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"THE EVIL ONE TOUCHETH HIM NOT"

"We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the Evil One toucheth him not." – 1 John 5:18.

THIS text is not a guarantee of eternal salvation to those begotten of the holy Spirit. It is not a guarantee of their salvation from trials, temptations, difficulties, etc., as some have seemed to suppose. It does signify, however, that those consecrated believers whom God has accepted and who have been begotten again to a newness of life, to a new nature, are under special divine supervision. They will not sin (wilfully) because their seed remaineth in them, the begetting power of the holy Spirit. This seed being in them, they cannot sin wilfully. If they should sin wilfully, it would imply that the holy seed, the begetting [R4252 : page 295] of the Lord's Spirit in them, had perished; that they were no longer New Creatures in Christ Jesus, for whom old things had passed away and all things had become new. It would mean that they had turned again, as the dog to his vomit and as the sow to wallowing in the mire – to sympathy with sin and things contrary to the divine Word and its spirit.

The Apostle declared that our Lord Jesus, the first begotten of the Spirit, will keep all these younger brethren begotten of the Spirit; keep them from the touch of the Evil One, from the injury which Satan would otherwise do them. As we have already suggested, this does not mean that they will be kept from trials, from temptations of the Adversary, for even our Lord was exposed to temptations from him; and these temptations, trials, oppositions, persecutions, we see to be necessary for our Christian character and for our development in our Redeemer's likeness of heart. The

promise, therefore, signifies that in the midst of these temptations of the Adversary the Lord provides his faithful with such protection, such defense, such assistance, as is not only necessary for them to come off victors but to keep them from yielding to temptation. It is in harmony with this that we are taught to pray, "Abandon us not in temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One" – suffer him not to touch, to injure us, to overthrow us, to destroy us.

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

While the Lord is abundantly able to work miracles for the protection of his faithful followers and for their deliverance from the Evil One, and while we feel sure [R4253 : page 295] that if every other means failed, a miracle would be wrought in our interest, nevertheless we are not to anticipate that the Lord will use miracles, but are to expect that generally he will use means, and oftenest human instrumentalities, for the protection and deliverance of the members of his Body, who abide in his love and are seeking to do those things pleasing to him.

"IF POSSIBLE THE VERY ELECT"

From the day of Pentecost until the present time the Lord's dear sheep have been beset by the same great Adversary, and have had fiery trials, and have also had the protection of him that was begotten of God, the Lord Jesus, who is keeping the faithful from the power of the Adversary. But the Scriptures unanimously point us to the end of this age as a time for special trial and testing, not only upon the world but also upon the Church, for "judgment must begin at the house of God." It is respecting this coming time that the Apostle forewarns the Church, saying, "Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day." He implies that the evil day with which this age shall end will have the severest trials ever known to God's people, and that they will

have the greatest need ever known for the armor of truth and righteousness. The same fact is referred to by our Lord in addressing the sixth phase of the Church, the Church of Philadelphia. He says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation which is coming upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth." (Rev. 3:10.) The seventh stage of the Church, the Laodicean, will come into that hour of temptation; and we believe that it is already in part upon us. What we would have all see is that the time ahead of us must be very peculiarly a time of trial and testing, else it would not be so strikingly referred to in the Word of God. Nor do we wish to arouse the fears of the Lord's people, to terrify. Our thought is rather to offer the consolation which will keep them in perfect peace; as it is written, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." The Lord's promises, exceeding great and precious, are enlarged before our minds at the same time, really in advance of the coming of the hour of temptation and trial, so that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished, thoroughly prepared.

Our Lord's words respecting the temptations and trials of the Church assure us that this class shall have nothing to fear, that they will be kept, that it will not be possible for them to be tempted, for with every temptation the Lord will provide a way of escape. Let us remember in this connection the Apostle Paul's words respecting our day and its trials, "God will send them strong delusions that they may believe a lie, because they did not have pleasure in the truth." (2 Thess. 2:11.) What we do desire is that each consecrated child of God may see the way of escape which God has provided and may use the same, and thus be in line with the Lord's provision and amongst those shielded ones, the very elect – "called, chosen, faithful." – Rev. 17:14.

