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RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SPIRIT-BEGOTTEN

'Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that Wicked One toucheth him not'.—1 John 5:18.



WHEN attempting to explain spiritual things, there is always a difficulty, particularly because we have only human words with which to express ourselves. Therefore, in order to make spiritual things clear, the Scriptures give us various similies and other figures of speech. In this text the Apostle John speaks of those who are begotten of God, those who have experienced a change of nature, who were first begotten according to the flesh, as children of Adam, and who have been begotten again—begotten of God. (1 Peter 1:3.) Since our Lord's resurrection, God has been inviting some to come out from the world and become New Creatures—no longer human beings, but spirit beings.

The first step toward this change of nature is the receiving of a new will. But we can see that it is a mistake to call the new will alone the New Creature; for the new will comes to us before we receive the Holy Spirit. It is the new will that presents our sacrifice. If we did not have the new will, we would not present our bodies a living sacrifice. The next step is that of the Redeemer's becoming a Surety for this sacrifice and for the attainment of the new nature. The third step is the Heavenly Father's acceptance of this sacrifice, of this slaying of the earthly nature by the Redeemer, and His giving of a special sign of His acceptance. That special sign of acceptance is the begetting of the Holy Spirit.

It is very necessary that we keep the new human will separate and distinct from that which we receive at the begetting of the Spirit. We had the new will

first; we desired and purposed to do God's will. Then we approached the Father in the way He had arranged—through our Redeemer. It is the new will that makes the sacrifice. The offering being presented, the merit of Jesus is applied, and thus the sacrifice becomes at once acceptable to the Father. Up to this point the will of the individual is still a human will, a new human will. The offering is then slain by the High Priest, our Lord Jesus, the acceptance of the Father being marked immediately by the begetting of the Spirit.

Just what God does at this juncture we do not fully understand. We do not understand clearly what a natural begetting is, though we have better means of understanding the natural begetting than of understanding the spiritual begetting. As to the spiritual begetting, we have the Divine expression that it is the starting of a new life. The one receiving it gains a supernatural illumination. Thereafter he is a changed person, a new person, a New Creature. He is now *in Christ Jesus*. He has new hopes, aims and objects, and is more and more enabled to apprehend spiritual things as the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit operate upon his mind.

But all this is something that cannot be explained to those who have not taken the necessary steps by which spiritual things may be understood. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'. (1 Corinthians 2:9-15.) Not until we have received this Heavenly illumination can we discern spiritual things. Nor do we at first discern them in the way of

appreciating them fully. Spiritual discernment grows from a small beginning. 'Old things have passed away and all things have become new'. These old things pass away, not instantly, but gradually; and the starting point is marked by this expression, 'begotten of God'.

NEW CREATURE DOES NOT PRACTISE SIN

To be begotten of God, then, is to receive the beginning of a new life, a new nature. The Apostle John declares of such, 'Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin [doth not practise sin—Diaglott]'. (1 John 3:9.) So long as these are under such holy control, inspired by the great and precious promises, and possessing the holy will, they could not sin wilfully—could not practise sin in their lives.

We are to distinguish between a wilful sin and being overtaken by a fault. The reference in our text is to wilful sin, the practise of sin. The New Creature cannot sin because it is the Heavenly seed, the seed of the new nature. Every flower, every animal, sprang from a seed of life. However infinitesimal the seed may be, however embryotic, *life* is there. Likewise with the Christian; so long as any of the holy mind of God is present, there is life. But if he sins wilfully, this holy seed is dead. If this seed perish, the individual is dead as a New Creature. Nothing would then await the individual but the Second Death; for he had been lifted out of the first, or Adamic death, and to die again would mean that he had come under the extreme penalty of God's Law a second time. This would be an individual sentence, and would be eternal. Such would be 'twice dead', as the Apostle Jude puts it—'plucked up by the roots'.—Jude 12.

So we see the Apostle John's meaning—whoever is in the spirit-begotten condition, whoever has this embryo of the new nature, could not sin wilfully, could not take pleasure in sin, could not give himself over to sin. To do so would signify that he had lost this Holy Spirit, and that he had become unholy again. As St. Peter explains, it would be like the sow that was washed returning to her wallowing in the mire. The Apostle John says that one begotten of the Holy Spirit will 'keep himself, and that Wicked One toucheth him not'. He not only will not sin wilfully, but he will keep constantly on guard, watching himself, just as a watchman guards the castle or the city or the house. He watches all the doors, all the avenues of access.

THE NECESSITY FOR VIGILANCE

This thought of setting a watch over ourselves, of keeping ourselves so that the Wicked One cannot touch or injure us, suggests another thought: The Lord Himself is the great Center of righteousness, purity, truth. All who are on the side of righteousness, purity, truth, will shun sin, will have no fellowship with it; for even if we should not really enter into sin in act, if we have any sympathy with it, we would be to that extent out of harmony with the Lord. As in a circle the nearer to the center the greater the safety; so it is with the circle of righteousness, whose Centre is Jehovah Himself.

The slightest sympathy with sin would cause the child of God to depart to that extent from the Centre of purity. As he widened the distance between himself and the Lord, he would draw nearer to the outer rim of the circle. Think of an island surrounded by water infested with crocodiles. The person who would remain in the center of the island would be perfectly safe from those enemies. But the nearer one approached to the coast line, the greater his danger. So Satan is represented as a wily foe; and to the extent that any of us would not watch himself, he would be getting nearer to the circumference of that circle. Any sympathy with what is not in the fullest harmony with the mind of the Lord, any participation in sin, would carry him closer and closer to the place of danger. The intimation of the Scriptures is that such [R5743: page 238] a one would be in great danger of being touched, caught, by the great Adversary and his demon host, to his injury, perhaps to his ruin.

Presumably every Christian has had something of this experience of drawing near to the place of danger. In proportion as we live near to the Lord, we are under Divine protection. In proportion as we waver in our loyalty, we come nearer to the Adversary. One might thus endanger himself without actually sinning. His heart might still be true to the Lord, yet he might be touched by sin by being involved with others in some way. Therefore the Word of God warns us to watch our actions, to watch our companionship, our conduct, to abide 'in the secret place of the Most High', to 'make straight paths for our feet', lest that which is weak and lame be turned out of the way. Rather, let it be healed, by keeping very close to our God, as far away as possible from the point of danger.

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