

Regeneration: What is it?

C. H. Mackintosh.

There are few subjects which have given rise to more difficulty and perplexity than that of regeneration, or the new birth. Very many who are, themselves, the subjects of this new birth are at a loss to know what it is, and filled with doubt as to whether they have ever really experienced it. Many there are who, were they to clothe their desire in words, would say, "Oh! that I knew for certain, that I had passed from death unto life. If only I were sure that I was born again, I should be happy indeed." Thus they are harassed with doubts and fears, from day to day, and from year to year. Sometimes they are full of hope that the great change has passed upon them; but, anon, something springs up within them which leads them to think their former hopes were a delusion. Judging from feeling and experience, rather than from the plain teaching of the word of God, they are, of necessity, plunged in uncertainty and confusion as to the whole matter.

Now I would desire to enter in company with my reader. Upon an examination in the light of scripture, of this most interesting subject. It is to be feared that very much of the misapprehension which prevails in reference thereto, arises from the habit of preaching regeneration and its fruits instead of Christ. The effect is put before the cause, and this must always produce derangement of thought.

Let us, then, proceed to consider this question. What is regeneration? How is it produced? What are its results?

1. And, first, what is regeneration? Very many look upon it as a change of the old nature, produced, no doubt, by the influence of the Spirit of God. This change is gradual in its operation, and proceeds from stage to stage, until the old nature is completely brought under. This view of the subject involves two errors, namely, first, an error as to the real condition of our old nature; and, secondly, as to the distinct personality of the Holy Ghost. It denies the hopeless ruin of nature; and represents the Holy Ghost more as an influence than as a Person.

As to our true state by nature, the word of God presents it as one of total and irrecoverable ruin. Let us adduce the proofs. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only* evil *continually*." (Gen. 6: 5) The words "*every*" "*only*" and "*continually*" set aside every idea of a redeeming feature in man's condition before God. Again, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are *all* gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy; there is *none* that doeth good, *no, not one*." (Ps. 14: 2, 3) Here, again, the expressions "*all*" — "*none*" — "*no, not one*" — preclude the idea of a single redeeming quality in man's condition, as judged in the presence of God. Having thus drawn a proof from Moses and one from the Psalms, let us take one or two from the prophets. "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the *whole* head is sick, and the *whole* heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it." (Isa. 1: 5, 6) "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? *All* flesh is grass, and *all* the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field." (Isa. 40: 6) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17: 9)

The above will suffice from the Old Testament. Let us, now, turn to the New. "Jesus did not commit himself, because he knew all, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." (John 2: 24, 25) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." (John 3: 6) Read, also, Romans

3: 9-19. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be." (Rom. 8: 7) "Having no hope, and without God in the world." (Eph. 2: 12) These quotations might be multiplied, but there is no need. Sufficient proof has been adduced to show forth the true condition of nature. It is "lost" — "guilty" — "alienated" — "without strength" — "evil only" — "evil continually."

How, then, we may lawfully inquire, can that which is spoken of in such a way, ever be changed or improved? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" "That which is crooked cannot be made straight." The fact is, the more closely we examine the word of God, the more we shall see that it is not the divine method to improve a fallen, ruined thing, but to bring in something entirely new. It is precisely thus in reference to man's natural condition. God is not seeking to improve it. The gospel does not propose as its object, to better man's nature, but to give him a new one. It seeks not to put a new piece upon an old garment, but to impart a new garment altogether. The law looked for something in man, but never got it. Ordinances were given, but man used them to shut out God. The gospel, on the contrary, shows us Christ magnifying the law and making it honourable; it shows Him dying on the cross, and nailing ordinances thereto, it shows Him rising from the tomb and taking His seat as a Conqueror at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens; and, finally, it declares that all who believe in His name are partakers of His risen life, and are one with Him. (See, carefully, the following passages: John 20: 31; Acts 13: 39; Rom. 6: 4-11; Eph. 2: 1-6; Eph. 3: 13-18; Col. 2: 10-15.)

