

COLOR BLIND
By Paul Penno Jr.
December 7, 2013

Zephaniah 3:13¹

Salvation from the Sin that Everybody Has Committed

A father was filling out an application form for his daughter who was seeking entrance to a very exclusive college. He came to the question on the form which asked whether the applicant was a leader. In honesty he wrote, “No, but she is a good follower.”

The application was sent in and a month later a letter arrived notifying him that his daughter had been accepted. At the bottom of the page the dean had written, “Since the entering class of 500 has 499 leaders, we thought that there ought to be room for one follower.”

A young woman gives birth to a blind son. “I do not want my child to know that he is blind!” she informs family and neighbors, forbidding anyone to use telltale words such as light, color, and sight.

The boy grows up unaware of his disability until one day a strange girl jumps over the fence of the garden and spoils everything by using all the forbidden words. His world shatters in the face of this unimagined new reality.

Jesus is that other-world Voice for us that shatters all untruths.

¹ 340, 520.

Not since the Vietnam War and probably not since the American Civil War have this nation’s leaders been more bitterly divided. Heaven sent Jesus Christ to bring “peace on earth, good will to men” (Luke 2:14).

Anyone who is concerned about “the everlasting gospel” in the message of Revelation 14 can’t help but catch an oft-repeated statement: “everybody does it!” Fidelity and honesty are “an unattainable morality.” This widespread philosophy is the source of the corruption that threatens ultimately to ruin.

It was invented and introduced when there was “war in heaven” fomented by “the dragon and his angels” (Rev. 12:7). Satan charged that it is impossible to keep the commandments of God, that God’s law is precisely what this Congressman said, “an unattainable morality.” The implication of Satan’s rebellion is of course that God is unfair to require moral fidelity since, Satan says, it is impossible. Today “the dragon” insists concerning marital infidelity and lying, “everybody does it.”

The Saviour who was born in Bethlehem’s stall has proved that Satan is telling a lie under oath. Romans 8:3, 4 sets forth good news of truth we desperately need to know: God sent His Son “in the likeness of [our] sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in [our] flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” Marital and moral fidelity is possible! In fact, infidelity and lies are impossible to the one “walks after the Spirit.” What does it mean to “walk after the Spirit”? To say “No!” to the “flesh,” and to say “Yes!” to the Holy Spirit. That simple!

Two of the ten commandments speak of how we use the tongue: the third says that if we believe the good news of Jesus Christ we will never be guilty of taking the Lord's name in vain; and the ninth becomes a wonderful assurance to the one who understands and believes how good the good news is.

We can't imagine what our Redeemer has in store for us. The Holy Spirit gives us a few clues, but it is like a person blind from birth trying to comprehend color. Imagine if you lived in a world of darkness—then could suddenly see. Imagine if you lived in a world without taste—and suddenly could taste a wonderful Christmas buffet with all the trimmings. Imagine if you lived in a world without sound—then could hear beautiful music.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16).

The entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, rightly understood, is good news, not bad news. God is not a stern Lawgiver dishing out a series of impossible-to-obey rules with the penalty of death hanging over our heads; He is a Savior from breaking those commandments.

He wants to deliver us from death; He has purposed that every human being shall enjoy eternal life, for “this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). Christ is already “the Savior of all men,” according to 1 Timothy 4:10, “especially of those that believe.”

When God the Father sent Jesus Christ to this earth, He gave Him a special job description—go down to that lost world and save it. Says Jesus: “[I came] to save the world” (John 12:47). He is not trying to find a way to shut us out of heaven; rather, He is trying to prepare us to enter in. God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, . . . having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph. 1:4, 5).

“But isn't there a terrible judgment coming when we shall all come under the stern scrutiny of God's law?”

Yes, but “if any man sin, we have an Advocate [defense lawyer!] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1, 2). And if anyone reading is afraid that this great “Defense Lawyer” won't take his case, John adds, “and not for ours [our sins] only but also for the sins of the whole world.” He is already your Defense Lawyer if you don't push Him away. Some criminals on trial fire their lawyers and then lose their cases. Don't fire Jesus! Let Him hold on to your case.

Jesus has become the new Head of humanity. He fired Adam, our first head who led us into sin, and has taken his place.

Thus you and I have a birthright given to us in Him, just like Isaac's son Esau had the birthright already given to him. Nobody in heaven or earth could have deprived Esau of that birthright except his own act of discarding it. When he sold it for a mere dinner entree, we read, “Thus Esau despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34). Paul warns us, Don't

give in to the subtle temptation to be a “fornicator or profane person, like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright” (Heb. 12:16).

Wouldn't it be heartrending in the final judgment as we stand before the Great White Throne of God, to realize that He actually gave us the gift of eternal life like He gave the birthright to Esau, but we sold it for some of this world's tinsel treasures! To save us from that ultimate agony, He is today sending us the message of the pure gospel as very good news.

