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## "YE SHALL BE FREE INDEED."

– MARCH 5. – JOHN 8:12,31-36. –

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

– John 8:36.

OUR Lord's discourses of this lesson are presumed to have been delivered on the day following the eighth or great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, referred to in our last lesson: this conclusion is based upon the statement of the first verse of this chapter and the last verse of the seventh chapter. It appears that, altho the eighth was the last day of the Feast proper, another day was kept to a certain degree, the people being loth to relinquish the joys of the season. Another view is that this was a part of the discourse of the eighth day.

It is said that during this festival there were two great lights near the porch of the Temple, where Jesus discoursed (the Court of the Women – the portion of the Temple structure open to women as well as to men). These lights or candelabra, ornamented and gilded, were about seventy-five feet high, and threw a great [R2439 : page 55] light over the city, extraordinary for that period. It is presumed that this may have given Jesus the text for a discourse on the light of the world: but it is possible that our Lord took occasion to make this observation at the time of the performance of a certain ceremony by the Jews, described by Buxdorf as follows:

The ninth day, or day after the expiration of the eighth, which belonged to the "Feast of Tabernacles," is a solemn day likewise, and is called, "The Feast of Joy for the Law;" because on that day the last section of the Law was read, the rest having been read weekly during the course of the preceding Sabbaths. On this ninth day the custom of the Jews was to take all the books of the Law out of the chest, and to put a candle into it, in allusion to Prov. 6:23, and more particularly to Psa. 119:105. – Synag. Jud., c. xxii.

This act, symbolically considered, would imply, first, that the Law was a light, and secondly, that ultimately the Jewish Law would be superseded by the True Light – the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Either this last, or the two great lamps, or both of them, were quite a sufficient suggestion and illustration of the lesson which our Lord designed to inculcate. The thought of the one is that the world is in darkness, and needs the Light of Life, and that he who walks in the light will not stumble. The thought or suggestion of the other is equally comprehensible, implying that ultimately the veil of ignorance shall be removed, and the spirit of the truth shall be discerned, [R2439 : page 56] and thus Jesus, as the True Light, shall lighten every man that cometh into the world, respecting the divine character and law, and the conditions upon which eternal life may be enjoyed.

Another suggestion is that, as this Feast of Tabernacles represented the period of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, en route to Canaan, the great light to be followed would probably refer to the pillar of fire and cloud, which led Israel during the wilderness journey as a great light, and which was to their enemies who pursued them a cloud of great darkness. This thought is in full accord with the others, for we realize that spiritual Israel is journeying toward the heavenly Canaan, through the wilderness of sin, and that our Lord and his teachings are a light and a guide to his people – to the entire household of faith, but especially to those who are vigilant and attentive to the heavenly counsel.

That relationship to Christ is not a matter which, being put on in the instant of consecration, can never be dissolved, is clearly shown by the statement of vss. 31 and 32. Therein our Lord sets forth that *discipleship* is the thing that is entered into by those who accept him as the Savior and the privileges and blessings obtainable only through him. And *discipleship*, as here shown, does not signify mastery: on the contrary, it signifies that the one who becomes a

disciple is, until perfect, a novice, who becomes a disciple in order that under the Master's instructions he may come, morally and intellectually, to the full stature of manhood in Christ. A great mistake is made on this point, not only by worldly people, who expect perfection in all who have named the name of Christ, but also by Christians themselves, who vainly imagine that a fulness of *consecration* to the Lord should produce in them instantaneous perfection: some vainly and sinfully claiming that they are without sin, and thereby give the inference that they have no need of a Savior, a Mediator, and his merit, to cover their blemishes of omission and commission.

The correct thought to get is the one which is clearly set forth in our Lord's Word; *viz.*, that sinners are not called to discipleship, but are called to repentance and faith in the Redeemer for the forgiveness of their sins (justification): but this is all to the intent that as justified persons they may, by a full consecration to the Lord, become his disciples, – *pupils* in the school of Christ.

