

WRITINGS OF J W H NICHOLS

by J.W.H. Nichols

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by J.W.H. Nichols, compiled for study and devotional reading.

4 Chapters

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S. Isaac or Ishmael.

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S. Isaac or Ishmael.

Isaac or Ishmael.

J. W. H. Nichols.

Genesis contains in germ every elementary principle afterward developed in God's ways with man. It has fitly been called "The seed plot of the whole Bible." We are not surprised, therefore, to find in Gal 4:1-31. that Sarah and Hagar are taken as representing the two great principles of law and grace. It is important to understand that the law applies to man in the flesh, and produces a condition of bondage. Ishmael is a type of the natural man, "born after the flesh," who for a time dwelt in the house of Abraham, until Isaac, the true heir, was born. Ishmael speaks of our condition by nature, when the flesh has undisputed possession, and we live to gratify self; while Isaac typifies that which is born of God — the new man: as the apostle wrote: "That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; afterward that which is spiritual" (1. Cor. 15.). It was not an improved Ishmael, that was to become the depository of God's promises, but Isaac, the new man, child of Sarah and child of faith (Gen 17:15-17). But, the birth of Isaac brought conflict, it soon manifested the character of the bondwoman's son. New birth is not a change of the old nature, and does not in the least alter the character of the flesh. The flesh "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). The cultured natural man remains man still. Ishmael might become "a great nation," the father of twelve princes, but he was the son of the bondwoman still. Ishmael and Isaac in Abraham's house were a striking illustration of the two natures in the believer. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary one to the other" (Gal 5:17). There was a struggle in the house of Abraham as to who was to have first place. He that was born of the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit (Gal 4:29); even so it is now, there is a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit in the children of God, until "He that is born after the flesh" is cast out — disowned as heir. Of Ishmael, God had said: "He shall be a wild man." Could fitter words be used to describe what the flesh is? So we must learn — as the apostle said: "I know that in me — that is in my flesh — good does not dwell" (Rom 7:18, N.T.). Therefore, to walk according to the mind of God, the flesh (the Ishmael in us) must be disowned. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh and the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24). Shrined with the blessed truth of what God has made us "in Christ" we are enabled to "put off the old man with his lusts and put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:22-24). Isaac's place in the house of Abraham as the heir, was manifested on the day he was weaned. It was a day of rejoicing for all in the house. Henceforth Isaac was supreme, and Ishmael was cast out (Gen 21:8-12). All this is full of salutary instruction for the people of God. The flesh cannot be allowed to hold sway in our lives, and our Lord Jesus Christ has His rightful place, and while such a state may exist there can be no fruit for God. What a day of gladness dawns, when the soul is able to say: "For me to live is Christ," and the flesh with its lusts is disowned. Worldly associations and desires (everything that savours of "Ishmael") lose their hold then, and the soul seeks "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). May we be true to all this, not striving to see how much "Ishmael" can be

tolerated in the presence of Isaac but absolutely refusing the flesh a place. Alas! how often we apologize for the bad conduct of our "Ishmael," instead of casting him out! While dallying with the flesh, what blessing we alas forfeit! The day of feasting and gladness in the house of Abraham only came when Isaac was weaned; not until Christ has His rightful place in our hearts and lives, can we know full liberty and blessing. It is one thing to be "sealed by the Spirit" (Rom 5:1-21.) and quite another to be in the liberty of the Spirit, as developed in Rom 8:1-39.

S. Paul's Gospel.

Paul's Gospel.

Abridged from J. W. H. Nichols.

