

The Nature of God

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to Ezekiel 33. Now to the Word, please, and it is the 11th verse that shall engage us:

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Every Scripture that is from the heart of God, aimed at the heart of men, carries with it a three-fold testimony. First, it tells us about *the nature of God*. Certainly this verse does. Secondly, it tells us about *the nature of man*. And, thirdly, it has something to say about *the nature of sin*. Now this verse is certainly doing that, as did the one last Lord's day that engaged us from II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Now God speaks to each generation in terms of its specific need. But He also speaks in terms of eternal principles. Whenever your understanding of the Word of God obscures the principle, as you see the particulars that are associated in the use of it, you have done damage to the Scripture. This is a principle; or, these are principles, rather, that are eternal and unchanging.

The first thing that you see as you read this text is that there is always the possibility that people that have made a good start should fumble, should fall, should fail, and should sin. I think this is patently clear. I believe it is the reason why in Hebrews we have such a verse as, "He is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25) And again "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." (I John 2:1) God is a great economist. He never provides what isn't needed, and He never warns when there isn't danger. And consequently He has stated in the context that, if a person who is righteous fails and falls into sin, that the previous righteousness does not in any wise eliminate the necessity of dealing with the present sin.

And the first thing then we have to see is, God realized that you and I would not always take the provisions that He had made, the grace that He offered, the escape that He provided, that we would be tempted, and would always live in the possibility of yielding to temptation and the capability of sin.

One of the neglected doctrines of the church, and the church has suffered no end because of its neglect, is that of the perseverance of the saints. I think it would do you well to read this and study it, use any source you have, and secure what you have not, in order to acquaint yourself, for instance, with what John Calvin taught. Frequently, we hear of Calvin as though he propounded antinomianism. You know what I mean by that, I am sure. Anti-against; nomas-the law; a teaching that after a person was forgiven, Christ had saved him from the necessity of keeping the law, obeying God, and pleasing God, and that because he was forgiven, he had a license to sin, and he could do what he wanted to do. Now this is antinomianism. Historically, it has been condemned as heresy through the centuries, and it has been unfortunately attributed to John Calvin. Now I am no particular defender of Calvin. He was a mortal, lived, died, and his mistakes have lived after him, and his blessings have continued. But the fact still remains that this is not what he taught. But one of the doctrines which characterized his teaching was that of the perseverance of the saints. And he stated it in this way; God preserves the saints by causing them to persevere. And we need to understand that when the Lord Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice. No man shall pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:27,28) He also said, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and no man shall pluck them out of my hand." And the characteristic of the sheep of the Lord is that they follow the Lord. They follow Him.

And so when God brings you out of death into life, He gives you a new heart, and a new nature, and a new spirit, and He makes you a new creation. And the characteristic of this new heart is that you want to please God. And this new nature, that you hate sin. And that this new spirit is that by His Presence, you are enabled to do what your new heart, and your new nature dictates; namely, to please God. There is provision made by the Spirit of God.

We see this in Ezekiel's 36th Chapter. We have dwelt on that in the past. He said, "I will take away the heart of stone, I'll give you a heart of flesh, and I'll put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes." (Eze. 36:26,27) God has made

provision for His children to please Him. He did not only give you a desire to please you and withhold ability. If He had done that, it would, have been the cruelest of mockery. To have given you a new heart which says you want to please God, a new nature which caused you to hate sin, and then not to have provided that which was necessary for you to fulfill your desire of your new heart and your new nature, would I said would have been the cruelest of mockeries. It could not be attributed to God. If He gives you a new heart and a new nature, then you have every reason to believe He is going to give you a new Spirit, wherein by the presence of this new-to-you Spirit, even the eternal God Himself, you will be enabled to please God. But the fact remains that, whereas the Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is victory for a child of God, there is provision, there is power for us to live a life that pleases Him, that we do not always do it, that overtaken in a fault on the one hand, led aside by desires on the other, or shackled by our ignorance, or by some other pressure from within or without, the child of God can fall into sin.

Now there is no question but what this is a possibility, and furthermore there is no state of grace where it won't be a possibility. And as long as you live, and I live, we are going to be subject to this temptation, and to the capability of sin. There is no work of God of which this Book speaks, and I know of none elsewhere, there is no work of God which will immunize you to temptation, and keep you from that place where you can sin if you choose to. But by the same token, the Scripture says, "There is no temptation overtaken you which is common to man, and He will with the temptation make a way of escape." (1 Cor. 10:13) So there is no sin that now besets you that must continue to govern you. He has provided victory.

