

"ABIDING IN HIM"

Notes of a sermon preached by Letwaba to his fellow laborers, in the Central Native Tabernacle, Johannesburg, 1932

We are sometimes in danger of regarding sin too lightly. We live where sin is constantly before us. It is spoken of, practiced, and regarded as a matter of natural course. Indeed people would like to make us believe that it is impossible to do anything else but sin. All about us are those who not only glory in sinning, and sin without a shudder, but who even despise those who are not prepared to go so far into sin as themselves.

Under the circumstances even Christians are apt to lose their horror of sin. The thought sometimes comes that perhaps it is not really so bad after all. If we considered sin as God sees it, we must admit that He can have no excuse for it, no pleasure in it. He will by no means pass it over. It will inevitably meet its reward, even though that reward may be delayed. God hated sin so much that He was prepared to pay any price whatever to do away with it. He even paid the price of His Son's agonizing death on the Cross, that He might put away our sins.

Now we have been preaching to sinners, but this afternoon I wish to have a talk with my brethren who are in the ministry. Our whole lives are occupied in turning men from sin to Christ. The closer we live to Christ, the more we love Him, the sweeter the communion we hold with Him, so will our hatred of sin be the more intense. Thus, since I wish to speak of our love to Christ, I have chosen as my text, 1 John 3:6, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not."

About His love to us there can be no doubt. It never wavers, never wanes. He has shown it in life and it has been tested even in death. You only have to look to Calvary, where Jesus died for you, and you know at once that He loves you. But our love to Him is not so constant. That is why some who profess His name are still content to live in sin. If we love Him, we will fear to grieve Him. No wife who loves her husband will willingly grieve him. She will not do what displeases him. Her very love will prompt her to do what gives him joy.

We are engaged in the godlike work of turning men from sin, but are we ourselves free from that horrible thing against which we preach? Remember that only a swimmer can plunge into the stream and save a drowning man. If you are not borne up against the floods of sin yourself, you cannot help to bear others up. When I was a boy, I used to swim in the river. One day an old man was in danger of drowning. I plunged in and pulled him out. Now had I been at the mercy of the waters myself, I not only could offer no succor to that old man, but I should have lost my own life.

Likewise if you yourselves are not living lives of overcoming sin then do not try to help others. First learn the way to walk the holy road yourselves, and then you can show others the road. What do we think of the drunkard who preaches temperance? We will not listen to him, for his actions belie his words.

A preacher must be holy. A preacher who lives in sin will damn more people than he saves. In Romans, chapter two, Paul asks, "Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?" It was evident that these people who preached to others, were not living holy lives themselves, for Paul continues, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." That is just what happens when a preacher does not live a holy life. He

turns people against his message, instead of attracting them to it. I knew a preacher at Potchefstroom, who preached to people to cease living in sin. But that man only emptied his church, for he was living in sin himself. He was a destroyer of the souls he had set out to save.

A preacher told his congregation to live lives of sobriety, and later they came to him as he sat over a pot of beer. They said, "You told us to leave that stuff, yet here you are drinking it yourself." His congregation rebuked him to his face, and he well deserved it. Our Lord tells us, "Cleanse that first which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also." Let us all pray, "Lord, cleanse me first, that I may be without sin before the people." The priest of old had to wash himself first. He must be cleansed from head to foot. He must be sanctified, and then, and not until then, could he reconcile the people.

My heart weeps over preachers who are living in sin, and at the same time calling their people to repent. They are not only destroying themselves, but they are destroying others also. Do you see that man sitting in chains? His hands and his feet are bound. He is a captive. Will you go to him and say, "Get you up and go forth to set others free?" No! Such words would be idle. He would answer you, "First set me free myself, and then will I go forth to break the shackles that fetter others."

My precious brothers, my precious women folk, are we not in danger of taking heed to others before we have taken heed to ourselves? Think what Paul wrote to the young preacher Timothy. In his First Epistle, chapter four, he says, "Take heed to yourselves . . . for in this way you will save both your-self and those that hear you." Timothy must first let his doctrine alter his own life, and in that way he could recommend it with confidence to others.

Note the sequence - first "Yourself," and then "Those that hear." Have you watched a cat as it plays with a mouse? It will allow the mouse to run away for quite a distance, and then, just as the little animal thinks it is free, the cat makes another pounce, and has its victim under its paw again. Each time the mouse plucks up courage and seems to say, "I have escaped at last," but that is no escape at all.

I know preachers who think that they have escaped from sin. For a few days, or for a few weeks they have victory over their besetments and they shout, "I am holy. All of you try to be like I am." But once more the Devil seizes them, and the next time one meets them, they are as bound in sin as ever. How can a man be freed from such a life of sinning and repenting? What is the remedy?

My text tells us how to live without sin. "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not." The secret is that of abiding in Christ. I do not see the sins of earth as I look upward into His face. Only knowing Him can make men free. There are many who know about Him, but they do not know Him. They are correct in their doctrine, and can answer all the questions of the catechism, but they do not know Jesus as we know each other. They have not made His personal acquaintance.

Love to Christ makes us to dread causing a cloud of sorrow to cross His dear face. We love Him, and so our chief delight is to please Him. The man and wife show their mutual love by the fact that they do not wish to hurt each other. They love to be in each other's company, and no other friendship is so dear. Thus we love to abide in Him, and our lives are controlled by love to Him. There are tasks that are so heavy, so dangerous, that we would not ask anyone to undertake them. Yet one who loved would dare even such a task. Why did He hang there on the tree of curse and shame? The answer is, "Because of His love to His Father and to us." Why can men live holy lives? The answer is the same. "He that

abideth in Him sinneth not." Is sinlessness drab and unattractive? Not to those who love Him. Heaven would not be heaven if sin were there. Nothing unholy shall ever find its way through those gates.

And my fellow-preacher, when sin shall have been cast out of your life, you will not have to wait to get to heaven, for you will begin your heaven right here. Our Lord Jesus tells us that if the eyes are dark, the whole body will be dark. You preachers are the eyes of the church, and if you live in the darkness of sin, the whole church will live in sin. If you want to lift your churches out of sin, then you must first be made holy yourselves. You who lead must always be ahead of those who are following. Show your people how to live in holiness of life by living the holy life yourselves.

I have no wish to hurt you, but if you are allowing sin to have place in your lives these words of exhortation are bound to wound. Let then the words that wound you also heal. From this hour live that life of abiding in Him. Spend time with Him. Enjoy His communion more than any earthly joy, and be sure of this: As you abide in Him, so you will live a holy life, a life of sinlessness, a life which will preach even when your lips are still. "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not."

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