

Ingrafting a Soul into the True Vine.

By Rev. Thomas Boston

(From "*Human Nature in its Fourfold State*")

Free Presbyterian Magazine – August, 1960

- 1) When the Spirit of the Lord comes to deal with a person, to bring him to Christ, he finds him in Laodicea's case, in a sound sleep of security, dreaming of heaven and the favour of God, though full of sin against the Holy One of Israel (Revelation 3:17), 'Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' Therefore, He darts in some beams of light into the dark soul and lets the man see that he is a lost man, if he turn not over a new leaf, and betake himself to a new course of life. Thus, by the Spirit of the Lord acting as a spirit of bondage, there is a criminal court erected in the man's breast, where he is arraigned, accused, and condemned for breaking the law of God, 'convicted of sin and judgment' (John 16:8). And now he can no longer sleep securely in his former course of life. This is the first stroke which the branch gets, in order to cutting off.
- 2) Hereupon the man forsakes his former profane courses, his lying, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, stealing, and such like practices; though they be dear to him as right eyes, he will rather quit them than ruin his soul. The ship is likely to sink, and therefore he throws his goods overboard, that he himself may not perish. Now he begins to bless himself in his heart, and looks joyfully on his evidences for heaven, thinking himself a better servant to God than many others (Luke 18:11), 'God, I thank thee, I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers,' &c. But he soon gets another stroke with the axe of the law, showing him that it is only he that does what is written in the law that can be saved by it; and that his negative holiness is too scanty a covering from the storm of God's wrath. Thus, although his sins of commission only were heavy on him before, his sins of omission now crowd into his thoughts, attended with a train of law curses and vengeance. And each of the Ten Commandments discharges thunder-claps of wrath against him for his omission of required duties.
- 3) Upon this he turns to a positively holy course of life. He not only is not profane, but he performs religious duties: he prays, seeks the knowledge of the principles of religion, strictly observes the Lord's Day, and, like Herod, does many things, and hears sermons gladly. In one word, there is a great

conformity, in his outward conversation, to the letter of both tables of the law. There is a mighty change in the man, which his neighbours cannot miss taking notice of. Hence, he is cheerfully admitted by the godly into their society, as a praying person; and can confer with them about religious matters, yea, and about soul exercise, which some are not acquainted with. Their good opinion of him confirms his good opinion of himself. This step in religion is fatal to many, who never get beyond it. But here the Lord gives the elect branch a further stroke. Conscience flies in the man's face, for some wrong steps in his conversation, the neglect of some duty, or omission of some sin, which is a blot in his conversation; and then the flaming sword of the law appears again over his head, and the curse rings in his ears, for that he 'continueth not in all things written in the law, to do them' (Galatians 3:10).

- 4) On this account, he is obliged to seek another remedy for his disease. He goes to God, confesses his sin, seeks the pardon of it, promising to watch against it for the time to come; and so finds ease, and thinks he may very well take it, seeing the Scripture saith, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins' (1 John 1:9); not considering that he grasps at a privilege, which is theirs only who are grafted into Christ, and under the covenant of grace, and which the branches yet growing on the old stock cannot plead. And here sometimes there are formal and express vows made against such and such sins, and binding to such and such duties. Thus many, go on all their days, knowing no other religion than to perform duties, and to confess, and pray for pardon of that wherein they fail, promising themselves eternal happiness, though they are utter strangers to Christ. Here many elect ones have been cast down wounded, and many reprobates have been slain, while the wounds of neither of them have been deep enough to cut them off from their natural stock. But the Spirit of the Lord gives yet a deeper stroke to the branch which is to be cut off, showing him, that, as yet, he is but an outside saint, and discovering to him the filthy lusts lodged in his heart, which he took no notice of before (Romans 7:9), 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' Then he sees his heart to be full of sinful lusts, covetousness, pride, malice, filthiness and the like. Now, as soon as the door of the chambers of his imagery is thus opened to him, and he sees what they do there in the dark, his outside religion is blown up as insufficient; and he learns a new lesson in religion, namely, 'That he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly' (Romans 2:28).

