

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE DEAD.

– 1 PET. 4:1-11. – SEPTEMBER 20. –

"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess." – Eph. 5:18.

THE Apostle's argument is that dead people cannot sin; and that the Lord's consecrated ones, having devoted themselves even unto death, already reckon themselves "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:11.) We have become followers of him who, realizing the sinfulness of sin, and that the whole human family was hopelessly under its control, gave himself even unto death, that he might redeem us from sin and its wages – death. If we appreciate our Lord and his work, his love for righteousness, and his sacrifice on our behalf; and if we desire to be truly his disciples, followers in his footsteps, it will mean that we will "arm ourselves with the same mind" that he had – the same opposition to sin, the same determination to lay down our lives in opposition to it, and in endeavors to assist in delivering those who are under its control. Not that any sacrifice of ours could effect the cancellation of the divine sentence, but that our Lord's sacrifice, being quite sufficient to accomplish this, we are privileged to show our devotion to him and to the principles governing his conduct: the inducement being held out to us that those who suffer with him shall share also his glory, his Kingdom, his immortality.

Those who have made such a consecration unto death, in opposition to sin, will certainly not commit sin *wilfully*, for to do so would prove that their wills had changed – that they were no longer begotten of the new will, the new mind, the holy Spirit or disposition, but had become alive again as the servants of sin. Such a course would prove that such persons had ceased to be New Creatures, and the loss of this new life to them would mean the Second Death. But so long as they remain willingly faithful to their vows of fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, in his opposition to sin – so long as they

remain thus reckonedly dead to sin and reckonedly alive as New Creatures, they have no sin. As the Apostle John expresses it, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him;...whosoever is born [begotten] of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; he cannot sin because he is born [begotten] of God." – 1 John 3:6,9.

The thought here is not that any of the Lord's people become perfect in the flesh, so that they never err in thought, word or deed. The thought is that the new *will* is counted the New Creature, separate and distinct from the *flesh*, so that while the will, the heart, is fully loyal to the Lord, in opposition to sin, the flesh is reckoned dead to sin, and hence any of its weaknesses and imperfections which are unintentional, not assented to by the new will, the New Creature, are not counted by the Lord, who knows us not after the flesh, but after the spirit. Thus, as the Apostle Paul declares, "The righteousness of the Law is *fulfilled* in us who walk not after the flesh [desiring to serve it], but after the spirit [endeavoring to do the Lord's will]."

The "time past of our lives," referred to in vss. 3 and 4, **[R3247 : page 364]** was the time when we were natural men, before we became New Creatures, begotten of the Lord's Spirit. That time past, and that past experience of life, sufficeth us – we want no more of it, we have found a better life. We would not return to the former condition of natural-mindedness and alienation from God under any consideration. The list of excesses mentioned by the Apostle – lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelries, carousings and abominable idolatries – were not the same with all of us; and yet there is a certain amount of correspondency in every case. Some of the early Christians were lifted by the Lord's grace out of very deep degradation of mind and body, and some of the Lord's people of today have been similarly lifted from the depths of Satan and sin, while still others, never having been so deeply degraded, were not lifted from such great depths. However, all who have the new mind of full

consecration to the Lord can realize a great change from the mind or disposition which was theirs naturally.

Even those born of Christian parents, who therefore were born on the plane of justification, realize that their natural hearts had more or less affinity for the things of sin, even including idolatries – idolizing themselves or others or money or fame or influence or whatnot. A change takes place in all, but the degree of change is necessarily marked by the degree of degradation preceding our consecration. How thankful some of us should be that in the Lord's providence we were born of Christian parents and under Christian influences! How careful all of the Lord's people should be that any children which they have brought into the world, or may yet bring, shall come under the most favorable influences to make them the more amenable to the "reasonable service" of a full consecration of their all to the Lord!