There are two expressions in Romans which indicate the special character of the apostle Paul's ministry. "The gospel of God" (Rom 1:1-17) clearly points to the source of the gospel; while "My gospel" (Rom 16:25), introduced in a sort of doxology, speaks of a blessed revelation, though not developed, which distinguished the apostle's teaching from that of the other apostles. It would be difficult to estimate our loss if we fail to grasp these two important truths. We live in a day when the faith of God's people is sorely tried! Many are perplexed by the condition of things both in the political and religious world. This, doubtless, is the result of the soul not being established in the truth, often due to wrong teaching as to the scope and purpose of the gospel. "Has Christianity failed in its mission?" is a question raised on wrong premises; it could never be asked were the natural man's condition and the purpose of God in the gospel understood. In the minds of many an idea exists that God has sent the gospel to improve the world, to make it a more congenial place for men to live in. To find the world more hopelessly evil than ever, after strenuously preaching its improvement, has dismayed many a "20th century" preacher, and thrown his listeners into confusion and despondency as to the outcome of what they thought was the gospel. Scripture has been misapplied to support the teaching that gradually the gospel preached must permeate the world and result in the establishment of the millennium which, however, is entirely foreign to the teaching of the word.

Nowhere do we find the apostleship of Paul placed on more positive ground than in Romans. He had not yet been at Rome, but, as the apostle of the Gentiles, he would fulfil his mission, which he had received from the Lord Himself for the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18). According to God's administrative order, Peter was specially commissioned to the circumcision (Hebrews); Paul to the nations or Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8). As recorded in the Acts Peter preached forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, but did not associate with this the truth of justification; while Paul in his first recorded sermon, added this blessed truth (Acts 13:38-39). The gospel (or good news) was not about man though it was sent to man; there was nothing joyous to say about him — in heathenism, wantonly corrupt; in philosophy, hypocritical; under law, a transgressor: every mouth was stopped and all the world was shown to be guilty before God" (Rom 3:1). Man conclusively proved himself unable to bring forth righteousness for God. God's Son is the blessed theme of the gospel; the glad tidings are concerning Him. He is presented in a twofold way: (1) in connection with the promises, "Seed of David according to the flesh," and (2) "Son of God with power" by resurrection of the dead (plural equals dead ones). The gospel of God had been announced by the prophets in the O.T.; it had been promised before it came; thus every possible objection which might be raised should be silenced before the unfolding of what God's gospel is. In the person of the Son, God has found One able to accomplish all His purposes, and make known all His thoughts of love for men. He alone could solve the problem that man raised centuries before, and could not settle - of good

and evil — and settle it to God's eternal glory. What marvellous grace that He should enter the dark domain of death where man lay in ruin and exposed to eternal wrath, taking upon Himself all the weakness of man, once and for ever rob the enemy of his spoils, and completely triumph in resurrection over all the enemy's power. The new life received by the believer is a life given and founded on the eternal value of what has been accomplished by the Son of God. In this blessed gospel God reveals a righteousness for man who has none; but a righteousness God — is revealed to, and on the principle of faith. This is the grand theme of the epistle. In Romans the believer is looked at as justified, righteousness being imputed to him through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that he may walk here in this world in the power of the risen life of Christ, having the glory in view. This epistle and that to the Ephesians, are the only two written by the apostle to the saints which are not corrective; the others had in view certain existing conditions to correct. In these two epistles we have the unfolding of positive truth: the former laying the sure foundation, and the latter giving the blessed structure built thereon.

S. Sanctification.

Sanctification.

J. W. H. Nichols.

Perhaps no truth of Scripture has been more distorted and misunderstood than the doctrine of "Sanctification." The Scriptures are sublime in their simplicity, but often the simplest statements have been beclouded by those who have sought to find in them support for their particular opinions. Some of the misunderstandings regarding sanctification have perhaps risen through giving the word a wrong meaning. It comes from two Latin words *sanctus* (sacred) and *facere* (to make), i.e., to set apart to sacred use. Its earliest mention is in Gen 2:3, in connection with the Sabbath day. In Exo 13:1-22. the firstborn of beast as well as of man was sanctified. In Lev 17:14, a man sanctified his house or his field (5: 17). The tabernacle and its vessels, the temple and its furniture, were all sanctified; so that it is evident sanctification had to do with things as well as persons. Certain misleading terms are frequently used now by some persons as "getting sanctified," "fully sanctified," "losing sanctification," etc. The users of these terms generally teach the doctrine of holiness by our own efforts; they insist upon a moment of definite surrender as the time when the "second blessing" is obtained. That every Christian should desire practical holiness is perfectly right; it is indeed the aspiration of the new nature, and Scripture ever exhorts to holiness of life; but this is not attained by human resolutions. Sooner or later the lesson must be learned which the apostle Paul experienced, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18).

