

[R3985 : page 134]

FILTHINESS OF FLESH AND SPIRIT

"Having therefore this promise, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." – 2 Cor. 7:1.

WE ARE not to understand the Apostle here to mean that we are to cleanse ourselves from the condemnation of original sin. Time and again the Apostle Paul and all the writers of the New Testament reiterate in various forms the declaration that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in God's sight. This signifies that nothing that we can do can enable us to live perfectly, even if original sin [R3985 : page 135] were cancelled for us; hence it would be a still greater impossibility for us not only to live perfectly now but to accumulate a merit which would cancel for us our share in the original transgression. On the contrary, the Scriptures with united voice declare that only by the shedding of blood could there come a remission of original sin – that only "by his stripes are we healed:" that the "Lord laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all," "He died the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God," and that by virtue of his sacrifice for our sins we are made acceptable with God, and the condemnation against us as members of Adam's race is set aside that we may have a new start. (Heb. 9:22; Isa. 53:5,6; I Pet. 3:18.) Not only so, but knowing that in our fallen flesh dwelleth no perfection, the Lord has graciously arranged to cover all our blemishes that are of heredity and not of intention, not of our willing. Thus we have what is Scripturally known as justification by or through faith in the great atonement which God has effected through the death of his Son.

It is this class, already justified "through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25), that the Apostle addresses in the words of our text – urging them to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the

flesh and the spirit. What does he mean? If we were cleansed by faith in Christ why address us thus along the line of works of our own for our own cleansing? We reply that our justification by faith was granted to us as the basis for our consecration to God as disciples of Jesus, as "followers of the Lamb." None were thus accepted unless in their hearts they turned from sin, desiring to be in harmony with God and his righteousness. Their consecration to God on the basis of their justification signified that they had not only turned from sin but that they had united their hearts and lives with Jesus – that they had enlisted under him as the Captain of their Salvation, to fight the good fight against sin in its every form, within and without, under his guidance and direction. Should these now after enlisting rest content and do no fighting against sin, either in their own mortal bodies or in their surroundings, it would be an indication that they had not the Spirit of Christ, which calls to mind the declaration of the Apostle, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." – Rom. 8:9.

"FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT"

We see then that it is God's will concerning us that we should do more than renounce sin in our minds – we are to give our hearts to the Lord, desiring fellowship with him: we are to be imbued with his spirit of opposition to sin, so that as New Creatures we will fight the good fight of faith against the Adversary and the world's spirit of selfishness, and against the weaknesses and blemishes and sinwardness of our own mortal bodies. These were the conditions of our enlistment, the conditions under which we were accepted of the Lord, and we must fight this fight of faith, as the Apostle says, if we would lay hold upon eternal life – if we would ever get the great reward of glory, honor and immortality with our Captain. Our text does not relate to our resistance of the Adversary and the world, but confines itself to our dealings with ourselves, which certainly is

our chief concern, our chief battle – he who rules his own spirit, his own mind, is a greater soldier, a greater hero, than he that captures a city in literal warfare. This is the Lord's estimation of the matter, and hence should be ours. – Prov. 16:32.

The Lord requires such a demonstration on our part – of activity against the motions of sin in our flesh, in our minds, as a demonstration that the New Creature is alive to the responsibilities of its conduct as a soldier of the cross, and additionally because he has decreed that none shall be of the little flock of joint-heirs with his Son who do not in these respects of loyalty to the Father and to righteousness and opposition to sin demonstrate their heart-likeness to Jesus. The Apostle affirms this, saying that we are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Rom. 8:29.) Whoever refuses or neglects the development of such a character-likeness or copy of Christ's mind, disposition, **[R3986 : page 135]** is refusing or neglecting the only terms and conditions on which he may hope to make his calling and election sure to a place in the Kingdom class. In view of this how zealously we should strive to fulfil the urgent admonition of the Apostle – to demonstrate and to increase to fervency our love for righteousness, for truth, for all the ways of the Lord, by opposition to sin, especially in our own bodies, cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit (mind).

FILTHINESS OF THE MIND

The cleansing of our minds is far more important than the cleansing of our flesh, because we might succeed measurably in cleansing the flesh while the mind might still be impure. In such a case we would remember the Pharisees whom the Lord rebuked, saying, Ye make clean the outside of the cup or platter, but within are full of all manner of uncleanness, impurity. (Matt. 23:25.) Out of the mind proceedeth evil thoughts, as the Apostle

declares, and these evil thoughts, these wrong conceptions, have to do with all the filthiness of the flesh. It is mainly, therefore, to the mind that the Lord appeals throughout his Word during this Gospel age. He invites us first of all to set our hearts right, our wills, and then having done this to allow the new will to rule our minds, and thus the new will through the cleansed mind institutes a rule and order and purification of the flesh.

