

The Cross and the Two Natures (Continued)

by L.E. Maxwell

L.E. Maxwell's sermon emphasizes the necessity of abiding in Christ to overcome sin and the importance of actively engaging in missions to fulfill God's purpose.

Scripture: 1 John 3:6

Topics: "Holiness", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the profound relationship between the believer's two natures and the necessity of living in fellowship with God, as outlined in 1 John 3:6-9. He warns against false liberties that lead to sin and stresses that true righteousness is evidenced by a life that does not sin, as believers are begotten of God. Maxwell illustrates that daily choices between the flesh and the Spirit require a continual process of dying to self and living in newness of life, akin to the Israelites taking possession of the Promised Land. He encourages believers to actively engage in spiritual battles, mortifying the deeds of the body, and to confess sins promptly, while also highlighting the urgent need for the church to engage in missions and occupy unclaimed territories for Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to holiness and obedience, reminding believers that they are empowered to overcome through the Spirit.

Transcript

IN THIS CHAPTER we wish to give special, though brief, consideration to that much discussed and difficult portion, I John 3:6-9 (A.S.V.):

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him.

My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous:

He that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.

We have never been satisfied with what we feel to be forced explanations of this passage. Most all seem so colored by doctrinal preconceptions as to miss the purpose of the epistle. John wrote this epistle in order to bring God's children into an experimental "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus

Christ.' The conditions of such a fellowship are practical as well as severe, and they center around proper believing and behaving. John says: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. An(! if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). The "holiness" man, so called, places most all his emphasis upon the first part of the verse; the rest of us on the latter. Let us first clean up our own house before we throw stones. We repeat the wise words of Dr. A. J. Gordon: "Divine truth as revealed in Scripture seems often to be between two extremes.... Almost all of the gravest errors have arisen from adopting some extreme statement of Scripture to the rejection of the other extreme. . . . If we regard the doctrine of sinless perfection as a heresy, we regard contentment with sinful imperfection as a greater heresy."

John says, "Let no man lead you astray (into a false liberty that leads to license) : he that doeth righteousness is righteous." John seeks to correct those believers who boast of righteousness "in Christ," while still, continuing in sin." "In Christ" and "in sin" do not go together. John says, "in him is no sin," and therefore to be abiding in Him is not to be sinning. He then climaxes this argument with the verse that "whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God." Would John be satisfied with our usual explanation that the general bent of the Christian life is rather characteristically good? That is a general truth. Yet a man may be a generally good Christian while still having no vital fellowship with God, such as John has in mind. Such an explanation makes no point in keeping with the purpose of the epistle, viz., to bring the already regenerated into abiding fellowship with God. Again, was John thinking of the suggestion that the believer sins not with his new man, but only with the old? We believe not. Finally, did John have in mind those who have been so eradicated (?) that they automatically do not sin? Surely not.

First of all notice that the phrase, "is begotten," is in the present tense. John refers not to the believer's past regeneration. John does not say the believer "cannot sin, because he was born of God." John is dealing with the present tense and the condition upon which the already regenerated may experience fellowship. But to be more practical, John says to me as I face a moral choice, that, if I "am begotten" with the living seed of God's Word, then I "cannot sin" in that given respect. The phrase "cannot sin" had perfect illustration when Joseph faced the choice (Genesis 39) of walking after the flesh or after the Spirit. He cried: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" God's word of promise Joseph so bid in his heart--"his seed remained in him"--that he "fled, and got him out"--"hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." In that given instance Joseph certainly "sinned not." Joseph said in substance, "I am begotten, I cannot sin."

Throughout life we shall be coming to similar forks of the road where we must daily choose between the flesh and the Spirit, between the old and the new. At that fork, we face our cross--"daily." New duty will demand, as it were, a new death and resurrection. This will be the way the believer "is begotten" to "walk in newness of life." New light will continually break on the pathway, demanding a new step of obedience.

Now shall we return, as it were, to the land of Canaan, the land of fruit and fight? When the Israelites entered that land, that blessed land of obedience, was it not already theirs by inheritance? In the self-same way believers have been given "all spiritual blessings" in Christ. But to us, as to Joshua, comes the promise, "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given you." Joshua must plant his foot upon the necks of his enemies. And believers today must mortify their members, .mortify the deeds of the body."

But did God hold Israel responsible for taking the whole of that land at once? Decidedly, no. In fact, he said: "I will not drive them out before you in one year. . . . By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Exod. 23:29, 30). Even so with us. We are to be all our days taking new territory, first in our own lives and then in "the regions beyond." Again, Israel faced "seven nations greater and mightier" than herself. How could she ever overcome but by the Almighty. Even so with us. The old life is too strong for us. But the promise is, "If by the Spirit you are doing to death (observe the present tense; the process is a continuing one), the practices, the stratagems, the machinations of the body, you will live" (Moule). God says to Israel and to us that in this way we shall possess our possessions.

