

OUR CLEANSING – INWARD AND OUTWARD

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." – 2 Corinthians 7:1.

AGAIN we call attention to the fact that the Bible was not addressed to the world, but to the Church; not to unbelievers, but to believers; not to sinners, but to those who have already turned away from sin. Many overlook this fact, and the result is a confusion of their minds.

But some may, perhaps, be inclined to say that the words of our text are applicable to sinners as well as saints – sinners especially – even though the Epistle itself is addressed "unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints, who are in the whole of Achaia." We answer, No! our text cannot appropriately be applied to sinners in general, who have not yet come to God, who have not yet repented of their sins and been forgiven. God makes no appeals to such; He merely denounces them as sinners and refuses them all recognition, all fellowship, and tells them that there is no other name given under Heaven amongst men whereby they can be saved from their sins than that of Jesus – through faith in His blood. In other words, God refuses to have any dealings whatsoever with those who cannot or will not accept of the great Sin-Offering which He has provided. As Jesus expressed the matter, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." – John 14:6.

The reasonableness of the Divine position is evident upon reflection. God in the present Age is gathering out of the world a Little Flock, whose peculiar trait of character is faith in Him and a desire to please Him. In the Age to come, the Millennial Age, God purposes to deal with the remainder of mankind, and then all His

requirements will be made so plain that the wayfaring man, though a simpleton, shall not err therein. (Isaiah 35:8.) The Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth in that glorious Millennial Day, and clearly manifest right from wrong, and show forth the Divine character and attributes, so that every creature may see – yea, all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears be unstopped, as is clearly stated by the Prophet. – Isaiah 35:5.

But now, in the present Age, there is a test of faith for this special Little Flock whom the Lord is selecting and whom He designates as His Church. Any who cannot exercise the faith cannot be of this elect Church, but must wait for their blessing at the hands of the Church during the reign of Christ, for which we still pray, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven."

SAINTS NOT NATURALLY ALL NOBLE

Not only has God made faith a necessary element of acceptance in the present time, but additionally, love of righteousness is made a part of the test. It is not enough that we should have the eye of faith which would recognize Christ's death as the Redemption-price for the sins of the world, we must additionally have hearts that love righteousness in order to come under Divine favor. The heart that loves righteousness discerns the weakness of its own flesh, its downward tendencies. The moment that heart recognizes Jesus as the Redeemer it flees to Him, not only to be covered with His merit as respects the sins that are past, but also to have the imputed covering of His righteousness as respects the unwilling blemishes and imperfections of the present and the future – imperfections that are contrary to the will and are the result of weaknesses inherited.

This class, not in harmony with the sin of the world nor with their own weaknesses, is referred to by our Lord in His message, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden [under the

yoke of sin and appreciating its penalty, death], and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." These learners – disciples, pupils in the School of Christ – are the class to whom the words of our text are addressed. It would be useless to exhort the world in general to cleanse themselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. The world is in sympathy with this very filthiness and has no desire to cleanse itself, has no just appreciation of how filthy it is in the sight of God and those who have His Spirit of Holiness. The Lord describes the condition of the world as one in which anger, malice, envy and various lusts [desires] are the usual and normal conditions by turns. Lust, selfishness – which often amounts to brutality in its seeking of wealth, or pleasure or power – seeks to fill the natural mind, so that if it were taken away, with nothing substituted, life would lose all of its charms. Where would be the propriety in exhorting such to put away filthiness of the flesh and spirit when they have nothing as a substitute?

Some may, perhaps, urge that there are as many noble-minded people not believers as are found amongst believers. We answer, Yes! the Scriptures agree to this, assuring us that amongst believers are not many great or wise or noble according to the course of this world. The Message of God's grace often lays hold upon the lower, meaner and more degraded members of the human family rather than upon the noble, who feel less keenly their own depravity and less necessity for the Savior and His assistance. If, then, amongst the world are to be found some who are noble-minded, and if believers are generally of a lower stratum, how comes it that God has a more particular interest in these than in unbelievers? By what kind of rule does the Lord accept as children some who naturally are less noble and reject some who naturally are more noble?

