

The Christian Life.

BY REV. O. P. BROWN.

"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." Phil. 3:11-15.

As interpreted by this passage the Christian life is not "instantaneous and entire sanctification;" sinlessness, but progressiveness. A life unfolding within a life: reaching outward and carrying the whole man onward to incorruptibility and holiness. But if other passages can be found which give a different coloring to this one, and if instantaneous and entire sanctification or perfect holiness as taught by some can be attained in this present life, let us by all means open our hearts to such a boon, as there is ample room for improvement in the church of to-day.

However, on closer examination of this question we find there is a number of different conceptions, as to what constitutes sanctification or holiness, entertained by those who claim this higher life. An experience that might mean sanctification to the mind of one may differ from that which means sanctification to the mind of another. Hence the words Sanctify and Holy have different meanings in the mouths of different claimants of holiness. To my mind this question as presented by its advocate verifies this statement.

In view of this we must turn to Scripture and ascertain if possible what these words meant in the mouths of the inspired writers. What these terms mean to men now should matter little to us, but what they meant to the writers of God's Word is of vast importance. In I Cor. 7:14, we find both words Sanctify and Holy used with totally different meanings from those given by the advocates of the so-called "higher life." Here Paul says "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband." Now does he mean to tell us the faith of one will make wholly sinless the other? If this word always means sinless evidently that is what he says. But since there is nothing clearer in all the teachings of Christ and the Bible, than that every one must answer before God according to his own sins and not that of another, he cannot understand the word sanctified always to mean made sinless, and of course must be using it with a different signification.

The occasion of this word will help us understand it. In the Corinthian church the notion had obtained that if one became a Christian he should no longer live in the marriage relation with another who was not a Christian, i. e., a heathen. Paul had often said "The Christian was married unto Christ," hence they inferred he should be divorced from all others. This view the apostle saw would lead to a series of divorce cases in the church, for it was then as now, often one became a Christian while the other did not. Hence he writes to correct this dangerous error, telling them "The one is sanctified by the other." Not that one is made spiritually clean or sinless by the other's faith, but in relation to each other as husband and wife they have become sacred; the marriage union which hitherto was a heathen rite, and might be violated any time or worse, openly disregarded, has been made inviolable by virtue of either husband or wife having become a believer. It has been confirmed, sealed. Before it was a heathen rite, now it is a sacred union. By this we see that "Sanctified" is used here as confirmed, sealed or consecrated.

In John 17:19 we read, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself." Did Christ mean that for their sakes he would make himself sinless? No: for he had always been sinless. He had been holy, but now by his life he confirmed, sealed that life appointed him, or consecrated himself to it. If here the word means sinless it implies he had been a sinner, for it would read, "And for their sakes I make myself sinless," or "purify myself." This could not be so, as he was always sinless, always pure, he had always been separated from sinners. But here again it is used as consecrate, or confirm, or rather seal to set apart, and does not in the slightest imply that Christ meant to make himself sinless.

He had lived to set the seal of approval upon the life which God had appointed him, but now he was to confirm it by his death, to seal it with his blood: hence he says "And for their sakes I sanctify myself." And further he says "That they too may be sanctified through the truth," i. e., that they also may be sealed through the truth. God had chosen his children before the foundation of the world, but they must be sealed through the truth.

Suffice it to say, without burdening this part of the subject with proof texts, that in these three important passages the word sanctify is not used once in the sense of becoming sinless. We have brought three witnesses

and they all testify to the same. Let every careful and candid reader examine the Scripture use of this word for himself, and he will find that in the vast majority of places it is used as consecrate, confirm, or seal, i. e., "seal to set apart."

Turning now to the word holy, we find in this seventh chapter of first Corinthians and fourteenth verse, that the children are holy because of the faith either of father or mother. Now does Paul mean to say a believer's child is sinless—spiritually pure—because of the parents' faith? No. Not at all. But he simply says they are legitimate. The sentence reads, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband, or else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." That is: if by one becoming a Christian consensual union is dissolved their children are unclean, or illegitimate; but as the nuptial tie by the faith of one or the other has been sealed, confirmed, their children are holy or legitimate.

We have discovered by this that *holy* as used here means simply legitimate, or proper: not spiritually but filially. Hence we see with what freedom both *sanctify* and *holy* are used in the Bible.

What we have said so far has been rather negative than positive in its relation to the Christian life. From these introductory remarks we may infer that Scripture does not teach spiritual purity is meant wherever the words sanctify or holy occur.

However our present object is not so much to state what is not, but what is—with such proof texts as may be deemed necessary for clearness—the state and condition of the true Christian as ascertained by Scripture.

In the text before us we read—"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." Evidently the writer of these words had not attained unto the resurrection of the dead. It was something in the future for him. But had he not attained unto the "newness of life" or unto the new life? Yes. But that is not the resurrection of the dead, or the state of the resurrection of the dead. Paul was at this time a regenerate soul, and born again: one who had passed from death unto life, but yet the state of the resurrection was to come. Then does not regeneration do all for us that can be done? No. There are other blessings to follow. Regeneration is the inducing with a higher life, a life from above, but is not the laying off, or the making over the fleshly man. This truth seems to be very vaguely apprehended by many Christians. The work of the Spirit is conformed with the gift of the Spirit. The first thing God's grace does for us is to give us a new life: really a new person: a controlling Spirit; which reanimates the fallen and withered soul of man and presses it into the service of God. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit."