The idolatrous companions of those who once lived in sin doubtless spoke of the latter as hypocrites, when they turned from these things, becoming dead to them and alive toward the Lord and his service. Their disposition would be to attribute such a change to some ignoble motive. It would be beyond their comprehension that anyone should voluntarily make such a change, for truly they would say that the course was "unnatural"! Likewise, in our day, those who step out of churchianity, with its forms of godliness without the power, with its social revelry, intoxication with the spirit of this world and of false doctrines (Rev. 17:2), and its idolatries of money, influence, etc., are considered peculiar people, and not infrequently their sanity is questioned. The natural man understandeth not why any should seek for more than that which would be outwardly respectable and honorable. The world knoweth us not, even as it knew not the Lord. – Rev. 18:3.

The fifth verse according to our Common Version seems to refer to those who speak evil, and to say that they will be obliged to give

an account in the day of judgment – in the Millennial Day, when they will be on trial. This is undoubtedly true. As our Lord declared, every act and word done in injury of the Lord and his faithful will receive a just recompense of reward – justly proportionate to the amount of their wilfulness in the matter. But there is another way of viewing this verse, equally true, viz., by connecting it with the preceding verse, so as to have it read, "Speaking evil of *you who shall give an account* to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." This last thought seems more fully in accord with the entire testimony of the Word on the subject. It is we, the Church, who are expecting shortly to give such an account. It is we who are being specially tried and tested during the present time, because to us the light and knowledge and opportunity have come in advance of the world. This is our trial time, and the Lord's judgment or decision with reference to who shall constitute the very elect, and respecting who shall be accounted worthy of joint heirship with the Lord, is the very decision that is to be rendered.

The Apostle continues with this thought, saying that it is for this reason (because we who are dead to the world and alive toward God are being called out now, as the Lord's elect class, therefore) the Gospel is preached *to us who are* (thus) *dead*, so that while the world judges us as in the flesh, like all other men, the Lord may judge us as in the spirit, begotten to a newness of life. This is in exact accord with what we saw in the first two paragraphs of this lesson. The world discerns not that the New Creatures are any different from other men; hence it wonders at their devotion, calls it folly or hypocrisy, and discerning the imperfections of the flesh may not at all times be able to see so great a difference between the New Creatures and the world. But God, who knoweth the heart, and who has from the moment of our consecration counted the flesh as dead, and who charges nothing against us as New Creatures, begotten spirit beings, except that which is *wilfully* wrong, is the One with whom we have to do, and in whose favor and love and promises we rejoice. God is "for us"! None can prevail against us; all things must work together for good to us,

because we are his, because he has called us according to his purpose, because we are seeking to walk in his way, not *after* the flesh, but *after* the spirit.

The end of all present things is near. Present institutions, under the supervision of "the prince of this world" (Satan), and controlled largely by his spirit, must soon, according to the divine promise, give place to the new conditions of God's Kingdom, when the great Redeemer shall take to himself his great power [R3247 : page 365] and reign – binding Satan and putting down all insubordination and everything contrary to the righteousness which is of God. We who so believe can look with great equanimity upon the changing conditions of this present time; and the evil-speaking of the world and its antagonism manifested toward us in various ways, because we are New Creatures, walking after the spirit to the extent of our ability, need not alarm us, for greater is he who is on our part than all that be against us. Hence it behooves us to be sober-minded – to take this reasonable and proper view, which does not overlook the future to see the present, but rather overlooks the present to see the future, held up before us in the Lord's Word. It behooves us also to watch unto prayer, to remember that we are not of ourselves sufficient for these things, that "our sufficiency is of God."

"Above all things," urges the Apostle, these who are dead to the world, and misunderstood by the world, but alive toward God and accepted through Christ as God's sons (despite all the blemishes of the flesh), these should be fervent in love amongst themselves. Such as realize the true situation, such as are standing for the principles of righteousness and truth and loyalty to the Lord, and enduring hardness as good soldiers, must have a deeply sympathetic love for all others who, like themselves, are battling for the Lord, and for the same principles of right. Whoever has not a fervent (burning) love for his fellows has reason to question to what extent he is one with the Lord and with the little flock whose experiences the Apostle is here delineating.

