

WHO COMMITS THE SIN UNTO DEATH? – PART I

"Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin, for His seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God." – 1 JOHN 3:9.

PRIVILEGES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND DANGERS OF THE NEW CREATURE

THERE is a certain amount of complexity attaching itself to questions relative to the Church's change of nature from human to spiritual. In order clearly to understand the initiatory process of that change, the begetting of the Spirit, we should have a proper understanding of what constitutes the human will; for it is that will which is changed.

We cannot think of anything better as an illustration of the subject than a legislative body, such as Congress or Parliament. In these assemblies, a large number of members sit in session; but they are divided into groups known as *parties*. Some members belong to one party, others to another. But the dominating party is in control.

So it is in the human brain. There we have numerous organs, representing variously religious sentiments, intellectuality, morality, the affections, etc. Then there are some that represent energy; others, acquisitiveness; others, combativeness. These different faculties, when called to consider a question, divide themselves into groups, the strongest of which is very apt to sway the others.

When, for instance, any matter involving the interests of self comes up for consideration, acquisitiveness being strong, may lead combativeness to fight for possession of the thing desired. It may also lead destructiveness to help in the fight. And it may to some extent drown the voice of justice, or conscience, and offset the

quality of love; for acquisitiveness may have schemes which would interfere with the operation of love.

On the whole, the organs which dominate the world are the organs of self-protection, self-gratification, etc. – all the organs whose names begin with the word SELF. Even if the religious organs – veneration, hope, benevolence, spirituality, etc. – are strong, the selfish propensities generally overpower them, so that they co-operate with selfishness. For example, benevolence overpowered by the selfish propensities, will say, I will give some money to this project, in order that it may show a large return; but I will not give it unless it show such return. Thus the quality of acquisitiveness and others pertaining to self will go into agreement with benevolence, by bending it to the service of self.

It is the usual thing to see such combinations in worldly people today. There are generous men with naturally noble impulses which they like to gratify. But in all that they do, SELF has become the preponderating factor. SELF gets in somewhere – self-esteem, self-interest, etc. This combination makes the selfish man; and though he may have considerable benevolence, veneration, etc., yet these noble qualities are under control of the selfish propensities.

FIRST STEP TOWARD TRUE CONVERSION

To this selfish man the Gospel comes, and offers a proposition which is unique, peculiar. It appeals to him through a new set of organs. It shows him that he should put *God* first, not *self*; that he should begin to see that the highest and noblest organs of the brain are those which recognize the Creator and man's responsibility as His creature. It shows him that he is thinking of self-aggrandisement, self-honor, self-everything!

Such a person, hearing the Gospel proposition, may be influenced to decide the matter either one way or the other. He may say, I do not like that thought. Selfishness may suggest that if he

accepts the Gospel offer he must stop his questionable business methods. Then he concludes that he does not care to take such a step; for it would demand more than he is willing to give, and he might have trouble with his conscience. Later on, perhaps, something in the nature of adversity or calamity will awaken him to take a different view of matters, and he will see the subject in a different light and be glad to do God's will. Then he may say, I realize that my life must be different. I am God's creature. Therefore it is right that I should consecrate my all to Him. But I see that consecration will work a great transformation in my life. I shall be obliged to change my course. I must drop certain habits.

This is the first step of true conversion. This is a turning from sin toward righteousness. It does not follow, however, that the person who takes this step will come up to the Divine requirements of a disciple of Christ. The rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he should do to gain eternal life was told to keep God's commandments. He replied that he had done this all his life. And Jesus loved him! The young man was trying to do right in every way. Was he not all right then? No! Jesus said to him: "One thing thou lackest. Go and sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and then thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow Me."

The young ruler thought this strange advice: for he had all along been living a most exemplary life. He was **[R5438 : page 116]** correct in his estimate of himself; but he was merely doing his *duty* in so living. No one has a right to live a bad life; no one has a right to do wrong. That he was merely doing his duty – no more – was practically what Jesus told the young man.

Continuing, the Master said: I have only one offer to make, but it is a very high one – joint-heirship with Me in the Messianic Kingdom. The life into which you may enter by becoming My disciple is a life of glory, honor and immortality – the Divine nature.

