

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Presumptuous Sins

(Jerry Fite)

David writes, “*Who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be clear from great transgression*” (Psalm 19:12-13).

In the immediate context, where God’s revealed Word is glorified as sweet to the taste, His word is also praised as meeting the need of the heart: “*Who can discern his errors?*” God’s word is our aid, for it is “...*quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12). With reverence, David wants to be clear of personal sins, which he divides into two categories: secret sins, and presumptuous sins. If secret sins are those hidden from our own heart, what are presumptuous sins?

Presumptuous sins reflect an attitude of mind when one commits a particular transgression. In the Old Testament, when the priest or judge determined God’s will regarding an unsettled matter between people, if a person “*doeth presumptuously, in not hearkening unto the priest that standeth to minister there before Jehovah thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil*

from Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:12). God’s deliberation was clear. The individual knew what was required in settling the matter. One could not plead ignorance. But instead of obeying God’s decree, one might deliberately, with no reverence for God, refuse to carry out God’s directive. In such a case, one was not just committing a sin, he was sinning presumptuously.

When the Israelites heard the report of the men who went to spy out the “promised land,” their fear of men overcame their faith in God. Instead of taking courage from two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, they shrunk as cowards, giving heed to the naysayers. Hearing God’s decree that their little ones, along with Joshua and Caleb, will inherit the land, and not their generation, they quickly move to strap on their weapons and go into the hill country to fight. God, through Moses, tells them, “*Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies*” (Deuteronomy 1:42). But they disregarded God’s clear directive, and “...*rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah, and were presumptuous, and went up into the hill country*” (Deuteronomy 1:43). They did not just sin, but in deliberate rebellion, they sinned presumptuously.

Presumptuous sin is sinning with a “high hand”. If one “*doeth aught with a high hand...that soul shall be cut off from among his people*” (Numbers 15:30). The chilling consequence of committing such rebellion before God was that no sacrifice for sin could be offered. If one sinned “*unwittingly*” or out of carelessness, a sin offering was authorized (Numbers 15:27). But no sacrifice was authorized for high handed rebellion against God’s Law.

When Jewish Christians were abandoning assembling with fellow Christians, for they were turning their backs on Christ, the inspired writer of Hebrews offers the following sobering words: “*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries*” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The willful sin here is disregarding Christ. By such apostasy, doesn’t one know he has “*trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified and unholy thing, and done despite unto the Spirit of Grace*” (Hebrews 29)? Oh God, keep me from such “great transgression”!