

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NEW MIND

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“We know that whosoever is born [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)

At the time of the writing of this epistle the Apostle John was an aged man, and according to tradition was the last of the apostles to die. He had by nature a very loving disposition and was spoken of as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” His character mellowed by many years of Christian experience, and he manifested a tender, fatherly feeling toward the church as he writes. (1 John 2:1)

In chapter one, verses 8 to 10, John points out that sin is a trait that affects us all. Facts and scripture testify that we are all sinners. (Rom. 3:10) John seeks to impress upon us that if we take the position that we have no sin, we are displeasing to God. God is pleased to have us acknowledge our sins and apply for cleansing from sin through the merit of his Son “Jesus Christ the righteous” and then to put forth effort to do away with sin as much as possible. It is the Christian’s responsibility then to put away sin—to avoid sin so far as possible. The Apostle is seeking to strengthen the brethren, to encourage the brethren that they sin not—“these things write I unto you that ye sin not.” He would urge us to resist our natural tendencies; encourage us to fight against the weaknesses of our flesh.

We are not to assume the attitude that we are sinners, that we cannot help it, and abandon diligent efforts to overcome our weaknesses. No, it must be a continuing fight. But realizing that we, in fact, do commit trespasses that are contrary to the desires of our hearts, the Apostle would have us remember that there is a place for us to go. He says, “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” The Apostle Paul expresses the same thought in Heb. 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” How thankful we are that all the sins of the flesh are forgivable through faith in his blood. God “knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” (Psa. 103:14) Our Heavenly Father has made this gracious provision for our forgiveness and has constituted Jesus as our Advocate.

In our text, the Apostle John writes, “we know that whosoever is born [begotten] of God sinneth not.” On the surface this might seem like a contradiction; for as we have already seen, the Apostle points out that we are all sinners. How can we harmonize this? Whoever is begotten of God has received the beginning of a new life, the new nature. Such an one is then referred to as a new creature. It is the new creature which the Apostle refers to when he says, “whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not.” Furthermore the Apostle is referring to willful sin, the practice of sin—deliberately and knowingly to

practice sin, according to the Amplified Translation. We must distinguish between a willful sin and being overtaken in a fault.

The new creature cannot sin willfully, cannot take pleasure in sin, cannot practice sin. To do so would mean that the seed of the new nature had perished and that the individual is dead as a new creature. Such an one would no longer have any standing before God and would come under the sentence of death—second death. Such are referred to by the Apostle Jude as “twice dead, plucked up by the roots.” Jude 12.

The Apostle Paul tells us—“we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” (2 Cor. 4:7) This treasure of the enlightened new mind is in the old mortal body. This new creature has only the mortal body in which to operate. In the resurrection, God has promised to give a glorious divine body to the new creature. At the present time, however, the new creature must live under and contend with the imperfections of the human body. By his continual fight against the sins and weaknesses entrenched in his flesh, the new creature demonstrates his loyalty to God and to the principles of righteousness. On the other hand, if the new creature does not put forth sufficient effort to control the flesh, this is an evidence of his disloyalty to God.

While the new creature “sinneth not,” does not practice sin, yet it might be entrapped through a weakness of the flesh, or be ensnared by the adversary. This would be unintentional on its part. It is for such occasions that the Father in His great mercy has provided Jesus as our Advocate. He will intercede for such sins, but not for willful or deliberate sin. Jesus died for sins due to the fall—Adamic sin—not for any willful sin of the new creature.

Sometimes, however, we have a situation where there is a kind of mixed condition, where the new creature has grown slack in guarding against temptation and has yielded with some degree of blame. We would describe such a sin as a partially willful sin. To the extent the new creature has neglected its responsibility with regard to keeping the flesh under control, to that extent the face of the Lord will be darkened to him. There will be a loss of grace and if the course is persisted in, there will follow also a loss of knowledge. It is the responsibility of the new creature to mortify or put to death the flesh. If the old creature, the flesh, starts to do wrong, the new creature is not to consent to it or allow the flesh to do wrong. Whenever the new creature becomes derelict in this constant warring with the flesh, it has to some extent given consent to the sin. In such cases of partially willful sins, stripes will be administered in proportion to the willfulness.