If you desire this high position, you must do more than merely avoid sin. God is now calling for sacrificers. If you do not sacrifice yourself, you cannot become My disciple; for those only who thus sacrifice are received of the Father and begotten of the Holy Spirit, and can share My glory. Those only will be granted a part in the First Resurrection. And the young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Alas; how many are likeminded! **[R5439 : page 116]**

To turn away from sin is but a step toward conversion. That movement is an antitypical going toward the Tabernacle. "Draw nigh unto Me, and I will draw nigh unto you," is the Father's proposition. The Word of God points out to the seeker that only through Christ who gave Himself as our Ransom, can any come to the Father.

He is also instructed that if he would retain God's favor he must become a disciple of Christ, by laying down his life in the service of the Lord and the brethren, doing good unto all men as he has opportunity. In this way he may become a member of Christ's Body. Then, after a while, if faithful unto death, he will have a share in the glory and honor which the Father has given our Lord. He will become a joint-heir with Jesus in the Kingdom.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A NEW CREATURE?

So this one becomes a New Creature when he has accepted the Divine will in this sacrificial sense; or, as the Scriptures present it, when he has made a full consecration unto death. "Gather My saints together unto Me," saith the Lord, "those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (Psalm 50:5.) Those accepting this call to enter into sacrifice are received of the Father; then they are begotten of the Holy Spirit. Thenceforth they are New Creatures: To them "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." – 2 Cor. 5:17.

The question may arise: What part of the individual becomes the New Creature? It is the *will* that becomes new. The will is the determination, or decision, of the majority of those organs of the brain which form the mentality. The *will* considers the matter: Shall I continue to sin? No; I will abandon sin. Shall I go further and make a full consecration of myself to God? Yes; I will make this consecration.

When he does so, God accepts him and begets him of the Holy Spirit, thus making him a New Creature. He makes up his mind – he determines the matter. He changes the direction of his *will*. At one time his will was inclined to sin. That was wrong. Then his will turned toward righteousness. This was right, so far as it went; but it did not make him a New Creature. Then he came to the place where He said, Lord, I consecrate my life to Thee – myself, with all my aims, hopes and ambitions. Thenceforth he is counted as dead to the world, and reckoned alive toward God, as a spirit being. This new will, this new mind, then, with its Heavenly hopes and aspirations, constitutes the New Creature.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NEW CREATURE

To be begotten of one signifies to be a son of that father. The Only Begotten of the Heavenly Father – the only one *directly* so begotten – was our Lord Jesus – God's Son. And all the Church are also recognized as being sons of God; "and if *sons*, then *heirs*, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ." The first One of the spirit-begotten class was our Lord Jesus. When the Holy Spirit was given Him at Jordan, in this begetting sense, He was no longer counted of God as the *Man* Jesus. But He had this treasure of the new nature in an earthly body, an earthen vessel, until He finished His sacrifice at Calvary. Then, in the resurrection, God gave Him a perfect spirit body of the Divine nature.

So it is with all of Jesus' disciples: They are invited to surrender themselves to God, consecrating their earthly interests to

become followers of the Master. Jesus states the conditions: First, faith in Him as the Messiah, the Redeemer; and second, denial of self and the taking up of the cross and following Him. These New Creatures are all sons of God, though the world does not understand that they are in any way different from others in their relationship to God. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him [the Master] not." (1 John 3:1.) This new mind must increase. This New Creature must grow in knowledge and capacity.

All of this makes the individual now very different from what he was as the old creature. If by nature he was depraved, and had violent passions prevailing in his flesh, he will now, having a better mind, be guided in the way of the Lord, and gradually become a copy of God's dear Son. This copy is primarily a *heart*-copy, though the change by degrees affects his life, bringing his body more and more into conformity to the new mind.

THE NEW CREATURE ON TRIAL

Since this new mind, the new will, the spirit-begotten New Creature, has its present residence in the old body, and since this body, the New Creature's only instrument of operation, has still its old tendencies toward sin – its weaknesses, its depravities – therefore there is a continual struggle between the New Creature and the old. It is a daily warfare, and either one or the other must perish. If the New Creature be not alert, thoroughly active, thoroughly loyal to God, the weaknesses of the flesh will gradually assert themselves, and the New Creature will be in danger of death.