But let us proceed. The first impossible fortress to face Israel was Jericho. But "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down," and Joshua "utterly destroyed all that was in the city." Now the question is appropriate, Was Israel to fight and take Jericho every other day? Nay, verily. "Having overcome all," they were "to stand." They were simply to "abide" in the victory already won. In that particular and to that degree they "sinned not."

In a similar manner we should take definite fortresses (such as laziness, covetousness, selfishness and self-ease and self-indulgence--perhaps long entrenched), and having planted the Cross there on that bit of the old life, "stand." That is taken; therein abide. It is only compromise and false leagues of peace with the cursed Canaanites that make it necessary to fight and retake (and perhaps never take?) certain "high places" where Satan holds sway with his "chariots of iron."

Mount Jebus once defied and mocked David and his men. That fortress had stood out for some four hundred years against Israel. "Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion." It became his capital city. From that point, he reigned over all. Is there some one point in the reader's life that defies entrance? By the greater Son of David, scale that height, cast out the foe, and see how you will "reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." John says the same, "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4, A.S.V.). What is the next place in your world to overcome? Whatsoever in your life's territory "is begotten" overcomes.

Daily the believer faces the Cross. Through that death-resurrection process, he "is begotten" into newness of life, both for fruit and for fight. As he walks in the light, overcomes at each new crisis of obedience, and there learns "to stand," to that degree (all that God requires for fellowship at the moment) he is assured by Paul as well as John, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not [in no wise] fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Beloved, can we imagine disobedient Israel boasting, while bleaching her bones in the wilderness, that she had everything up in Canaan? What glory then is it for the double-minded believer, wandering in the wilderness of a divided affection, to boast continually that he has everything "in the heavenly places in Christ?"--all the while taking no territory for Christ, experiencing no milk and honey and grapes, and grappling with no foes for his Redeemer. Any "stale-mate" conception of the two natures will not stand the test of Scripture. You are no Adam-Christ believer. Do you believe in suppression? God did not say to put Canaanites to tribute, to keep them tied up. They were to be put, not to tribute, but to death. Are you an eradicationist with all fruit and no fight? Your position is contrary to Scripture and to your own experience. Both positions are untenable. The Cross has the solution. We have been crucified with Christ--have "put off" the old man. Now put him out, i.e., "mortify" his deeds. Apply His death. Let the Cross shame and crucify you out of any position of unholy duplicity. "Purify your hearts, ye double minded." The Cross condemns us to live like saints. Hallelujah! Let us go up at once and possess. We be well able "through

the Spirit."

A word of encouragement for those who have slipped--and who has not? The only remedy is to confess your sins at once. The propitiation is ours. Remember also that the Blood avails for the sins of ignorance, and the failures many. But let our attitude be forever that of John's: "that we sin not."

O fellow believer: "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." Let us lift up our eyes and behold the fields white unto harvest. We have dwelt at length upon the great stretches of territory untaken in our own lives. But we would fall woefully short of God's program and purpose in this chapter if we did not give our thought to the vast unoccupied fields in all the world. Oh, to get over the "civil war" that we may go into all the world and win for the Lamb the reward of His sufferings! The great Shepherd of the "other sheep" who commanded us, "Occupy till I come" must be in agony over those other sheep concerning whom He Himself said, "Them also I must bring." There is perhaps no single point upon which the church of Jesus Christ is so utterly disobedient to the command of her crucified Lord as upon the subject of "missions." The Canaanites of covetousness and laziness--though sins of omission are greater often than the sins of commission--have killed the forward march of the church. The church as a whole is "living after the flesh"--and dying, going into atrophy and death. From Dr. Glover's Progress of Worldwide Missions we would quote the following by a well-known missionary leader, the Rev. Charles R. Watson, D.D., President of the American University at Cairo:

The occupation of all the unoccupied fields is the distinctive and crowning challenge of this missionary age. Upon the church's acceptance of that challenge great issues seem to depend: issues affecting the vitality of the Christian Church, issues determining the welfare and happiness of millions of our fellow creatures, issues conditioning the lives of nations, issues upon which God Himself has been pleased to hang the unfolding of His eternal purposes in Christ. The unoccupied fields must be occupied, and what is the price of their occupation? The pathway which leads to their occupation lies across other unoccupied fields--great areas these--in our own lives and hearts, not yet surrendered to the will of Christ, not yet fully occupied by His Spirit, not yet touched by the flame of a perfect love and consecration. Only as He is permitted to fully occupy these nearer areas in our own lives will He be able to gain entrance into those more distant fields of the unoccupied world.

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