- 5) Upon this he goes further, even to inside religion; sets to work more vigorously than ever, mourns over the evils of his heart, and strives to bear down the weeds which he finds growing in that neglected garden. He labours to curb his pride and passion, and to banish speculative impurities; prays more fervently, hears attentively, and strives to get his heart affected in every religious duty he performs; and thus, he comes to think himself, not only an outside, but an inside Christian. Wonder not at this, for there is nothing in it beyond the power of nature, or what one may attain to under a vigorous influence of the covenant of works; therefore, another yet deeper stroke is given. The law charges home on the man's conscience, that he was a transgressor from the womb, that he came into the world a guilty creature and that in the time of his ignorance, and even since his eyes were opened, he has been guilty of many actual sins, either altogether overlooked by him or not sufficiently mourned over; for spiritual sores, not healed by the blood of Christ, but skinned over some other way, are easily irritated, and soon break out again. Therefore, the law takes him by the throat, saying, 'Pay what thou owest.'
- 6) Then the sinner says in his heart, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all;' and so falls to work to pacify an offended God, and to atone for these sins. He renews his repentance, such as it is; bears patiently the afflictions laid upon him; yea, he afflicts himself, denies himself the use of his lawful comforts, sighs deeply, mourns bitterly, cries with tears for a pardon, till he has wrought up his heart to a conceit of having obtained it. Having thus done penance for what is past, he resolves to be a good servant to God, and to hold on in outward and inward obedience, for the time to come. But the stroke must go nearer the heart yet, ere the branch falls off. But the Lord discovers to him, in the glass of the law, how he sins in all he does, even when he does the best he can; and therefore, the dreadful sound returns to his ears (Galatians 3:10), 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things,' &c. 'When ye fasted and mourned,' says the Lord, 'did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?' Will muddy water make clean clothes? Will you satisfy for one sin with another? Did not your thoughts wander in such a duty? Were not your affections flat in another? Did not your heart give a sinful look to such an idol? And did it not rise in a fit of impatience under such an affliction? 'Should I accept this of your hands? Cursed be the deceiver, which sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing'

(Malachi 1:13,14). And thus, he becomes so far broken off, that he sees he is not able to satisfy the demands of the law.

- 7) Hence, like a broken man, who finds he is not able to pay all his debt, he goes about to compound with his creditor. And, being in pursuit of ease and comfort, he does what he can to fulfil the law; and wherein he fails, he trusts that God will accept the will for the deed. Thus, doing his duty, and having a will to do better, he cheats himself into persuasion of the goodness of his state and hereby thousands are ruined. But the elect get another stroke, which loosens their hold in this case. The doctrine of the law is borne in on their consciences, demonstrating to them that exact and perfect obedience is required by it, under pain of the curse; and that it is doing, and not wishing to do, which will avail. Wishing to do better will not answer the law's demands; and therefore, the curse sounds again, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not - to do them;' that is, actually to do them. In vain is wishing then.
- 8) Being broken off from all hopes of compounding with the law, he falls to borrowing. He sees that all he can do to obey the law, and all his desires to be and to do better, will not save his soul: therefore, he goes to Christ, entreating that His righteousness may make up what is wanting in his own, and cover all the defects of his doings and sufferings; that so God, for Christ's sake, may accept them, and thereupon be reconciled. Thus, doing what he can to fulfil the law, and looking to Christ to make up all his defects, he comes at length to sleep securely again. Many persons are ruined this way. This was the error of the Galatians, which Paul, in his epistle to them, disputes against. But the Spirit of God breaks off the sinner from this hold also, by bringing home to his conscience that great truth (Galatians 3:12), 'The law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them.' There is no mixing of the law and faith in this business; the sinner must hold by one of them, and let the other go. The way of the law, and the way of faith, are so far different, that it is not possible for a sinner to walk in the one, unless he comes off from the other: and if he be for doing, he must do all alone; Christ will not do a part for him, if He do not all. A garment pieced up of sundry sorts of righteousness, is not a garment meet for the court of heaven. Thus, the man is like one in a dream who thought he was eating, but being awakened by a stroke, behold his soul is faint; his heart sinks in him like a stone, while he finds that he can neither bear his burden himself alone, nor can he get help under it.

