

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

How Obtained - How Maintained

STUDIES SETTING FORTH THE BELIEVER'S POSSESSIONS IN CHRIST

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Chapter Four -

THE CHRISTIAN'S CHOICE - SELF OR CHRIST

There are two kinds of Christians, easily identified and clearly distinguished from each other. The question may be asked, "How can there be two streams from one fountain-head which flow so widely apart?" We must get an answer to this question if we are to choose to be spiritual Christians and live consistently as such.

The Co-Existence of two Natures in every Believer

Every Christian is conscious of a duality within himself:

- Part of him wants to please CHRIST, part of him wants to satisfy every demand of self.
- Part of him longs for the rest of the promised land, another part lusts for the onions, leeks and garlic of Egypt.
- Part of him grasps CHRIST, part of him grips the world.

There is a law of gravitation which pulls him sinward while at the same time a law of counteraction pulls him Christward.

The Scriptural explanation of this duality is that every believer has within him two natures: the sinful, Adamic nature; and the spiritual, CHRIST nature. The first Epistle of John gives us a clear unfolding of this truth.

"If we say that we HAVE no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8).

If any Christian, however full-grown, he has no sin and is entirely freed from his old nature, he deceives himself. He does not deceive his family or his friends, least of all does he deceive GOD. He only deceives himself. In the next verse GOD makes provision for the sins of Christians.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

The "**sins**" and "**all unrighteousness**" mentioned here are those of saints.

If there is "**no sin**," then the believer "**can not sin**." Every stream, however tiny, must have a source. The apostle John knew well that some people longing after holiness would be tempted to go beyond Scripture, so he uses very drastic language by way of warning.

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him (GOD) a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:10).

The gross, fleshly sins may have gone from us, but what of the hidden sins of the spirit; the harsh judgment, the secret irritability, the wrong attitude, the unkind thought. Then what of the sins of omission. I am more afraid of James 4:17 than of almost any verse in the Bible. It tells me that sin is not merely an act or an attitude; but it is an absence. It is what I do not do that I know I should do. Who then is without sin?

In every believer is that old nature that can do nothing but sin. Inherent within it is a threefold inability: it cannot know, obey or please GOD. By physical birth we possess this God-ignorant, God-defying, God-displeasing nature which is bent on the gratification and the glorification of self.

In every believer is a new nature which cannot sin. Inherent within it is a threefold capacity: it can and does know, obey and please GOD. By spiritual birth we possess this God-knowing, God-obeying, God-pleasing nature which is bent on the gratification and glorification of CHRIST.

The Conflict of these two Natures in every Believer

These two natures co-inhabit every believer through life. John wrote to believers as though he did not expect them to sin because they had this God-begotten nature.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (I John 2:1).

Yet he made full provision for their sinning because they had this devil-begotten nature.

"And, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1).

GOD makes no attempt to improve this old nature, because it is unimprovable; nor to subject it, for it is irreconcilable; nor yet to eradicate it, because He has a far more wonderful way of conquest over it.

The co-existence of these two diametrically opposed natures in one person inevitably necessitates conflict. It is the age-long conflict between Satan and CHRIST with the Christian's life as the battleground. The conflict is personalized in Romans 7. CHRIST had come into Paul's life to possess and control it. But another contests His right. Romans 7 is the picture of a Christian torn to pieces by this conflict and baffled and discouraged beyond words.

It is this conflict which staggers many a young Christian and often causes a total eclipse of faith or a gradual backsliding into the world. The first step into the Christian life was taken because his conscience was awakened to the evil of his doings. His chief concern was for his sins. He sought CHRIST as his Saviour that he might have forgiveness of sins. In the realization of forgiveness he experienced great joy and began witnessing for CHRIST. But soon he finds himself doing the same things again; the evil habits persist; worse than all, joy in CHRIST lessens, the heart grows cold and he becomes utterly discouraged.

But his love for GOD is not altogether quenched. Something in him cries out for GOD, while another something contests every inch of GOD's claim and control. He strives against sin, prays for release and makes every effort in his own strength to get victory. He comes to the place where he says, "Is it worth while?" One day on the very verge of despair he cries out for deliverance, **"Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"**

What seems like his utter downfall is really his hour of deliverance. He had to come to the end of Romans 7 before he could enter into Romans 8. Are you living in Romans 7 today? Do you wish to know the way out?

The Conquest of the Old Nature

GOD has given us clear and definite instruction regarding our part in the dethronement of self.

