

Victory Over Dispositions and Tendencies

by Asa Mahan

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of Christ and the Holy Spirit in renewing believers' dispositions and enabling them to live in obedience to God.

Scripture: Romans 6:6, Romans 8:10, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:22, 2 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Sanctification", "New Covenant"

Description

Asa Mahan preaches on the transformative power of Christ's work within believers, emphasizing the removal of evil tendencies and the impartation of a divine nature that leads to obedience and holiness. Through embracing the promises of the new covenant by faith, believers are enabled to escape the corruption of the world and partake in the divine nature, experiencing a fundamental change in their propensities and dispositions. The process involves Christ taking away sinful tendencies and replacing them with a new nature that prompts love, joy, and righteousness, leading to a life characterized by obedience to God's will and freedom from the power of sin.

Transcript

2 Peter 1:3-4 "According as His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

To "escape the corruption which is in the world through lust," implies that we are not only saved from the actual sins that are in the world, but that the evil propensities and tempers, "the law in our members," which induces sin, are taken from us, and are supplanted by new and divine tendencies which naturally induce the opposite virtues. Nothing less than or diverse from the above exposition can be the meaning of the passage under consideration. This a main and specific purpose of all the promises. They assure to us, when understood, and embraced by faith, not only deliverance from sinning, but "the death of the old man," or the crucifixion of all those tempers and dispositions which induce sin; and not only actual obedience to the divine will, but "a divine nature," which prompts and constrains obedience in all its forms. It is as much the nature of "the new man," or the promptings of his new and divine tendencies, to be pure in heart and life, as it was that of "the old man" to "obey the law of sin."

Christ "takes away our sins" by taking away the evil dispositions within us that prompt us to sin, and in the place of these dispositions giving us "a divine nature," which will prompt us to "love, joy, peace,

long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance."

"If Christ be in you, the body is dead, because of (or in respect to) sin;" that is, all our evil propensities and tendencies, and all internal causes which disturb our peace, lie dead in His presence, and void of power to draw us from our allegiance to Him, or to disquiet our spirits, or shut the peace of God out of our hearts; while "the Spirit is life, because of (or in respect to) righteousness;" that is, all our moral and spiritual activities are quickened into active obedience to the will of God and the law of righteousness.

As preparatory to a clear understanding of this subject, let us consider the following statements of the apostle. "Now, the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Behind all these forms of sin, "works of the flesh," lie certain propensities, dispositions, and tempers, which, when touched by corresponding temptations, set on fire burning and "warring lusts" and evil passions, and these induce the sins and crimes above designated. Suppose, now, that these old propensities, dispositions, and tempers are taken away, and, in this state, new ones of an opposite nature are given; in other words, that "the heart of stone is taken out of our flesh," and in its stead there is "given us heart of flesh." Under our renovated propensities, and new dispositions, tendencies, and tempers, or "divine nature," it becomes just as easy and natural for us to bear "the fruits of the Spirit," as it was, under our old ones, to work "the works of the flesh." Here, then, we perceive clearly what is provided for, and promised to, our faith in the new covenant, what Christ, as the Mediator of that covenant, promises to do for us when He is "inquired of by us to do it for us," and what He will commission the Spirit to work in us when He shall "baptize us with the Holy Ghost."

It is perfectly evident that two forms of genuine Christian experience are presented to our consideration in the subject before us; that the element of supreme obedience, hearkening to the voice of God, obeying His will, and seeking Him "with all the heart, and with all the soul," characterise each state alike, and that the one is conditional and preparatory to the other. When we "return unto the Lord, and obey His voice with all our heart and with all our soul," we are in one state. When the Lord our God has circumcised our hearts to love the Lord "with all our heart and with all our soul," we must be in another and different state, or the promise is without meaning. We are surely in one state and relation to God when we are "searching for Him with all our hearts," and in another and different state and relation to Him when we have "found Him," He coming to us, and "dwelling in us, and walking in us," as our God, and we having fellowship with Him as "His sons and daughters." When we are "inquiring of God" to do for us what is promised in the new covenant, we are in one state. We are certainly in quite another and different state when God, in fulfilment of the provisions and promises of that covenant, has "put His law in our inward parts, and has written it in our hearts," has "cleansed us from all our filthiness and all our idols," has "taken away the stony heart out of our flesh and given us an heart of flesh," and has "put His Spirit within us" that is, "baptized us with the Holy Ghost." No candid mind will question the truth of the above statements.