Returning to our text, our attention is called to a further responsibility of the Christian —“he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” We have need for vigilance in keeping a watch over ourselves, keeping ourselves close to the Lord so that wicked one (Satan) cannot touch or injure us.

In 1 John 3:3 we read, “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” Here again our minds are pointed to the responsibility of the new creature to put off the works of the flesh, to, as much as possible, walk up to the standard of perfection, to emulate that which we see reflected in the divine character. Thus the Lord himself is put forth as the great example, the center of righteousness, of purity and truth. All who are on the side of righteousness, purity and truth will have no fellowship with sin, will shun sin, have no sympathy with sin. The nearer we stay to the center of purity, which is Jehovah himself, the greater will be our safety. On the other hand, the slightest sympathy with sin on the part of the child of God, causes a departure, however small, from the center of purity—our Heavenly Father. Thus anything not in the fullest harmony with the mind of the Lord, even the slightest sympathy with sin, poses a danger to some extent to the child of God.

Such an one then is to some extent, at least, in danger of being touched, or caught by the adversary. Possibly all of the Lord’s people have had experiences where, for a time, or in some experience, they came close to the place of danger from our great adversary. Let us remember that to the degree we live close to the Lord, in that proportion we are under His divine care and protection. On the other hand, in proportion as we fail to live close to the Lord, we come nearer the adversary and place ourselves in jeopardy of spiritual ruin.

We believe it is possible for us to thus endanger ourselves without actually sinning. Our hearts might still be true to the Lord, yet we might still be touched by sin by being involved with others in some way. Friendship with the world might be a good example of this. The Apostle James warns us to not be friendly with the worldly. (James 4:4) Therefore, we must be careful in our actions to avoid even “the appearance of evil” lest in some way we give the wrong impression and bring dishonor, however slight, on the cause to which we have dedicated our lives. Let us take heed to the Apostle Paul’s admonition to the Hebrews (Heb. 12:13), “And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” The adversary is quick to attack us on the points where we may be weak and vulnerable. Let us seek to have these weak points healed by keeping very close to our Heavenly Father in fellowship and communion, that we may stay as far away as possible from the point of danger. Let the beautiful words of Psalm 91:1-6 be a description of our closeness to our Father.

Another aspect of our responsibilities as Christians is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in Rom. 13:12, 13. In connection with our subject of the New Creature’s responsibility, we shall deal more particularly with the admonition to “cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light; let us walk honestly as in the day.” if the Apostle in his day could say “the night is far spent, the day is at hand,” how much more true it is today. In V. 11 he said “for now is our salvation nearer than when we [first] believed.” How true this is as we look at the evidence around us. While the day is

not fully ushered in, yet we see evidence that we are living in the early dawn of the new dispensation. We believe we are in the time of trouble during which the kingdoms of this world will “become the kingdom of our Lord and of Christ.” (Rev. 11:15) Thus we are living in the period when the present dominion of Satan shall be completely overthrown and become the kingdom of God’s dear son. The scriptures indicate that this will be a specially evil day, a time in which the “children of light” shall be severely tested. Our Lord in Matt. 24:24 indicated that the tests would be so great “insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” The Apostle Paul describes it as a day in which “Every man’s work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.” (1 Cor. 3:13, 14) Who shall receive the reward? He who has built with “gold, silver and precious stones, upon the true foundation which is Christ.” (V. 12)

We feel that the Apostle’s admonition to the Church at Rome is of special benefit to us at this time. Therefore, let us consider the first aspect of Christian responsibility contained in these verses. As Christians, footstep followers of the Master, we have the responsibility to “cast off the works of darkness.” What are the works of darkness? Let us list some of them: error, superstition, sin in all of its aspects (including grosser sins), evil speaking, malice, envy, strife, etc. Bro. Russell has described the works of darkness as “any works that will not stand the fullest approval of the new dispensation.”

