

6: Gone For Ever

*The face of the LORD is against them that do evil,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

[Psalm 34:16]

HAVING established beyond all doubt that the Lord is actively concerned about His own, to which the Psalmist returns in verse seventeen, he considers sin in all its forms. He opens by using figurative language to make his point, and says that “The face of the LORD is against them that do evil”; yet in Exodus 33:20 God said to Moses: “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”

Psalm 34:16, then, is not to be taken literally. “Face” is a metaphor for the very essence of God. This raises certain realities about Almighty God that need to be recalled.

1: Essential Knowledge

Scripture reveals that Almighty God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent — all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present and all-holy. To this, Jesus added: “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth” [John 4:24] At best, it is very difficult for mankind to understand spiritual matters, because we are earthbound; and despite the boasts of this age, our poor brains are, in comparison to God, very limited indeed. If that alone were to be remembered and acted upon, it would be a very beneficial and timely warning against the pride and the shocking arrogance of this present age.

God is holy. That is also very hard for this day and generation to take in, because we live in very decadent times, where ungodliness is rife, depravity is commended, and where there is an incredible hatred, hardness and hostility against Biblical truth. Therefore in approaching the text before us, the wisdom of Job is of immense value: -

Job 9:4: “Who hath hardened himself against him [God] and hath prospered?” and
Job 9:12: “Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou?”

With this in mind, return to Psalm 34:16: “The face of the LORD is against them that do evil...”

2: Complete Clarity

Our text makes two things very clear: God is implacably against all ungodliness, sin and iniquity, and He has warned of the consequences for anyone who persists in that direction. Scripture teaches in the clearest of terms that, despite any contemporary appearance to the contrary, sin cannot possibly succeed, because **“The face of the LORD is against them that do evil.”** Wrongdoing may seem to be in the ascendancy, and that is certainly the case in the British Isles; but there are consequences to be faced. God is sovereign and supreme, and He has spoken for all time.

At such a time as this, there is always the danger of Christians being conditioned, if not corrupted, by the pandemic of sin. In an ungodly age, where the goalposts are always moving, unless you take a stand you will find yourself occupying territory that not so long ago was regarded as being out of bounds.

The Breaching of Boundaries

Proverbs 22:28 is instructive in this matter. It can be read literally, with regard to the boundaries between neighbours; or metaphorically: **“Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set.”**

‘Thy fathers’ mean those holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [**2 Peter 1:21**]. Thus their words did not represent man’s will, but that of God. Beware, O beware, of those who try to substitute an eternally-fixed boundary between good and evil for a moveable one! This leads to -

The First Question

It is this: **“On which side of the fence are you?”** **“Where do your affections and affiliations lie?”** Many may know **Colossians 3:1 & 2**:

“If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”

But mere knowledge is not obedience. **“Blessed is he that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly...”** So says **Psalm 1:1**. This leads to the second question.

This question is: **“What will the ultimate outcome be?”** In order to consider that, return to our text: **“The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.”** The memory of evil doers and their deeds will be dissolved. They, and their deeds, will be separated, severed, and, in due course, obliterated.

The Political Level

Elements of this process are sometimes seen in this world. Consider what happens when the rule of despots and demagogues die. In their lifetime, they try to keep their memory

alive by naming towns and cities after themselves. When they are gone, those places are renamed. In their lifetime, statues are raised in their honour — sometimes becoming idolatrous. When they have died, they are quietly removed.

Some have mausoleums for their embalmed bodies to be seen by public. Eventually, they are closed and their remains are quietly removed. Have we not seen this happen in living memory? Psalm 37:35 & 36 describes the process prophetically:

“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.”

The Personal Level

What all this and much more amounts to is this: those who set themselves against the Lord are doomed to fail. More than that, their very memory is doomed to destruction. That's a sobering thought. It should so exercise believers' minds as to make them more determined than ever to adhere to the Biblical way of living, as laid down by God's grace and mercy in the Holy Bible. This raises -

3: A Complete Contrast

Consider what Scripture says about those who faithfully follow the Lord, by honouring, loving, serving and obeying Him. Sometimes such people suffer in this world for their faith. Read Hebrews 11 for an account of the trials and tribulations of the righteous in Old Testament times.

Verses 37 & 38 summarise their lives, saying:

“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain by the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”

There have been many instances of such things down the ages, and in this very day, especially in those parts of the world that are particularly hostile to the Christian faith. Yet what does the Scripture say about their memory? Proverbs 10:7 says: *“The memory of the just is blessed...”*

Seen By Many

The memory of the just, especially where you can cite examples from people you have known, not only brings a smile to the lips, but also is a timely reminder of what the power of God can do in ordinary people's lives. Such memories are particularly good when they are put to practical use. This is done by consulting the Scriptures, and by

prayer, both of which were the mainstay of those of a day gone by.

A passage of particular worth is Psalm 40:3, which speaks of the consequences upon the soul of saving faith in Jesus Christ:

“And he [Jesus] hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”

What does this mean? Surely it is of a change for the better, such as –

- X a kindly disposition towards others;*
- X conversation that is decidedly different from that of the world;*
- X a sympathetic ear for another’s troubles;*
- X a helping hand where needed;*
- X a friendly smile that strangely warms the heart;*
- X a quiet word of encouragement for the disheartened; and*
- X above all, a settled determination to serve the Lord in every possible way.*

Since you began to read this sermon, time has moved on. Moments make lives, as grains of sand make the sea-shore. There are but two ways in which a life can go — according to the course of this world, or according to the word of God. Time will tell which course each one followed, and what memories were sown in the process: –

*“Tomorrow, Lord, is Thine,
Lodged in Thy sovereign hand;
And if the sun arise and shine,
It shines at Thy command.*

*“The present moment flies,
And bears our life away;
Lord, make Thy servants truly wise,
That they may live today.”*

Philip Dodridge, 1702-59

Scripture quotations are from the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible, the rights of which are vested in the Crown and administered by the Crown’s patentee, Cambridge University Press.