

Reasoning Together

*“Come now, and let
us reason together,
saith the LORD:
though your sins be
as scarlet, they
shall be as white as
snow; though they
be red like crimson,
they shall be
as wool.”
—Isaiah 1:18*

ONE OF THE ABILITIES OF

the human organism that is unique as compared to other forms of life, whether plant or animal, is the ability to reason. Reason is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as follows: “the power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking, especially in orderly

rational ways, ... proper exercise of the mind, ... the sum of the intellectual powers.” Our opening text suggests that this is a quality implanted in man by his Creator, because it exhorts us to reason together with him.

One might legitimately ask how we can reason together with God, a being whom none of us can physically see or hear, much less fully comprehend. To reason with the Almighty, and to do so in accordance with his plans, purposes, and character attributes, requires that we know something of him. In one sense, we can gain an understanding of

God by looking about us at the vast beauties of the heavens, and the natural wonders we observe daily on earth. (Ps. 19:1,2) In doing so, we learn to appreciate that there are certain laws of nature which govern these marvelous creations. The natural realm points out the power and wisdom of a being which is far beyond that which could be conceived by the human mind.

More is required, however, than knowing merely of God's great power and wisdom in order to reason with him. We must also appreciate something of his eternal plans and purposes as they relate to his created works, as well as his other character qualities which become manifest as a result of this knowledge. For example, if we view the beauties of creation around us, and ascribe them to an all-powerful and wise Creator, but at the same time believe that he plans to destroy the earth, we are forced to question whether such plans would be based on sound reasoning.

There is only one true and harmonious source for learning about God, his plans, purposes, and character. It is his Word, the Bible. By a careful and diligent study of the Scriptures, we are able to understand how God reasons—logically, orderly, thoughtfully. Based on this—an understanding of his Word—we are then enabled to have a proper foundation by which to come and “reason together” with him.

NONE RIGHTEOUS

Man's present condition is harmoniously described in both the Old and New Testaments. “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

“There is none righteous, no not one.” (Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Rom. 3:10-12) As plainly stated as these statements are, the trend of thought among mankind today is away from this scriptural viewpoint. Many theorize that human conduct is right or wrong only as it is compared with standards that have previously been established. To further accentuate this departure from God’s Word, the additional claim is made that one human being has as much right to set a standard as another, and that no one need be “conscience stricken” simply because of non-conformity to a previously accepted standard of behavior. This is a form of moral anarchy, a state of society in which every individual does as he pleases. In other words, this viewpoint means that there is no such thing as sin within the Biblical meaning of that term.

This viewpoint, in addition to being out of harmony with the Scriptures, is void of sound reasoning. For example, a man who over-indulges in drinking alcoholic beverages and wakes up the next morning with an unbearable headache, may not have committed a “sin,” as he considers the matter in his mind. The reaction of his body, however, does not agree. It shouts at him, as it were, that he has violated a law by which the human organism is kept functioning in an orderly and healthy manner. The modernist may call this the law of nature, but he should not forget that someone established that law. Whether or not he knows who it was, he realizes that his head and stomach protest in pain when he violates that law.

Some may try to convince themselves that human behavior is only relative, and that there is no real

sin. Yet, very few would venture to say that torturing human beings in prisons or concentration camps is not wrong. Rarely will many people believe that killing millions of innocent men, women and children, as is done in modern warfare, is a moral virtue. It would not be difficult to cite many similar illustrations of inhuman conduct which the vast majority of people would at once acknowledge to be wrong.

We should not have the thought, however, that only extreme acts, such as torture and murder, constitute sin. In an all-encompassing sense, all conduct which contributes to the unhappiness of innocent victims is wrong. One of God's commands stated, "Thou shalt not covet." (Exod. 20:17) When one covets that which belongs to another to the point that he will endeavor by dishonorable means to wrest it from him, that is wrong. It is wrong in the eyes of all decent, reasoning people, and it is wrong because it is a violation of God's law. It is sin!

MAN'S LIMITED RECOGNITION OF SIN

The reason these more flagrant violations of the laws of decency are acknowledged to be wrong even according to imperfect human standards—as also they are declared by God to be sin—is that man was created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26,27) To the extent man retains some of that image, he reasons to the same end. Less self-righteousness and more reverence for divine authority would surely help mankind to see the possibility that the violation of other laws referred to in the Bible is also wrong.

The Apostle Paul wrote that death has passed upon all, because "all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) The downward course of sin began with Adam. It was

the violation of a simply stated law of the Creator which constituted man's original sin. The narrative does not provide all the details involved in that sin, but we know that Adam willfully violated a law under which he was placed by God, and that he reaped the penalty for sin, which is death.—Gen. 2:16,17; 3:17-19; 5:5

As we trace man's history from Adam, the wrongdoing of the race becomes more and more apparent. Selfishness is the one word which seems to best summarize the intents which have led to sin of every kind. We have oft heard the expression that we live in a "dog eat dog world." Indeed, such a policy has been the basis of practically all human behavior since the world began. This evil motive has manifested itself in all forms of injustice, unfair practice, graft, murder, and war.