We answer that the rule or standard of Divine acceptance is faith and obedience of heart. Those who with their hearts, their minds, their wills, turn away from sin and by faith accept the Divine arrangement, the Lord is pleased to accept according to

their wills, their intentions, and not according to their flesh and its blemishes. Their unwilling defects according to the flesh are veiled from His sight by the Robe of Christ's righteousness covering them, to the extent of the inability of their new minds, which despise sin and seek to war a good warfare against it in their flesh and everywhere. Such is the class addressed by the Apostle in our text, saying, "Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit."

GOD'S BELOVED DISESTEEMED

As the mouthpiece of the Lord the Apostle addresses all believers who have fled away from sin and who are striving to be pleasing and acceptable to God, as "dearly beloved." The Apostle, a noble-minded man himself, appreciated the fact that many of these dearly beloved brethren had weaknesses and imperfections of the flesh. He did not love them *on account of* these blemishes, but *in spite of* them – because at heart they were loyal to the principles of righteousness and striving to overcome sin and its inclinations in their own mortal flesh, and – so far as their influence would go – in the world. But the world does not love these whom the Father loves, whom Jesus loves, whom the Apostle loves. Our Master's [R5737 : page 231] words are, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and have ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, that your fruit should be permanent." – John 15:16,18,19.

The world does not like these chosen ones because, confessing their own weaknesses and striving against them, they call them by their proper names – sins, meannesses, filthinesses of the flesh and spirit. Every effort made by these to cleanse themselves is a reproof to others who are not striving to cleanse

themselves, and who hate to be reminded that the things in which they [R5738 : page 231] take their greatest pleasure are greed, selfishness, inordinate affections, strifes, pride, vainglory. Whoever is fully satisfactory to the world may be sure that he is not satisfactory to the Lord. Whoever is satisfactory to the Lord need not expect to be satisfactory to the world; for the fellowship of this world is enmity to God, and, therefore, the world is not subject to the Divine standard, neither indeed can be, as the Apostle explains. (James 4:4; Romans 8:7.) Its heart is in the other direction.

The law of the New Creation – love for God with all our hearts and for our neighbor as ourselves – is to the world unreasonable, unthinkable, undesirable every way, and every reminder of it, even by the presence of those who at heart are on the side of righteousness, causes displeasure and discomfort. To these the Lord and His footstep followers have always been unwelcome – intruders. They prefer to be let alone, to have no suggestion offered to the effect that they are wrong. True, some of them have a pleasurable pride in generosity, a love of a good name, and a reputation for honesty and virtue. But they wish to be considered as standards and exemplars, and resent any intrusion, any measurements of their thoughts, words or deeds by the Divine standards. Therefore those who continually recognize and honor the Divine standards are disesteemed by them.

THE NECESSITY FOR CLEANSING

But why should the Apostle suggest that the Church should do a cleansing work in their hearts and in their flesh when we find that God has wholly covered these blemishes from His sight? If the blemishes are covered, why trouble about them further? Ah, there are the best of reasons! Those who at heart are loyal to the Lord and His righteousness are distressed by their blemishes, their sins, the weaknesses of their flesh, even though they are aware that the

Lord has graciously covered all these, and is not imputing their guilt because at heart they are opposed to them. The desire of this class is to build, to establish, character by faithfulness to principles of righteousness. They wish that their minds may become more and more established in faithfulness to the Lord and His Golden Rule of love; and that, so far as possible, the new mind shall control the fallen, imperfect flesh and bring it into subjection, into accord, with the Divine Law of Love.

Whoever, after having experienced the Lord's blessing in the forgiveness of sins, has no desire to war a warfare against them, and to bring into subjection to his new mind the powers and talents of his mortal body, has not the true spirit of sonship. He would thereby be giving evidence that he does not truly love righteousness, and that he does not truly hate iniquity. He would thus be testifying that he is not of the class whom the Lord desires as His sons on the spirit plane – as members of the Little Flock, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife.

We see, then, good reason why the brethren should be appealed to by the Apostle in our text. We see a good reason why all begotten by the same Spirit of holiness should give heed to his words and make the cleansing of the flesh and of the spirit the principal work of the remainder of life. We see that unless they do this, they will belie their pretensions of love for righteousness and hatred of iniquity. We see that by such a warfare against the weaknesses of the flesh and of the spirit, the Lord designs that they should establish a crystallized character. Thus as the Scriptures express it, they shall be "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light" – fit in heart for the Divine service. Such as are thus fit in heart for the service of the Millennial Kingdom will, we are assured, be granted new bodies, free from all blemishes, in the First Resurrection. Thus, having perfected their minds and established character in their hearts in the present life by controlling the flesh so far as possible, they demonstrate that at heart they have the

character-likeness of their Lord and Redeemer. Only those who do thus develop into copies of God's dear Son will constitute the Very Elect, the Kingdom Class, the Seed of Abraham, through whom the world will shortly receive its blessing.