What this text brings us to see is that there is always the possibility of a child of God falling into sin. Now we ought to realize that there is an application to the impenitent, to the world outside. And we will make that later. But right now I hear the voice of God as He pleads with these that are in covenant relationship with Him. He pleads with Israel. He pleads with the nation. He pleads with these that are the heirs of the promise, and they have been led aside in the same way that everyone is led aside. We have spoken to you about the three idols that beleaguered Israel and tripped them up, and caused them to come under God's justice, and punishment, and wrath. The worship of Ashtoroth, the lust of the flesh, for Ashtoroth was the deification of the female and the license to sex indulgence outside of the will of God. The worship of Baal which was to placate the evil spirits so that there could be prosperity and sufficient money to get what one wanted. It was equivalent to cheating and lying. He that would be dishonest in business is actually worshipping Baal in its effect. Whereas he may not ever go to an idol and offer incense, yet still it was to cheat the law of economics and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship that was involved in Baal worship.

Then the worship of Moloch for the sake of securing position, and place, and power; and again, it was to secure that which was not properly earned and deserved. And so consider the worship of Ashtoroth, and Baal, and Moloch, these being the three primary avenues of idolatry that brought Israel under such judgment. You will recognize that this is going to be the area of conflict in your life. And if you would take the Christians that have backslidden, and I'll use the term that is appropriate to some, but nevertheless one that God was pleased to use. And I think it would be expressive of having gone back from state of fellowship and consciousness of His presence to a place where one is out of fellowship. If you check into the Christians of the 20th century that backslide, or that go back go back from some place they have had with God, almost invariably you will find it is specifically to one of these three areas that we have touched on: the lust of the flesh, and how many times Christians have been just ruined there in this area. And we must recognize that it is being constant assault. Our whole nation seems to be given up to idolatry in a far worse sense than Corinth or Athens that Paul condemned. For every newsstand, and billboard, and everything that you see or hear seem to be but the hymns that are dedicated to the worship of the modern 20th century Ashtoroth. And this is an area that assaults the Christian. And God is just as concerned when His children read that which is forbidden, and they think that which is forbidden, and talk that which is forbidden by Him because of His high desire for His people, as He was when Israel went down to the temple of Ashtoroth, or to the groves dedicated to the worship of Ashtoroth.

And then we discover that the other areas are things, the worship of Baal. Now we do not have temples set aside for Baal worship in America, but nevertheless, we realize that, if you read the newspaper, the magazines, that things become the symbol of success. These are status symbols. And to possess them is to prove that one has achieved. And one has place. And then it becomes an obsession to get certain status symbols. And so we find that the whole of fashion is on this order. There are people today, in this city, that are madly consumed by an obsession to be in the latest fashion and mode, and in so doing they

are bringing themselves into the place where their approval and their happiness comes, not from something within and their relationship to God, but from without. And, my dear, whenever your happiness depends upon the applause of another, or the approval of another, you have placed it in very treacherous hands. Because it is too flimsy a support for your happiness to let it rest in the hands of others. And so this is the worship of Baal, and you are going to be tempted in this direction. You are going to be tempted along the way to allow yourself to become enamored with the thought that perhaps, if you bend here, or twist there, or turn in the other, that something is going to happen that is going to make you a happier person. Obviously, everything we do we do with some misguided idea, or properly guided idea of happiness. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is not only assured us in the Declaration of Independence, but it is put into us as part of the very structure of our personalities and our beings. And what you do, you do essentially to be happy. You do because you think that if you take this you will be happy; or if you do that, you will be happy.

Take the 3rd and just dwell on it a moment. You are going to be tempted to get some position. You are going to feel that if you have some honor given to you, some position afforded you, that you are going to be a happier person. Oh, what a delusion this is. What a terrifying delusion this is. I saw a sign years ago, and I have not forgotten it, because of the truth implicit in it. It said, "Work hard 8 hours a day, so that you can get to be boss and work 12 hours a day." And seemingly this is about the only real effect that comes from the promotion: Greater responsibility and greater difficulty.

During our recent prayer conference in White Plains one of the Pastors got up, and he said, "You know the Pastors of big churches do not have any problems." And here he was, sitting in some suburban, rural community, a small group of people, every one of whose home was in ten minutes of the parsonage, and he was able to live there with them and happily. And he just felt somehow that if he had been pastor in what he called one of the large churches (I really do not think there are any in our Society) but if there were - he would be happier. Oh, if we could understand that position is just one of the snares that has been given by the god of this world to drive us from that place that God wants us to be. And so His people, your people, my people - "God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn and live." Now you say, What does this have to do with me? Wicked? I am not among the wicked. My dear, regardless of what state of grace you may be, and how many years you have been forgiven, when in your mind and motive you have the intention to defraud God of the right that He has in your life, this intention causes you in that state to be wicked. Do you see? Regardless of whether your past sins are under the blood. Wickedness is not a state here of this - it is not a state of relationship. It is a state of attitude. The wicked is that attitude - the wicked attitude is the one that wants to get something out of the will of God, to experience something out of the will of God, to be something out of the will of God. And in this it becomes wicked.