But what are the provisions and promises of this new covenant? As far as they include "the promise of the Spirit" the most essential element of the covenant -- on this part of the subject I shall not now speak, having said already all that is needful here. What, then, do the words, "take the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you an heart of flesh," mean? What can they mean but a fundamental change and a renewal of our propensities? We are "by nature children of wrath," "prone to evil as the sparks are to fly upward." When God does for us what is provided for and promised to us in the new covenant, we have "a

new heart" and "a new spirit," "a divine nature, which impels us to love and obedience, just as our old nature impelled us to sin.

With the above exposition accords all the teachings of the New Testament upon this subject. The "exceeding great and precious promises" are given us for the revealed purpose that "by these" -- that is, by embracing these promises by faith -- we "might be partakers of the DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." "By nature" -- that is, under the influence of our old nature, or propensities, dispositions, and tempers, "we are "children of wrath," and "bring forth fruit unto death."

Under the dispositions, tempers, and tendencies of our new or "divine nature," we are just as naturally "children of God," and "have our fruit unto holiness," while "the end is everlasting life." Why are we called upon to "reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? Because "our old man," our old propensities, dispositions, and tempers, is crucified, "put to death" with Him, that the "body of sin," our old and evil nature, "might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

Our old nature, or propensities, dispositions, and tempers, the apostle calls "the body of this death," and thanks God, as we all should, that, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," we are delivered from this "body of sin and death" One special design of the apostle in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of Romans is to elucidate this great truth. While the old nature remains, fight against its tendencies and promptings as we will, and form what good resolutions we may, "the good which we would we shall not do, but the evil which we would not, that shall we do."

The reason, as the apostle affirms, is obvious. "The law in our members will war against the law of our mind, and bring us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members." From "this law of sin and death" Christ sets us free, putting within us, in place of that law, "the law of the Spirit of life." The same doctrine the apostle obviously teaches in the following passage: -- "So, then, they that are in the flesh (under the dominion of their natural propensities) cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh (under its control), but in the Spirit (under His control), if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. But if Christ be in you, the body," that is, the body of sin of which the apostle has been exclusively speaking thus far, "is dead, because of sin; but the Spirit," that is, the new nature or spirit which Christ gives, "is life," lives and reigns within us, "because of righteousness."

Now mark the inference which the apostle draws from his previous reasonings "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh." In other words, because that, through the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, "the body of sin," our old and evil propensities," may he destroyed," and "the old man may be crucified with Him," and we may, "through the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," be "made free from the law of sin and death," we should indeed cease to "live after the flesh," should be "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit;" and should "reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Just such teaching runs through all Paul's epistles, and, I may add, as the reader will perceive in the light of these suggestions, through the whole New Testament. Paul, for example, says of himself, "I am Crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Again he says, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified

unto me, and I unto the world."

To Christians he says, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Such language implies more than this, that his old propensities, "the body of sin," "the old man," is yet living and warring in the soul, but, by the grace of Christ, are held in subjection. Mere subjection is not death. What the apostle undeniably intended to teach is this: that his propensities, dispositions, and temper had been so renovated that the world, with its affections and lusts, had no more power over him than they have over the dead. Christ, on the other hand, lived in him, and occupied all his affections, and held undisputed control over all his activities. Some important suggestions and reflections here present themselves.

