contrast between the relation of the sinner to God and his relation to the world. He is in the world, and subject to all the influences of the world, and he is 'without God.' Not merely forgetful of God, or without believe in Him, but withdrawn from His life, without knowledge of Him, without His help in the dangers of the worldly life, without any hope of His mercy and love. They had no hope, and were without God in the world.'

I. This, then, is the effect of sin on the soul; it alienates the sinner from God, it leaves him in the world without God. It is not, of course, meant that any man while yet alive on earth is altogether separate from the God 'in whom we live and move and have our being.' He upholds the whole order of creation; not a sparrow falls, and therefore not a man breathes without His will, His help. Withdrawn from God the world would cease to be; there can be no such thing as absolute alienation from God in this life.

Sinners are 'without God' because they lose the power of communing with Him, of 'feeling after Him and finding Him'; and, further, they are 'without God', because He is hostile to their sins, and to themselves so far as they are identified with their sin. Man is alienated from God, and God is alienated from man by man's sin. That is the twofold aspect of this final result of sin which we have to consider.

II. Man loses by sin the power of communing with God, of relying on His help, of realizing His love.

This communion is destroyed by sin. I do not mean repented sin, for that, though it weakens and clouds the soul, is by God's mercy in Christ forgiven, and the sinner is restored to his lost union with God; but I mean sin which the soul will not give up, sin entertained and delighted in, sin which dwells in the memory and controls the will. Whenever a man is living in

sin and finds pleasure in it, the thought of God is no comfort or rest, but bitterness and disquiet, and He flies from communion with Him. For sin takes away the very condition which makes the thought of God. The stay of the soul. When external troubles or anxieties come upon a man, troubles uncaused by anything he has done, but none the less oppressive, there is no consolation or rest like that of laying the whole before God, and leaving the solution of it in His hands. It is not our own doing, its causes are independent of us; God will accept the burden we lay upon Him, and sooner or later, 'unto the godly there ariseth up light in the darkness.' But when our own sin has caused it, and we will not cease from the sin, there is no comfort in appealing unto God. The first condition of His help is wanting; we dare not give up the very cause of the trouble that is weighing us down. So the sinner shrinks from the one source of comfort, and cuts himself off from communion with God. For he trembles before the wide and unyielding claims of God on the soul. He wants to keep something back, to retain one 'bosom sin,' to hide part of himself from the Divine eyes,' and God claims the whole or will have none.

III. God Himself is not, cannot by His very nature be passive while man is forsaking Him. He is always hostile to sin, and must therefore hate that which is sinful, in so far as it is identified with sin. The sinner chooses his own pleasure, his own will instead of God's will. He has turned from God, and has chosen himself, and in the pursuit of his own ends has forsaken his Master and friend; and then when he would return, he finds that his rebellion is also banishment, that God has forsaken him, that sin, which is man's desertion of God, is also punishment, which is God's departure from man. He has preferred himself to God, and God's punishment is to leave him with himself. 'Ephiraim has joined himself to God idols; let him alone.' Yes, even in this world we see that punishment beginning, as the sinner wakes up to find himself far from the abiding source of happiness, cut off from communion with God, estranged from the Divine life; and yet he cannot forsake his sin, for it has enthralled his will, and has become itself his sharpest penalty. But this is only the partial anticipation of the 'last state of that man,' in that condition which is only conceivable to us as 'eternal sin,' eternal alienation from the life of God.

Remember, that man is responsible for his own sins. They are his doings. "It is told of a famous smith of medieval times that, having been taken prisoner and immured in a dungeon, he began to examine the chain that bound him, with a view to discover some flaw that might make it easier to be broken. His hope was vain, for he found, from marks upon it, that it was of his own workmanship, and it had been his boast that none could break a chain that he had forged. Thus with the sinner, his own hands have forged the chain that binds him, a chain which no human hand can break". I have read another story on the wages of sin which illustrates the same truth expressed in the other story!' A certain tyrant sent for me of his subjects and said,

“What is your employment?” He said, “I am a blacksmith.” “Go home and make a chain of such a length.” He went home; it occupied him several months; and he did not have wages all the time he was making it. When he brought it to the monarch he said, “Go and make it twice as long.” He brought it again and the monarch said, ‘Go and make it longer still.’ Each time he brought it there was nothing but the command to make it longer still; and when he brought it at last, the monarch said, ‘Take it and bind him hand and foot with it, and cast him into a furnace of fire.’ These were the wages of making the chain. Here is a mediation for you, ye servants of the devil. Your master, the devil, is telling you to make a chain. Some have been fifty years in welding the chain; and he says: “Go and make it still longer.” Next Sabbath morning you will open that shop of yours, and put another link on; next Sabbath you will be drunk and put another link; next Monday you will do a dishonest action; and so you will go on making fresh links to this chain; and when you have lived twenty more years, the devil will say: ‘More links on still.’ And then at last it will be: ‘Take him and bind him hand and foot and cast him into a furnace of fire.’”

We are told that there are thus things which the true Christian desires with respect to sin: Justification, that it may not condemn; sanctification, that it may not reign; and glorification, that it may not be.”

An Arminian, arguing with a Calvinist, remarked, “If I believed your doctrine, and were sure that I was a converted man, I would take my fill of sin.” ‘How much sin,’ replied the godly Calvinist, ‘do you think it would take to fill a true Christian to his own satisfaction?’ Here he hit the nail on the head. “How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” A truly converted man hates sin with all his heart, and even if he could sin without suffering for it, it would be misery enough for him to sin at all.” He will have nothing to do with that which only separates him from his best friend on earth, and his eternal friend in heaven. He says with the poet:

There is not one evil that sin has not brought me.

There is not one good that has come in its train;

It hath cursed me through life, and its sorrows have sought me.

Each day that went by in want, sickness, or pain.

And then when this life of affliction is ended, what a home for my weary heart did it prepare?

The Anger of Him whom my sins had offended, And the night, the sick night, of eternal despair.”

Therefore the Christian's hope is in Him who was made sin for him, and hope them-all sins-away up on the rugged tree of the cross. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound since sin alienates from God, let us have nothing to do with sin- Amen.

Swift Mem. College.

March 6, 1930

Having no hope, and without God in the world. Ep. 2: 12.

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These words, we are told, form a part of the description given by St. Paul of the state of his heathen converts before they accepted the Gospel of Christ. But though they were thus originally applied, it is, I think, quite allowable to see in them a description of the effect of sin generally. For the words are used of the heathen because they were sinners; it was as sinners, and in consequence of their sinful state, indeed we might

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20,

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Amen.

Sweet Home College.
March 6, 1930.