

BORN OF GOD.

THERE are few texts that have been the subject of more anxious inquiry than 1 John 3:9: "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." This is made much of by the self-styled "holiness" people, who use it to bolster up their own claims to perfection. They seem to take it for granted that they are specially referred to in the text, and think that all one has to do to be beyond the reach of sin is to profess to be born again. On the other hand, there are some who think that such a condition as the text describes is impossible in this life, and that it refers to the life to come, claiming that the new birth is at the resurrection. A question having been asked as to the meaning of the text, we take space for a brief exposition of it.

In the first place we would say that being "born of God" is a change that takes place in this life, and not at the resurrection. John says in this same chapter (verses 1, 2): "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Men are not by nature children of God. Paul says that the "children of disobedience," who walk according to the lusts of the flesh, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind," are "by nature the children of wrath." Eph. 2:2, 3. To the unbelieving Jews, who sought to murder Christ because he reprov'd their wicked deeds, the Saviour said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." John 8:44. Now since "all have sinned" and are consequently by nature the "children of wrath," children of the devil, it follows that those who are now the sons of God have become so by the new birth.

Again, being born again is a prerequisite to obtaining the life to come. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3. And he repeated the statement in these words: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Verse 5. These texts not only show that the new birth takes place before the resurrection, but they also set us on the track of what the new birth is.

We learn that in the new birth both water and the Spirit have a part. This reminds us of what Paul says in Rom. 8:14-16: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The possession of the Spirit shows that we are sons of God, and that we are Christ's. Rom. 8:9. It is called "the Spirit of adoption."

The first work of the Spirit upon the hearts of men, is to "reprove the world of sin." John 16:8. Conviction of sin, if not stifled, will necessarily drive the soul to Christ (see Rom. 7:24, 25; 8:1); and Paul says that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." 2 Cor. 5:17. But

if a man in Christ is a new creature, it must be that he has had a new birth; therefore we know that one who is born of God is one who is in Christ.

Now read Rom. 6:1-3 "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" And also Gal. 3:26, 27: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Here we learn, what has already been stated, that sons of God are they who are in Christ; and we learn also that we put on Christ, or are ushered into Christ, by baptism. Now connect with these texts 1 Cor. 12:12, 13, where baptism and the Spirit are coupled together, as in John 3:5. It reads: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

Thus the Spirit convicts of sin; the convicted sinner repents and flies to Christ for cleansing from sin; he shows his acceptance of Christ by being baptized, and rises to walk in newness of life, a new creature in Christ, if he abides in Christ. This is the new birth, or, as it is commonly called, conversion.

But what has this to do with the statement in 1 John 3:9 that whosoever is born of God sinneth not? We shall see, when we have examined one or two texts more which relate to the new birth. We have already seen that the Spirit of God is the prime factor in effecting the new birth. It first works upon the heart, to convict of sin. But how does the Spirit convict of sin? Through what does it operate? In Eph. 6:17 we are told that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Then since the word of God is the Spirit's sword, it must be by means of the word that the Spirit convicts of sin. In support of this conclusion we read Heb. 4:12, 13: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Then the word of God,—and by this the law is specially referred to,—has much to do in the work of conversion, or the new birth. Without it, the Spirit could make no impression on the heart; and so the psalmist ascribes to it a leading place in the work of conversion, saying, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Ps. 19:7. Now we are prepared for a text which will bring us right back to the one with which we started. We quote 1 Peter 1:22, 23: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit [note the union of the Spirit and the word of truth in the work of conversion] unto unfeigned love

of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.”

In these texts last quoted we find the word of God brought to view as the seed by which men are begotten sons of God. Now read once more the text which we are studying: "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." Why does not such an one commit sin? Because the seed by which he was begotten remains in him. And what is that seed? The word of God and the Spirit of God.

That the possession of the word of God in the heart is a guard against sin, is shown by the psalmist, who, speaking of the righteous man, says: "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide." Ps. 37:31. And again he says: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Ps. 119:11.

This statement about the law of God being in a man's heart, reminds us of what the Lord Jesus said, through the psalmist, of himself: "Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Ps. 40:7, 8. Now since David says that the law in the heart keeps a man's feet from slipping, we will examine a notable instance in the life of our Saviour, to see how it works.

After Jesus was baptized, he was led into the wilderness to be tempted. After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, the devil said to him: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Matt. 4:3. How did Jesus meet this temptation? Not with parleying, but with the words, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." That settled the question once for all.

Then the devil took Jesus up and placed him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." Again the prompt reply came: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Here again, from the fullness of the word which was hidden in his heart, Jesus drew a weapon which foiled this attack of the enemy.

Once more the devil plied his temptation. Taking Jesus into a high mountain, he showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, promising them all to him if he would but for one moment worship Satan as God. Quick as thought came the words from the lips of Jesus, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

Notice that Jesus met every temptation with a text of Scripture. But these temptations were suffered and recorded for our benefit, that we might learn how to resist.

Again: Faith is said to be the Christian's shield. Eph. 6:16: "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." But faith cannot be separated from the word, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Rom. 10:17. One's faith is just equal to the amount of the word that he has—not committed to memory, simply—but hidden in the heart. Now we can understand 1 John 5:18: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." The object of a shield is to protect the person from flying missiles. In ancient times, when men fought with swords and bows, the man who received all the blows on his shield kept himself, so that he was not touched. So in the Christian warfare, the one who receives the assaults of Satan upon the shield of that faith which is the outgrowth of God's own word, will keep himself untouched. Thus it was that Christ came off unscathed in his contest with Satan.

Once more: In John 15:7 we read: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." That is a comprehensive promise. "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." What will be the constant request of the one who abides in Christ? It will evidently be for more of a likeness to him. David expressed it when he said: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Ps. 27:4. Dare anyone say that such desires will not be gratified. They must be, for Jesus said: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Matt. 5:6. Not filled with a good, happy feeling; not filled with complacency; not filled with self-conceit; but filled with righteousness—right doing—obedience to God's commandments as righteousness is inseparably connected with meekness. Zeph. 2:3; Ps. 25:9.

From this brief study it will be seen that 1 John 3:9. does call for perfect obedience. So does the whole Bible. That book makes no provision for a little sin to be retained. Christ died that he might present to himself, that is, find when he comes for it, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Eph. 5:27. This is the requirement. And surely if one abides in Christ, and if the word of truth by which he was turned from sin, still remains in him, it will continue to have the same effect that it had at first, and will keep him from sin. This does not mean that the individual will necessarily be perfect in knowledge, nor that he will be in a position where there is nothing more to gain; but it does mean that so far as he has knowledge of the law of God he will walk in it. He will be one of the "undefiled in the way." Ps. 119:1.

Such an one will never boast of his goodness. He will be too much occupied in keeping from falling, to boast, and how will he keep from falling? "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." The more he beholds Christ, the more will he feel his own nothingness in comparison; this will beget humility; humility will beget trustfulness; and trustfulness will bring strength. Thus he will be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," and, going on from strength to strength, will at last appear in Zion before God.

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