It is of the very last importance to be clear and sound as to this. If I am led to believe that regeneration is a certain change in my old nature, and that this change is gradual in its operation, then, as a necessary consequence, I shall be filled with continual anxiety and apprehension, doubt and fear, depression and gloom, when I discover, as I surely shall, that nature is nature, and will be naught else but nature to the end of the chapter. No influence or operation of the Holy Ghost can ever make the flesh spiritual. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" and can never be ought else but "flesh;" and "all flesh is as grass" — as withered grass. The flesh is presented in scripture not as a thing to be improved, but as a thing which God counts as "dead," and which we are called to "mortify" — subdue and deny, in all its thoughts and ways. In the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see the end of everything pertaining to our old nature. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5: 24) He does not say "They that are Christ's are improving, or trying to improve the flesh". No; but they have crucified it. It is utterly unimprovable. How can they do this! By the energy of the Holy Ghost, acting not *on* the *old* nature, but *in* the new, and enabling them to keep the old nature where the cross has put it, namely, in the place of death. God expects nothing from the flesh; neither should we. He looks upon it as dead; so should we. He has *put* it out of sight, and we should *keep* it so. The flesh should not be allowed to show itself. God does not own it. It has no existence before Him. True, it is in us, but God gives us the precious privilege of viewing and treating it as dead. His word to us is, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6: 11)

This is an immense relief to the heart that has struggled for years in the hopeless business of trying to improve nature. It is an immense relief, moreover, to the conscience which has been seeking a foundation for its peace in the gradual improvement of a totally unimprovable thing. Finally, it is an immense relief to any soul that may, for years, have been earnestly breathing after holiness, but has looked upon holiness as consisting in the improvement of that which hates holiness and loves sin. To each and all of such it is infinitely precious and important to understand the real nature of regeneration. No one who has not experienced it can conceive the intensity of anguish and the bitterness of the disappointment which a soul feels, who, vainly expecting some improvement in nature, finds, after

years of struggling, that nature is nature still. And just in proportion to the anguish and disappointment will be the joy of discovering that God is not looking for any improvement in nature — that He sees it as dead, and us as alive in Christ — one with Him, and accepted in Him for ever. To be led into a clear and full apprehension of this, is divine emancipation to the conscience, and true elevation for the whole moral being.

Let us, then, see clearly what regeneration is. It is a new birth — the imparting of a new life — the implantation of a new nature — the formation of a new man. The old nature remains in all its distinctness; and the new nature is introduced in all its distinctness. This new nature has its own habits, its own desires, its own tendencies, its own affections. All these are spiritual, heavenly, divine. Its aspirations are all upward. It is ever breathing after the heavenly source from which it has emanated. As in nature, water always finds its own level; so in grace, the new, the divine nature always tends towards its own proper source. Thus regeneration is to the soul what the birth of Isaac was to the household of Abraham. (Gen. 21) Ishmael remained the same Ishmael; but Isaac was introduced. So the old nature remains the same, but the new is introduced. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It partakes of the nature of its source. A child partakes of the nature of its parents; and the believer is made "a partaker of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1: 4) "*Of His own will* begat he us." (James 1)

In a word, then, regeneration is God's own work, from first to last. God is the Operator, man is the happy, privileged subject. His cooperation is not sought in a work which must ever bear the impress of one almighty hand. God was alone in creation — alone in redemption — and he must be alone in the mysterious and glorious work of regeneration.

2 Having endeavoured to show, from various passages of scripture, that regeneration, or the new birth, is not a change of man's fallen nature, but the imparting of a new — a divine nature, we shall now, in dependence upon the blessed Spirit's teaching, proceed to consider how the new birth is produced — how the new nature is communicated. This is a point of immense importance, inasmuch as it places the word of God before us as the grand instrument which the Holy Ghost uses in quickening dead souls. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made;" and by the word of the Lord are dead souls called into new life. The word of the Lord is creative and regenerating. It called worlds into existence; it calls sinners from death to life. The same voice which of old said "Let there be light," must in every instance say "Let there be life."