If, on the contrary, the New Creature remain loyal to God, the old creature will perish. The one or the other must die before the conflict is over. It is a fight to the finish. And this conflict is a test of the New Creature – not of the old creature. The New Creature has been called to glory, honor and immortality. In order to attain this state, it must prove unquestionably its loyalty to God. In

proportion as the new mind controls, and we love righteousness and hate iniquity, in that same proportion shall we have strength in battling with the forces outside, with the conditions of the present time; and the greater success shall we have in battling with our own flesh.

In this warfare there may be sometimes more and sometimes less success. But not until the victory is won will the Lord grant the reward. "To him that *overcometh* will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne." The thing to be demonstrated is loyalty to God, loyalty to the principles of righteousness, and to our covenant. Those who are most loyal and most devoted to God will come off "more than conquerors" and will gain the highest reward, will sit with Jesus in His Throne.

Some will come off overcomers, but not on so high a plane, needing the special tribulations to assist them. But even though they fail to come to the highest standard, they will, nevertheless, come off overcomers; else they would never get any share in the Heavenly reward, nor life at [R5439 : page 117] all. These will form the Great Company, who come up out of the great tribulation and wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14.) They will be greatly favored in that they will be the honored servants of the glorified Bride class, who are to constitute the "more than conquerors."

FALLING INTO TEMPTATION NOT SIN

During this time of battling between the New Creature and the imperfections of the body in which the New Creature resides, the new mind should be developing and growing gradually stronger. The will of the body was *reckoned* entirely dead before the individual could be counted a New Creature. But the body has the old brain, which has the same tendencies as formerly. The work of the new mind is to bring this body into full subjection to the will of Christ. The child of God may, however, be attracted by business or

pleasure, which may lead him as a New Creature into more or less of stupor. In such stupid condition of the New Creature, the flesh, wide awake, might get the advantage, not because the child of God has wilfully sinned, or because he has been intentionally negligent, but because he has yielded more or less to temptation. But it is one thing to yield thus under temptation, and another thing to go deliberately into sin. Whoever sins wilfully is counted a child of Satan, because he has Satan's spirit instead of God's spirit.

If any of those who were once begotten of God should get into that attitude where they would wilfully desire to commit sin, it would indicate that they had ceased to be sons of God and had become sons of Belial. It would signify that the spark of the new life to which they had been begotten had become extinguished. "He that is begotten of God sinneth not." If he sin – deliberately, wilfully – he ceases that moment to be a son of God. Sons of God do not love sin. Any one, therefore, who would thus intentionally go into sin would give evidence that his new mind had entirely passed away, and that he had become dead to God, even as previously in consecration he had become dead to the flesh.

We believe that not very many have ever taken this step of bold opposition to God, wilfully and intelligently; and we hope that there will not be a great many to go into the Second Death. However, it is for God's people to keep as far away as possible from this disastrous condition. This condition is reached by a gradual process, step by step. When we come to God we first repudiate sin. Later we come to the point of presenting our bodies living sacrifices, and are accepted. So, contrariwise, those who repudiate righteousness usually go back gradually. Step by step of indulgence in sin gradually leads away from God, until the New Creature ceases to exist.

NEW CREATURE HANDICAPPED BY FLESH

When the Apostle John, in our text, says that those who are begotten of God sin not, he means that the sin is not *wilful*. Is there, then, any other way to sin than to sin wilfully? We answer, Yes. It is wilful sin that is unto death. The Scriptures tell us that "all have come short of the glory of God" – there is none perfect, "none righteous, no, not one." The righteousness which is imputed to the members of the Church, is imputed to their *flesh*. The New Creature itself is perfect. But as a New Creature the disciple of Christ desires to put off from its flesh all the former things of sin and death and to be fully conformed to the image and likeness of God. Yet he is more or less handicapped, not only by the imperfections of his own fleshly body, but also by the imperfections of others. He has to contend with the evil tendencies in his fallen nature, and also with those around him. [R5440 : page 117]

The same Apostle declares that if any shall say he *has no sin*, the truth is not in him, and he is making God a liar. (1 John 1:8-10.) And these two statements of the same writer are in harmony. The statement of our text applies to the New Creature itself, and the other applies to his *fleshly body*. He cannot fully avoid sin in his flesh, on account of its weakness, and the deceptiveness and unfavorable conditions surrounding him.

These New Creatures, however, can maintain themselves in the love of God and as sons of God. "We have an Advocate with God, Jesus Christ, the Righteous." (1 John 2:1.) God knows our weaknesses, and has made this very provision for us. The Apostle says we may keep ourselves in the love of God by keeping ourselves clean. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) Our daily trespasses are to be acknowledged to the Lord, and forgiveness sought and obtained. Thus we pray daily, "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive* those who trespass against us."

