

[R5933 : page 229]

RE PARTIALLY WILFUL SINS BEFORE CONSECRATION

SIN is to be viewed from two different standpoints. The Bible declares that all are sinners; for in Eden the whole race was judged and the whole race was condemned. These sinners may more or less sear their own consciences by doing things which they know are wrong, and may thus further degrade themselves mentally, morally and physically; or they may strive against sin and their own weaknesses and try to improve their character and their life. To whatever extent they do either the one or the other they are advancing or deteriorating.

But with the world God is not at present taking account of either of these courses. He has provided that all who will come back into harmony with Him shall have the favorable provisions of the Millennial Age, restoring them fully to God's image and favor. That will be *their* trial time. It is not what mankind do now that will determine their eternal destiny, although their present course will affect their character, making them more or less likely to respond to the opportunities of the next Age. The present lives of some seem to be so hardening them that many stripes will be necessary in the Age to come before they can be brought into an obedient and teachable attitude, if, indeed, they ever respond and come into heart-harmony with the Kingdom arrangements. What men do now may degrade or elevate them, but will not bring them either eternal life or eternal death; for the world are all under sentence of the first death, all under the Adamic penalty.

God has plainly declared that there is to be a future life, a future hope, and why this is so and how release [R5933 : page 230] from this sentence is to be brought about. Moreover, He has given a special Message during this present Age to which some of us have

gladly responded. We have determined that if God thus graciously designs to offer eternal life to every human being, and will now receive those who desire to be in harmony with Him, we will turn away from sin and live contrary to it, and will be servants of God and of righteousness. All who take this stand are directed of the Lord through His Word and His providences to the terms and conditions upon which they may become members of the Christ company, the Church company. God's provision is so broad that it has made ample arrangement for all their necessities.

Only now, therefore, is there such a thing as sin unto death, wilful sin, that will decide their eternal destiny. The Apostle Paul says, as the mouthpiece of the Lord, that if we, the Church of Christ, sin wilfully after we have received the Spirit of God – after we have come to a knowledge of the Truth as it is in Jesus, and have tasted of the Heavenly gift – there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins – only destruction. (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31.) If we sin wilfully after we have left sin, then our course indicates perversion of mind, change of heart, a returning to a wallowing in the mire. None but the Church can do this; for only these have passed from death unto life. We made a bonafide contract with the Lord, and He will not ignore it. He will hold us to it; and we must either fulfil our covenant or meet the penalty – eternal death.

THE CASE OF SAUL OF TARSUS

But no sins that we committed before consecration are those wilful sins which will bring the Second Death. Such wilful sins are committed after consecration. Let us take the experience of Saul of Tarsus as an illustration. It would seem that Saul did not commit wilful sin when he persecuted the Church of Christ; for he said afterward that he verily thought he was doing God service. We can readily see how a strong character like Saul of Tarsus might think he was serving God in stoning St. Stephen and in other acts of like nature. He supposed that the followers of Jesus of Nazareth were

violating the Jewish Law and trying to overthrow Judaism. He thought he was upholding God's institutions. He had no intimation whatever that he was doing anything contrary to God's will. When he was stricken down by the supernatural light and heard the Lord saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" he was astonished, and said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" It was a strange thought to him that he was persecuting the Lord; for he supposed that he was serving God. But as soon as he saw his error and realized that he was persecuting the Lord's people, he turned about at once and came into full harmony with the Divine will. He evidenced by his sincerity of heart that he had not wilfully done wrong.

We cannot suppose that if Saul had been committing wilful sin in stoning St. Stephen, the Lord would have appeared to him and would have sent His servant Ananias to give him instruction. Nevertheless, Saul had done wrong, and he received a measure of stripes, of chastisement. His semi-blindness for life was in measure a retribution, a correction, as well as a means of keeping him humble in view of later revelations. – 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

As we understand the Scriptures, the merit of Christ's death does not cover wilful sin of any kind, but only those sins which are done unintentionally by us. It would seem that those who love sin, who prefer sin, are not likely to be reached by the Gospel Message of this Age. Those who are not satisfied with themselves, but who are in difficulties merely on account of the weaknesses of the flesh, are the kind most likely to be reached. If at any time before coming to the Lord these honest-hearted ones have committed sins which had some measure of wilfulness, they probably had some later experiences that were in the nature of stripes, some sufferings therefor, either before consecration or subsequently.

WE REAP WHAT WE SOW

When one becomes a New Creature in Christ, we understand that all the affairs of the old creature are settled legally before God's

Law. Whoever comes into Christ becomes dead as a human being, in God's reckoning. But if in his past life he has violated the laws of his being by a course of improper living, by committing sins that affected his health, the seeds of those sins will still be in his body; and he may throughout his entire life be obliged to suffer the results of this past wrong-doing. Or if in a moment of passion or under the influence of drink, for instance, he may before becoming a Christian have committed a crime, he may have to suffer to the end of his life because of this. But this would not mean that these sins had not been covered by the merit of Christ. It would be the natural retribution for wrong-doing, for violating Divine Law and perhaps human law. His sins would be the result of Adamic weaknesses and not purely wilful; and when he gives his heart to the Lord, they are no more remembered against him.

Our thought would be, then, that there are no sins of the Christian prior to consecration to be reckoned for after consecration, though the weakness or disabilities resulting from former sins may remain with him while he remains in the flesh, and he – or she – may always have these weaknesses or their results to contend with. "As a man soweth, so shall he also reap," is a universal Law of God operating in our being, even though, through the Ransom-sacrifice of Christ, one may be received into the family of God and forgiven. Had it not been for the redemption through Jesus, all these sins would have meant death eternal. No one can indulge in sin without its making its impression upon the mind and upon the body, and the New Creature has that much more to struggle with. But he will have the Lord's sympathy, and he has the constant application of the merit of his Savior as a covering **[R5934 : page 230]** for those sins and infirmities against which he is fighting. He has the Throne of Grace to which he may daily go for cleansing, through the precious blood, and to which he may go in every time of need.

The fact that sins indulged in will leave their effects in both mind and body which may require years to eradicate, should cause

even those who are not consecrated to the Lord to live clean, pure lives, to seek to be in harmony so far as possible with the laws of their being. If all the world could realize the importance of this and would act accordingly, they would be greatly advantaged in the Age to follow this, when the whole world will be on trial for life or death eternal.

