

[R1697 : page 277]

## "ONCE IN GRACE ALWAYS IN GRACE."

THAT monstrous doctrine of "eternal torment," a blasphemy on the name and character of Jehovah God, has led God's people to some very illogical conclusions on other subjects as well; amongst others, to the view that whoever becomes a true child of God can never become a "castaway" from divine favor. Thus does Satan use the *fear* of torment to hinder love to God, while he operates reversely, through the same fear, upon the minds of the same people to make them feel secure and careless, though they so dread God that true love is impossible.

The human mind is so constituted that it can by sophistry or false reasoning convince itself of error: hence the only safe position for any of us is to have absolutely no will or preference of our own, and thus to come to the Word of God free from all prejudice, intent simply upon knowing his will and plan: otherwise we are in constant danger of deceiving ourselves into whatever view we *prefer*; for "the heart is deceitful above all things." [R1697 : page 278]

Of course the Scriptures are appealed to as proof of this theory, that all are forever safe and sure of heaven who have been begotten of the spirit of truth. Hence we should examine carefully the Scriptures bearing upon this question, that we be not deceived. We read: –

(1) "Whosoever is born [begotten] of God doth not commit sin; for [or because] his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born [begotten] of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." – 1 John 3:9,10.

(2) "Whosoever is born [begotten] of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth [catcheth] him not." – 1 John 5:18.

(3) "Being born [begotten] again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." – 1 Pet. 1:23.

(4) "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." – John 6:44,37.

(5) "My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." – John 10:29.

(6) "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." – Rom. 8:29.

(7) "The Lord knoweth them that are his." – 2 Tim. 2:19.

(8) "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." – Phil. 2:13. **[R1698 : page 278]**

(9) "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." – 2 Pet. 1:10,11.

(10) "To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." – 1 Cor. 5:5.

The first four of these texts are supposed to teach that at our conversion we get from God an atom of himself, the seed of the new being; and this seed is presumed to be indestructible, incorruptible, unimpairable. It is claimed that although this *seed* may lie dormant awhile, or be hindered from development by a sinful course of life, it will ultimately, surely develop into a true and noble spiritual being.

But these texts do not so teach. They do not teach that the new nature, begotten by the holy *seed*, the truth, cannot corrupt, cannot die; – that the convert cannot fall from grace. The contrary is the suggestion

and lesson of the figure used – natural begetting. It shows us the possibility of misconception, miscarriage, still-birth, etc., after the spiritual begetting as after the natural begetting. Thus the figure used contradicts the theory sought to be built upon it.

They do teach, that if our begetting is genuine, it must be a begetting or inspiring by the *truth*, and not by *error*; and that if we are really begotten by God's precious promises to new hopes, and new ambitions, and a new course of living, our natural preference for sin (by reason of the fall) having given place to a preference for righteousness, we cannot sin (wilfully); – and to them that are accepted in Christ nothing is reckoned sin that is contrary to their will, *uncontrollable* weaknesses, resulting from the fall, being covered from God's sight by the *ransom*. – Rom. 4:7,8.

Hence, if any man sin (wilfully, intentionally), it is a sign that at that time he is not begotten of God by the Word of truth. If he ever were begotten to a holy, consecrated will, the seed of truth must have died; for so long as it remains he could not take pleasure in *wilful disobedience*.

The truth-seed itself is incorruptible, but not so the newness of life begotten by it. The truth may be let slip, and leave us as though we had not known it. "We have this treasure [the spirit of the truth and the new wills begotten of it] in earthen vessels," as the Apostle says. (2 Cor. 4:7.) And our earthen vessels are all more or less cracked by the fall, so that we are unable to contain or to retain a full measure of the spirit of the truth, – with all the daubing and patching we can do; at best they are leaky vessels. Therefore, the Apostle again says, **[R1698 : page 279]** "We ought to give the more earnest heed lest we should let these things slip [leak out]."

