

## SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

While I live I must grow better. This is God's plan and programme for us, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." "That from now on we be not children, tossed to and fro,... but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things." Ephesians 4:14-15. Our Creator's longing and exalted ideal for His wayward children is expressed thus: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly;... your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The comforting assurance that follows constitutes a challenge to us: "Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it."

Our merciful Creator is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Repentance of heart must be followed by reformation of character: this is what God calls "sanctification," a life programme of growing in grace, growing better. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all unrighteousness." The cleansing of past sin is immediate; the cleansing of the life - the transformation of character - requires also the forsaking of sin. "He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy." Proverbs 28:13. "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all My statutes, and do what is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he has committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he has done he shall live." Ezekiel 18:21.

Clearly, then, salvation includes a very practical and progressive programme of right living. Salvation "is the gift of God." However, acceptance and the keeping of that gift is assured only as one is being sanctified by the power of God's Holy Spirit. "God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." 2 Thessalonians 2:13. The dictionary describes sanctification as "holiness, saintliness." The Bible basis of sanctification is separation as a means to that end. God calls for one to separate from sin and to be separated unto Him. "Then come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17-18. "Know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for Himself." Psalm 4:3.

Sanctification is not a plan of self-improvement, but a plan of divine-human involvement. It does not involve the subjection of personality and liberty; but the restoration of human dignity and true freedom. It is not the surrender of human rights, but the acceptance of divine power, to enable one to do right. It is a true assessment as to who is for us and who is against us. It is wisdom to choose Christ who will direct those in the way of life, and to escape the snares of them who dominate in the way of death. "Do you not know that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Romans 6:16,22.

How important is this "now"! How thrilling is God's promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Verse 14. A new Master is directing in the way of obedience. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;

behold all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17. Temptation and testing will continue, but the old ways of failure and sin give place to a willing and loving obedience to the will of God. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:1,2. "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof is no death." Proverbs 12:28.

This text refers to the great principle of life which was violated by man when he sinned. To forsake sin and follow Christ in the way of obedience re-establishes this life-giving principle. This is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" which affects the transformation of the repentant sinner. No man begins really to live until he begins to live right; and no man can live right until he knows Christ as His Saviour and Lord, directing and empowering him in his daily life. Faith is exercised, and he becomes a living testimony to the power of God, able to declare, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13. "By his humanity, Christ touched humanity. As the Son of man, he gave us an example of obedience; as the Son of God, he gives us power to obey."

Like his Master who "loved righteousness, and hated iniquity" (Hebrews 1:9) the follower of Jesus will be eager to "do all things" to please God. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3. Such loving obedience reacts in rich blessing to God's child, for it sanctifies his life, and keeps him in the way of life. The psalmist said, "All Thy commandments are righteousness." Psalm 119:172. And Jesus said, "I know that His commandment is life everlasting." John 12:50. Hence our Lord's pointed answer to a young man's anxious enquiry, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." Matthew 19:17.

No one is saved by obeying God's holy law. But it is none the less true, that the faith that does not lead to obedience is presumption, not faith. The one whom Jesus saves will be eager to obey God and will find grace and power to do so. "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one (Adam); much more they which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ." Romans 5:17. "He who would receive the free gift of God by which he may live for ever, must of necessity receive into his life the righteousness of God whereby he is made fit to live ever more. Man cannot receive eternal life without receiving righteousness. He cannot accept one or the other, but rather both or neither.

To enable God to thus impute and impart His righteousness there can be no deferred payment plan. God's plan is not "Fly now and pay later." Rather it is, "Pay now and fly later." God demands the full price now: it is all or nothing as far as He is concerned. Our sinful selfish life does not amount to much, but this is what God requires and accepts. "I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Romans 12:1,2.

God's greatest miracles are living miracles: men and women growing in grace and goodness at a time, and in a world, where morality, purity, and integrity, are at an all time low. What glorious possibilities challenge anyone prepared to pay the price. There is literally no limit to what one may become if self and sin are set aside with a firm purpose to live a life wholly consecrated to God. All the resources of Heaven will then co-operate

to change and beautify the life beyond one's highest expectations. Through the power of God's Holy Spirit, and grace freely granted to meet every need, victories will be achieved that past weakness and failure suggest are impossible.

Nothing but God's standard of righteousness will suffice. Most people are content to accept or to tolerate the prevailing lower standard of morality. One who is resolved to serve God faces the danger of being satisfied with a false standard of right and wrong. The righteous standards of God are unchanged, but not unattainable. God does not trim His "robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10) to fit the man; instead He changes the man to wear the robe fittingly and honourably. The Master warns against the smug satisfaction of some within the church satisfied to be as good - or better than - the next man. Jesus declared, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:20. He who attains to his own standard of goodness must needs have a low aim. If while I live I grow better, my great Redeemer is preparing a royal welcome for me. God and the word of His grace are able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. Praise and glory be to Him who makes all this possible.

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