Forms of Christian Experience before and after we have entered into the Privileges of the New Covenant. We can now understand clearly the difference in the conditions and relations of the believer before and after the promises of the new covenant have been fulfilled in his experience. An individual, we will suppose, has, through the Spirit, been convicted of sin, and has exercised genuine "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." As far as his voluntary activities are concerned, he is now in a state of supreme obedience to the will of God. His old propensities, dispositions, temper, and tendencies, however, remain as they were, and remain to war against this new-born purpose of obedience. If the convert is left here, just where the mass of them are left under the teachings they commonly receive -- if the convert is left here, what, I ask, will be his future experience? Nothing, I answer, but the loss of his first love, the dying out of his primal joys, and sad falls and lapses, with periods of rejoicing and victories few and far between. It is infinite presumption to expect better results under such circumstances. And this is just what we do witness in the general experience of the Church. Open and gross immoralities excepted, the convert carries with him into the Christian life the same propensities, dispositions, and temper that he had before his conversion, and these, when strongly excited, overcome him as they did before. How absurd for a believer, in such circumstances, to "reckon himself dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Suppose, on the other hand, that the convert, instead of being left in this perilous position, is fully taught the provisions and promises of the new covenant, and is led to apprehend Christ as the Mediator of that covenant. The convert now, in the exercise of a strong faith, "inquires of Christ to do this for him." What does Christ do? First of all, "He baptizes the convert with the Holy Ghost," and "endues him with power from on high" for the exigencies of his new life. The Spirit, in the fulfilment of His mission, enters upon the work of universal renovation. He accordingly "takes the heart of stone out of the convert's flesh, and gives him an heart of flesh," -- "gives him a new heart and a new spirit," "writes the law upon his inward parts, and puts it in his heart," "circumcises his heart to love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul," renders him a "partaker of the divine nature," "takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto him," "reveals Christ in him," so that "he beholds with open face the glory of the Lord, and is changed into the same image from glory to glory," and is "filled with all the fulness of God," consummates a vital union between him and Christ, so that Christ is in him, as the Father is in the Son, and thus "blesses him with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," and "abundantly furnishes him for every good work."

This all-cleansing, all-renovating, and all-vitalising process the apostle calls "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Our salvation is commenced with "the washing of regeneration," and is consummated by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Into what new relations does the convert enter when he has passed through the first state, and entered into all the light, and privileges, and enduements of power of the second? He is now "delivered from his enemies," and may "serve God without fear, in righteousness and holiness before

Him, all the days of his life." With "the old man crucified," imbued with a new and "divine nature," "filled with the Holy Ghost," and with "the power of Christ resting upon him," he may, with all assurance, "reckon himself dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ His Lord." When Christ, as "the Mediator of the new covenant," comes to believers, He says to the old propensities, dispositions, tempers, and lusts, the old man which once held them in bondage, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." When that "old man," with his hosts of affections and lusts, pursues after God's people to bring them back into their former bondage, that old tyrant, with all his armed host, is overwhelmed and lost in the Red Sea of Christ's blood. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." What a melancholy reflection it is that most believers advance no further in the Christian life than "the washing of regeneration," are ignorant of Christ as the Mediator of the new covenant, and, consequently, have no experience of "the renewing of the Holy Ghost"!

We may now attain to a somewhat distinct understanding of the following words of the apostle: -- "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The original word rendered wholly, I would observe, is one of the strongest words known in the Greek or any other language. It is made up of two words, olos, or all, and telos, everywhere in the New Testament translated perfect. The word made up of pantos, all, and telos, and rendered uttermost in the passage "He is able to save unto the uttermost," is a word of the same strength of meaning. In the passage above cited, the words "sanctify you wholly," from their original meaning, namely, sanctify you entirely in all respects, and in the connection in which they here stand, can mean nothing less than this -- a total renovation and purification of all our propensities, dispositions, temperaments, and activities, mental, moral, spiritual, and physical. The words, "I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless," also impart to the phrase "sanctify you wholly" this full breadth of meaning. When we are in this state, we then become partakers of just what is provided for and promised to us in the new covenant. Sanctification, in this form, is also absolutely promised to our faith in connection with the prayer of the apostle under consideration. "Faithful (worthy to be trusted) is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

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