The possibility of *falling away*, after having come into full fellowship with the Lord and been reckoned members of his "body," is very clearly taught by our Lord as well as by the apostles. In fact, the only ones in danger of falling away from divine favor are those who

have been lifted up to that favor, and not the world still groveling in sin, "without God and without hope." The Apostle Paul says,

"If *we* [the consecrated Church] sin wilfully, after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins [*we* having enjoyed our share of grace under the one sacrifice], but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall *devour* [not preserve, nor purify, but destroy such wilful sinners as] the adversaries [of God]." – Heb. 10:26,27.

Again, he declares, It is impossible to renew unto repentance those once enlightened, who have been made partakers of the holy spirit, etc., if they shall fall away. (Heb. 6:4-8.) But so infatuated and so deceived by their own hearts are those whose views we criticise, that to these words they reply, Yes, but the Apostle says *if*; whereas he knew that they could not fall away, and is merely citing an impossible case. Such people can only be left to the blindness which their own wilfulness and prejudice has induced. Whoever can read this citation, and still claim that the Apostle was teaching the impossibility of Christians falling from divine favor, is surely lacking either in intelligence or conscientiousness; and it would be useless for us to try to convince him. For he who could and would so distort the divine record would have no difficulty in getting rid of any arguments we or others might frame.

The Apostle Peter speaks of this same class, saying, "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [*i.e.*, by being "begotten by the Word of God"], they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been *better* for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it [been "*begotten* by the Word of God"] to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own

vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." – 2 Pet. 2:20-22.

Our Lord taught the same lesson in his parables. He represented the state of the justified who backslide, by a man out of whom the devil had been cast and which, returning, found the heart swept and garnished, but unoccupied, and, entering in with others, made "the last end of that man worse than the first." – Matt. 12:43-45.

In the parable of the wedding guests (Matt. 22:11-13) the Lord shows one (who represents a class), who evidently came in among the others, clothed in the provided "wedding garment," and who was fully recognized as a guest and "friend" by the host *until* he removed the garment [which typifies Christ's imputed robe of righteousness]; and then he was cast out of the special light and favor into the outer darkness from which he originally came in.

In the parable of the sower our Lord shows how the good seed (the Word of God that liveth and abideth forever) might be received upon stony ground and sprout into being, and that new being afterward die, and how the same good, incorruptible seed in other cases is choked by the thorns of worldly business, pleasure and ambition. – Matt. 13:3-9,18-23.

In the parable of the Vine (John 15:1-8) he shows that one may be begotten by the Word of God, and even become a member of the elect Church, the *true* Vine, and be recognized as such by the husbandman, God, and that yet, if he fail to bring forth the fruits of the spirit, he will in due time be cut off from that elect Church or *true* Vine. For the present state of our membership is not final, but a probationary one, – His "house are we, *if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*" (Heb. 3:6.) We are justified by God's grace and called to be his sons, and "*he is faithful* that promised." (Heb. 10:23.) If there be failure or unfaithfulness, it will be on our part. Hence in receiving us as sons he is taking us at our **[R1698 : page**

**280]** Covenant: and whoever becomes a "castaway" must become such of his own *wilful* act, – "If we sin wilfully," etc.

Our Lord mentions some such whom he will disown, saying, Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonderful works in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils.

Again, he tells us of one fully recognized as a servant and entrusted with a talent for service, who, because unfaithful, will have it taken from him and be himself cast into outer darkness: not because he never was a real servant, but because, being really a servant, he proved unfaithful. – Matt. 25:14-28.

Let us now glance at the other texts cited to prove this theory that a true Christian cannot fall from divine favor.

The fourth is a simple statement that the Word and providence of God alone can draw men to Christ, the Life-giver, and that Christ will not refuse any coming as the result of such a drawing. It says not one word about his holding men who come so that they cannot go from him again, crucify him afresh and do despite to the spirit of God's favor.

The fifth text merely asserts God's willingness and ability to shield and keep all who desire to be kept – who abide under the shadow of the Almighty. It does not at all imply an imprisonment of those in God's care, so that they cannot go from him as they came to him, by the exercise of their own *free* wills.

