

---


This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google<sup>TM</sup> books

<https://books.google.com>



# THE CITIES OF REFUGE.



THERE is scarcely anything that shews more clearly the great difference between the thoughts of God and of man, than the different judgment that man forms of sin from what God has pronounced about it. Men are apt to think little of sin unless it comes out in some open, violent, or indecent act. The secret thought, the impure desire, the inward hatred or covetousness of the heart is quickly passed over and forgotten, men do not trouble themselves about it; and still more the quiet, careless, cheerful unbelief in which they pass their days is counted nothing. But what is God's testimony about these things? He says, "The thought of foolishness is sin" (Prov. xxiv. 9); and He classes the sin of *unbelief* with the gross open sins of idolatry, adultery, and murder. There is one fearful passage where God has so reckoned them all up together, and given the like eternal sentence of woe to the orderly, decent, moral unbeliever, as He has to the blood-stained murderer. "But the FEARFUL, and UNBELIEVING, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev. xxi. 8). But more than this, the word of God declares us to be "by *nature* children of wrath" (Eph. ii. 3), one and all hopelessly ruined in our very birth, conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity; and that this is our unavoidable condition by our very constitution, the fearful consequence of being sprung from the fallen one, Adam—attaching corruption to us without a possibility of our avoiding it, with nothing but a depraved and lost and ruined nature—body, soul, and spirit, as our only inheritance from our parents. Now here it is that man will not bow to God's word.

This is the most unpleasant truth which man resists and argues against, and questions, and tries to explain away; because it humbles him to think he is so evil—he likes not to believe that his reason and understanding and heart are so utterly depraved, and *must* lead him only wrong; and that he is in such a condition that he can use no effort and make no progress that can, as regards God, in anywise improve or amend him. But the word and judgment of God are as clear upon this point as upon the fact of salvation; and when that word is believed, the soul bows to and acknowledges the truth of its own lost condition by nature, as much as it rejoices in the mercy and grace of God in giving Christ to save it from that ruined estate.

I have been led to make these observations by reading the history of the cities of refuge (Numb. xxxv. 9). Mark God's sentence *thrice* recorded in that chapter against the man who might *accidentally* and *without enmity* kill another:—"He is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death." As for instance, supposing a man went into a wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head of the axe flies off and strikes his neighbour so as to kill him, God sentenced this man as a murderer, and the avenger of blood was to pursue and slay the murderer; when he meeteth him he shall slay him (Deut. xix. 5; Numb. xxxv. 19). Men would call this hard. Men have in their laws carefully distinguished between one guilty of manslaughter and murder, and they would acquit the former whilst they would condemn the latter. But God's law, which is holy, and just, and good, condemneth both the one and the other. The fact of life having been taken rendered the man in God's eye a murderer, and the sentence was that he should be slain by the avenger of blood whenever he met him. True he might say, "It was not my fault, it was merely accident, I had no control or power to hinder it." Still God's law remained inflexible, "He is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death."

Now compare your own condition with this. You are a sinner by nature, by birth, found in a world under judgment. You may say you *cannot help* it, you did not come into the world by your *own will*; you *had* no control over



the circumstances that placed you here, nor over those around you. True, but all this reasoning does not alter the fact, and is of no avail; here you are in sin, and in a world of sin, and therefore under the sentence of God's wrath, and the only question that remains for you to consider is of the same kind that remained for the manslayer, Has God, who has condemned, provided any way of escape from this His own sentence. If He has, the safety must be as certain as the condemnation is certain.

But your case is really far worse than this. Not only are you by nature a child of wrath, but you have deliberately and wilfully added transgressions and sins to sin. Many a time have you had the secret conviction of what it was right to do, and stifled it; many a time have you paused for a little moment over a sin, and just questioned yourself, Shall I, or shall I not, do or indulge this? and then you have quietly made up your own mind, in spite of all conviction and remorse, to follow your own evil desires, and to cherish and allow the sin. Here then there has been something not merely accidental but deliberate, something about which you have had your own wilful choice, notwithstanding secret whispers that it was evil. Your condition is more like that of the *wilful* murderer, who slew another with malice aforethought, rather than that of the manslayer, who could not help the accident. And has God provided any refuge for *such* a sinner? Will He pardon repeated and deliberate acts of sin?