Were we perfect there would be little difficulty in ruling our minds and our bodies as soon as the will had been fixed for righteousness; but six thousand years of falling from the image and likeness of God have wrought great havoc in us all. Hence, as the Apostle declares, "In my flesh dwelleth no perfection"; and again, "We cannot do the things that we would"; and again, "The spirit [here the New Creature, the will] indeed is willing, but the flesh [the old nature, mental and physical] is weak." (Rom. 7:18; Gal. 5:17; Matt. 26:41.) This discrepancy between the new will, the new mind, and the mind of the flesh and the flesh itself, both reckoned as dead but really quite alive, **[R3986 : page 136]** requiring continual vigilance to restrain them and keep them in line with the New Creature's intentions, means quite a fight, and success in this fight means a victory, and victory in this fight is what the Lord proposes to reward with the special honors and blessings proffered during this Gospel age. It is quite unnecessary here to detail the various forms which this filthiness of the mind may assume – all of them selfish, all of them more or less degraded, all of them tending downward, and hence in opposition to the resolutions and covenants of the New Mind, the New Creature. A part of this filthiness of the mind is selfishness, which frequently is so mean as to be ashamed of itself, to seek to hide itself under various pretexts of generosity, etc., and by outward ostentation, gifts, etc. Other features of the filthiness of the mind are jealousy, covetousness, ambition. These various forms of selfishness are all to be recognized, as the Apostle declares, as of evil origin, works of the flesh and of the Devil. Lasciviousness or

sensuality is a further part of this filthiness – another form of selfishness or love of self-indulgence. With all of these conditions of the mind, the New Creature should be in opposition to the extent of despising them, fighting against them, destroying them.

"FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH"

Although, as our Lord's words intimate, an outward cleansing of the flesh and making clean of the outside of the cup would not prove a purity within of the mind, of the heart, the proposition is reversely true that outward filthiness does indicate a filthiness of the mind, because the mind controls, and if it were purified the result would be a cleaning up of the outside. Indeed we may be pretty sure that the love for the approval of others would lead almost everyone to keep his externals, seen by men, fully up to the standard of his mind if not above it. It is easier to cleanse the flesh than to cleanse the spirit, the mind. The Apostle's urgent exhortation is that all who are the Lord's people should cleanse themselves of all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit.

A brother once said to us, "How does it come that the reading of MILLENNIAL DAWN affected my outward life as nothing else ever did? I used to drink in moderation, I used to smoke immoderately, occasionally I played a game of cards with the rector of the Episcopal Church to which I was attached, I chewed tobacco, and occasionally used strong language, of which I am now ashamed. My friends gave me tracts and booklets on smoking and on the use of intoxicating liquors, but they had no weight with me. I replied, in substance, 'Mind your own business, I am able to take care of myself.' But after reading MILLENNIAL DAWN a change took place. I gave up all those things of which before I had not been ashamed. They all appeared in a new light – as unworthy of me as a son of God and follower of the Lamb.

Now the strange thing to me is this: I looked all through the DAWNS to see what I had read there that had influenced me thus, and to my surprise I could find no condemnation of the things I had renounced. Now my question is, How does it come that the book which says nothing on this subject has had such a powerful influence over me, while the other books which said much on the subject had no influence?"

We replied, "Brother, the DAWN is merely a restatement of the Bible itself and puts matters in the Bible way. Hence it did not ask you as a New Creature to lop off some of the unsightly branches of your fallen disposition, but it did hand you the axe of Truth and suggest to you that you cut down the whole tree, branches and all, pointing out to you that the New Creature would live and flourish and finally be perfected only as it would master the old nature and thus become "more than conqueror," and be counted worthy of a share in the Kingdom, because of its character-likeness to our Lord. – Luke 3:9.

THE CLEANSING POWER

Does some one say that it requires great strength of character, great power of the will, to cleanse our minds and our flesh? We answer, Yes, and that is exactly what the Lord seeks to develop in us. All of his joint-heirs in the Kingdom will be found to be strong characters, and that because of the development of character in the present time in the conflicts with the flesh. Does some one else suggest that with the cravings of the flesh such a victory is impossible? We reply that the Apostle's words do not indicate that the flesh will be made absolutely pure and perfect. His suggestion is that it may be cleansed of its filthiness – so that everything coarse, rude, slovenly, dirty, filthy in thought or in deed, in mind or in person, would be reprehensible to us, offensive. Moreover, we gain this desirable and glorious condition not suddenly but gradually. The cleansing process must

begin at once, but it will continue until our latest breath, for although we can and do quickly become pure in heart, pure in intention, pure in our wills, it certainly does require time to accomplish the purification of the mind and the flesh. The power which begins this cleansing, which continues it acceptably in the Lord's sight, is the new will; and this very fight against sin and uncleanness strengthens the will so that each victory makes it more ready and more capable for the next conflict. By use our wills grow stronger. Hence the necessity not only of a thorough consecration at the beginning, but the necessity also for keeping this in memory, that the will may always be firm, prompt, unflinching as respects loyalty to God, righteousness, truth, holiness, love.