While the new day is not fully ushered in, yet we are called “the children of light, and the children of the day,” (1 Thess. 5:5) and therefore do not belong to the realm of sin and darkness, but rather to the new day. Thus our Christian responsibility during this period of darkness is to walk “as in the day.” Thus we see that we must put off everything not in harmony with the light of the new day. This, then implies full devotion to the will of our Father, a complete consecration of our lives for the purpose of becoming servants of righteousness. In thus seeking to faithfully cast off the works of darkness, the Christian seeks daily to cleanse himself from all “filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear [reverence] of God.” (2 Cor. 7:1)

By working the works of God, then, we cast off the works of darkness. When asked the question “what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (John 6:28, 29) “Belief” in Jesus means more than a mere mental assent that he came into the world, the Son of God to be man’s redeemer. Belief in Jesus means an acceptance of him as our redeemer, faith that his sacrifice cleanses us from Adamic sin. Belief here would mean a firm conviction in Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf, stimulating in us activity—the desire to follow in his footsteps, pledging our lives in full consecration. This is what Jesus meant when he said to believe on him was to do the work of God.

The Apostle James in James 2:26 tells us that “faith without works is dead.” In V. 18 he says, “I will shew thee my faith by my works.” What are the works that demonstrate our faith? It is the diligent application of ourselves to the study of God’s word that we might be able to discern the mind of God—that we might know his will; that we might bring our lives into conformity with the divine will.

In 2 Pet. 1:3 we read, “according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him.” Thus we learn that it is through a knowledge of God, which knowledge is received through a careful study of His word, that we receive everything necessary for the sustenance of the new creature and the development of godliness. We of course realize that this knowledge of the principles of truth and righteousness thus learned must be put into practice in our daily lives, and we must develop the fruits and graces of the spirit. If these are manifested in our lives, it is an evidence that we have been working the works of God and casting off the works of darkness.

In 2 Tim. 2:15 the Apostle admonishes Timothy and we all will do well to take it to heart personally—“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” We have a responsibility to diligently apply ourselves to a study of God’s word. The importance of this is indicated by the Apostle’s word to Timothy in chapter 3, Vs. 16 and 17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” To state it in reverse then, the implication is that without a careful study of his word, we will lack that which is necessary for our development, for our perfecting, and we will not be properly developed for the good works to be participated in by the faithful. Therefore, let us see our responsibility to apply ourselves diligently in a study of God’s word.

Returning to Rom. 13:12, we read, “and let us put on the armour of light.” We put on the armour of light in the same way that we put off the works of darkness, by a study of His word and an application of the principles of truth and righteousness in our lives. It is described as the “armour of light” because only those who are fully enlightened through a careful study of his word are able to put on the whole armour of God. But something is implied by putting on the armour. No one ever puts on armour unless he expects to fight. So also the true soldier of the cross expects to fight and must be properly equipped for the battle. But the Christian’s warfare is a fight of faith. In the words of the Apostle in 2 Cor. 10:3, 4, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)”

In Rev. 3:10, reference is made to the “hour of temptation which shall come upon all the

world.” We are well along in this “Hour of Temptation”; and because the errors are more subtle today than ever before, we must apply ourselves more diligently to the study of the truth. Thus we take heed to our armour, that each piece is securely buckled on, polished and bright.

