

100. The Close of the Commandments.

I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments. *Ex. 20, 5. 6.*

God promises grace and every blessing to all who keep His commandments; therefore we should love and trust in Him and gladly do according to His commandments.

But He threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. "I am the Lord, thy God," are the solemn words with which He begins the words of His Law to the nations of the world to teach them who He is and to impress upon them His perfect right to issue such commands and to exact strict obedience to them. He also has the power to execute His threats. He adds the words: "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God." He is jealous of His authority, vigilant of every conduct towards it, angry at every rebellion against it. And He will visit the iniquity of the fathers, that is, punish the sins of the fathers, upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Many a child is a bodily, mental, and moral cripple owing to the sins and vices of one or the other parent or both of them. If a person could only sin by himself and suffer the punishment alone, matters would not be so bad. But if a person sins, he always harms also some one else besides himself. Here we see the fearfulness of sin. Like parents, like children!

Nevertheless, God is not unjust. We read Ezek. 18, 20: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." We must always keep separate moral responsibility and material consequences, personal guilt and inherited affliction. An affliction is no disgrace; it rather is a means of leading us to the Savior, as to an open door of grace, to everlasting salvation.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to enlighten our hearts that in the mirror of Thy Law we may duly perceive our many and great sins and seriously consider the state of our souls. Show us that our whole nature is evil by birth and that out of the evil heart evil thoughts and words and deeds without number daily proceed. Show us the dire consequences and the dread wages of transgression, Thy wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation, that we may learn to look with terror at our sins, sincerely repent of them, and seek Thy grace which Thou offerest us in the Gospel. Amen.

Who shall the Lord's elect condemn?
'Tis God that justifies their souls;
And mercy, like a mighty stream,
O'er all their sins divinely rolls.

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