THE WAY OF ESCAPE

If it be conceded that we are down very close to the hour of temptation, when the Evil One will be permitted to bring extraordinary delusions and trials to bear upon the world and the nominal Church, then we are in the time when we ought to be looking about us to see what way of escape the Lord has provided for us. We believe that many of our readers will agree with us that the Lord's special provision for keeping us from the power of the Evil One is the Present Truth, which he has supplied largely through the WATCH TOWER publications. If any one is disposed to controvert this point, we shall not dispute it, but be glad if he has received more efficient assistance from other quarters, glad if by any means the Lord is upholding him, strengthening and arming him for the trials and besetments just before us.

But whatever the channel of divine blessing by which the Lord would keep his own secure and restful in the coming time of stress, we may be assured that our personal cooperation is necessary to our deliverance. "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21) was never a more necessary command to the followers of Jesus than at present; and we may expect that the temptation of this hour will be considerably along that line of abiding in God's love. This in turn will imply a love for the brethren; as the Apostle has suggested, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20.) Indeed, the intimation clearly is that "The love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. 24:12.) A cooling of our love toward God will mean a loss of our desire to please him in our own thoughts and words and doings, which will include a cooling of our love for his service in the dissemination of the Gospel message and the gathering and feeding of the household of faith. Various things will conspire to this end – the love of money, the love of pleasure, the love of self, the love of earthly things in general, all of which were consecrated, devoted, before we received the spirit of adoption. If our love

grows cold it will determine that we are not such as would be worthy to associate with our Redeemer in his Kingdom glory. [R4253 : page 296]

In no way will this loss of the "love divine, all love excelling," be more manifest than in respect to our sentiments and conduct toward the fellow-members of the Body of Christ. The Apostle tells us of what our attitude of mind toward these should be, namely, that as Christ loved the Church and laid down his life on our behalf, we ought also to love the brethren so that we would be willing to lay down our lives on their behalf, in their interest. The love that would give up life itself for the brethren may certainly be expected to sacrifice smaller things in their interest. And indeed such are the tests which the Lord permits, declaring that he who is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in much. It is therefore for us to see, to note, to criticise whether or not we have this love for the brethren which the Lord declares he will accept as love for himself, and without which we cannot be his disciples; for this was the new commandment which he gave to us, saying, "A new commandment I give unto *you*, that *ye* love *one another* as I have loved *you*." – John 15:12.

LOVING THE MEAN THINGS

It would indeed be easy to love the brethren and to lay down our lives for them if they were all like our dear Master and exemplar; but they are not. The inspired Apostle tells us that amongst the brethren are not many noble, not many great, not many wise, not many learned, not many rich. Again he says that God hath chosen the mean things of the world. Are we astonished at this? Does it seem like a reflection on the Church of Christ? Do we ask why divine grace has passed by some of the noblest of our race and accepted some of the meanest to discipleship? The answer of our Lord is, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." The explanation is that many of the great, rich, learned, noble, have

not sufficient humility to receive the divine message in the proper manner. They realize themselves to be superior to the majority and think it but just to have this acknowledgment; and, failing to see the divine arrangement, they assure themselves that if anybody will be saved it will be themselves, for they are the finer and nobler specimens of the race. They see not that God looketh upon the heart instead of upon the outward man, and that however weak and ignoble and fallen a person, his heart, his will may be thoroughly turned into harmony with God and to the service of righteousness. They fail to see that in God's sight such a meek and quiet spirit, such a humble dependence upon the Redeemer for salvation, such a faithful looking to the Lord for grace to help in every time of need, is much more pleasing in the divine sight than is the more proud attitude of the nobler ones; and that such humble, trustful, appreciative, faithful ones the Lord has designed shall be participants with Christ in his excellent glory, not because of the perfection of their flesh, but because of the perfection of their hearts, their wills, which continually strive to bring every thought and word and deed into harmony with the divine will.