"GOD WORKETH IN YOU"

The Apostle elsewhere declares along this line, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12,13.) We have just been considering how we should work out our salvation, that the new will must hold its dominating influence over the fleshly mind and body (reckoned dead) in order to gain our ultimate victory. But now we inquire, How does God work in us to will and do his good pleasure? We answer that he strengthens our new minds, our consecrated wills, by revealing to us more **[R3986 : page 137]** and more clearly the significance of the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word. Thus is the power of God exercised toward all those who are his through his Word, through his providences, through the brethren in whom he has already worked, and a part of whose business it is as his representatives to build one another up in the most holy faith, and to assist one another in the cleansing of the flesh and the spirit.

This thought is brought out in the context. We quote, "What part hath a believer with an unbeliever, and what agreement hath a Temple of God with idols? For we are the Temple of the living God, even as God said, 'I will dwell in them and work in them: and I will be their God and they shall be my people.' Wherefore come ye out from among them [the untrue, the unbelieving, the unclean] and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and will be to you a Father. And ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." – 2 Cor. 6:15-18.

Now notice the Apostle's argument – "Having, therefore, this hope, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves." Ah, yes! there is a promise in these words, "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" – the power of God that, in proportion as it is received into good and honest hearts, will work in them not only to will aright but also to do aright, thus leading to the cleansing both of the mind and of the flesh. Whoever can comprehend what it is to be a member of God's holy Temple class, must realize the **[R3987 : page 137]** holiness, sacredness, purity that would properly attach to any and everything connected with it. As the Apostle again says, referring to these gracious hopes and promises, whoever has such a hope in him will purify himself even as he is pure. (I John 3:3.) The thought of being accepted as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty must be impressive to every heart in proportion as it is appreciated. Few are so gross as to suppose that God would have any fellowship with that which is unclean and impure. And when we see that the divine arrangement through Jesus' sacrifice covers all of our unintentional blemishes and weaknesses, surely we cannot ask for more – that it should cover from the divine sight intentional weaknesses, intentional blemishes or even slackness on our part in putting away all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit.

PERFECTING OUR HOLINESS

While we are reckoned of the Lord as perfect, as holy from the moment we are accepted as members of his family, covered by the precious robe of Christ's righteousness, he expects of us, as we have seen before, a manifestation of energy in the vanquishing of the motions of sin in the flesh, and in the perfecting of holiness in our lives. God has but one standard, and that standard is perfection of holiness. His direction to us is, "Be ye perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.) At the same time our Lord knew well that in the present life, under present conditions, and acting through our present mortal bodies, it would be an absolute impossibility for any one of his followers to ever attain perfection in the sense or degree that the Father is perfect. Nevertheless it was proper that our Lord should give the perfect standard or pattern just as the school-book sets before the child a copper-plate engraving showing the perfect, the desirable standard of writing, not with the expectation that the child will ever succeed in exactly copying the engraving, but with the desire that the child shall improve itself by attempts at copying. So the Lord wishes us to be continually attempting to copy his perfection and to recognize no inferior standard. Hence our text's declaration respecting our perfecting holiness can mean no more than that we shall do our best to reach the standard of perfection in holiness to the Lord – come as near to that standard as is possible, a little nearer every day we live.

Our text declares that this perfecting of holiness is to be attained through a reverence for the Lord – an appreciation of his greatness, his perfection. The Christian who according to the flesh is deficient in veneration will have greater difficulty along this line of perfecting holiness than one who has naturally large veneration. A great deal of reverence for God and holy things is surely a great aid in our appreciation of the Lord's wonderful greatness and wisdom, power, justice, love; and the greater our

appreciation of him, the higher our esteem of the pattern set before us, the better undoubtedly will be our success in the copying of it. A person who has naturally little of reverence for God and holy things, and who is naturally coarser and more self-centered and self-satisfied, has correspondingly a harder work before him if he would make his calling and election sure. He will the more need to remember his deficiency, and to cultivate reverence for the Lord and to humble himself – "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; he that exalteth himself shall be abased." – Matt. 23:12.

In view of these things we urge upon all of the Lord's consecrated people a fresh determination to follow the counsel of the Apostle, and to allow the divine promises and prospects to work in our hearts to the cleansing of our minds and our flesh from all filthiness, to the perfecting of our new natures in holiness, in the reverence of the Lord.
