

ON TRIAL FOR LIFE.

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

– *Rom. 8:13.* –

THERE is no intimation in this scripture of a second probation for any of those addressed: the words were spoken and written for those who, in the *present* existence, are on trial for life. It does not say, If ye live after the flesh, ye shall have another trial; neither does it say, Ye shall be punished with eternal torments; but it does speak of a *present probation*, the issue of which shall be either life, or death – the extinction of life, cessation of existence.

Neither does the text say anything about faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ as a requisite to salvation: it says nothing whatever about what we believe or do not believe, but simply and only about *how we live*. Shall we, therefore, spring to the conclusion, as many do, that it teaches that it makes no difference what we believe if we only live righteously? By no means; and those who consider it to be in conflict with either the doctrine of restitution (the Millennial age of judgment or trial for the world) or the ransom, or who have failed to observe its contradiction of the theory of eternal torment, have taken but a shallow observation of the Apostle's teaching, and in fact have lost its entire force.

Not noticing that the words are addressed to the Church, and not to the world, the heedless Christian applies the admonition to the world, and allows it to lose its force upon himself. This is the very reverse of the Apostle's intention: he is talking *to the saints, to consecrated believers* in the redemption, who have been begotten of the holy Spirit and become new creatures in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1-8.) And it is for this reason that he says nothing here about faith in the ransom, that being conceded; nor about the Millennial age of trial, because those

addressed are on trial *now*, and their trial will be over and their reward obtained before the world comes into judgment. – 1 Cor. 6:2.

The warning, therefore, is not at all applicable to the world, but is full of solemn import to the Church – to the consecrated believers, new creatures in Christ Jesus, who, having been begotten of the holy Spirit, have now a spiritual nature, the old human nature having been consecrated to death. Such, having solemnly covenanted with God to present their bodies – their human nature – a living sacrifice (which was acceptable through Christ, and therefore accepted [R1748 : page 8] of him), and to henceforth live after the spirit, are not at liberty now either to annul that covenant, or to ignore it. They cannot claim again that (redeemed human nature) to which, by their covenant, they have given up all right, claim and title. And if they endeavor to do so, either by ignoring or despising their covenant, they thereby forfeit their claim to the new, spiritual nature, which can only be attained by faithfulness to the covenant of sacrifice, even unto death.

It is therefore *logically* manifest, even if the Apostle had not said it, that if *we*, consecrated believers, turn back again to live after the flesh, *we* shall die; that for us to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Rom. 8:6.) Our Lord's words in Matt. 16:24,25 are to the same effect – "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

An important question then is, What is it to live after the flesh? We answer, It is to live after, or in conformity to, and in gratification of, the inclinations and cravings of the fallen human nature. And it is the easiest thing possible to do this. All we have to do is just listlessly to abandon ourselves to the current of our old nature, and cease to strive against it. As soon as we do this, we begin to float down the stream, and by and by we find the current more and more rapid and resistance more and more difficult.

The death to which our text points as the inevitable end of such a course, is manifestly the "second" death. We were redeemed from the

first death and then placed on trial for eternal life, and in the event of failure, the loss of that new life will be the second death, – from which there can be no redemption and no deliverance.

The Apostle defines the works of the flesh thus (Gal. 5:19-21) – "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, – Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings and such like." What moral filth and pollution this describes; but such is the tendency of the fallen human nature. Just cease to strive against the old nature, and presently some of these noxious weeds will be flourishing and crowding out the good that remains.

"Ah, well," says one, "I have not all those mean qualities." Well, we are glad you have not: very few people have all of them; but beware, you may not know what manner of spirit you are of. Be sure that your old nature is not without an inherited and perhaps a formerly cultivated bias in some of these directions. Watch and pray against them, that ye enter not into temptation.

On the other hand, consider the blessed fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22,23), which are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law." To live in the cultivation of these graces is to "live in the spirit." And "if we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit" – make progress in the spiritual life. "Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; for the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." – Gal. 5:25,16.

Thus the Christian life is of necessity a warfare, a battle, between the new and the old natures, a hand to hand conflict which we dare not relinquish; for, not only is the prize of our high calling dependent upon it, but also the issues of life and death are in it. How solemn a thing is it, therefore, to live under these circumstances; for daily and hourly we stand before the bar of judgment. The words of our text have no

application to the world now, but *to us* who are now on trial: If *we* live after the flesh, *we* shall die; but if through the spirit we do mortify [put to death, refuse to gratify] the deeds of the body [the tendencies of the old nature], we shall live." And all who are truly the sons of God will do this: "for," says the Apostle (verse 14), "as many *as are led* by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God." If we *wilfully* refuse the leading of God's spirit, we forfeit the relationship of sons; if we listlessly disregard it, we endanger that relationship, and as surely as we are sons we shall receive chastisement for our correction and discipline.

But while we should be very grateful for the chastening, restraining hand of the Lord which thus helps to keep us in the straight and narrow way in which the spirit of God leads his own, we should be very careful to require just as little of it as possible. "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged of the Lord" and chastened. (1 Cor. 11:31,32.) But, nevertheless, with the most careful and prayerful watching against the uprisings of the old will of the flesh, we will doubtless make some missteps and need some of the Lord's chastening; for, says the Apostle (Heb. 12:5-12), "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, but if ye be without chastisement whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Let us, therefore, not forget the exhortation which speaketh unto us as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."

In the difficult course before us, and in view of all the dangers that beset it, how blessed is the promise that our Heavenly Father is ever willing to give the holy spirit to them that ask him, and the assurance also that if we be filled with the spirit we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. How necessary is it, therefore, to live near the fountain of divine grace, to pray without ceasing – especially in these last times when our

great adversary is so active and so cunning in his devices to deceive and lead astray the Lord's people.

The words of the poet are most appropriate to every one at this particular time –

"Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul;
Take every virtue, every grace,
And fortify the whole."
