

Romans - Commentaries by William John Hocking, Editor

The Believer's Monthly Magazine: Volume 3, Two Natures., The (7:5)

AN unsaved person has only one nature. He is in the flesh. So the apostle affirms "When we were in the flesh" (Rom. 7:5). Afterwards he speaks of believers, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit" (Rom. 8:9).

This being so, there arises a conflict between the two natures, because they are contrary the one to the other. This is what the apostle says, "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). The Holy Spirit, of course, acts upon the spirit, which is born of Himself (John 3:6).

The existence and opposition of the two natures in the believer is here clearly stated; but the word rendered "cannot" in the Authorized Version is too strong. As it stands it implies that it is an impossibility for the saint to do what the Spirit would lead him to do.

Thank God it is not so. The correct rendering is, "That ye may not do the things that ye would." The flesh will hinder, or try to hinder; but we are not under its power. "But now being made free from sin [this is not forgiveness of sins, but deliverance from the sinful nature which is in us], and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness" (Rom. 6:22).

The apostle says, "Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Walking in the Spirit gives power over the flesh. The flesh is never changed or eradicated: but by the power of the Spirit dwelling in the believer, it is set aside, overcome, and not allowed to act. Such persons are called the "spiritual," of whom the apostle speaks, "Ye which are spiritual" (Gal. 6:1). They are fit instruments to be used of the Lord in helping those who have been overtaken in a fault. And how are such overtaken in a fault, but by listening to the flesh and yielding to its suggestions or to Satan's temptations through the flesh? "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14).

Some profess to be in a sinless state, through the old nature being destroyed and rooted out of their hearts. And when evil thoughts arise they blame the devil for them; whereas the Spirit of God blames the evil nature in them (James 1:14).

The spiritual believer is he in whose heart dwells love, joy, peace; long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. These are the fruit of the Spirit. Happy and blessed is such an one, being a vessel ready to be used of the Lord (Gal. 5:22).

The doctrine of the apostle is the same in Romans 7, 8. But there he gives deliverance, through Christ, from the evil nature, or sin in the flesh. He cries out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:24). He gets deliverance through Christ, not by the destruction of "this body of death," which is in him still, as he states in the end of verse 25 "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin." His state is unaltered; but he is delivered, and has found his place to be in Christ, and not in the flesh; declaring in triumph, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Yet the flesh is still in him.

This is what the apostle then enlarges upon; giving us to know that the sinful nature in us has been condemned in Christ on the cross. Sins are forgiven, but the wicked nature which commits them is not forgiven, but condemned in Him Who bore all on the cross. Blessed liberty, in which to bring forth fruit unto God. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6:22).

And again, we read, "Our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away [annulled] that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin ... Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (6:5-11. R.V.). It is not that the evil nature in us is changed (I would again remark) or destroyed; but set aside, and the believer is to reckon himself as having died with Christ, but now risen with Him, and hence to walk in newness of life.

Here is a solemn question for the conscience. Can a saved person be in an unspiritual state of soul? We find it is possible. He may have life in the Spirit, and not walk in the Spirit. Let us not lose sight of this. A believer may "sow to the flesh and reap corruption." He may grieve that Holy Spirit, by Whom he is sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). He may quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). The Spirit is grieved by our listening to the flesh or the devil, and doing something we ought not to do. He is quenched by our not doing what He would lead us to do.

Further, the gifted may not be spiritual. The Corinthians "came behind in no gift," but they were carnal and walked as men. Only watchfulness, prayer, and obedience can keep us walking in the Spirit. Then will He fill our hearts with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Such was Barnabas. "A good man; full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." May we be such.

Guernsey. G.R.

The Believer's Monthly Magazine: Volume 3, Correspondence. (6:3)

"Counsel for the day of small things." A correspondent has been good enough to point out that the initials subscribed to this article (B.M.M., July last, p. 154) should have been J.J.P., and not J.N. D. Will our readers kindly make the necessary correction?

W.D.— We have sent you an answer to your question. It is an important one, but hardly of a kind to discuss in these pages.

Enquirer. — "Jesus unites believers to God." Is this statement scripturally correct? There is no scripture to confirm it as far as we know. On the contrary, the thought is opposed to the teaching of the word which continually speaks of the believer as being "in Christ," but not "in Jesus" or "in God" (Rom. 6:3; 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3; and many other passages). "We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5:20). But the Spirit ever avoids saying we are "in God." So the members of the body are said to be the members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27). It is true our "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), but this is quite a different thing from the statement in question.

J.— Please explain the difference between the mercy and the grace of God. To make a brief distinction, God in His grace acts towards sinners in accordance with the love which He is. Hence the contrast between law and grace (see Galatians). Grace was therefore unknown till Jesus Christ, by Whom it came (John 1:17). Mercy hover was displayed in O. T. times, for God acted even then in accordance with what man was in his need and sin. Thus, mercy flows from compassion towards a destitute condition, but grace is the exercise of a love which is infinite and uncaused. The father (Luke 15) in mercy would supply the needs of his prodigal son, but in grace he gave the best robe, the ring, the sandals, the seat at the banquet.

W.C.— Kindly explain the meaning of the middle clause of Luke 16:9 "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." "Mammon" is a word taken from the Chaldee, which means riches. Beside being used three times in this context, it also occurs in Matthew 6:24. The lesson that the Lord was enforcing in connection with the preceding parable is that the children of God should use this world's riches in such a way as to secure to themselves a future reward. To serve mammon while serving God is incompatible (verse 13); but to make friends with it is to ensure an eternal advantage to be realized in the habitations on high. This method of using money in view of a heavenly reward is shown in other places. "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not" (Luke 12:33). See 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

W.R.W.— We were thankful to receive your letter, and to hear you make a practice of reading the B.M.M. "in conjunction with the word of God." We wish every one of its readers were like you in this respect. We have read with care your criticism upon C.G.H.'s verses (B.M.M. October last, p. 240); and we are quite at one with you as to the propriety of addressing the Lord with reverence. In this respect there is surely need for us all to grow. But we would not be hard upon the author of the lines. After all, in saying "It's a pleasure to serve Jesus," he is not speaking to Him but of Him. This does not justify the expression as strictly correct (Rom. 12:11; 14:18; 16:18; Col. 3:24); but we did not consider it a sufficient blemish to disqualify it for insertion.

W.T.— Would those who were without the knowledge of God be unsaved (1 Cor. 15:34)? Ignorance of God is generally the mark of an unsaved condition (Eph. 4:18; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Thess. 1:8). Here it implies the want of knowing the power of God in resurrection (Matt. 22:29); and, no doubt, refers to some among them who had crept in, teaching this false doctrine. In that case they would be such as are mentioned in 2 Peter 2:1.

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