

FLESH AND FAITH : AND THEIR ENERGIES FROM THE FIRST.

(GEN. III, IV, V.)

These are very important chapters. They shew us the production of the two great energies which, to this day, animate the whole moral scene around us ; and also shew us these two energies doing their several businesses then, as they are doing still.

They are remarkable chapters ; wonderful in exhibiting so much various moral action so distinctly and yet so concisely, leaving, I may say, nothing unnoticed, and yet in so short a space.

I would notice the production of these two great energies and their workings, the energy of flesh and the energy of faith, i. e., of the old nature and of the renewed mind.

The lie of the Serpent prevails to produce the first of these.

The Serpent gains the attention of the woman to words in which there was some suggestion injurious to her Lord and Creator. It was a lie, though subtly conveyed ; the only instrument by which he could reach and tempt her. She listens and answers—and her faculties thus enlisted are soon in action in the cause of her seducer, and she falls.

The principle which is called the “flesh,” or “old man,” is produced at once, and at once begins to work. Confidence in one another is im-

mediately lost. Innocence had needed nothing ; but guilt is necessarily shame, and must get some kind of covering. Every man to this hour carries in him what he cannot comfortably and confidently let out ; even to his fellow creature. Restraint has taken the place of freedom, and artifices come to the relief of guilt and shame. So it is now ; and so was it in that hour when the flesh was generated.

More deeply still does it retire from God. Men can bear each other's presence under the dressing of form and ceremony, and the common understanding of the common guilty nature ; but they cannot bear God's presence. Though he had the apron of fig-leaves, when His voice is heard, Adam retreats under the trees of the garden. This is the flesh, or the old guilty nature, to this day. God is intolerable. The thought of being alone, or immediately with Him, is more than the conscience can possibly stand. All its contrivances are vain. God is too much for the flesh. It secretly whispers and lays all the mischief on God Himself, but it cannot come forth and tell Him so. Out of its own mouth it is judged.

These are its simplest, earliest, energies : we are hateful and hating, and we are at enmity against God.

But the working of this same principle (thus produced in Adam through the lie of the Serpent) is manifested in other ways afterwards in Cain. "Cain was of that wicked one." He becomes a

tiller of the ground. But he tills, not as subject to the penalty, but as one that would get something desirable out of the ground, though the Lord had cursed it ; something for himself, independent of God.

This is a great difference. Nothing is more godly, more according to the divine mind, concerning us, than to eat our bread by the sweat of our face, to get food and raiment by hard and honest toil. It is a beautiful accepting of the punishment of our sin, and a bowing to the righteous thoughts of God. But to get out of the materials of the cursed ground what is to minister to our delight, our honour, and our wealth, in forgetfulness of sin and of the judgment of God, is but perpetuating our apostacy and rebellion.

Such was Cain's tillage. And accordingly it ended in his building a city, and furnishing it with all that promised him pleasure, or advanced him in the world. This he seeks after—and seeks after with greediness, though he must find it all in the land of Nod, in the regions of one who had left the presence of God.

He had his religion withal. He brings of the fruit of the earth that he was tilling, to God. That is, he would fain have his enjoyment of the world sanctioned of God. If he could command it, he would keep God on terms with him, though he was making the very ground which He had cursed the occasion of his enjoyments. This is very natural, and practised by our hearts to this

hour. Cain desired to link the Lord to himself in his worldliness and love of present things, that he may keep conscience quiet. But the Lord refuses, as He does to this day ; though, as we have said, the heart to this day would fain make the same efforts, and get its worldliness and love of present things sanctioned and shared by Jesus, that conscience may not interfere with the pursuits of lust.

What ways of the flesh or of "the old man" are here ! All this is the very thing that is abroad in the world to this hour. It is the working of that apostate principle which was generated by the lie of the Serpent in the soul of Adam. And being of the wicked one Cain "slew his brother." He had religion, as we have seen ; but he hated and persecuted the truth ; just as to this day. Look at the same thing in Saul of Tarsus, as he gives you the account of it himself in Acts xxvi. Look at it in the person of the Pharisees set against the Lord. Look at it in the history of Christendom all down its generations to the present hour.

This is the enmity of the seed of the Serpent to the Seed of the woman. "Cain was of that wicked one and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." This was the cause. It was the enmity of sin to godliness, the enmity of the carnal mind against God, the lusting of the old man, the lusting of flesh against Spirit ;

it was the hatred of the world to Christ, because He testified of it, that "the works thereof are evil." It does not always wear such garments stained with blood; but it is always in the heart, "The carnal mind is enmity against God."