Why do we enter this school? What lessons are we to learn in it? And for what reasons do we seek to learn these lessons, and consecrate ourselves to their study?

The incentive to enter the school of Christ is the heavenly Father's invitation to *justified believers* who approach his throne of grace by the new and living way – Christ: to such he extends a "high calling," inviting such to become "sons of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

This school of Christ may be considered a school of self-denial, of self-sacrifice, prompted by love and maintained by devotion. The great Teacher of this school, appointed by the Father to instruct those who shall be accepted as his "brethren," was himself educated in the same school, under the Father's inspection and direction – "He learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect

[acceptable to the high station to which he was called – the divine nature] he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." – Heb. 5:8.

It was necessary that the "Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," should be tried in all points like as we are – that his obedience to the Father's will at any cost should be fully proved and demonstrated, as well as his love for his neighbor, humanity, whom by the Father's arrangement he came to redeem and to uplift. Much more, it is necessary that we who belong to this fallen but redeemed race, having been called to joint-heirship with him, should receive instruction and disciplining in this school which the Father has provided for those invited to be his sons, – partakers of the divine nature, – to the intent that we may fully put on the spirit of Christ, which received the Father's unstinted approval. Indeed, we have the plain declaration to the effect that we are all called according to a predestination on God's part that we might become copies of his Son, and thus be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," as joint-heirs in the Kingdom.

From this we see that in joining the Lord, through faith and consecration, we are not proclaiming ourselves graduates and heirs, but are proclaiming ourselves students, disciples, who *desire to be prepared to inherit* "the things which God hath in reservation for them that love him." If this thought be kept in mind, as the divine teaching on this subject, it will help to prevent our discouragement with ourselves when we find that unavoidably we do those things which we ought not to have done, and leave undone those things which we ought to have done, and that in our flesh dwells no perfection. – 1 Cor. 2:9; Rom. 7:25.

Moreover, we are to remember that it is not the flesh that has entered the school of Christ, and is under his instructions and preparation for the Kingdom, – for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 15:50.) Our acceptance of the divine call to

spirit nature meant the renouncement of the earthly nature in [R2439 : page 57] every sense of the word, and meant our begetting as new creatures – "sons of God." It is the "new creature," the new mind, the new will, that is in the school of Christ, and that is to be perfected – to be brought into full accord with the divine will – to become a copy or likeness of the Lord. We will never succeed in getting our flesh into absolute harmony with the divine law, because of its imperfections, inherited and otherwise. And he who is looking for perfection of his flesh, and who is resting his faith therein, must of necessity have a poor hope of ever attaining to the likeness of Christ – of ever becoming one of the predestinated class – "a copy of his Son." – Rom. 8:29.

It is unnecessary that we should point out that the new mind, in proportion as it develops in likeness to the mind of Christ, will relax no efforts to keep the body under, with its motions of sin – to keep the will of the flesh dead. Surely, no spirit-begotten son of God could allow sin to *reign* in his mortal body: should sin to any degree control him, it will not be willingly, and hence could be but momentarily – until the new mind, the new creature, seeing the uprising of the flesh, would conquer it, obtaining the promised grace and help in every time of need, from the heavenly store-house of grace, – Christ.

This thought, rightly entertained, will help true disciples to appreciate their own position, and not to be utterly cast down if overtaken in a fault of the flesh, so long as they realize that their *hearts* are not in sympathy with the sin and unrighteousness, but on the contrary in full sympathy with the principles and instructions of our Teacher, and longing to be pleasing and acceptable in his sight. And this correct thought will also help all such to exercise fervency of love amongst themselves, toward the "brethren," who similarly are disciples, pupils in this school, – new creatures, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit of their minds. If, therefore, each shall see blemishes in the flesh of the "brethren," disapproved and striven against, each should remember that the evil which he sees is that of his brother's enemy and not the evils of the brother himself, the "new

creature;" – if so be that he gives us the assurance that his heart, his will, is in harmony with the Lord and his law of Love; and that he is daily seeking to learn the lessons taught in this school of Christ; and seeking to fight a successful warfare against the weaknesses of the flesh.