"LET US CLEANSE OURSELVES"

The words, "Let us cleanse ourselves," do not have reference to our getting rid of Adamic condemnation. Such cleansing from original sin is impossible on our part, as the Apostle elsewhere explains. We cannot have it unless we receive it as a free gift from God. In what sense, then, do we cleanse ourselves? We answer that having been reckonedly cleansed by the Lord, and brought under the influence of His Holy Spirit and the enlightening understanding of His Word, we are now invited to show our zeal for righteousness and to cooperate with Him in the work. While all the condemnation is reckoned as having passed from us, we still have the opportunity of showing the Lord what our spirit, our intention, would be, by striving against sin in our minds and in our flesh. The *incentive* to this cleansing is of the *Lord*, but the cleansing *itself* is something for *us* to do – "Let us cleanse *ourselves*." The cleansing work is a tedious one; for at first we did not discern how deeply defiled we were, how nearly all the suggestions of the mind were selfish. We did not even recognize selfishness as being sin.

As the eyes of our understanding opened more and more widely we got proper views of the Lord and His righteousness, our own conditions, the need of His covering Robe, etc. Day by day, as we have since striven to put away sin, selfishness – yea, every element of ungodliness and unloveliness – we have become more painfully conscious of how deep was the stain which we at first, perhaps, thought was merely superficial. Many of the Lord's people, after years of labor in seeking to cleanse themselves from the filth of the flesh and of the spirit, now, alas, see more of their own blemishes than they discerned at first, even though they have

gotten rid of much of this natural filthiness, selfishness, etc. This would make the work of cleansing a very discouraging one if it were not for the assurance of the Lord's Word that He regards us, not according to the flesh, but according to our intentions, our desires, our endeavors. He reckons us as overcomers because of our good *warfare against the natural blemishes*, whatever may be the measure of our success.

The distinction which the Apostle draws between the [R5738 : page 232] filthiness of the flesh and that of the spirit should be noticed. After we have accepted the Lord, we take our stand with Him as the Captain of our Salvation, to be soldiers of the Cross and to fight a good fight against sin and all the works of the flesh and of the Devil. Soon we find ourselves in company with others of the same class, and naturally and properly begin to cleanse the flesh, to put away evil practises, outward wrongdoing of every kind. This is well. What fellowship could there be between children of the light and any works of darkness? Before long, in the case of many, a considerable outward change is manifested – careless language is avoided, passions are restrained, selfishness is curbed, at least in its outward manifestations. Neighbors and friends may see a considerable change. This is *good*, but not *sufficient*. We must also cleanse our *spirits*, our *minds*. It is not sufficient that we avoid *outward* wrongdoing. Our *minds* must be cleansed. We must learn to hate sin, to repel its first advances. We must learn that our minds and our bodies are the temples of the Lord and that everything contrary to Him and His Law of Righteousness and Love must be barred.

Others are witnesses to some extent of our trials and triumphs of an outward kind. But the most important battles of the New Creation are those which are known only to ourselves and to our Captain – the battle of the new *mind* or *will* against the influences of the old, natural disposition. The true soldier of the cross will find this battle-ground quite sufficient to engage all of his

combativeness and destructiveness and to keep him fully occupied. Such as are on the alert to develop the new character have much less time than others to criticize their neighbors, friends and brethren. They find enough in themselves requiring vigilance and restraint. And as they progress in this direction, they become more sympathetic toward others who have the same or other weaknesses and inclinations contrary to the Divine standards. They sympathize especially with the brethren of the New Creation, who similarly have given their all to the Lord and are battling against the world, the flesh and the Adversary, in their bodies and in their spirits.

OUR GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION

Those who have already come into relationship to the Father as children should remember that God's promises are that we shall be more and more received into His fellowship, have more and more of His blessing, in proportion as we are loyal to these principles with which we started out. If we have turned away from the world and from sin, and find that we have certain contaminations of the flesh, we should put all these away – even the taints of sin we should seek to put away. The more we energize ourselves in this direction, the more of God's favor shall we have, the more shall we be pleasing and acceptable to Him.

