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THE NEW CREATURE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO DIVINE LAW

PART I

THE LAW COVENANT was a Covenant that God made with Israel, based upon the keeping of the Law, which was briefly expressed in the Ten Commandments. The Apostle Paul says that our Lord was born under the Law (Gal. 4:4); not under the Ten Commandments merely, but under the Law Covenant. This Law Covenant, the Apostle elsewhere shows, was that addition to the Abrahamic Covenant which was typified by Hagar and not by Sarah. Our Lord was under this Hagar Covenant, then – under the Law Covenant, the Covenant of the flesh – up to the time when He was thirty years of age.

We have no *record* whatever respecting our Lord's obedience to the Law before He became of age, although we have every reason to believe that He kept the Law Covenant. But the time of His special trial began at His baptism. The fact that God was willing to enter into a Covenant of sacrifice with our Lord shows that He was perfect at that time. Our Lord persisted in keeping the [R5089 : page 271] Law during the time of His ministry, and at the same time sacrificed those rights which were His because of keeping the Law.

With our Lord it was the same as with Adam. Jesus was perfect at the time of His baptism; therefore, no one could question His right to life. Consequently, God dealt with Him as with One who had life rights. But as Adam was placed on trial to see whether he would prove faithful, so our Lord Jesus was on trial during the three and a half years of His ministry, to prove His worthiness to retain His life rights. If He had failed to keep the Law any time during His ministry, He would have failed to have Divine approval. Likewise if He had failed to keep

His Covenant of sacrifice He would have failed to make His calling and election sure.

CONDITION OF HEART TESTED CONTINUOUSLY

What our Lord did in this matter is on a parity with what each one of us does. We come to the Lord in the beginning and present ourselves living sacrifices; His acceptance of us and the imputation of His merit to us makes us perfect beings from the Divine standpoint. Everyone who is perfect in the flesh has a right to life, according to the Divine Law. But the fact that we have a right to life for the moment, does not prove that it will be everlasting.

At the end of the thousand years of Christ's reign the world will be actually perfect. They will then be subjected to a testing to prove whether or not this perfection is deep and abiding, whether or not it is the permanent condition of their hearts. So it was with our Lord. Before His consecration He certainly had no such trials and contradictions of sinners against Himself as He had afterwards. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself?" (Heb. 12:3.) Practically all His trials began at the time of His consecration. We have no reason to suppose that our Lord was undergoing a trial for life or death before His consecration.

When our Lord was thirty years old, He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. His trial, which was to prove His worthiness, began at His consecration and continued until His death. For three years and a half the spirit of His mind was being tested. If during that time He had committed any sin whatever, would He have been accepted of God then? Surely not! He was on trial, not as an old creature, but as a New Creature, and His trial did not end until on the cross He cried, "It is finished!" This did not alter the fact, however, that He was still under the Law. The Law had dominion over Him as long as He lived. As a New Creature He did not have a body of the spirit kind. He had a human body, and was, therefore, responsible for everything that His human body would do.

It is just so with us. The body is reckoned dead in one sense of the word. As the Apostle says, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Does this refer to us merely as New Creatures? Yes. Is not our flesh reckoned dead? Yes, but we are *figuratively* raised from the dead. (Rom. 6:4,5; Col. 3:1.) To whatever extent our bodies fall short of perfect obedience, Christ, as the great Advocate, makes good. So if any of us sin, we have an Advocate with the Father. No matter how *trivial* the sin may be, it is a *sin*. God keeps no accounts with the flesh, but holds the New Creature responsible. It is for these weaknesses of the flesh that the New Creature goes daily to the Lord and says, "Forgive us our trespasses." We have an Advocate with God, and if we sin we may come to God and obtain grace in every time of need. – I John 2:1; Heb. 4:16.

THE TWO-FOLD TRIAL OF THE NEW CREATURE

As we have seen, when our Lord made His consecration at His baptism, He was a perfect human being. When the Father accepted His sacrifice, He was begotten again; and He was to this degree a new soul, a New Creature – spirit. But He had this treasure of the new mind in an earthen vessel, and the New Creature was responsible for all that the old creature did. If the old **[R5089 : page 272]** creature had gotten Him into trouble, the New Creature would have been responsible.

As previously stated, our Lord was under the domination of the Law as long as He lived. The question then arises, How long did He live as a man? Our answer is that in a very important sense of the word He died at the time of His baptism; that is to say, He died so far as His *human will* was concerned, but His human *body* did not die. His human body, therefore, was still as liable to every Law as it had been before. He became a New Creature in the spirit of His mind, but a New Creature without a new body; and in the Divine arrangement the New Creature accepted and used the old earthly body, with all the responsibilities of that earthly body, whatever they might be.