This is Scripturally termed walking in the light, and not stumbling about in the darkness – understanding and acting upon and in harmony with the divine arrangement – viewing matters as God views them, and as he presents them in the Word of his grace. We need not, however, expect the worldly-minded to be willing or able to view the Lord's consecrated people in this light – of love, of charity, of patience, of long suffering, of brotherly kindness. On the contrary our Adversary, "the god of this world," points out to them the hypocrite, who uses the name of Christ and the [R2440 : page 57] law of Love as a cloak of maliciousness, selfishness, etc., and this Adversary continually seeks to misrepresent the terms and conditions of the school of Christ, not only to the world and to the hypocritical professors, but also and especially to the true disciples, whom he would fain discourage and turn back from the right way – persuading them, contrary to the Word of the Lord, that they are being judged according to the flesh, and not according to the spirit, the new mind.

"Disciples indeed" are those who will finish their course in this school of Christ and graduate and become joint-heirs with their Lord, and ultimately be associates with him in teaching and blessing all the families of the earth. But joining the school does not bring these results necessarily; as our Lord indicated, it is only by *continuing* in the school, continuing under his direction, under the direction of his Word of truth, faithfully and perseveringly, that the grand object of this school shall be attained. Nevertheless, at each step of the journey it may be our privilege to see that we are making progress – that we are coming to know more and more of the truth, and that it is more and more making us free. We are not to expect an instantaneous knowledge nor an instantaneous freedom.

The general effect of the light of the truth, of which the Word of God is the lamp, is to break the shackles of superstition and to make people independent, but these effects are of questionable profit to those who are not disciples in the school of Christ. To others, freedom and light of knowledge are apt to bring nearly as much bane as blessing, leading often to arrogance, self-conceit, unkindness, boastfulness, combativeness, dissatisfaction and general unhappiness. These evil results come upon those who are made free in some respects only, and left bound in other respects: and this is the general and growing condition of the civilized world to-day, including the majority in the nominal Church.

But the true disciples, heeding the Word of the great Teacher, and continuing in all things to be his pupils, are not only set free from superstitions and ignorance, but also from the service of Sin; and receive instead a correct appreciation of their own natural weaknesses and blemishes, and of the divine mind – the truth. In consequence, their freedom is one which blesses instead of injuring them; one which brings humility instead of pride and boastfulness; one which brings patience instead of anger; one which brings generosity and benevolence instead of spitefulness and selfishness; one which brings joy and peace instead of [R2440 : page 58] discontent and bitterness of spirit. Truly, the Son alone can make us free indeed.

And yet, be it remembered, our freedom is not a freedom of the flesh, but a freedom of the heart, the mind, the will, the new nature. And this freedom is necessarily incomplete so long as we have this treasure in an earthen vessel – so long as the new creature must use the imperfect body of the flesh as its instrument and exponent. These "brethren" of Christ, "sons of the highest," will be free in the absolute sense only when they attain their share in the first resurrection, – "I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness."

Our Lord points out that those who commit sin are the servants of Sin, and are not free. The Apostle declares, "He that committeth sin



is of the devil," and yet declares that, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 3:8; 1:8.) How, then, shall we reconcile these opposing statements and understand the Scripture which declares, "Being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness?" – Rom. 6:18.

We answer that the Scriptures ascribe *no sin* to the new mind, and *no perfection* in righteousness to our fallen flesh: both of these facts must be kept in mind in studying this subject. The "new creature" begotten of God (whose flesh is reckoned dead) and which is represented by the new mind, CANNOT SIN, because in its very essence as the "seed" or germ, implanted by the truth, "the spirit of the truth," it is opposed to sin. (James 1:18.) This new creature is so fully in accord with righteousness, so fully imbued with the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of holiness, that it delights in holiness, and not in sin; and this must be the case so long as this begotten or holy spirit condition continues. He that is *begotten*\* of God sinneth not (willingly – does not approve of nor take pleasure in sin), because his *seed* remaineth in him, – the holy seed of the truth, the spirit of the truth, with which he was begotten, and "that wicked one toucheth him not." – 1 John 3:9; 5:18.