In John 3:3, Christ says "Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of heaven," and when Nicodemus marvels at this, and asks "How can a man be born when he is old," Christ explains it to him by his reply—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." That is: what is born of the flesh must ever remain flesh, and that which is born of the spirit must ever remain spirit. Or, in other words: he says "what I have said about a new birth has nothing whatever to do with a transformation, or a making anew the fleshly man. He was born of the flesh and of course must ever be flesh with all its weaknesses, and failures: fitted for death, while on the other hand that which is born of the spirit cannot be other than spirit, pure and holy, separate from sinners, fitted for the kingdom of heaven."

Yes regeneration does not make the old nature over (that is the Nicodemus view of it) but gives us a new creature. We are "new creatures in Christ Jesus." Nevertheless it seems to be a general impression among Christians that regeneration is a renovation of the old nature. Yet we would not say the renovation of an old building was to make a new one, or the making a new one the renovation of an old. Why then should we think to be born anew is to improve the old nature, or the improving the old nature being born anew? The Christian has been born once of the flesh, and become partaker of all that is flesh, and once of the spirit, and become partaker of all that is spirit. He has been the subject of two births giving existence to two natures. Hence he is a twofold being: of the flesh outwardly, and of the spirit inwardly. The outward man is prone to sin, the inward man lives unto God. Paul says: "In me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." The carnal mind is enemy against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Further, John tells us "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. And if we (i. e., John and those to whom he is writing) say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Of the spiritual man though we read something better: for he is sinless. Paul in speaking of him says "But I delight in the law of God after the inward man," and John tells us "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God." We know John has reference here to the "inward man" of whom Paul speaks: because he says "Whosoever is born of God," and Christ tells us "only that which is born of the spirit is of God."

If this be not the Bible teaching the first epistle of John must be paradoxical: for in its first chapter we read "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves,"

while in the fifth he tells us "He who is born of God sinneth not and the evil one cannot touch him." But evidently the one passage has reference to the Christian as a church member militant, and a citizen: a man of flesh and bones; the other to be man who is "born of God," or "of the spirit": the inner man.

Are we then to infer from this that we may live unto sin after the flesh, and unto God after spirit? No: because "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Paul sees that the spiritual being will predominate. That the Christian will be led to him and John says "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth. The proof that we have the new nature within us is its outward manifestation. As the steam overcomes the inertia of the engine, and wields it as if gravitation had lost its hold upon the iron, so the spirit becomes the powers that wields the Christian as if all earthward tendencies were eliminated, but as the engine has not shaken off gravitation but is going by a superior force, so the Christian has not gotten beyond the power of sin, but is led by virtue of a superior influence: the power of the spirit of God who is in him.

Now before Paul wrote "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as though I had already attained either were already perfect," he knew what it was to be thus under the power of this higher life; this spiritual life; this "man from above"; for in the verses preceding our text he says "But what things were gain to me those I count loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things," and yet he strives to attain unto something beyond his present attainments. In the 10th and 11th verses he tells us that "He wants to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death: if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

He had realized one experience, he longs for another. The one was the regeneration of the soul, the other was the redemption of the body. The one was his present condition, the other his future state. This is clear from what he says in Rom. 8:29 "Even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, to wit: the redemption of our bodies." Clearly there is to be a redemption of the body which was to Paul, and should be to us a high hope.

Why this "Redemption of the body?" because we are imperfect; if we were perfect it would not be necessary. But "As we have borne the image of the earthly we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Now this I say brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God neither doeth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." I Cor. 15:49-56. "Then shall be brought to pass that death has lost its sting, then shall be the total destruction of sin: for death's sting is sin, and to take away the sting of death is to destroy sin. This perfection, this triumph over sin, comes when? "Then at the resurrection of the dead. Paul no doubt was thinking of this when he wrote "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which I was also apprehended of Christ Jesus."

Growing out of this truth set forth in these eleventh and twelfth verses of our text is his attitude expressed in the thirteenth to fifteenth verses. He says, "Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore as many as be perfect be thus minded." The writer of these words believes the highest present attainment of the true Christian rests upon two things, namely: the forgetting of the past and the pressing toward the future. Those who have striven honestly to live righteously well know "to be thus minded" is the most perfect way to live. If we want to live the very highest Christian life we must learn to forget the past failures, and even successes: for to ever rue our short comings is discouraging, and to live on the success of other days retards present progress. Let us then "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," for this is the Christian life, the joyous life, the hopeful life to believe we shall be better next year than this. If the past has not been so bright yet our hopes are high: for we know "we shall come off more than conquerors through him that loved us."

"Let as many as be perfect be thus minded." Yes this is the perfect Christian life as it is the perfect rule for any life. A phalanx of young men had taken up the pursuit of art, and all made fair success but one, who after many vain attempts sought to know why he so miserably failed, and with a little reflection it was revealed: he could never see the rude and the crude about his work. It pleased him well until the prizes were awarded. So likewise, if we cannot see the defects of our lives all may please us well until the great awarding day, while those who see theirs, and strive to overcome them in blending together the factors of life shall discern the true image of the Christ coming forth in them day by day. So let all who desire the highest, the most perfect, life here hold clearly before them the true ideal, forgetting the past, and the day will come when they by the grace of God being divested of corruptibility shall arise, and attain the incorruptible pattern which they have so long striven to make their own. "For," we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."