In other words, the flesh has its law and its responsibilities. But as a New Creature our Lord was under an additional law. We are not to understand that as a New Creature He was released from the Ten Commandments. In his flesh He was a perfect human being, under the Law. As a New Creature He undertook to do more than merely keep the Law; and so the New Creature was on trial – not merely to prove whether the flesh would live up to the requirements of the Law, but whether the flesh should be brought into subjection to the higher law of the New Creation. Thus our Lord *more* than kept the Law – not *less* than kept the Law.

Jesus died to the *Law Covenant*, but not to the *Law*, at the time that He made His consecration. He was not relieved from His responsibility to the Law according to the flesh, but as a New Creature He gave up all hope, all anticipation, as respects that Law Covenant. When He gave up the human nature He would have no use for that which applied to the human nature, which He was giving up in order to get something better. Therefore, He died to the Law Covenant, not because He could not keep it, but because by becoming dead to that Covenant He might become alive to the Covenant of sacrifice. The blessings of that Law Covenant would have been merely earthly life. So when our Lord consecrated Himself, He sacrificed everything that went with the Law Covenant.

NO ADVOCATE FOR OUR LORD

If our Lord's human nature had failed to keep the Law, the New Creature would have been held responsible. It is the same with us, as we have illustrated before in the case of a man and his dog. The New Creature is like the man and the old creature like the dog. But the man is responsible for the dog. If the dog does damage or bites anyone, the owner is responsible. God has made a special arrangement for us, however, by which we may go to the throne of heavenly grace for the imperfections of the flesh, because we have an *Advocate*. But Jesus had *no Advocate*; and therefore any misdeed on the part of His flesh

would be charged to Him directly, as He would be responsible for all the flesh might do.

As we have seen, our Lord at thirty years of age was a perfect man, accountable under the Law Covenant. When He had made a consecration and when that consecration had been accepted by the Father, He was counted alive as a New Creature and reckoned dead as an old creature. These facts should not cause us to lose sight of the other fact that He was not really a New Creature, but merely begotten to a new nature, and that He would not be entirely free from the earthly nature until He was actually dead.

So, then, as a New Creature our Lord was responsible for all of God's laws that applied to Him as a man. The fact that He had given up all the earthly hopes and ambitions and privileges did not give Him liberty to violate the Law of God; and therefore His passing from under the Law Covenant did not give Him liberty to break the Law.

Even so with us. We cannot trespass against our neighbor in any degree. The fact that we have become New Creatures in Christ makes us still more responsible for good behavior. We have need of the Lord's covering merit for every fleshly imperfection that we have. The very fact that we have need of that covering for our fleshly imperfections shows that our every thought, word and action are taken cognizance of by God; and since we are still imperfect, an arrangement is provided for us by which we may go to the Throne of Grace and have our weaknesses covered by our Lord's merit.

GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY RESTING ON OUR LORD

But our Lord had *nothing to shield Him*. Although He had given up all hope of human life, that He might have the spiritual blessings, yet He was responsible for every feature of the Divine Law.

The Divine Law has always existed. God always had certain laws of right and wrong; He Himself is under a law of righteousness. Our

Lord Jesus and all the holy angels are subject to a law of righteousness. What ceased at our Lord's consecration was the Covenant promise of life which was based upon that Law and which had been won by our Lord. Since no imperfect being can keep that Law, another arrangement is made for us – a sacrificial arrangement, based upon our Lord's merit, imputed to us. "Gather My saints together unto Me; those who have made a Covenant with Me by sacrifice." – Psa. 50:5.

From the Divine standpoint our Lord kept the Law as a New Creature; from the human standpoint He kept it as an earthly creature. To God we are one thing; to men we are another. Before God Jesus had the standing of the New Creature. But He did not keep the Law *merely* in the *spirit*; He kept it in the letter as well. As for ourselves, we cannot keep the *letter* of the Law, but we *must* keep the *spirit* of it. Our Lord, being *perfect*, [R5090 : page 272] kept the Law both in spirit and in letter. Every act of obedience to the Law was credited to the New Creature, and any failure would have brought death. Even though the account was entered in the name of the New Creature, these acts of obedience were only *credited* to it. Just as a parent might put into the bank money for a child, the child does not have the money and cannot receive it until he becomes of age; so with our Lord. Everything that He did was put to His credit. And if He had done anything *wrong*, it would have been *charged* to the New Creature. "The wages of *sin* is *death*." – Rom. 6:23.

CHANGE OF NATURE A GRADUAL PROCESS

But had our Lord remained under the Law Covenant, He would not have become the *heir*; for the child of the *bondwoman* could not become heir with the son of the *freewoman*. (Gal. 4:30.) The son of the freewoman was the *New Creature*.