9) What can he do who must needs pay, and yet has not enough of his own to bring him out of debt; nor can borrow so much, and is ashamed to beg? What can such a one do, I say, but sell himself, as the man under the law that was become poor? (Leviticus 25:47). Therefore, the sinner, beat off from so many holds, attempts to make a bargain with Christ, and to sell himself to the Son of God, if I may so speak, solemnly promising and vowing that he will be a servant to Christ as long as he lives, if He will save his soul. And here, the sinner often makes a personal covenant with Christ, resigning himself to Him on these terms; yea, and takes the sacrament, to make the bargain sure. Here upon the man's great care is, how to obey Christ, keep His commandments, and so fulfil his bargain. In this the soul finds a false, unsound peace, for a while; till the Spirit of the Lord gives another stroke, to cut off the man from this refuge of lies likewise. And that happens in this manner: when he fails of the duties he engaged to perform, and falls again into the sin he covenanted against, it is powerfully carried home on his conscience, that his covenant is broken; so all his comfort goes, and terrors afresh seize on his soul, as one that has broken covenant with Christ. Commonly the man, to help himself, renews his covenant, but breaks it again as before. And how is it possible it should be otherwise, seeing he is still upon the old stock? Thus, the work of many, all their days, as to their souls, is nothing but a making and breaking such covenants, over and over again.

Objection: Some perhaps will say, 'Who liveth, and sinneth not? Who is there that fails not of the duties he has engaged to? If you reject this way as unsound, who then can be saved?' Answer: True believers will be saved, namely, all who do by faith take hold of God's covenant. But this kind of covenant is men's own covenant, devised of their own heart, not God's covenant, revealed in the Gospel of His grace. The making of it is nothing else but the making of a covenant of works with Christ, confounding the law and the Gospel; a covenant he will never subscribe to, though we should sign it with our heart's blood (Romans 4:14,16), 'For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect. Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed' (chap 11.6), 'And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise, grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise, work is no more work.' God's covenant is everlasting; once in, never out of it again; and the mercies of it are sure

mercies (Isaiah 55:3). But that covenant of yours is tottering covenant, never sure; but broken every day. It is a mere servile covenant, giving Christ service for salvation; but God's covenant is a filial covenant, in which the sinner takes Christ and His salvation freely offered, and so becomes a son (John 1:12), 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God:' and becoming a son, he serves his Father, not that the inheritance may become his, but because it is his, through Jesus Christ. (See Galatians 4:24, and onward.) To enter into that false covenant, is to buy from Christ with money; but to take hold of God's covenant, is to buy of Him without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1), that is to say, to beg of Him. In that covenant men work for life; in God's covenant they come to Christ for life, and work from life. When a person under that covenant fails in his duty, all is gone; the covenant must be made over again. But under God's covenant, although the man fail in his duty, and for his failure falls under the discipline of the covenant, and lies under the weight of it, till such time as he has recourse anew to the blood of Christ for pardon, and renews his repentance; yet all that he trusted to for life and salvation, namely, the righteousness of Christ, still stands entire, and the covenant remains firm. (See Romans 7:24, 25; and 8:1.)

Now, though some men spend their lives in making and breaking such covenants of their own, the terror on the breaking of them becoming weaker and weaker, by degrees, till at last it creates in them little or no uneasiness: yet the man, in whom the good work is carried on, till it be accomplished in cutting him off from the old stock, finds these covenants to be as rotten cords, broken at every touch. The terror of God is thereupon redoubled on his spirit, and the waters at every turn get in into his very soul, until he is obliged to cease from catching hold of such covenants and to seek help some other way.