\**Gennao* here signifies *begotten*, and refers to the beginning and not the completion of our "change" of nature. – See also *Revised Version*, and the *Emphatic Diaglott*.

So long as the heart (the mind, the will) is holy, in harmony with God and with righteousness, – that is to say, so long as the seed of our begetting, the spirit of the truth, the spirit of holiness, continues in us, – the new mind cannot approve of sin, but must and will be its opponent. Even tho many of the battles fought are with the members of our own fallen and weak human nature, their appetites and desires, we nevertheless, as "new creatures," are separate and distinct from the flesh and the weaknesses and imperfections of the flesh are not imputed to the new creature in Christ Jesus, but are reckoned as covered, hidden under the merits of our Lord's redemptive sacrifice.



Thus, altho our flesh, through weaknesses of the fall, and through evil besetments, may never come up to the standard of the divine law, notwithstanding all our efforts to bring it into subjection to the same, nevertheless *we*, as "new creatures," have the Scriptural assurance that "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us ["new creatures"] who are walking not after the flesh [but resisting day by day its seductive influences to the best of our ability, and seeking divine aid] but after the spirit [we are walking, – not *up to* the spirit probably, but following day by day, to the intent that eventually we shall, by the grace and help of our great Teacher, arrive at the glorious condition of character as "new creatures" which even the Heavenly Father can accept as copies of his dear Son]." – Rom. 8:4.

On the contrary, if any who had thus become "new creatures" should engage in sin *willingly, heartily*, and live according to the flesh, it is a sure sign that the *seed* of truth wherewith he was *begotten* has perished: for so long as this *seed* remaineth in him, he cannot sin willingly. – 1 John 3:9.

Those who are slaves of sin, who have not been made free indeed and received into sonship, may sometimes be used for a time, under present conditions, as servants of the divine plan, in the accomplishment of the plan of the ages; as, for instance, God sometimes overrules and uses the wrath of man and Satan's opposition; but God has made no provision for the everlasting continuance of sin and those who are its slaves. Ultimately the only ones who shall be privileged to exist at all will be sons of God. Not to be misunderstood here, let us remember that there are sons of two ages: –

(1) The sons of this Gospel age, begotten of the Father to joint-heirship with Jesus Christ, our Lord, as his "brethren," otherwise called the Bride of the First-begotten, who has inherited all things. "Now are *we* [thus] the sons of God." This house of sons, begotten to the spirit nature, will soon be complete, and never have further additions to its members; but we are to remember that –

(2) Another house of sons is shortly to be started. For the declaration is that our Lord Jesus shall become a Father, a Life-giver, to the world – to whosoever will accept this gift of God under the terms of the New Covenant during the Millennium. Those will be the sons of the after resurrection, while the Church are to be sons of the first resurrection, the first-born ones. The Apostle, referring to these sons of Christ who will be begotten during the Millennial age, and be born to full sonship at its close, declares that they also shall be delivered "from the bondage of corruption [death] into the glorious liberty of the sons of God" – freedom from sin, death, sighing, crying, pain, etc. They will inherit these, the common privileges of all the sons of God, and in addition the earthly heritage, the "purchased possession," secured for mankind by the great sin-offering. – Rom. 8:21-23.

The restitution class of earth will thus be sons of Christ, who *bought* their life and who will give afresh to them that which was lost in Adam and which he redeemed at the cost of his own life. But this will not imply that such will not eventually own Jehovah as their Father also and be owned by him as his sons. On the contrary, the typical custom in Israel on this point makes this all plain. For instance, all Israelites were known as children of Abraham, children of Israel and children of Jacob.

But the central thought we would impress is that all who shall be recognized by God as *sons* at any time must be freed from the incubus of sin by the Only Begotten Son of God, the Mediator, – and such only are free indeed.

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