Such is the flesh, the old nature, in the history of its production, and in the course and character of its workings. It is exactly now what it was then. It rules "the course of this world" under Satan, but it is found also in each of us, if provision be made for it. But we are to know it—to know whence it came, and how it works, and to mortify it in its principle and in its acts, in all its proper native energies which so continually beset the soul.

But we now turn to the other activities which we find produced and at work in these wonderful chapters—the activity or energy of faith produced by the word of God through the hidden but effectual power of the Spirit.

While Adam was in the condition to which sin had reduced him, while he was still the guilty and culprit man under the trees of the garden, the tidings of the Conqueror slain, of Him who bore the penalty, and yet reached the point of glorious victory, the woman's Seed, reached his ear; and he is born again of the incorruptible seed, the word of the truth of the gospel.

He comes forth just as he was. But he comes forth in the full sense of salvation and of the victory which the grace of God had counselled and

wrought for him. Accordingly he speaks of life. There is something very fine in that. He calls his wife "the mother of all living." There is something truly marvellous as well as excellent in that. Dead as he was himself in trespasses and sins, he talks of life—but he talks of it in connection with Christ, and with Him only. He gives himself no living memorial at all. He does not link himself with the thought or mention of life, but only the Seed of the woman, according to the word which he had just heard. Nay, he rather implies that he knew full well he had lost all title and power of life; and that it was entirely in another—but that it was in that other for him. That the life found in another, was for his use, he had no manner of doubt; the proof of which is this—that he at once comes forth from the place of shame and guilt into the place of liberty and confidence and the presence of God.

He regains God. He had lost Him and been estranged from Him. He had lost Him as his Creator, but he had now regained Him as his Saviour, in the gospel, in the woman's Seed, in Christ his righteousness.

But we may add, to our great comfort as sinners, this simplicity and boldness of faith is exactly after the mind of God. Nothing could have been so grateful to Him as this—and consequently, in pledge of this, He first makes a coat of skins for Adam, and then with His own hands He covers his naked body.

Very blessed this is. This is the faith which at the day of the well of Sychar, and to this day, gives the Lord a feast—meat to eat which even the loving careful sympathies of His dearest saints know not of.

Christ is now every thing to this pardoned sinner. In like manner, through faith, Eve exults in the promise. It is the joy and expectation of her heart; and Abel's religion is entirely formed by it. The penalties of sweat of face and sorrow of heart seem to be forgotten. And what is deeply to be considered—the earth is lightly held, when Jesus was firmly grasped. Adam has regained the Lord Himself, and he seems never to count on being a citizen of the earth again, but a mere tiller of the ground according to divine appointment for a season; and then to leave it to share the full fruit of the grace and redemption he had now trusted, in other worlds. He dies—that is all. He seeks for no memorial here. He builds no city. He aims not to improve a cursed world. He toils in it and eats his bread out of it. But he never forgets that judgment is upon it. The family of Seth call on the name of the Lord, and look, in God's way and time, for comfort and blessing* in the place of present toil and curse. But that is the thing of hope and of prophecy, while strangership in the judged world, is the present path of faith and godliness. This is a wondrous Scripture indeed and it speaks to us of this very hour through which we are passing.

The energy of the flesh or of the old nature is produced and set at all its proper work; the energy of faith is also brought forth in the souls of the redeemed, and displays its power very blessedly. We learn our lessons here. We carry the two energies in us. By nature we are citizens of the city Enoch, and through grace our souls have got connection with Christ, like Adam or Abel or Seth. And we wait for the translation of Enoch (Gen. v. 24).

These are contrary the one to the other. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."



NOTES OF AN ADDRESS TO CONVERTS.

ACTS XI.