- 10) Therefore, the man comes at length to beg at Christ's door for mercy, but yet he is a proud beggar, standing on his personal worth. For, as the papists have mediators to plead for them with the one only Mediator, so the branches of the old stock have always something to produce which they think may commend them to Christ, and engage Him to take their cause in hand. They cannot think of coming to the spiritual market without money in their hand. They are like persons who have an estate of their own, but are reduced to extreme poverty, and forced to beg. When they come to beg, they still remember their former character, and though they have lost their

substance, yet they retain much of their former spirit: therefore they cannot think that they ought to be treated as ordinary beggars, but deserve a particular regard; and, if that be not given them, their spirits rise against him to whom they address themselves for a supply. Thus God gives the unhumbled sinner many common mercies, and shuts not up in the pit according to his deserving; but all this is nothing in his eyes. He must be set down at the children's table, otherwise he reckons himself hardly dealt with, and wronged: for he is not yet brought so low, as to think God may be justified when He speaks against him, and clear from all iniquity, when He judgeth him according to his real demerit (Psalm 51:4). He thinks, perhaps, that, even before he was enlightened, he was better than many others; he considers his reformation of life, his repentance, the grief and tears which his sin has cost him, his earnest desires after Christ, his prayers and wrestlings for mercy; and uses all these now as bribes for mercy, laying no small weight upon in his addresses to the throne of grace. But here the Spirit of the Lord shoots his arrows quickly into the man's heart, whereby his confidence in these things is sunk and destroyed; and, instead of thinking himself better than many, he is made to see himself worse than any. The faults in his reformation of life are discovered; his repentance appears to him no better than the repentance of Judas; his tears like Esau's, and his desires after Christ to be selfish and loathsome, like those who sought Christ because of the loaves (John 6:26). His answer from God seems now to be, Away, proud beggar, 'How shall I put thee among the children?' He seems to look sternly on him for his slighting of Jesus Christ by unbelief, which is a sin he scarcely discerned before. But now at length he beholds it in its crimson colours, and is pierced to the heart, as with a thousand darts, while he sees how he has been going on blindly, sinning against the remedy of sin, and, in the whole course of his life, trampling on the blood of the Son of God. And now he is, in his own eyes, the miserable object of law vengeance, yea, and gospel vengeance too.

- 11) The man, being thus far humbled, will no more plead, 'he is worthy for whom Christ should do this thing;' but, on the contrary, looks on himself as unworthy of Christ, and unworthy of the favour of God. We may compare him, in this case, to the young man who followed Christ, 'having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; who, when the young men laid hold of him, left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked' (Mark 14:51,52). Even so, the man had been following Christ, in the thin and cold garment of his

own personal worthiness: but by it, even by it, which he so much trusted to, the law catches hold of him, to make him a prisoner; and then he is fain to leave it, and flees away naked -- yet not to Christ, but from Him. If you now tell him he is welcome to Christ, if he will come to Him, he is apt to say, Can such a vile and unworthy wretch as I, be welcome to the holy Jesus? If a plaster be applied to his wounded soul, it will not stick. He says, 'depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord' (Luke 5:8). No man needs speak to him of his repentance, for his comfort; he can quickly espy such faults in it as makes it naught; nor of his tears, for he is assured they have never come into the Lord's bottle. He disputes himself away from Christ and concludes now that he has been such a slighter of Christ, and is such an unholy and vile creature, that he cannot, he will not, he ought not to come to Christ; and that he must either be in better case, or else he will never believe. Hence he now makes the strongest efforts to amend what was amiss in his way before: he prays more earnestly than ever, mourns more bitterly, strives against sin in heart and life more vigorously, and watches more diligently, if by any means he may at length be fit to come to Christ. One would think the man is well humbled now: but, ah! deep pride lurks under the veil of this seeming humility. Like a kindly branch of the old stock, he adheres still, and will not submit to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). He will not come to the market grace, without money. He is bidden to the marriage of the of the King's Son, where the Bridegroom Himself furnishes all the guests with wedding garments, stripping them of their own: but he will not come, because he wants a wedding garment; although he is very busy in making one ready. This is sad work; and therefore, he must have a deeper stroke yet, else he is ruined. This stroke is given him with the axe of the law, in its irritating power. Thus, the law, girding the soul with cords of death, and holding it in with the rigorous commands of obedience, under the pain of the curse; and God, in His holy and wise conduct, withdrawing his restraining grace, corruption is irritated, lusts become violent; and the more they are striven against the more they rage, like a furious horse checked with the bit. Then corruptions set up their heads, which he never saw in himself before. Here oft-times, atheism, blasphemy, and, in one word, horrible things concerning God, terrible thoughts concerning the faith, arise in his breast; so that his heart is a very hell within him. Thus, while he is sweeping the house of his heart, not yet watered with gospel grace, those corruptions which lay quiet before, in