All of this should be clearly recognized as sin, and thus confirm the truth of the Scriptures in declaring that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) Not all have been willful planners and perpetrators of sin, but from the vortex of selfishness which moves a dying world along from one form of wrongdoing to another, none are able wholly to escape. That is why the apostle explains that all have become sinners because Adam sinned. We have been "shapen in iniquity, and in sin" we were conceived, declares the prophet.—Ps. 51:5

PUNISHMENT FOR SIN

Another recognized principle of right is that those who violate established laws should be punished. In this also we see evidence of the image of God directing

the process of human reasoning. This principle is of divine origin, and we can reason together with him upon it. The Creator was the first to declare that there is a penalty attached to wrongdoing. This manifests itself in the laws of nature, in that when these laws are violated, calamitous results inevitably follow.

Adam and Eve might have died simply because they violated a law of God, even if they had not been told about it in advance. However, as a just God, he told them not to partake of a certain tree in the midst of the garden and warned that if they did so, they would die. This fact made them realize, and should also teach us, that the laws of God cannot be spurned with impunity, but that there is a penalty for sin, the ultimate end of which is death.

Since the days of Eden, man has been a sinner, and the penalty for sin has been falling upon each generation as it has started upon its brief span of imperfect life. From the cradle to the grave each individual of the fallen race has lived and walked “through the valley of the shadow of death,” knowing that there would be no reprieve, and no escape, from that sure destiny.—Ps. 23:4

The grim reality of a dying world has been tragic enough in itself. Yet, to plague the people still more there have been invented those theoretical visions of a terrible abyss of literal torture in which, it has been claimed, countless billions would find themselves after they were supposed to have died. How we thank God that this part of man’s thinking is not true. The Scriptures state the whole truth on the subject when they declare simply that the “wages of sin is death.”—Rom. 6:23

Instead of hinting that “wages” more severe than death is the punishment for sin, we are assured that a way of escape, even from this penalty, has been provided. In the same verse, after stating that death is the “wages of sin,” the apostle declares that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Scriptures also declare, “As in Adam all die,” all those who come into Christ “shall ... be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:22) If we ask how this could be, the Bible tells us that “Christ died for our sins.”—I Cor. 15:3

FURTHER REASONING

It is well that at this point we accept God’s invitation to “reason together” with him, as stated in our opening text. We have already acknowledged that punishment of wrongdoers is just. We have also concluded that the Creator has the right to require obedience to his laws, and to punish the disobedient. However, the divine penalty for sin is death. When man pays that penalty by going into the grave, he is unable to do more. Upon conviction of a crime, a man may pay a fine of one hundred dollars and then be free. Yet, when the fine of death is paid, there can be no freedom, for death takes all that man has, even life itself.

Here is where the love of God enters into his design to guarantee that his original purpose in the creation of man shall not be in vain. The ultimate destiny which he planned for his human creatures shall not be frustrated or annulled, not even by man’s own sin. Here again, we are invited to reason together with him. It was just and right that God inflict the penalty of death upon a disobedient race.

God's justice in this, however, enhances our appreciation of his mercy when we realize that it was he who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish [forever], but have everlasting life."—John 3:16

THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

In simple language the Bible tells us that Jesus, whom God sent to redeem the world, died for the people. (John 1:29; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 2:17) Modern thinking might have us believe that the thought of one dying for another is repulsive, and that such an idea originates in ancient superstitions regarding the demands of heathen deities, or of what is offensively referred to as the "tribal god" of ancient Israel. Let us not be misled by this false reasoning. Such thinking ignores and, perhaps, would like us to forget, that the highest form of nobility and bravery known and honored by men is that of one person dying to save another.

We laud this bravery whenever and wherever we see it manifested. Soldiers who die for their country are considered heroes. Those who in any way sacrifice their lives in order that others may live or enjoy life more abundantly, are properly considered the greatest benefactors of mankind. In this we see another reflection of the image of God with which the human creation was endued. When we properly appraise the virtue of sacrifice we are simply reflecting the character likeness of God in our thoughts and viewpoint. We naturally honor sacrifice and label it heroism because God is the author of this worthy principle. When we recognize this, the Biblical plan

of redemption for sin by means of sacrifice is seen to be both beautiful and understandable, as well as just and loving.

EARLY ILLUSTRATION

The earliest record of sacrifice is the narrative of Genesis concerning the offerings brought to the Lord by Cain and Abel. Without understanding what was involved one might wonder why God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. However, God had a reason for this. When he sentenced our first parents to death he said that the "seed," or offspring, of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:14,15) In the light of subsequent revelations of God's plan for human restoration, this vague statement is seen to be a promise that the penalty for sin would one day be remitted.