The Apostle in pointing out that there is filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, does not mean that the New Creature is filthy. The New Creature, as we are elsewhere told, is undefiled. The New Creature is holy. The word *spirit* is frequently used to represent mind. The *will* must be thoroughly changed before one can become a New Creature at all. And for the will ever to draw back would mean a drawing back unto perdition. To have a will for sin would mean that we had lost the Holy Spirit; that we are in the Second Death.

But the Lord's children have this new will, this new **[R5739 : page 232]** treasure, in an earthen vessel. We have a natural

disposition toward sin. Additionally, we have minds that, even though they are *putting away* the things of sin, have more or less *recollection* of the things of sin, the impurities of sin. So while we draw ourselves away from that which is sinful, we are to strive also to have our minds pure. We are to cast out everything in us that is sympathetic with sin. We are not to think of those things, we are not to permit ourselves to ruminate on what is sinful. We are to set our affection on things above. – Colossians 3:2.

As we fill our minds with God's promises, the whole character, the whole life, becomes more transformed. The Apostle says, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." Our minds which were in accord with the earthly things, the earthly nature, are not only to be lifted from obedience to sin, but are to be turned in a new direction. Our minds are to be filled with holy thoughts – thoughts of the Lord and His service. When the mind is in a right attitude toward God, it is comparatively easy to serve the Law of God. The Apostle exhorts us to *perfect* holiness. We had the holiness started in us when we became the Lord's people. We gave ourselves *wholly to Him* – He never accepts a *part*. Our consecration is to do God's will wholly. We present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. We started out saints; and the Lord recognizes none others than saints. Therefore we are to seek to live up to the Divine standard in all the conduct of life – our words, deeds, thoughts.

OUR CLEANSING AND THE LORD'S CLEANSING

But this perfecting of holiness goes on, this cleansing of ourselves, noticing to see where there is anything in us that is impure, and putting all that away from our conduct – and, more than that, putting it away from our *minds*. As we do this, holiness spreads through all the avenues of life. And so a Christian ought to have a very beautiful character. If any Christian has not a beautiful

character, it shows that he has not been properly attending to the matter of his cleansing, daily giving attention to his purification in his outward relationship to mankind, and inwardly in his relationship toward God.

We are to do all this in the fear of the Lord, the reverence of the Lord. There is a difference between the fear that is reverential and the fear that is slavish. The reverential fear is a profitable fear. We are not to fear our Heavenly Father as if He were a devil, who would turn on us and treat us with cruelty; but we are to have a godly fear, which will delight to do those things pleasing and acceptable in His sight. So all this cleansing of ourselves, all this perfecting of ourselves in holiness, is with a view to being perfected in the fear of the Lord. Having begotten us of His Holy Spirit, having given us these precious promises, God will expect us not to put our talents into a napkin and make no progress, but to bring forth fruit – some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some a hundred-fold. And as we do this, we shall be rewarded in proportion.

There is another Scripture which speaks of the *Lord* as doing this cleansing work. "Cleanse *Thou* me from secret faults." (Psalm 19:12-14.) These words of the Prophet David are the sentiment of all the Lord's true people. By these words the Prophet showed his recognition of the fact that he was not capable of cleansing himself. He recognized that he might have secret faults that he did not appreciate himself – that he did not see himself. Perhaps he did not see some faults that others would see. He desired God to cleanse him from these. This indicated that he desired to get away from everything that was not in harmony with God.

This would be the proper sentiment for all Christians. **[R5739 : page 233]** We should pray to the Lord that He would show us whatever in our lives is not fully pleasing and acceptable to Him, that He would help us to see ourselves as others see us, and

especially to see ourselves as He sees us. We believe that many of the Lord's people have been shown their imperfections and weaknesses (in the Lord's providence) by a very severe jolt. We ask the Lord also, as did the Psalmist, to keep us back from presumptuous sins, to cleanse us wholly from these.