The sixth text merely mentions that the class foreknown to the Lord as those who will be joint-heirs with Christ, he has foreordained must have characters like that of Christ – must be copies of him. See a further treatment of this text in Z.W. TOWER, Feb. 1, '94

The seventh text declares that God cannot be deceived. He knows those who become his, by being begotten by the Word, and he knows

equally well whenever any lose the spirit of the truth and cease to will and to do according to his good pleasure.

The eighth text shows our continual dependence upon the Lord, not only for our first impulses toward holiness when we are *begotten* by his Word to newness of life, but also when we need the encouragement and promptings to deeds of righteousness which his exceeding great and precious promises continually inspire. God's Word is "the power of God unto salvation [by which he works in us first to will aright and then to do right] to every one that believeth" – receiving the spirit of that Word into good and honest hearts. – Compare 1 Pet. 1:23 with 2 Pet. 1:4 and Rom. 1:16.

The ninth text shows that our continuance in safety depends upon our own course of conduct after God has done his part through his Word and providences; if then we *do these things*, if we cultivate the spirit of Christ and are "not barren nor unfruitful," but "give diligence [R1699 : page 280] to *make our calling and election sure*," then, under such conditions, we "shall never fall;" for God will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape. – See TOWER, Oct. 15, '92.

The tenth text is the only one that gives even a slight support to the doctrine claimed. Here one of the begotten or consecrated Church has committed sin; not necessarily a wilful sin, but quite probably in part at least a sin of ignorance; the transgressor was probably a "babe" in Christ and in the knowledge of the divine will, or had mistaken the liberty wherewith Christ makes free for license to sin, or both. At all events, the Apostle's language indicates that his case was not a *hopeless* one, as it would have been had the sinner transgressed against *full* light and knowledge, *wilfully*. For the same Apostle declares that such cannot be renewed unto repentance. – Heb. 6:4-6. Compare 1 John 5:16.

The Apostle would show the Church the importance of prompt and decisive action to correct such an error. The wrong-doer should not

be temporized with, nor coaxed and advised, nor remonstrated against, but should be promptly disfellowshipped by all the pure-minded, refused all recognition and all privileges of fellowship, no matter what his professions or knowledge or talents: thus left to the world and the devil for fellowship, he would be the more likely to see his condition and reform. That in the case mentioned the man did not have a *bad spirit*, [R1699 : page 281] but still had some love for God and his people and a desire for spiritual things, is shown by the Apostle's words, "That the *spirit* may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." If his spirit had been bad, the Apostle would not suggest its being saved – all that is evil must be destroyed. This man's spirit was good – his will was to do God's will, but from some cause he did not allow the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word work in him to *do right*. The purity of the Church demanded that he be dealt with rigorously; and his own future depended upon whether or not the animal nature which was ruling him should be mortified – put to death. – Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5.

The mortifying of the flesh implies that we cease to do evil and learn to do well; becoming dead as to sin, but alive unto righteousness. Only those who attain to such conditions will *ever* have everlasting life upon *any* plane of being.

But there are two ways of reaching the same end. The more desirable and more noble of the two is this; viz., after justification and peace with God, by faith in the great atonement, we should consider ourselves as bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, and hence no longer our own, and should present our bodies living sacrifices to the service of the Lord – to be used, not according to our former will of the flesh, but according to the will (the Lord's will) to which we have been begotten by the word of truth. Such will not fulfil the desires of the flesh – sacrificed and reckoned dead, but the desires of their new spirit. The mind of Christ dwelling in them richly will control them more and more, and accomplish the sacrifice of the flesh in God's service. The class who so do, during this Gospel age, are called



"Overcomers;" and to them will be fulfilled all the richest of God's promises; and, as joint-heirs with Christ, they shall inherit all things. These are in all a "little flock," because their path is a narrow one.