God also reveals later in his Word that there can be no remission of sin without the sacrifice of life, symbolized by the shedding of blood. (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22) In the acceptance of Abel's flesh and blood offering God was pointing forward to a time when, through the sacrifice of a "lamb without blemish" which he would provide, man would be permitted to return to his lost estate. (I Pet. 1:18,19) Thus, as our opening text states, man's sins, though they are "as scarlet," are to be made "white as snow."

ABRAHAM OFFERS ISAAC

This thought of sacrifice is again brought to our attention in God's dealings with Abraham. To Abraham, God made the promise that through his seed "all families of the earth" would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Many of the families of the earth were already dead when this promise was made.

Billions have died since. To bless these it is necessary that they be restored to life. Having died because they were sinners, the promise of their restoration implies that their sins are to be remitted. In connection with this promise God again illustrates his purpose to provide for the remission of sin through the sacrifice of his Son.

This illustration was given in a very unique fashion. Abraham was asked to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. Having great faith in God's wisdom in asking him to do this, and also in God's power and willingness even to raise Isaac from the dead, Abraham proceeded to obey the divine command. Agreeing to the plan for sacrifice, Isaac was stretched upon the altar ready to be slain when an angel of God intervened, and a lamb was provided as a substitute.—Gen. 22:1-13; Heb. 11:17-19

When Abraham demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, a beautiful picture was provided concerning God's plan. Before the Creator's intention of recovering man would be realized through restoration to life, a loving father would voluntarily give up his son in sacrifice. Indeed, it was the Heavenly Father, the Creator and fountain of all life, who gave his only begotten Son to bring about man's release from Adamic condemnation.

DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL

Centuries later the descendants of Abraham were held in slavery in Egypt, and through Moses God wrought a miraculous deliverance for them. In connection with this there was the sacrifice of a lamb—the Passover lamb. This also pointed forward to a still greater deliverance—a liberation from slavery

to sin and death—and reminds us again that this release will be possible because of a sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” and as Paul confirms, “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.”—John 1:29; I Cor. 5:7

Throughout the Old Testament the promise of a coming Messiah and Deliverer is oft repeated. The Israelites looked forward to the coming of this foretold King, this Ruler who would have authority over all nations and dispense to all people the blessings of peace and life which God had promised. Jesus came in fulfillment of these promises, but the expectations of the Jews were not immediately realized. They had failed to note the condition upon which their long-promised King would be exalted—that is, the condition of sacrifice.

JESUS CAME TO OFFER SACRIFICE

Jesus came to be the King of kings, but first he must be the “Lamb of God,” who would be offered in sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. The only way to bless those who are dead is to restore them to life. The race is dying because of sin, death being the wages of unrighteousness. If man is to be restored, those wages must be paid by another, and by one who is not under similar condemnation. In God’s plan, Jesus was this one who died, first for Adam, and through Adam, for the entire human race—his posterity. He gave his life that we, his followers, and all the world, might live.—I John 2:1,2; 4:9,10

Thus, in the symbolism of the Scriptures, we are told that though we may be stained as scarlet because

of sin, we can be as white as snow as a result of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. This is one of God's ways of telling us that the wrongdoing of our first parents, and the continued sin and selfishness of their offspring, have not thwarted his purpose in the creation of man. In the divine economy the sin which has slain the race has provided an opportunity for God's love to manifest itself through sacrifice. This makes it possible for the guilty to be released from Adamic condemnation, and freed from death through a resurrection of the dead.

How understandable and practical is this arrangement when viewed in the light of reason! With this viewpoint in mind we can read the Genesis record of the creation and fall of man and realize that only temporarily is the human race deprived of the symbolic "tree of life" found in Eden. (Gen. 2:9) In that arrangement we can see a miniature of the Creator's design for an earth full of perfect human beings, living happily and at peace forever.

VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED

There has been immeasurable value in the experiences of suffering and death through which the race has passed. When awakened from death and given the opportunity to obey God's law, each member of the human family will be able to choose more intelligently the course he will take. From his past experience, man will be able to contrast the advantages accruing from obedience with the great loss resulting from disobedience.

Reason tells us that no other plan than the one outlined in the Bible can possibly save the human race from ultimate destruction. Reason also identifies the

Creator as the only one who could carry out such a plan, because its completion calls for a resurrection of the dead. The exercise of power necessary to raise the dead is no obstacle to God. He has, in fact, imbued his glorified Son, Christ Jesus, with this same power.—Matt. 28:18; John 5:25-27

Thus, when we read the Scriptures, we realize that the one who caused to be recorded the wonderful promises we find therein is abundantly able to fulfill them. Indeed, he will fulfill them in his own due time. We can be assured, therefore, that the destiny of man to live in peace, health, and safety forever upon earth is yet to become an accomplished fact. God's Word is sure in this regard. "Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD."—Isa. 45:18 ■