In the case of the manslayer, God appointed three cities of refuge in the land of Canaan, dividing out the land into three parts, and assigning a city of refuge to each division. Each of the three cities was set upon a mountain (Josh. xx. 7); and God directed a road to be made to each, so that none might mistake the way (Deut. xix. 3). When, therefore, any one had accidentally been guilty of the blood of another, his first thought would be, where is the city of refuge, and he would look round for it: and when he perceived where it lay, then he would take the road to it, and make haste for his life till he had reached the gates of the city, and was safe within its walls. How anxious would he be to get within the walls before the report of the murder having been committed should reach the ears of and arouse the avenger of blood—lest he should be

pursued, and overtaken and slain by the avenger while his heart was hot, according to the command of God. So should you anxiously inquire, Has God provided a refuge where I may be safe from all the ruin, and sin, and corruption of my own nature? Blessed be His name, He has—Christ is that refuge—he that believeth on Him shall never perish, but hath everlasting life. Sin and its wages are no longer reckoned against the believer; but life eternal, with its joys and glories, become his portion. And here I draw a strong contrast between this history of the cities of refuge, and Christ as the refuge of the sinner. The poor unfortunate manslayer might have but feeble sight, so as not to be able to see the city of his refuge at a distance; or his strength might fail on the road, and the avenger of blood might hear and pursue, and overtake and slay him, before he could reach the city; in fact, he might perish by the way. He needed strength and perseverance, and health and swiftness, in order to reach the city, and after all he might fail in attaining it. But not so as regards the sinner's refuge. There can be no perishing by the way, because there is no way, no path to Jesus. You have not to ascend to heaven, to fetch Him down from above; or to descend into the deep, to bring up Christ from thence; you have got no steps of improvement or amendment to take; you have not to get strength, or power, or perseverance; you have not to make alterations or resolutions. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart." It is the word of faith. It is to believe God's record about His Son. It is to trust God, that He gave Jesus to bear sin, to become the sinner's refuge. Sin has placed you far off from God and from safety; faith in the blood of Christ *at once* brings you nigh to God, and sets you in a place of eternal salvation. When the sinner has believed, when conscious of his guilt he has trusted in Christ as his Saviour, then he is at once and for ever safe. He is then *in* Christ, and "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." He is safe in the city of his refuge. Christ is as much the *way* as He is the *life*. So that there is no being in the way without being safe. You sometimes, perhaps, hear the expression "such an one is on the way to Christ." Now that cannot be true, for there are no stepping stones to Christ. No one has to change or get better before he

reaches Christ. It is written "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." The very fact of calling on His name, with the heart, is salvation; for faith alone could induce the person to call. "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" So you have not to become righteous or good before He will save you, you have not to amend before He will have mercy. He himself is the righteousness, holiness, and redemption you stand in need of; and directly you believe in Him, you have Him as your righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Again, the city of refuge was only a place of safety for the accidental and not the deliberate murderer. If the wilful murderer fled thither, he was to be delivered up to the avenger of blood, and to be slain without pity (Deut. xix. 12, 13). But not so the sinner's refuge—Jesus saves from wilful, deliberate, repeated sins; from the sin of the nature itself, and from sins committed. His blood cleanseth from ALL sin. I hear sometimes the expression, "My sins are too great or too many to be pardoned." Now this expression sounds very much like humility, and seems to come sometimes from the contrite heart. But such is not really the case. It is, in truth, the expression of secret pride of heart and disbelief of God. It is questioning the value of the precious blood of Christ. When God has said "*Whosoever* will, let him take of the water of life freely," what dreadful pride and unbelief must it be that tempts a person to say, "I am too bad to be saved." The real secret is, that the person who says so, inwardly hopes at some future time he shall be a little better, and shall have left off some of his sins, and shall therefore be able to recommend himself a little more to God; and therefore he desires to wait till he feels himself improved,—before he ventures to trust in Jesus. But all this arises from ignorance and unbelief. If you think you are going to get better, and thereby recommend yourself to Christ, you have no need of Him at all, and no title to Him at all, because He only came for the *lost*, for the desperately wicked, for those who were past all hope of being mended.

Just consider what gave an Israelite (if not a Levite) a title to the city of his refuge? It was not birth, nor apprenticeship, nor long service, nor money, nor goodness, nor worthiness, that gave him a claim to a dwelling in one of those

refuge cities. A man with unstained hands had no citizenship there. But if blood was upon him, if vengeance was against him, if he had become in God's judgment through his own act a murderer, then he could claim a title to dwell in one of those cities; if he could make out a clear case before the elders of the city of his having taken the life of another, and therefore that judgment was hanging over his head, then they were bound to give him at once a place that he might dwell safely (Josh. xx. 19).