Breaking the ninth commandment is a sin for which many people will lose their souls; but there is salvation from that sin. When God says, “You shall not bear false witness,” He means that we are never to tell even a little white lie, never to give a false impression even by a nod of our heads. It forbids all gossip, including damaging the reputation of another person by keeping still when he or she is being accused—if we know something good to say. We can “bear false witness” simply by keeping still when it's possible for us to speak up to save somebody's reputation.

This commandment becomes an assurance that we have a Saviour who will save us from breaking it.

We are to “speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace” (Zech. 8:16). All bearing of false witness comes from its true origin—Satan. “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources; for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Prov. 12:22). “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape” (Prov. 19:5). We read that God actually hates “a lying tongue, . . . a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies” (Prov. 6:17-19). But remember, even though God hates lying, the Bible assures us that He loves the liar, and seeks to save him from the lying.

There are dear, sincere people who bear false witness and have no idea what they are doing.

They are among those for whom Jesus prayed when He was crucified, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Sometimes parents teach little children to tell lies. But still God loves them and seeks to enlighten them. Some people are “color-blind,” that is, they can't tell the difference between a red light and a green light and thus have accidents.

The famous agnostic Thomas Huxley was once lovingly confronted by a very sincere Christian. This believer stressed to Huxley that he was not in any way impugning Huxley's sincerity. Nevertheless, might it not be possible that mentally the great scientist was color blind? That is, some people cannot see traces of green where other people cannot help but see it. Could it be that this was Huxley's problem—that he was simply blind to truth that was quite evident to others? Huxley, being a man of integrity, admitted that this was possible, and added that if it were, he himself, of course, could not know or recognize it.

God is merciful to such people, but better still He has promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who don't know the difference between right and wrong. He wants to be their Teacher. Let them listen to Him! In the judgment day, ignorance of the truth will be no excuse. Thank God, right now we have another opportunity to learn, to "go to school" with Jesus as our Teacher.

In the last two chapters of the Bible we have three warnings that tell us that "whoever loves and practices a lie" will not be able to enter the eternal kingdom (Rev. 22:15). Books and movies that tell a lie are "loved" by one whose heart is not reconciled to God. Thus we see that not only is it serious to "practice a lie," but it is equally serious to "love a lie." Long before the lips may utter a falsehood, if the heart is dishonest, we have already sinned. "Lord, . . . who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who . . . speaks the truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:1, 2). "Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool" (Prov. 10:18). In other words, we can smile at someone, slap him on the back, shake his hand, and yet "hide" our hatred of him deep within our heart; all this is breaking the ninth commandment.

What this boils down to: it is impossible for any of us mortals to obey the ninth commandment unless we are truly converted deep within.

Jealousy of someone else who seems prettier or better than we are, even a desire to see that person fall—all this happens long before a word is spoken! And we all know how that problem is deep within our own hearts. It's so true as Romans 3:10 says,

"There is none righteous, no, not one." Surely we need to pray, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me" (Ps. 139:23, 24). We don't want what Psalm 140:3 says is deep inside everybody by nature: "the poison of asps . . . under the lips!" Oh, do we ever need a Savior! And thank God again, we have One!

Can we bear false witness by saying nice things to somebody? Yes, if we speak flattery. Saying something nice to someone's face and then snickering behind his back is bearing false witness. "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" (Prov. 29:5). David tells of the pain he suffered, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Ps. 55:21). We do not realize how deep this problem is rooted within us. It's so easy to say "Good morning!" to someone when in our heart we wish he could get what he deserves! The ninth commandment calls for complete honesty in our dealings with one another.

"But suppose you know someone is doing wrong; how can you be honest and pleasant at the same time?" You can pray for him as Jesus prayed for the bad people who crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." It does not help to rebuke someone unless the love of Christ is in your heart; but if that love is there, the Holy Spirit will teach you exactly what to do that is

both loving and honest. You might be able to help that person, but if not, you can be happy, for your own conscience will be clear.

The tongue is the instrument that is often the agent in breaking the ninth commandment. Says Proverbs 10:19, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” “Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. . . . Let your words be few” (Eccl. 5:2). If we sense how easily we are tempted to be deceptive, we can remember the common sense good news of the apostle James that will save us from messing up our lives:

“If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. . . . Ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member. . . . How great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. . . . And it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:2-6). A match can do both good and evil, depending on the will and the heart of the one who uses it!

There is indeed good news for all of us. The ninth commandment becomes an assurance to the one who believes the preamble to the ten commandments, that “the Lord your God” has already delivered you out of this “house of bondage,” which includes our deeply learned habitual breaking the ninth commandment! He saves the tongue because He first saves the heart!

Christ came down to this world and took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature, living as we must

live in an evil and corrupt society, yet always saying “No!” to the temptation to tell lies or even to give anyone a false impression. He met the dragon of sin in its own lair (our fallen human flesh or nature) and conquered it.

“What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,” He did; He took our own nature with all of its weaknesses, and triumphed over sin in that same nature. “By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). And why did He do this wonderful thing? Verse 4 tells us: “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4).

In very simple terms, this means the same as the preamble to the ten commandments: He has delivered us “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”! You and I don’t have to go on being deceptive in any way; He has promised to make us honest from the depths of our hearts, inside out. What a precious blessing!