We have had a tendency, you know, as Christians to think of the wicked as being outside the church doors, and they are. But I am trying to press upon your heart today that God is speaking to a people in covenant relationship with Him. And He is saying If the wicked... Now when you and I find ourselves being drawn by gravitational pull from within, or from pressure without, toward that which God held to be worthy of the direst judgment, do not think that because of the passing of the centuries, God's attitude has changed.

If, for instance, you want an experience outside of the will of God, do not think for a moment that because your name is on the church role, and you are a professing Christian, that it is less wicked for you than it would have been for someone that would have been under the sentence of death because of it. Never. It is equally heinous in its nature, and it is its nature that we have got to see, and recognize, and understand. Now, if this is the case, we see this and recognize this as a valid, principle of the truth, and the work of God, then we are going to know that it is God's intention and God's purpose for His people to deal with that which He condemns the same way that He expects His people to be faithful in dealing with the sins of the unsaved out in the world.

This is what you must see, if you are to see the message God has given me today. When you allow, or I allow, in our lives something that grieves Him whose name is holy, it is no less wicked, because we are called by His Name. It is no less wicked. It is no less wicked for a child of God, for instance, to have bitterness, and strife, to have anger, and wrath, and malice than it is for the demons to have bitterness and strife, and anger, and wrath, and malice. Anger, and wrath and malice has not been mitigated, or ameliorated, or somehow may less noxious because it occurs in my heart than it does in the heart of a demon.

When it occurs in my heart it is as identically the same thing as when it occurs in the heart of a demon, of the pit. Do you see? When a lie occurs in the heart of a professing Christian, it is not one less disastrous or evil in its effect than when it occurred in the heart of Satan who is the father of lies.

And this is what God wants us to see. We must call things by their name and deal with them as they are. Now, when this happens, the fear of God, the proper wholesome fear of God develops, and a right regard for the way in which our lives are to be related to Him develops. If you are prepared to say that when sin occurs in my heart, it is equally heinous as when it occurs in the heart of anyone, anywhere, there will not be a tendency to excuse it, there will not be a tendency to pass by it, and there will be the proper means of dealing with it, and God them can bless.

Now notice what He said: If My... He says, If I live, saith the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." You say, But I am a Christian, and you are talking primarily to Christians. What do you think about death? Do you remember what Paul said to the church at Corinth? They had abused that holy institution of our Lord's appointing, the Communion Table, and they came, drinking, eating, in gluttony; and when he wrote of it, he said this: "For which cause many are sick, and some sleep." (I Cor. 11:30) And this has been interpreted by commentators for centuries to mean that God, realizing the incorrigibility of even His children that they were not prepared to deal with it, was simply prepared to allow sickness to come because they had given place to the devil and it had come, and some of them had died because of it.

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psa. 111:10) Do you actually realize, dear child of God, that if you allow unconfessed sin in your life, you have made it impossible for God to protect you? Do you realize this? that there is a fence about the Christian? "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him." (Psa. 34:7) "Them that fear Him." And this means that because we fear Him we hate sin, and hate all kinds of sin. And when it occurs, we deal with the thought as though it were the finished deed. And this brokenness, and this confession, this attitude in our hearts toward sin, erects around us a wall. But when we allow sin in our life, we have tied God's hands, and it makes it impossible for Him to protect us, because He has a conflict going on. He has a conflict between the god of this world, Satan. And when you allow in your life the thing that God cast Satan out of heaven for, and sends demons to hell for, and sinners to hell for, when you allow in your heart dishonesty, cruelty, lust, selfishness, whatever it is, then there is an argument going on in the courts of heaven, and Satan is coming and saying, Now look, You cannot protect him, You cannot protect her, because this person has done the same thing You cast me out of Heaven for, and You bound us in chains for it, and You are sending these to hell for it, and You cannot protect him as long as that attitude continues. This exposes the body. This exposes the mind. This exposes the home and the family. This exposes everything to the ravishing attacks of the enemy. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." God is not pleased when we allow ourselves to have cherished an attitude which exposes us to what the enemy can do to us. God has no pleasure in this chastisement. He has no pleasure in this grief. He has no pleasure in what results from it. God does not want to see His children bruised. He does not want to see us hurt. There is a law, however, an unalterable, unchangeable law, that when a person who names the Name of Christ, a person who has been born of God allows sin to go unjudged, and unforsaken, and unconfessed, and uncleansed, he has absolutely opened the doors of his life to everything the enemy can do. And I believe that it is imperative that we should realize that the conflict is going on.