STRIPES FOR PARTIALLY WILFUL SINS

If these trespasses are merely weaknesses of the flesh, or of ignorance or stupidity, they are sins which will be fully forgiven of the Lord on application. If they be sins in which the new mind has been slack, in which it has been more or less culpable, through lack of sufficient positiveness, then to that extent the New Creature must be held responsible. And for all such trespasses, for which the New Creature is in any way at fault, there will be stripes, or punishments. It is for this partially wilful portion of the sin that the New Creature is responsible. This does not come under the head of Original Sin and its resulting imperfections.

A Christian might have a natural tendency to anger, and it might be impossible for him fully to control this tendency. Before he as a New Creature would be able to realize the situation, his natural tendency to lose his temper would involve him in trouble. The New Creature in such case should do everything possible to overcome this, through prayer and persistent effort, and if necessary, by imposing upon himself a penalty for every failure in this direction – some self-denial, perhaps. But if the New Creature should say, Well, that is my flesh; I cannot help it, he might receive stripes, and an earthborn cloud might arise between him and the Lord; and that one would be spiritually sick until he should return to the Father and make proper amends and be re-instated. If this attitude continued, it would seem to make against his ever becoming a member of the Little Flock. He would have to decide *positively* for or against the right.

So, then, there are sins that are not forgivable, but punishable. If the transgression should come to the degree of full, wilful sin, it would be a sin unto death. This means that the New Creature had ceased to be; for the Spirit of God, operating in the sons of God, always makes for righteousness and hates sin. Whoso loveth God

"keepeth himself, and that Wicked One toucheth him not." – 1 John 5:18.

THE PURPOSE SERVED BY TRIALS

But, as the Apostle states, we have this treasure of a new mind in an earthen vessel. We are a combination of the Heavenly and the earthly – a Heavenly will and an earthly body. Sometimes the body will put the New Creature to the test, urging it to give up this matter of consecration. So he has trouble; for the earthly body is merely *reckoned* dead. But God, in harmony with His promises, ignores the old nature – the earthly – and recognizes [R5440 : page 118] only the Heavenly, so long as the will is loyal; and He has promised grace sufficient for every time of need.

As before stated, there may come a time when the new will temporarily becomes drowsy, dormant. This is a cause for serious concern; for then the New Creature is in grave danger. There must be a determined will, a positive will for God, which will keenly regret any temporary deflection; otherwise there is no New Creature. As the battling goes on between the new will and the old body, the new will becomes stronger and stronger, if it is properly awake to the situation. Yet God may permit the flesh to have more and more severe temptations. He allows the world and the Adversary to bring pressure to bear upon the flesh, so that He may test, prove, the loyalty of the New Creature. It was because our Lord was found faithful "unto death, even the death of the cross," that He was counted worthy of the Divine nature. So it is to be with His footstep followers. The Father knows just how much we can stand, and will never suffer us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, but with every temptation will provide a way of escape. – 1 Corinthians 10:13.

WHY SOME FAIL TO OVERCOME

So the experiences of the way go on. As the Apostle suggests we are risen to walk in newness of life – our resurrection is already begun. (Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1.) And this new walk will become more and more courageous, more and more successful, in proportion as we respond to the Lord's touch – the disciplinary experiences. And if we allow Him to mould us as He wills, we shall finally finish our course and be brought forth in full resurrection from earthly, human nature to Heavenly, Divine nature. Then the new will that has all along been progressing in an earthly body will thereafter make progress in a spiritual home; it will have a body like unto that of the risen and glorified Jesus. – 1 John 3:1,2.

In the case of those not overcoming fully, we find this condition; they yield more or less to the besetments of the Adversary, and strive to avoid being too peculiar, to avoid giving any offense to their friends. Thus they become more or less overcharged with the cares of this life, or with the deceitfulness of riches, pleasures, etc. The Apostle urges that these lay aside all such weights, and run with patience the race set before them. Such a class never for a moment think of giving up the race; but in due time they will be put through fiery tribulations, which will destroy their flesh. Nevertheless, they will fail of the reward of the High Calling, which the more faithful will receive.

(TO BE CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE.)

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