neglected comers, fly up and down in it like dust. He is as one who is mending the bank of a river, and while he is repairing breaches in it, and strengthening every part of it, a mighty flood comes down, and overturns his works, and drives all away before it, both that which was newly laid, and what was laid before. (Read Romans 7:8-13.) This is a stroke which goes to the heart: and by it, his hope of making himself more fit to come to Christ, is cut off.

- 12) Now the time is come, when the man, between hope and despair, resolves to go to Christ as he is; and therefore, like a dying man, stretching himself just before his breath goes out, he rallies the broken forces of his soul, tries to believe, and in some sort lays hold on Jesus Christ. And now the branch hangs on the old stock by one single tack of a natural faith, produced by the natural vigour of one's own spirit, under a most pressing necessity (Psalm 78:34,35), 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.' (Hosea 8:2), 'Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know Thee.' But the Lord, never failing to perfect His work, fetches yet another stroke, whereby the branch falls quite off. The Spirit of God convincingly discovers to the sinner his utter inability to do anything that is good, and so he dies (Romans 7:9). That voice powerfully strikes through his soul, 'How can ye believe?' (John 5:44). You can no more believe, than you can reach up your hand to heaven, and bring Christ down from thence. Thus, at length he sees that he can neither help himself by working, nor by believing; and having no more to bang by on the old stock, he therefore falls off. While he is distressed thus, seeing himself likely to be swept away with the flood of God's wrath, and yet unable so much as to stretch forth a hand to lay hold of a twig of the tree of life, growing on the bank of the river, he is taken up, and in-grafted in the true vine, the Lord Jesus Christ giving him the spirit of faith.

By what has been said upon this head, I design not to rack or distress tender conscience; for though there are but few such at this day, yet God forbid I should offend any of Christ's little ones. But alas! a dead sleep is fallen upon this generation, they will not be awakened, let us go ever so near to the quick: therefore, I fear that there is another sort of awakening abiding this sermon, which shall make the ears of them that hear it tingle. However, I would not have this to be looked upon as the sovereign God's stinted

method of breaking off sinners from the old stock. But this I maintain as a certain truth, that all who are in Christ have been broken off from all these several confidences; and that they who were never broken off from them, are yet in their natural stock. Nevertheless, if the house be pulled down, and the old foundation razed, it is much the same whether it was taken down stone by stone, or whether it was undermined and all fell down together.

Now it is that the branch is ingrafted in Jesus Christ. And as the law, in the hand of the Spirit of God, was the instrument to cut off the branch from the natural stock; so the Gospel, in the hand of the same Spirit, is the instrument used for ingrafting it into the supernatural stock, I John 1:3.

"That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." See Isaiah 61:1-3. The Gospel is the silver cord let down from heaven to draw perishing sinners to land. And through the preaching of the law prepares the way of the Lord; yet it is in the word of the Gospel that Christ and a sinner meet. Now, as in the natural grafting, the branch being taken up is put into the stock, and being put into it, becomes one with it, so that they are united; even so in the spiritual ingrafting, Christ apprehends the sinner, and the sinner being apprehended of Christ, apprehends him, and so they become one, Philippians 3:12.