It is worthy of remark, that in this chapter we have the first account of Gentile converts:—of the receiving, in sovereign goodness and grace, poor sinners who had not even the promises to boast of which God had given to the Jews. To such it is, too, that Barnabas comes with the earnest exhortation contained in verse 23: "That with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord." What Peter was taught here as to the Gentiles we all have to learn as to ourselves. When the blessed news of grace and pardon first reaches a sinner's ears and heart, he rejoices in the thought of pardon and forgiveness. He does right. Jesus, the

blessed Son of God, has met him in mercy with His precious blood. But with this the light enters into his soul. When there have been deep discoveries of sin before the soul has become happy, the peace of the soul is more settled. The sin to which grace is applied is in a measure already known. But when, through the proclamation of divine pardon, without previous convictions, the soul has suddenly received joy, though there is always the discovery that we are sinners, the knowledge of the depth of sin in the heart, and what has to be forgiven and cleansed, is very small. The consequence is, that after God has called us, and the divine light has broken into our souls, we feel disturbed and uncertain, and even begin sometimes to doubt the fact of our being cleansed. This is wrong. The deeper discovery of sin and the knowledge of our own heart is useful. If we walk humbly and near to God, this knowledge will be made, comparatively speaking, peacefully ; if not, in humiliation and failure. But you may not call unclean what God has cleansed. God has brought cleansing and pardon to us down here. We have not to wait for it until we go up there. God has cleansed you. You are clean *now*. But I desire to lead you to some further exercise of heart upon it, and clearer apprehension of God's ways ; a fuller exercise of conscience, that your peace may be as solid as your joy was genuine when you first heard of grace and forgiveness. In Luke xv. the great principle set forth is, that it is God's happiness

when we are brought back to Him. Of course the joy of the restored one comes in, but is not the primary thing. The object of all three parables is not to show our joy, but the joy of God in our conversion. The three parables all teach the same grace, but we get, I believe, the joy of the Son, of the Spirit, and of the Father. But remark that in the two first we find a grace which finds and brings back what was lost, without any further question of the state of the soul. In the third we have man's departure even into the lowest degradation of sin, and what passes in his soul on his return, till he is clothed in divine righteousness, with Christ, in his Father's house. God has foreseen and provided for the whole case of the sinner. The younger son was as really a sinner when he left his father's house as when he was eating husks with the swine. He had abandoned God to do his own will. But the Lord pursues the case to the full degradation of sin, for sin degrades man. The young man comes to himself, turns back towards God, is converted; but he has not yet met God, nor has he the best robe on him. He did not know in his conscience Divine righteousness. When he really meets his father, not only is he in tender love—only the more shown because he had been lost—received when in his rags into his father's arms, but he is made righteously fit for the house, clothed with Christ. His father was on his neck when he was in his rags; but he was not received into the house in that state. He

could not have been. But God has provided for the sinner what Adam in his innocence had not. He has provided Christ. Grace reigns through righteousness. The best robe, no part of the son's portion before he left, is now put on him, and he is fit for the house to which that robe belonged. All the extent of the soul's departure from God has been weighed. The soul may be exercised about it, and will till self is wholly given up as a ground on which we can stand with God. No going in legally as a hired servant—before God it is rags and exclusion, or the best robe and joyful admission. All true experiences lead to that emptying of self, and Christ all, and we in Him before God. Then, as I have said, our peace is as solid as the joy of the thought of forgiveness was blessed, and the joy itself deeper, if not more genuine. Another truth is connected with this. God having perfectly cleansed us by the blood of Christ, the Spirit dwells in the cleansed heart. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Spirit gives us the consciousness of our relationship as dear children. "Because ye are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." What manner of persons ought we to be, who are the temples of the Holy Ghost? we may well continually ask ourselves. But do not let failures make us doubt that we have it. Low and wretched as was the state the Galatians had fallen into, they never doubted they had the Spirit of God; but

they were getting wrong as to the ground of their standing, as to how they received it; so that the apostle had to ask them, "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. iii. 2.) "We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." We have life as truly as Christ is alive; but we are not yet in heaven. The thief, indeed, was privileged to be taken directly home, believing only to-day, but to-day the first companion Christ had in Paradise. We do not look for such immediate departure, but our ground is the same: we are as truly saved, but not so soon to be in heaven. Rather have we to go through this evil world; to go through it as crucified with Christ, dead indeed, but risen—to go through it with His Spirit dwelling in us. Be careful lest you grieve that Spirit. You have to go through the world bearing the name of Christ upon you. See that you bring no reproach upon that blessed name by being *inconsistent*. The world will be sharp to exclaim, There are your Christians! You will have to go through the world with God dwelling in you. To carry this treasure in an earthen vessel. Entrusted with this treasure, an habitation of God through the Spirit. Of course it is only through His grace that you can carry such a treasure through an evil world; but there is power in Christ, there is sufficiency in Christ, for all He would have you to do or be. He exhorted them that they should cleave to the Lord. De-