It is just so with the salvation that is in Jesus. The good, the upright, the righteous (if such there could be), would have no claim upon him; Christ was sent only for *sinner*s; and the more I know what sin is within me, and what sin has done to condemn me, the more I feel my need of, and the clearer I read my fitness for, the blood of the Lamb.

God's ways are not as man's ways, nor His thoughts as man's thoughts. If, as a poor person, I am in want of relief, and go to ask man's charity, I must get a good recommendation; I must be able to prove that my character has been good, that I have not been a thief, or a drunkard, or the like, but that I am what men call "a deserving object." It would not do for me to knock at the rich man's door, and say, "I ask your charity, but I have been a thief and a liar, and have hated you, and abused you, and no one can say a good word in my favour." But the ground on which I receive the charities of God is exactly the reverse. My ruin, my need, my corruption, my evil, my sins, are what have made me a fit object for His best gift, His only Son; and I get all His blessings, and mercies, and love, upon the only ground that I never have and never can deserve them. If I were, therefore, to try to lessen or excuse my sins, I should be weakening my very qualification for mercy. If I were to seek to lessen the disorder myself, I should prove I did not need the physician. Man commends his love towards his fellow by giving his favours to the *deserving*; "God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were *yet sinners* Christ died for us." The Apostle Paul rejoiced in this truth. "This is a faithful saying," says he, "and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He might have stopped there; but no, he desired to prove his

own meetness for the blessings of this faithful saying, to prove that he himself was one fit for this salvation; and therefore he adds, "of whom I am *chief*." He knew in the experience of his own vile heart (upright, and moral, and righteous as his life had outwardly been) what it was to be chief of sinners. And did he wish to conceal or hide this? Did he fear that this shut him out from Christ? No, he well knew that his very evil made him the fit object for the mercy of Christ, who came to save *sinners*.

One other great point of contrast between the cities of refuge as the place of safety for the manslayer, and Christ as the sinner's refuge, is that the one afforded only a temporary deliverance from wrath, whereas *eternal* salvation is the portion of every one who believes in Christ. If the manslayer kept carefully within the walls of his refuge city, all was safe; but he might grow weary of the confinement, he might long for the home, and the friends, and the fair pastures of his inheritance, which he had been obliged to leave; and should he venture without the walls, if he strayed from the city, his life was again as much in danger as ever, he was no longer safe; the avenger of blood might again find him and slay him; he was as much exposed to the sword of the destroyer as if he had never known safety at all. But is this so respecting those that make Jesus their refuge? Can they ever again be exposed to wrath? can they ever again be under judgment? No! blessed be God, over the refuge He has provided in Jesus for the sinner, the word *eternal* is inscribed. To believe is to have *everlasting* life—"he shall *never* come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." The salvation through faith in Jesus, is not safety for an hour, or a day, or a year, but *for ever*. Never can wrath break out against a believer in Him. For who is he that condemneth? Christ the very one who alone has *all* judgment committed to Him, who alone, therefore, has the power to condemn, is the very one in whom the sinner who believes on Him is safe; the very one who died for the sinner; the very one who liveth in the presence of God to plead the eternal value of his own blood on behalf of the sinner who trusts in Him, and to maintain his right and cause. Hear what the "chief of sinners" says—"I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things



present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is not that the poor weak believer may not indeed doubt, it is not that he may not wander in thought and heart oftentimes away from the precious Lord who bought him; if the safety depended on his keeping himself safe, indeed that were salvation but for a moment. But the truth is, God who has loved him keeps him safe in Christ. Many things might come in and weaken my love to God, but nothing can weaken God's love to me. None shall pluck them out of my Father's hand. In God alone is continuance.

In conclusion, I would warn you that the day is coming when God will make inquisition for blood; when Christ will come from heaven as the Avenger for God, for God has committed all judgment to Him. Even now He is *ready* to judge; and whilst I earnestly hope you may now turn to Jesus as your only refuge from your own guilt and sin and its condemnation, I would also have you to know that Jesus is the one who will most surely execute all God's vengeance against the unbeliever. The very Lamb in whom the sinner may now know God's eternal mercy, is the very Lamb from whose wrath the men of the world will try to flee away. It is written, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, *taking vengeance* on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2 Thes. i. 7). Now that the long-suffering of God is salvation, now that He pauses, as it were for yet a little moment in order that He may have mercy, trust in His mercy, make Jesus your "strong refuge," believe on Him and be safe.

LONDON:—Tract Dept, 1, Warwick Square, Paternoster-row.



Price ½d. or 4s. per hundred.