It is not just a matter of the disease germs in the air. It is not just a matter of cars going down 43rd that could jump the curb and go into a saloon and pin someone against the bar as happened in this tragedy just last Saturday, Friday. This isn't the only thing that can happen. We are in conflict with organized conspiracy against the children of God, governed by an intelligent being, Satan, with a host of evil spirits at his bidding, and they are constantly in conflict with the children of God, going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom they may devour. And when you allow in your heart and life, sin, you have absolutely tied the hands of God from protecting you. "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him."

Let me repeat it. "And the fear of the Lord is to hate evil." (Pro. 16:6) Now if you want the protection of God, if you want the encircling wall of Jehovah Nisi, if you want God to be on your side, then there it is absolutely imperative that you have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. Otherwise the gate is left open; the door is off their hinges. It is like Jerusalem with the gates burned. Anybody can come in any place they wish.

Now this is why God says, "He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked." It isn't something that He Himself is going to impose, though He must if it is undealt with. But it is the natural consequence of a morally responsible being, violating moral principles, but which ties the hands of God from affording protection that He is prepared and willing to give to His own. And so, if it was true in that day that many were sick, and some slept, early demise, early death, because of this sin at the Lord's Table, then you can understand what this means: "I have no pleasure in the early death of the wicked."

Now let it be understood by us that there is another application to the unsaved. But I want you to see another aspect of death. If Life is a Person, then to live is to have fellowship with this living Person. We read the Scripture says, "He that hath the Son hath Life." (I John 5:12) And then it tells us, Because life is in the Son. And "if we have walked in the Light, as He is in the Light, we have fellowship one with another." (I John 1:7) I cannot conceive of anything more utterly distasteful and unpleasant, unhappy and difficult, than the Christian life without personal, conscious fellowship with God. And I have known in times in the past when this fellowship was broken, and oh, what a cross, what a thing it is, and if one is sensitive to fellowship with Him they are aware when it is broken, and consequently we ought to have the greatest concern. This ought to be its own real incentive for you to keep a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men, so that you can insure continued fellowship with God.

It doesn't make any difference how difficult the situation may be. It doesn't make any difference how many problems you many have. As long as He is with you in the furnace, the fire is not hot. But O my friend, if you are standing on ground in the sunshine with a cool breeze off the mountain, and He isn't there, it is a furnace; if you have ever known fellowship with Him this is living death, to have known fellowship with God and to have grieved the Spirit, and to have that fellowship broken. And so it ought to be that there is this great sensitivity on your part to this continued, conscious, constant fellowship with Him. And this ought to be its own reason, that the moment that you grieve Him, you ask your heart, Lord what is it? I sense that You are grieved. I sense that this doesn't please You. What is it? And deal with it on the spot, because He will tell you on the spot. And if you have been in fellowship with Him you will know when it is broken, and if you know when it is broken, you are nearer than you will ever be again to fixing it right there.

This is living death. Let me see something else with you in it. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways. For why will ye die?" You will notice that there is a quality of freedom here. Almighty God who says, As I live, speaking of His eternity, and with His eternity is all of His other attributes, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His infinite power, His omnipotence, His infinite wisdom, His omniscience, everything that God is, is expressed in this word, As I live, the eternal God is speaking to man, and He is saying, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die."

Do I speak to someone that knew better days with the Lord than today. If this is not the happiest day in your Christian life you have ever had, if you haven't had sweeter fellowship already as you woke in the morning than you have ever had before, if there has not been a sense of joy that this is another day that you can walk in, closer to Him than yesterday, well put it this way, dear friend, if you ever were here in your relationship with God, and your love for God, and your hunger for God, and your burden for souls, you were here, and now you are here, do you know what has happened? You have backslidden. You have gone back from here to here, however imperceptible it might be to your friends, God knows and you know that you are not where you once were. Now you ought to have been here yesterday, and here today, and here tomorrow in your relationship. It ought to be an enlarging, expanding, and enriching relationship with Him. If it isn't, something has happened. You have gone back. And if you have gone back from here to here, it is not going to be hard for you to go back from here to here, and from here to here, and from here to here. And it is going to be a continual retrogression until you deal with it. Now what are you waiting for to deal with? What are you waiting to have happen?