"How are we sanctified?" is a question answered by Scripture in Heb 10:10 — by the will of God and the offering of the body of Jesus Christ. 1Co 6:11 speaks of it as a definite act, "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified." Heb 2:11 also, "They who are sanctified. Again in Heb 10:14, "Them that are sanctified." All this is positional sanctification, the result of God's act in grace, and true of every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ the moment faith receives Him as a personal Saviour. Set apart to God by the work of the Lord Jesus and the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit (1Pe 1:2), the believer's standing before God is unassailable. As born again by the Holy Spirit and the word of God (see John 3:5), and sealed by the Holy Spirit upon receiving the gospel, who in imparting this new nature separates us from the world to God (Eph 1:13), the believer's sanctification, positionally, could not be more perfect than it is. It is of this aspect of sanctification that Scripture most frequently speaks. To confound our "standing" before God with our "state," is frequently productive of much soul-misery. The believer can never be more meet for heaven than when he is first brought to Christ as Saviour. "Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12). Our meetness, then, is not the result of any effort on our part. The thief on the cross was made meet for Paradise by sovereign grace based on the sacrifice of Christ, else he could not have gone there. To make positional sanctification subsequent to justification is a great error, and destructive of the appreciation of the work of redemption; it casts the soul upon itself and its experiences, only to result in

self-occupation, and leads to self-complacency or despair. The prodigal in Luke's Gospel gives an illustration of this common error when in the far off country he soliloquized, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of Thy hired servants." His thought evidently was to crave an opportunity to improve his state, and enable him to prove himself worthy of a better place. How little he knew the Father's heart! How different the father's thought! The kiss of forgiveness settled the past and secured the future, so that the prodigal was unable to propose what he had purposed. Fellow-believer, you have been received, not as a servant but as a son! That the believer's condition, or state of soul, should ever be a cause for exercise before God, however, it is important to recognise; and the more we understand the wondrous position God has given us in the riches of His grace, the deeper will be our desire to answer in a practical way to this grace. Here comes in such scriptures as John 17:17, "Sanctify them to the truth; thy word is truth." 1Th 4:3-4 "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." 2Ti 2:21-22, "A vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts," etc. We cannot detach practical sanctification from the new nature received at new birth, and it is important to see that we are dependent upon the word of God and the Holy Spirit for this. Man is mentioned in 1Th 5:23 as "spirit, soul and body." By departure from God, he became enslaved to his natural lusts. Now grace has wrought, but this does not render one independent but rather brings into gladly recognised dependence upon God. Christ, who loves us is by the Holy Spirit set before our hearts as the object of our affections; and the Father's word to us is, "Be ye holy for I am holy." Being born of God, the new nature in the believer has holy tastes and desires; but because the flesh, the old Adam nature, is also in us, power for holiness lies in walking with God in conscious dependence. Judicially, our old man has been crucified with Christ . . . that we should no longer serve sin" (Rom 6:1-23) and we are to arm ourselves with this truth, to "reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," whose death entitles us to deliverance from sin and from the law. But how many there are who, conscious that they had no righteousness to present to God, came to Him for forgiveness and rest; but while receiving these blessings apart from works, now seek to gain sanctification by works. Practical, progressive sanctification is not by effort of the flesh therefore (for a legal basis is an impossible foundation for holiness), but as the soul realizes its standing before God and the wonderful truth that by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18) the believer is sanctified, the desire is inwrought by the Spirit that everything incompatible with this should be denied. The conduct is brought into conformity with the truth: "Ye are sanctified." The standard of holiness is not lowered thereby, but the reverse; for self is treated as worthless and corrupt, the true standard being normal conformity to Christ, and the Holy Spirit the only power for its accomplishment. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:20-21).

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