pend on Him ! Some are allowed to have a long season of joy on first believing ; but God knows our hearts, and how soon we should be depending on our joy, and not on Christ. He is our object ! joy is not our object. Do not let your joy lead you to forget the source of it, and then it need never wane. This joy is right and beautiful in its place ; I am not saying a word against it—God forbid. But I warn you against resting in it. Do not let your joy be your dependence. Do not lean on it for strength. There is danger of joy, however genuine, making you forget how dependent you are every moment. Depend upon Him—cleave to Him with purpose of heart. Do not be content with being happy (may you continue so); but with Paul, forgetting the things which are behind, press on, etc. (Phil. iii.) I have seen many Christians so full of joy that they thought there was no such thing as sin left. It is true, sin no longer remains on you ; but the flesh is *in* you to the end. The old stock is there, and you will find that, if you are not watchful, if divine life is not cherished and cultivated in your hearts by looking at Christ and feeding on Him, it will be putting forth its buds ; if it does, they must be nipped off as they appear. No good fruit comes of the old stock. It is the *new* that bears fruit unto God. But though the flesh is in you, do not be thinking of this, but think of Christ—cleave to Him ; and may your souls be maintained in this truth, that Christ is your life ! ay, that Christ

is so your life that Christ must die (the thought of which is blasphemy) before you can perish. And as He is your life, so is He the object of that life. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Gal. ii. 20.) As you grow in this knowledge of Him, a joy grows deeper than that of first conversion. I have known Christ more or less between thirty and forty years, and I can say that I have ten thousand times more joy *now* than I had at first. It is a deeper, calmer joy. The water rushing down from a hill is beautiful to look at, and makes most noise; but you will find the water that runs in the plain is deeper, calmer, more fructifying.

Observe: they are exhorted with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. A distracted heart is the bane of a Christian. When my heart is filled with Christ, I have no heart or eye for the trash of the world. If Christ is dwelling in your heart by faith, it will not be the question, What harm is there in this, or that? rather, Am I doing this for Christ? Can Christ go along with me in this? If you are in communion with Him, you will readily detect what is not of Him. Do not let the world come in and distract your thoughts. I speak especially to you young ones; we, who are older, have had more experience of what the world is; we know more what it is worth; but it all lies shining before you, endeavouring to attract

you. (What does it fill its shop windows for else?) Its smiles are all deceitful; still it *is* smiling upon you. It makes many promises it cannot fulfil; still it *promises*. The fact is, your hearts are too big for the world, it cannot fill them; they are too little for Christ, for He fills heaven: yet He will fill you to overflowing.

Observe again: it is, *Cleave unto the Lord*. Not cleave to duty, or law, or ordinances (though these are good in their places), but to the *Lord*. He knew how treacherous the heart was, and how soon it would put anything in *His* place. You will have to learn what is in your heart. Abide with God and you will learn your heart with Him, and under His grace; else you will have to learn it with the devil through his successful temptations. But God is faithful; and if you have been getting away from Him, and other things have been coming in and forming a crust round your heart, and you want to get back again, God says, What is this crust? I must have you deal with it, and get rid of it! Remember, Christ bought you with His own blood, that you should be His, and not the world's. The denial of this fact is an artifice of the devil. Do not let the devil come in between you and God's grace. However careless you may have been, however far you may have got away from Him, return to Him; doubt not His joy in having you back,—count upon His love,—look at the sin which led you away with horror, but do not wrong Him by distrusting His

love, any more than you would an affectionate husband or wife, by throwing a doubt on their love if you had been for a moment ungracious. Hate yourself, but remember how he has loved you, and will love you until the end! Mistrust not His work—mistrust not His love. "It was granted unto the Gentiles to have repentance unto life." All is of God!

I would have you carry away in your minds three things which by grace are given you. 1st, cleaving to the Lord; 2nd, perfect forgiveness; 3rd, a purged conscience. To illustrate this last, take the case of Peter. He denied his Lord—denied Him to a serving-maid; but the Lord had turned and looked at him, and he had gone out and wept bitterly. A few weeks after this (Acts iii.) he could say that they were a lost and ruined people, because "they denied the Holy One and the Just;" the very thing he had done himself, in a worse way too, for he had been with Him as his friend for three years. But his conscience was purged; he knew he was forgiven; and now he could turn round, and fearlessly charge others with the very thing he had done himself.

One word more. Talk with Him. Never be content without being able to walk and talk with Christ as with a dear friend. Be not satisfied with anything short of near intercourse with Him who has loved you with such manner of love!