We must condemn the flesh. GOD condemns the flesh as altogether sinful. He sees **"no good thing"** in it. We must accept GOD's estimate of the flesh and act accordingly. This seems easy, but it is very difficult. GOD's standard is very exacting. He says there is **"no good thing"** from the center to the circumference of the flesh. He condemns its innermost desires (Ephesians 2:3) and its outermost deeds (Colossians 3:9). The first step that Paul took to life on the highest plane was to condemn the flesh and to **"have no confidence"** in it (Philippians 3:3-4).

But we do have confidence in the flesh. We divide it into the good and the bad. Certain things in the flesh we condemn as sinful, others we admit to be weaknesses; but there is another good-sized portion of the flesh that we rate very high and trust without reserve. We make a cross-section of the flesh, good and bad together, and think it measures up fairly well.

But let us put the flesh to a test. Take the most God-like thing in human life, which, is love, and place the purest specimen of it in your life alongside of I Corinthians 13, which is GOD's love. Is it always long-suffering with no trace of impatience or irritability? Is it always kind with no rudeness or harshness? Does it never seek its own through selfishness or jealousy? Does it think no evil but is always without charitableness and suspicion? Has your flesh never broken down under this divine test?

GOD asks us to condemn even the cross-section as unclean and untrustworthy.

We must consent to the crucifixion of the old man. GOD has already crucified the old man, but we must give our hearty consent to the transaction and consider it an accomplished fact. This

was the second step Paul took to life on the highest plane. He said, "**I am crucified with Christ**" (Galatians 2:20).

Have you consented to your crucifixion with CHRIST? There can be no reservations, no holding back part of the price. The whole "I" must be reckoned crucified. GOD asks you to put your signature to this statement, "**I am crucified with Christ.**" If you have never done so, will you do it now?

We must co-operate with the HOLY SPIRIT in keeping the old man crucified. What CHRIST has made possible for us the HOLY SPIRIT makes real within us, but only with our intelligent co-operation. GOD states very clearly what our part is.

(1) Reckon yourself dead unto sin.

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

Through the crucifixion of the old man the believer is freed from sin's power and released from sin's dominion. Every claim of sin has been nullified and he has been made dead to sin. Grace has made this an accomplished fact; faith makes it an experimental fact. Through grace the old man was put on the cross and buried in the tomb; through faith he will be kept there. As the Christian reckons himself "**dead... unto sin**" the HOLY SPIRIT makes it real; as he continues to reckon, the HOLY SPIRIT continues to make real.

(2) Make no provision for the flesh.

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14).

Yet we daily and hourly make provision for the renewal of the life of the flesh by feeding him upon the things that make fat. We provide for the flesh by the books we read, by the pleasures in which we indulge, by the companions we keep, by the pursuits we follow.

Do you spend hours in reading novels and then wonder why you have no taste for the Bible? The HOLY SPIRIT lives on spiritual food. Are you starving your spiritual nature by feeding it on husks? Are you trying to feed the HOLY SPIRIT on the theatre, the cinema, dancing or bridge? Are your nearest friends such as weaken you spiritually? Is it your aim in life to make money and is all your time and strength bent to attain that goal? Then do not wonder that your spirit is lean.

"For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8).

GOD's law of sowing and reaping in the spiritual realm is as inexorable as it is in the material realm.

If we sow to the flesh, we shall reap that which is fleshly. To which are you sowing, the flesh or

the Spirit?

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5).

"Mind" - it is a strong word. Upon what things is your mind fixedly set and with what things is it habitually occupied? Do you **"mind"** clothes or a bank account? We are responsible for the direction that our thoughts take. What things do you **"mind"**?

"That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

The world judges a Christian very largely by his walk. But what does the world think of the Christian who walks with it six days of the week and separates from it only long enough to go to church on Sunday?

Perhaps you have taken the first step into the Christian life by accepting CHRIST as your Saviour. You faced the choice of your sin or GOD's Son, and you chose CHRIST as your Saviour. But since that time your life has been one long wilderness journey filled with defeat and discouragement. You are tired of it all and your heart cries out for peace, rest and victory. Are you ready then for the second step? GOD puts before you another choice - self or CHRIST? CHRIST is your Saviour. Will you let Him become your Lord?

"Oh! the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be,
When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered
'All of self and none of Thee.'

"Yet He found me: I beheld Him
Bleeding on the cursed tree;
Heard Him pray, 'Forgive them, Father,'
And my wistful heart said faintly.
'Some of self and some of Thee.'

"Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and oh! so patient,
Brought me lower while I whispered
'Less of self and more of Thee.'

"Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea;
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered:
Grant me now my soul's petition
'None of self and all of Thee.'"

~ end of chapter 4 ~