Now then, we may see why the Lord enjoined upon us that we should love one another, and rather implied that it would be a difficult matter to do so at all times, to make allowances for the weaknesses of the flesh and the imperfections of judgment in one another. And this is exactly what the Apostle John declares, saying, "We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." (I John 3:14.) Thus he intimates that a love of the brethren will be so difficult a matter as to constitute an absolute proof to us that we have passed from death unto life, from the death state in Adam, and have become New Creatures in Christ.

It is easy enough to love some of the brethren. We are apt to love those who are about on our own plane and of our own style and liking; but the Lord anticipated this and said, "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? [What proof have you that you

have passed from death unto life?]) Do not the publicans and sinners the same?" (Luke 6:32.) It is easy enough to love some of the refined or wealthy or naturally noble or the educated, those who are on our own level or a little above, as respects earthly things. But this does not fill the Lord's requirement. We are to love one another *as* he has loved us. (John 13:34.) [R4254 : page 296] He commends his love to us in that it is to each according to his needs. The more noble, the less of the Lord's grace is sufficient for them; the more degraded, the more of the Lord's grace is necessary and will be supplied. Thus we are to love the brethren; for those who are less noble, yea, those whom the Apostle declares are amongst the mean things of this world from the world's view-point, will need our love the more because of a natural depravity and weakness and imperfection. And if we love as Christ loved, we shall be glad to give our lives to each and for each according to the needs of each, laying down our lives for the brethren in moments or hours or as each may need our help. Ah, what a new, what a different view is this of the love of the brethren! The practice of it would cut off some of our special fellowships with those who need our assistance little, and would transfer our fellowship and sacrifice of time to those of the brethren who need it more. And what a blessing, what an uplifting would come to some of the meaner ones, and what a blessing from the Lord would come more and more into our own hearts as we become more and more copies of him in thought and in deed!

We have already pointed out that the time of trouble coming upon the world will be a result of the loss of love and the outworking of selfishness – no peace to him that goes out nor to him that comes in, for every man's hand shall be against his neighbor – for himself. This signifies almost a complete loss of confidence throughout the world. Shall we not suppose reasonably that this trial is the one which will begin at the house of God? May we not reasonably conclude then that the trial which will come upon the Church will be the same kind; namely, a testing of our

love for the brethren and of our applications of the principles which the Lord has laid down for our dealings with the brethren? We believe that this is so, and that the Lord will judge his people along this line of love, which is the law of the new nature and the fulfilling of all law. Whoever lacks the spirit of love will possess correspondingly the spirit of selfishness, the spirit of the Adversary, the spirit of ambition, of pride, of anger and malice, and hatred and strife against all those who oppose or even seem to oppose his interests. Let us remember that such sentiments even in the heart, though unexpressed, are most dangerous to the new nature. Those who have such sentiments in their hearts are surely very close to the point where the Adversary would be able to touch them, influence them, injure them, bring them under his power, and very close to the place where the Lord would be willing to reject them from discipleship and to allow the Adversary to [R4254 : page 297] have them; even as in Judas' case, to whom the Lord said, "What thou doest, do quickly."

But let us, on the other hand, make use of the various blessings and instructions which the Lord has given us; let us put on the whole armor of God; let us make our own the various truths which the Lord has put into our hands; let us apply them, put them on as an armor; let us be strong in the Lord, in the power, the armament which he supplies in his Word, and let us see to it that the spirit actuating us is that of love, which will be ready to sacrifice everything for the fellow-members and to count it all joy thus to lay down our lives for the brethren. Let us remember that not only is there a special blessing to those who shall assist the brethren, even the weakest of them, but that there is a special threat against those who shall harm or stumble or injure even the least of the Lord's little ones!

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