Let our “loins be girded with the truth”—signifying that we are consecrated to the service of the truth. Let us put on “the breastplate of righteousness” and continue to grow in our appreciation of the divine arrangement for our justification. And may the truth continue to have a cleansing, a purifying effect on our lives as we seek to develop a righteous character. Let us have our “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” And as this peace of God “which passeth all understanding” pervades our hearts, it will assist and comfort us over the rocky paths of trial and adversity. Furthermore, it will assist us to live peaceably with all men insofar as possible without compromising the truth. And “above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Let us get a firm grip on the shield of faith by a study of his word. “His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” (Psa. 91:4) “And taking the helmet of salvation” representing our intellectual knowledge, our understanding of the Divine Plan. Let us get a firm grip on the “sword of the spirit”—our only offensive weapon. In 2 Cor. 6:7 the Apostle speaks of the “armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” But armour as such is not worn on the right hand and on the left. The Diaglott says “arms of righteousness.” In other words—“a pebble from the brook”; a “thus saith the Lord”; our offensive weapon, the sword of the spirit.

In 1 Tim. 6:12 the Apostle describes the Christian’s warfare as a “good fight of faith;” that we should “lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.” And in 1 John 5:4 we read “... this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” So then let us recognize our responsibility to put on the “armour of light” that we may be properly equipped to be a good soldier of the cross and fight the good fight of faith to a successful conclusion.

Turning again to Rom. 13:13 we read, “Let us walk honestly, as in the day.” Here is another aspect of our Christian responsibility. While we are not yet fully in the day—the new dispensation—yet we belong to the new dispensation. Therefore, we should live as nearly as possible in accordance with the perfect standard that will then prevail. Honesty is a basic trait of character. It is probably the most valuable trait of character, for where there is little honesty, there is little character. When we refer to honesty as a trait of character we do not mean merely as respects to dollars and cents (money matters), but also to the thoughts and intents of our hearts, and to our words as well. We must be honest with ourselves, make an honest appraisal of our progress, face up to our weaknesses and muster strength to overcome them. As the Pastor comments: “Every true child of God should see to it that he is honest, not only in money matters, but in his treatment of his neighbors and his brethren in the church, and above all, in his

confessions respecting his faith.” In Phil. 4:8 the apostle brings to our attention the importance of honesty in thought and how we should carefully screen those things that we allow our minds to dwell on. The Apostle Peter in 1 Pet. 2:12 brings to our attention the importance of “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles;...” A good and honest heart was a fundamental requirement to receive the truth. In Luke 8:15 we read, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” It was necessary for us to have an honest and good heart to receive the truth, and it is necessary for us to maintain this condition of heart if we are to retain the truth. The lesson then for us is, however others may walk, we must see to it that we “walk honestly as in the day.”

The Apostle continues in Rom. 13:13, “not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness.” This is an instance, we believe where the translators failed to convey the thought of the Apostle. Apparently they failed to take into consideration that he was writing “to the saints” and not to the world. The language they have used here is applicable to the crimes of the most depraved class of people. Such language does not properly describe the misdemeanors that might be expected among the saints. We understand the Apostle to be exhorting the saints to avoid being intoxicated with the spirit of the world; to exercise moderation, self-restraint in respect to all of their earthly affairs. We believe the Apostle is seeking to bring to our attention that the truth should exert a restraining influence in our lives.

It would seem likely that the Apostle would conclude his list of those things which are to be avoided with those which he considers to be the most grievous. Thus he concludes with the exhortation that the saints should avoid “strife and envying.” Surely strife and envy indicate a wrong condition of heart and while doing injury to the one so affected, it may injure others also.

The Apostle admonishes us to “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” (Phil. 2:3) Surely we all can see beautiful traits of character in our brethren that we would like to have more fully developed in ourselves. “Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.” (Gal. 5:26) “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” James 3:16.

So then, let us seek more and more to recognize our responsibilities as Christians and to daily apply ourselves to the proper discharge of those responsibilities. We have responsibilities to our Heavenly Father to do that which we have covenanted; we have responsibility in connection with his word to study it, become familiar with it and apply it in our lives; to “cast off the works of darkness” and “put on the armour of light.” We have a responsibility with regard to how we walk, and a responsibility with regard to our brethren. Let us be faithful in the discharge of these responsibilities.