The other way of reaching the same result, viz., of becoming dead to sin and alive toward righteousness is followed by many; but it is an ignoble way, an unsatisfactory way and in every sense undesirable. It is this: After gaining justification and peace through Christ, to make a covenant of self-sacrifice, and then by yielding to temptations and weaknesses to fail to overcome; and yet to hold tightly to the Lord, at the same time not resisting the desires of the flesh – not crucifying the flesh with its affections and desires, *good* and *bad*. This is the attitude of the majority of truly consecrated Christians – they are seeking to serve God and mammon, to please self and worldly friends as well as the Lord, some going to one extreme and some to another. The result of their course is that they please nobody. The world endures them, but despises their religious aspirations as "cant," and themselves as hypocrites. They are always dissatisfied with themselves, feeling conscience-smitten that they are violating the spirit of their consecration. They do not please the Lord, but he has pity on them. He sees that if right-doing were *just as easy* as wrong-doing, this class would choose the right; and in sympathetic pity he does for them the only thing that can be done further. He delivers them to Satan; he permits the great enemy of righteousness to attack them; – he permits their cherished ambitions to ensnare them and pinch them, their idols to fall, their earthly sweets to turn to bitterness, until, heart-sick and disappointed, the spirit may turn fully to the Lord, not an "overcomer," not a sacrifice, but one in whom the *flesh* has been *destroyed* by bitter experience, crying,

"I have sought the world around,  
Peace and comfort nowhere found.  
Now to Christ my spirit turns,  
Turns a fugitive unblest."

But such a result is by no means a certainty; instead of the buffetings and troubles turning the heart to the Lord, it may and often does result in utter loss of the spirit of Christ and a total cutting off and destruction of the unfruitful branch.

The Apostle says, "that the spirit *may* be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The result is at best an uncertainty – it may or may not be saved ultimately. The only way to save such as will not sacrifice is to put them through troubles which will destroy the flesh and develop the spirit; and this heroic remedy the Lord applies.

This is the secret of much of the *trouble* through which God's people pass: – they are [R1699 : page 282] not overcomers, and he is putting them through troublous experiences to destroy the will of the flesh and its control of them as "new creatures," and save them from their old selves. For the "great company" (mentioned in Rev. 7:9,10) refers not merely to some of this class now living, who, because not overcomers, not self-sacrificers, will not be saved from the great "time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation," but go into it and "have their portion with the hypocrites" and the world, in order that they may have the love of fleshly things – worldly ambitions, etc., – entirely burned out: it refers as well to a similar class passing through trouble during all this Gospel age. To those *rightly exercised* a reward, a blessing, will be granted and everlasting life – although all such will lose the great prize to which all called in this age might attain, with far less pain and trouble, if obedient to their covenant, – self-sacrificers. But if, notwithstanding this discipline and experience, any still choose to live after the flesh, the Apostle's warning is that such "*shall die*" (Rom. 8:13); and he refers to the second death evidently, because the first death (Adamic death) passed upon *all*.

But let it not be forgotten that the "overcomers" also "suffer," pass through "fiery trials" and "endure a great fight of afflictions," partly in their own persons and partly in their fellowship with others misused. (See Heb. 10:33,34.) There is a difference, however, a great difference

between these sufferings of the *sacrificers* and those sufferings previously mentioned, of the class having their flesh *destroyed*. The sufferings of the self-sacrificing class are for godliness, for righteousness' sake, and in the interest of the Lord, his people and his truth, directly or indirectly: and such sufferings are accompanied by a joy and peace which make them, however severe, to appear but "light afflictions" and "but for a moment." (Compare Acts 16:22-25; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18; Acts 5:41.) But joy and rejoicing are properly lacking in the sufferings for correction in righteousness, and for unfaithfulness to the covenant of self-sacrificers: the *destruction* of the flesh is therefore doubly painful; and for every reason those who have been called to suffer with Christ as joint-sacrificers, and by and by to be his joint-heirs, should lay aside every hindrance and weight and run in the race, – that they may make their calling and election sure and win the prize.

In this tenth text, therefore, there is nothing to indicate that all who obtain the grace of God will never fall from it: it does, however, show God's longsuffering mercy, his unwillingness that *any should perish* in whom an acceptable character can be developed at any cost.

In conclusion, then, we exhort you, "that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (2 Cor. 6:1; Heb. 4:1.) The crown of life is promised to those faithful until death. – Compare Ezek. 33:13,14; Rev. 2:10,11,26; 3:5.

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