Some people are praying for revival. Do you know what they mean by revival? An emotional atmosphere that compels them to do the thing that they have been unwilling to do when they did not have an emotional atmosphere, but they knew they should have done it all the time. But this isn't revival in my sense, because this would be a compulsive thing. This would be coercive. Whenever you do something because you have to do it, and the emotional atmosphere, or some other psychological pressure makes you do it, then it in that sense is not a moral action: a moral action has to be a free action. If you are forced to do it,

there is no benefit or virtue in your doing it. This is why I believe so firmly in a government of freedom of the individual, because only where there is the freedom of life can there be the development of virtue. And when a person is compelled to carry chains, then his abstinence from certain things is not proof of virtue, but simply proof of a good locksmith and blacksmith. And so it is that if God makes you, there is no benefit in what you have done.

And so, here Almighty God, the One who has the power to point His finger and send constellations into the sky, burning in their place, and following their orbits, Almighty God stands and holds out His hand to omnipotent man in his own realm and sphere, and says, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the Wicked, but that the wicked turn and live. Turn ye. Turn ye. For why will ye die." God gives the quality of freedom to your action. He allows you to face the issues, and the consequences. And, dear child of God, if you have been born of Him, passed from death to life, and have not held some injury to brain tissue, or some damage to your nervous system, so that you have lost contact with reality, if you understand words that are being spoken today, then you have moral responsibility to act upon those words to act upon that truth, and I believe that there will be for you no greater incentive, or moral pressure than you are now feeling, that you ought to. And since Oughtness is the voice of God calling to action, I ought to get this right, I ought to settle this, I ought to get this clear, I ought to get this clean, I ought to break, I ought to bend, and the sense of oughtness is the voice of God to your dear heart telling you the course that you should take. And I do not believe that there will ever be from God more moral emotional pressure than you are feeling when you are aware of what you ought to do.

Now when you are aware of what you ought to do, then your move has allowed God to move toward you, and He can meet you. But if you are waiting for a moral quality of atmosphere in a meeting sometime, when you are going to be forced to do the thing you have known all the time you ought to have done, then be sure of this, that what you do because you are forced has is no moral virtue, no moral quality to it at all. It is what you do because you know you ought to do it. You have heard Him say, "Turn ye. Turn ye." And you have the complete power not to turn. But you choose to turn. You choose to bend. You choose to break. You choose to bow. This is moral. This has spiritual quality to it. This releases God to meet you.

Now hear it again. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." If I speak to the unsaved, you that have never been born of God, this is God's Word. He does not want you to perish. God is not willing that any should perish. I speak to the Christian who forfeits so much. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: for why will ye die,..." Oh Christian friend, why will you go in living death, without the joy of the Lord, without the blessing of His presence, without release, without Him in His fullness? Why will you go? Today is the day, now is the time. And God is appealing to you to do what you ought to do just because you ought to do it. And He leaves you free, and I must leave you free. Let us pray.

Our Father, to the ones who turn, Thou does offer forgiveness. To the ones who turn, Thou dost offer pardon. To the sinners that come with their mountain, their enormous world of guilt, Thou does offer cleansing and eternal life. To the child of God who has allowed that to come into his life which grieves Thee, Thou does offer forgiveness and pardon, if we are but willing to come as Thou does bid us, taking sides with Thee against ourselves, acknowledging and confessing our sin, then we can know life which is the consciousness of Thy presence, the joy of Thy fellowship, can know life. Father, we pray today for those that have had a name to live, known better days, and in some sense have backslidden today, gone back from where they were, and they have not called it by the name wickedness, and seen how Thou didst see it. Oh, that somehow the Holy Ghost has shown it this morning. Guide us now as we close.

Dear Friends, to force moral action and not to give opportunity for moral action is derelict. I am going to ask this of you today, any of you that feel that God has said, Now I want you to do or act on you have heard, be wise. Remain seated where you are until others have gone, choir has left, just remain seated, and then, after the others have gone, I will see you, we will go together into the room to the my right, and we can have a time of prayer together. We are going to stand and have the benediction in just a moment, and then if you would like to remain, you stay, remain seated quietly in prayer, and we will have a time of prayer after the choir has retired. Shall we stand.

Our Father, we thank and praise Thee for Thy love, Thou hast given Thyself. And Thou dost ask for brokenness, and honesty, and turning, and for reward Thou does give Thyself, the fullness of Thyself. We pray today that there may be hearts that are stirred by Thy Spirit with such an intense, deep desire for better days, days they have known in the past, that they cannot leave. They will just have to remain seated, then can meet Thee as we seek Thee together. Now may Thy grace, and mercy, and peace, be and abide upon us now and until Jesus comes again. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, September 23, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1962