When our Lord made the Covenant of sacrifice at Jordan He passed from His position under the Law Covenant and from His *fleshly* relationship to Abraham, into the *spiritual* relationship and

became the spiritual "Seed" of Abraham; for there He sacrificed all the blessings and favors which were *His* under the *Law Covenant*.

But we are to remember that in our Lord's case, this change of nature required three and a half years. He did not pass instantaneously from one relationship to the other, but by a process in which He was dying daily and [R5090 : page 273] also becoming alive daily. He had accepted the terms of the Covenant of sacrifice. During those three and one-half years, He was in the process of transfer from the Law Covenant to the Sacrificial Covenant. After He had fulfilled the terms of that Covenant, He was put to death in the flesh, and quickened in the spirit. (I Peter 3:18. R.V.) But He did not enter into the glorious station typified by *Isaac* until after His resurrection from the dead.

So it is with us. We renounce the earthly that we may share in the heavenly. But the change requires a period of time, during which we are dying daily and becoming more alive daily. We shall be made fully alive only in our resurrection, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. (I Cor. 15:50.) While this change is not instantaneous, but by degrees, yet the Father dealt with our Lord from the moment of His consecration, and so He deals with us. We have the foretaste of the blessing now, but it will not be ours completely until the sacrifice shall have been finished. Our Lord's baptism did not constitute Him The Christ in the full sense of the word, but He was declared to be The Christ with power when He was raised upon the spirit plane. – Rom. 1:4.

PURPOSE OF OUR LORD'S SUFFERING

The Scriptures give us to understand that our Lord's sufferings produced a variety of results. First of all, those sufferings were in fulfilment of the Law, and by them He testified His obedience to the Law of God. He suffered for well-doing and not for evil-doing. Second, it was appropriate that He should prove to God His loyalty and faithfulness, so as to establish His worthiness to be made the great

Messiah and to be granted the great power and glory which Messiah will exercise.

The Apostle Paul gives us this particular thought, when he says that it pleased God to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through suffering. (Heb. 2:10.) At the same time this suffering would demonstrate our Lord to be the great Messiah who would eventually lead the people out of sin and death. The Apostle also intimates that His sufferings were expedient and wise for the assistance of those who would be His followers, when he says that this High Priest was touched with a feeling of our infirmities, that He might be able to sympathize with those who are in trouble. He was faithful Himself, having gone through various trials and testings. – Heb. 4:15.

When mankind come to know how it was that Messiah assumed control of the world, all humanity will have full confidence in Him – not only in the power with which He will rule His Kingdom, but also in His justice, His love and His mercy. He has been tempted in all points as the Church is, and therefore, not only can *we* have the benefit resulting from His experience, but the whole world in the future may also have an opportunity to appreciate it.

The sufferings of Jesus became a witness both to angels and to men. He gave the demonstration of the full extent of loyalty even unto death. As a reward the Father did not give Him merely the high position that He had at first, but exalted Him to His own right hand in the heavenly places, "Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:21); even to the *divine nature*. All this was a part of the Father's great Plan; and by our Lord's experiences we see that the Heavenly Father has demonstrated His Justice, His Power and His Love in a *most marvelous way*.

THE CHURCH'S EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO OUR LORD'S

Our Lord's perfecting, indeed, was a little different from ours, and yet there is a similarity between the two. He was perfect before He humbled Himself; He was still perfect as the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself; but as a result of His consecration He received a begetting of the Holy Spirit to the divine nature, and His development as a New Creature required that He faithfully carry out His vow, or Covenant, of sacrifice, in the doing of the will of the Heavenly Father. By such faithfulness He perfected Himself on the divine plane – that is, He proved Himself worthy according to the Covenant – "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." – Rev. 5:12.

Similarly the followers of Jesus are to be sharers with Him of the sufferings of this present time and in the glories which shall follow, for "If we suffer [with Him] we shall also reign with Him." (2 Tim. 2:12.) Although we are imperfect in the flesh, while He was perfect, yet the Robe of His Righteousness, the merit of His sacrifice, covers all of our blemishes and makes us, as His footstep followers, holy and acceptable before the Father, as joint-sacrificers with Jesus.

The begetting of the Holy Spirit starts us in the life divine. We are not to be perfected in the flesh, but in the spirit; and our perfection and acceptance with the Father will be demonstrated by our loyalty of heart and the fulness and thoroughness with which we submit our all to the Divine will and seek to glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are His. Our *justification* comes to us as a reward of *faith*, regardless of works, but our *glorification* will follow only as a reward for *faithfulness* – "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." – Rev. 2:10.

(Continued in next issue.)

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