But some one says, “It’s so difficult to be honest through-and-through! We live in a world filled with deception, and you have to be ‘worldly’ or you can’t get ahead! How can I be so different?” The answer is—Jesus Himself. He lived in our same “worldly” world, in a culture filled with deception. He could have saved His life at the end if He had been willing to just keep silent when the High Priest demanded an answer from Him by oath: “Tell us, are You the Son of God?” Jesus had to give a truthful answer,

and it cost Him His life by crucifixion. But in so doing He earned the right to be our Savior!

The story of David and King Saul in the Bible is an encouragement to all who feel themselves unjustly opposed or even persecuted for their conscientious beliefs they hold in all honesty, but who find themselves opposed.

David was loyal to the principles of “church organization” in that he knew that Israel as a nation must have a government, and (in those days) a government must have a king.

David knew that the prophet Samuel had anointed Saul to be Israel’s king, apparently with the approval and guidance of the Lord. David humbled himself to believe this even though King Saul wanted to murder him! “Saul became David’s enemy continually” (1 Sam. 18:29).

It was a very severe test for young David who was either still in his teens or just out. But David humbled himself to what he knew was Reality. David is a perfect example for those who today feel persecuted by supposed “servants of God.”

On one occasion David as a fugitive happened to be hiding in a cave when who should come in to relieve himself as in a bathroom, but the great King Saul himself! David’s friends who were hiding with him back in the shadows urged him to seize this opportunity that God had apparently given him, and kill his enemy; but David refused to lift his hand against “the Lord’s anointed” (1 Sam 24:1-6). So loyal was David to the principles of “church organization”!

Those who face unjust opposition and even persecution in seeking to do what God says will not be forsaken by the Lord. He will permit them to be tried, even severely so, for the Lord permitted David to have every excuse to believe that the Lord would indeed forsake him (if David wanted to be unbelieving); but David held on to his faith in the Lord.

Here is the Lord’s solemn promise to those who serve Him faithfully today, even in the face of severe opposition and persecution: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

To the one who values truly important things, being honest through-and-through is a most precious blessing. None of us has received such a character naturally through our genes or DNA; we have to “learn” it from Jesus. Such a character is a gift of His grace, imported from heaven. “The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (Zeph. 3:13). This marvelous achievement will make Satan very angry, for he believes it is impossible for any human being to become truly honest. Don’t believe what he tells you to believe!

The Book of Revelation describes a people who in the last days have permitted the Holy Spirit to mold them, to teach them, to train them, to be like Christ in character:

“I looked,” says John, “and, behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion [a symbol of the church], and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand. . . . These are the ones who follow the Lamb

wherever He goes. . . . In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:1-5). We can’t wash any portion of God’s word down the drain. It’s written here for us to believe.

This is people who as a group are different from any others in all world history, for “they sing as it were a new song before the throne.” A “new song” means a new experience; and a new experience means they have heard and received a new message, a fresh proclamation of “the everlasting gospel” which has accomplished this wonderful achievement. Yes, “the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

But this is a clearer proclamation of that gospel! Luther, Calvin, and the 16th century Reformers saw much light and were a blessing to the world. But in these last days we live in the time of the great three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 and of that message of the fourth angel in chapter 18—“the everlasting gospel” is now more fully being revealed. Its purpose is not merely to prepare a people to die, but to prepare the corporate body of God’s people for translation without seeing death.

Granted, some will refuse this last days ministry of Christ as our great High Priest; but there will be many who will honor Him by permitting the Holy Spirit to work upon their hearts. “But these people are sinners by nature, just like you and me.”

Yes indeed, but they have permitted Jesus to save them from continued sinning. They have no advantage, no more education or “perks” than anybody else; they have simply seen something,

comprehended something, that others in past ages could not see. Paul prayed for us when he said,

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love [*agape*], may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19). That means, to be ready for the glorious second coming of Jesus!

Today there are those three angels going everywhere in the world, proclaiming this most precious message. Soon a fourth angel will join them, and a Voice will sound from heaven in some way to every person in the world, “Come out of [Babylon], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

That Voice is speaking to you! It is telling you the good news that Christ has saved you from breaking that ninth commandment! You can be a new person; you don’t have to stay in old, dark spiritual “Egypt” for He has set you free! The prison doors are open; walk out into the sunshine!

Lying isn’t so bad, many people say. What’s bad is lying under oath. But Jesus tells us that we should talk as under a solemn oath all the time. “Let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of the evil one” (Mt. 5:37). “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin” (Prov. 10:19).

Conventional wisdom says that it's commonly taken for granted that adulterers will almost automatically lie about it. But God has a higher "wisdom," and it is effective. His Holy Spirit is even now, all over the world, teaching a people of whom it will honestly be said, "In their mouth [is] found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5). Don't laugh; that's going to be true.

Such transparent honesty is the fruit of Christlike love (*agape*), and it can be realized only as self is crucified with Christ. He denied self. He could easily have told a little white lie in order to evade His cross. But He didn't. Hallelujah indeed!