True, there are some of the Lord's accepted ones whom he counts dead as respects the flesh and alive as respects their spirit, their new natures, who are less lovely naturally (in mind and body) than some who are of the world, less fallen naturally: but wherever the true love of the Lord prevails it will indeed cover a multitude of sins, a multitude of blemishes, a multitude of imperfections, in those whom it will recognize as fellow-pilgrims in "the narrow way," "brethren" of the one family of God. This proper love, the love of God, will enable those who possess it to consider one another from the divine standpoint, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, the heart, the intention.

Amongst those who are dead to the world and alive as New Creatures, there should be a special exercise of hospitality, and that without grudging. It should be hearty, and not merely because the Lord commends and commands it. Hospitality, indeed, is, as the Apostle points out, an element of character which should be cultivated toward all men: We should "do good unto all men as we have opportunity, but especially to the household of faith." There are some who can recognize this principle of hospitality quite keenly, and who, if hospitality be denied them, will be inclined to berate the brethren for their lack of the proper spirit. Such and all should inquire of themselves to what extent they have ever exercised hospitality and generosity to others; and anyone who realizes that he has received more from the brethren than he has given them should feel ashamed, and should seek of the Lord wisdom, that he may know wherein is his weakness, that he has so far come short of the great privileges of the Lord's followers, all of whom are to be *givers* rather than receivers – except under special conditions of distress. But let none of us forget that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Let each of us seek to enjoy the blessing which comes from a liberal interpretation of this word hospitality.

The Lord's grace and bounty are manifold; they come to us in numberless forms, in things both spiritual and temporal. Some of us

may receive a larger number of these favors than others, but in that event the responsibility or stewardship is proportionately increased; and the Apostle urges (vs. 10) that we should seek to serve out to others whatever gifts we possess. He who waters others shall himself be watered. This principle applies to everything, both temporal and spiritual.

Still speaking of this Church class, dead to the world, and judged by the world as though they were men, but alive toward God, and judged by God as New Creatures, spirit beings merely sojourning in these fleshly bodies, as in a tent, and waiting in this wilderness condition to learn the lessons necessary before entering the land of promise, the heavenly Canaan, by sharing the First Resurrection, the Apostle proceeds to point out that these, when they *spea*k, should be as "God's oracles," absolutely truthful, wholly reliable. If they *serve* they should do it with all the ability [R3248 : page 365] which they possess, recognizing that the ability is God-given as well as the talent. These exhortations to truth and faithfulness in utterance and service are applicable first of all to believers (the Church) amongst ourselves, but applicable also to all with whom they come in contact. We may be evil reported of and slandered, but all who know us, who have dealings with us, should find from experience our loyalty to principle, our endeavor that the words of our mouths as well as the meditations of our hearts and the conduct of life should be pleasing to the Lord and an honor to his name and cause, that God may be glorified through Christ, to whom belongs the glory and the Kingdom forever. His Church alone, in the present time, recognizes fully and properly the right and dominion of the Lord as the King. We alone have the [R3248 : page 366] blessing that comes from this recognition and relationship, but we look forward with joy to the time when his Kingdom shall be established amongst men; when the time shall come for which we are praying, "Thy Kingdom come"; when the knowledge of the Lord shall be made to reach every creature, and when many shall come to know and to love and to obey him whom now we rejoice to honor as our Redeemer and King.

As is indicated by the Golden Text, this lesson was designed by those who selected it to be a Temperance Lesson. We have not dealt with it after the manner they intended, but according to the Apostle's meaning. It certainly is a total abstinence lesson in one sense of the word, viz., in the sense that the class who have become dead to sin and alive toward God will desire to abstain from "every appearance of evil," which certainly will include intemperance, concerning which the Lord's Word is very explicit, in declaring that "No drunkard shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven." – 1 Cor. 6:10.

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