

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FLESH AND SPIRIT

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." – Galatians 5:17.

THE APOSTLE is addressing these words to Christians, who have become New Creatures in Christ, to whom old things have passed away, and all things have become new. These are said to be begotten of the Holy Spirit and therefore to be, in reality, spirit beings, who will be changed in the Resurrection, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" – spirit beings who have not yet been completed. But the New Creature has only the flesh in which to operate at the present time.

God expects that the New Creature will manifest his loyalty, and demonstrate worthiness of perfection of the spirit in the First Resurrection. The Apostle says that such must expect to find a conflict going on – the Spirit lusting against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit. The word *lust* here used is a good Anglo-Saxon word meaning *desire*. The *New Creature* strongly desires to be loyal to God and to do His will. The *flesh* strongly desires *against* all this.

These two spirits are in opposition. The two are in antagonism. The flesh desires to serve itself. It has earthly desires, earthly objects, earthly aims. The New Creature desires to set its affections on the Heavenly things and to sacrifice the earthly interests and aims and prospects, to live as a spirit being tabernacling in the flesh – to live no longer as a human being with earthly interests. Whatever serves the one interest is in conflict with the other interest.

NEW CREATURES HAMPERED BY THE FLESH

The words of our text are not addressed to the world, but to the Church. The Church has been begotten of the Holy Spirit – a New

Creation. If these live after the flesh, if they renounce their covenant of sacrifice, they will die. But if they mortify, or kill, the deeds of the flesh and abandon this wholly for the Spirit, they shall live – have everlasting life. We all see that in our Lord Jesus, holy, harmless, undefiled, there was such a contrast; the earthly interests drawing one way, and the Heavenly interests another. These were all pure and perfect desires; nevertheless, as the New Creature, begotten of the Holy Spirit, He was obliged to overcome them.

We recall our Lord's words very near the conclusion of His ministry: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50.) The conflict was going on; but the Lord's spirit was firm, and He was obedient to the terms of His sacrifice. Being *perfect*, however, *He could* do those things that He would. He did them, and won the great victory.

In our case the matter is different. *We* are by nature *fallen*. Our earthly appetites and tastes are depraved. All are more or less selfish; some more depraved than are others.

Our flesh is depraved; *we cannot* do the things that we would. Hence we need the merit of Christ to assist us; hence the Apostle tells us that every time we as New Creatures have done wrong, we should acknowledge the error and go to the Throne of Heavenly Grace to obtain mercy and find help for future needs. Thus we show to God the loyalty of our hearts. All those having Christ's mind and disposition are hampered merely by the weaknesses of the flesh, the *fallen* flesh; but they have an Advocate, to whom they may go and have these weaknesses of the fallen flesh compensated for.

The question may arise, Why should there be any conflict between the flesh and the spirit in our case? and how do we overcome these weaknesses sufficiently to desire to become joint-sacrificers with Christ, before we are begotten of the Spirit at all? The answer is that while the whole race is fallen, many of the fallen ones realize the shame of their condition and long to do righteously,

but are unable to do so. They find themselves to be slaves of sin. They are weak; they are so bound that they cannot do the things that they would. Many of the Jews were in this condition. They were desirous to do God's will, but were unable to do so. The *desire* was there, the *will* was there. But because of man's fallen condition there were other qualities of their mind in opposition.

The human mind is made up of various qualities. When sin came in, the lower and baser of these qualities of the original man gained the ascendancy, and the nobler of these qualities gradually became effaced, until the original likeness of God was measurably gone from humanity. But in some of the sons and daughters of Adam there is sufficient of the original God-likeness to oppose sin and to seek to have reformation of life. Such good influences are manifest even amongst the heathen.

During the Jewish Age, some amongst the Jews were [R5212 : page 104] seeking to live in harmony with God. Others were following the course of Belial, and serving Satan and giving themselves up to selfishness. And so it is today. The Jews could not keep their Law, and unless they could keep the Law perfectly, they would fail of getting everlasting life, just the same as those who had never been under the Law. Since Pentecost there has been a different arrangement. God has provided a Savior, whose death is efficacious for the sins of the world.

THE CONFLICT ENDS WITH DEATH

Why, then, has this death not yet been effective for the world? God is wishing to find a class willing to lay down life itself in God's service. Some of these fallen children of Adam, noting the call of God's Word – to become footstep-followers of Jesus – have enough strength of character to follow in Christ's footsteps. They manifest their determination by consecrating their lives to His service. Such a consecration means that the higher qualities of the mind have

united, and have gotten control, of the lower qualities of the mind, putting them under constraint.

Under the inspiring influence of God's promises and the Message of the Gospel, they are through the great Advocate received as members of His Body – as New Creatures in Christ, begotten of the Holy Spirit. Thenceforth they have a relationship with God. They are expected then to go forward from step to step, continually fighting against the snares of Satan. This is the Christian's life – the battle mentioned in our text. The two influences – the flesh and the Spirit – are contrary; hence the conflict.

There is no need to go *outside* and battle with *others*. There is plenty to do *within*. *Happy* are those who, by their endeavors, show their loyalty to God! In due time, by the power of the First Resurrection, they will lose the old body altogether and will be clothed upon with immortality. If we are "faithful unto death," we shall be like Him, our Lord and Head, see Him as He is, and share His glory.

There is, however, a great and continuous battle; for although the new will asserts itself, puts the body under and compels its subjection to the new mind, nevertheless, the mortal body, not being actually dead, is continually coming in contact with the world and the Adversary, and is continually being stimulated by these and by earthly cares, ambitions, methods, strivings, conflicts, to insubordination to our new will.

No saint is without experience of this kind – fightings without and within. It must be a fight *to the finish*, or the great prize for which we fight will not be gained. For although the New Creature, by the Lord's grace and strength, repeatedly masters the mortal body, nevertheless, *until death* there can be *no cessation of the conflict*.

"How goes the fight with thee?
The *life-long* battle 'gainst all evil things?"

Thine no low strife, and thine no selfish aim;
It is the war of *giants* and of *kings!*

*

*

*

"Say not the fight is *long*;
'Tis but *one battle* and the *fight is o'er*;
No *second warfare* mars thy victory,
And the *one triumph* is for *evermore!*"