"THE PERFECTING OF HOLINESS"

Our text declares that such a purification of flesh and spirit, body and mind, constitutes a perfecting of holiness. The thought here is that holiness cannot be attained in a moment, but that it must be gradually effected, perfected. A right view of this matter will hinder us from falling into certain dangerous errors. Holiness is not a charm which we may put in our pockets; it is not a garment which may be worn occasionally. Holiness resembles more the tempering of a piece of metal; it enters into the entire fiber, changing its general characteristics; it is transforming in its influence. True, there is a holiness *reckoned* to the Lord's people in the Robe of Christ's righteousness, which is granted to us when first we turn from sin, accept the Redeemer, and consecrate ourselves to God. But this is not sufficient. We must work into our characters that which we have willed – or, as the Apostle expresses it, we must allow the Lord to work in us the holy will, and the holy conduct which must necessarily accompany the holy will, as opportunity and conditions will permit.

But how is this holiness perfected in us? How does God work in us to will and then to do His good pleasure? Our text answers this portion of the question, too, assuring us that it is God's part to give us the promises; and that these promises constitute the incentives to those who are in the right attitude of mind. Without these Divine promises of the present and the future blessings, who would battle against his own weaknesses? Who would strenuously resist the attacks of the world and of the Adversary? Moreover, who would willingly sacrifice his life and all his natural rights to

serve the Lord and His cause, if there were no exceeding great and precious promises to quicken and energize him to the service of the King, in battling against sin, in assisting all who are on the side of righteousness? Surely there would be few, if any at all. And so our text intimates, saying, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves," etc. The promises are indeed the power of God unto our cleansing – our salvation – as pointed out by St. Paul. – Romans 1:16.

"GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES"

Looking into the context to see to what promises the Apostle refers, we find in the preceding verses the declaration, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:17,18.) What a promise! What a suggestion! – that we, by nature defiled and imperfect, should not only have the notice of our sovereign Creator, but should be invited to become His children and be given the assurance of His parental affection for us – that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that reverence Him." How wonderful it seems! And then, as the Apostle elsewhere declares, this is not the end of the matter, but merely the beginning, for he says, "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." – Rom. 8:17.

Yes, it is this thought of what is implied in the term children of God, sons of God. The blessings and riches of the Father are to be extended through our Lord Jesus, especially to the Little Flock, which is now being selected from amongst men to be His Bride and associates in the Kingdom. These are not accepted into the Kingdom at once, but as it were on probation; as the Apostle says, "Now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we

shall be" – if we are faithful. As sons of God in the present life we have the joy of knowing of our Father's character through His Word, which we are permitted to understand, but which the world does not understand. We are assured of Divine supervision; so that not the slightest thing can happen to these sons except as their Father sees would be to their advantage. But they must show their love, their devotion, their oneness of spirit with the Father and the Redeemer ere they can be counted in as His Bride in the full, absolute and complete sense, and be granted a share in His glories.

It is to demonstrate their possession of these graces that these consecrated ones are left for a time in the midst of evil and unfavorable surroundings – to prove their love of righteousness, their opposition to iniquity, their love to God and their faithfulness to Him, their love to all who are in sympathy with the Divine arrangement. If they stand these tests fully, it will mean that they will endure considerable opposition from the world, the flesh and the Adversary; and that they will be correspondingly strengthened by these experiences. It is this class to whom the Apostle refers saying, "If so be that we suffer [with Him], we shall also reign with Him." We are to suffer as He did for right doing, and because our neighbors and friends are blind as to what is the right, the proper course. We are to suffer gladly and joyfully whatever cup the Father may pour for us, knowing that He is too good to be unkind, too wise to err.

"Let us then, dearly beloved, cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." As the Apostle Peter declares, "If we do these things, we shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." – 2 Peter 1:10,11.

[R5742 : page 233]

THE PILGRIM'S WANTS

"I want that adorning Divine,
Thou, only, my God, canst bestow;
I want in those beautiful garments to shine,
Which distinguish Thy household below.

"I want, oh, I want to attain
Some likeness, my Savior, to Thee!
That longed-for resemblance once more to regain,
Thy comeliness put upon me.

"I want to be marked for Thine own;
Thy seal on my forehead to wear;
To receive that "new name" on the mystic white stone,
Which only Thyself canst declare.

"I want so in Thee to abide,
As to bring forth some fruit to Thy praise;
The branch that Thou prunest, though feeble and dried,
May languish, but never decays.

"I want Thine own hand to unbind
Each tie to terrestrial things,
Too tenderly cherished, too closely entwined,
Where my heart too tenaciously clings.

"I want, by mine aspect serene,
Mine actions and words, to declare
That my treasure is placed in a Country unseen,
That my heart and affections are there."

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