If my reader will turn to the third chapter of John's Gospel, he will find, in our Lord's interview with Nicodemus, much precious instruction in reference to the mode in which regeneration is produced. Nicodemus held a very high place in what would be termed the religious world. He was "a man of the Pharisees" — "a ruler of the Jews" — "a master of Israel." He could hardly have occupied a more elevated or influential position. But yet, it is very evident that this highly-privileged man was ill at ease. Despite of all his religious advantages, his heart felt a restless craving after something which neither his Pharisaism, nor yet the entire system of Judaism could supply. It is quite possible he might not have been able to define what he wanted; but he wanted something, else he never would have come to Jesus by night. It was evident that the Father was drawing him, by a resistless though most gentle hand, to the Son; and the way He took of drawing him was by producing a sense of need which nothing around him could satisfy. This is a very common case. Some are drawn to Jesus by a deep sense of guilt — some by a deep sense of need. Nicodemus, obviously, belongs to the latter class. His position was such as to preclude the idea of anything like gross immorality; and, hence, it would not, in his case, be so much guilt on his conscience as a void in his heart. But it comes to the same in the end. The guilty conscience and the craving heart must both be brought to Jesus, for He alone can perfectly meet both the one and the other. He can remove, by His precious sacrifice, every stain from the conscience; and He can fill up,

by His peerless Person, every blank in the heart The conscience which has been purged by the blood of Jesus is perfectly clean; and the heart which is filled with the Person of Jesus is perfectly satisfied.

However, Nicodemus had, like many beside, to unlearn a great deal, ere he could really grasp the knowledge of Jesus. He had to lay aside a cumbrous mass of religious machinery, ere he could apprehend the divine simplicity of God's plan of salvation. He had to descend from the lofty heights of Rabbinical learning and traditional religion, and learn the alphabet of the gospel, in the school of Christ. This was very humiliating to a "man of the Pharisees" — "a ruler of the Jews" — "a master of Israel." There is nothing of which man is so tenacious as his religion and his learning; and, in the case of Nicodemus, it must have sounded passing strange upon his ear when "a teacher come from God" declared to him "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Being by *birth* a Jew, and, as such, entitled to all the privileges of a son of Abraham, it must have involved him in strange perplexity, to be told that he must be born again — that he must be the subject of a *new birth*, in order to see the kingdom of God. This was a total setting aside of all his privileges and distinctions. It called him down, at once from the very highest to the very "lowest step of the ladder." A Pharisee, a ruler, a master. was not one whit nearer to, or fitter for, this heavenly kingdom, than the most disreputable of the children of men. This was deeply humbling. If he could carry all his advantages and distinctions with him, so as to have them placed to his credit in this new kingdom, it would be something. This would secure for him a position in the kingdom of God far above that of a harlot or a publican. But, then, to be told that he must be born again, left him nothing to glory in. This, I repeat, was deeply humbling to a learned, religious, and influential man.

But it was puzzling as well as humbling. "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Surely not. There would be no more gained by a second natural birth than by a first. If a natural man could enter, ten thousand times, into his mother's womb and be born, he would be naught but a natural man after all; for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Do what you will with flesh — with nature, and you cannot alter or improve it. Nothing could change flesh into spirit. You may exalt it? the rank of Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a master of Israel — and you could hardly make it higher — but it will be flesh, notwithstanding. If this were more generally and clearly apprehended, it would prove the saving of fruitless labour to hundreds. Flesh is of no value whatever. In itself, it is but withered grass; and as to its most pious endeavours, its religious advantages and attainments, its works of righteousness, they have been pronounced by the pen of inspiration to be as filthy rags. (Isa. 64: 6)

But let us see the mode in which our blessed Lord replies to the "how?" of Nicodemus. It is peculiarly interesting. Jesus answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3: 5-8) Here we are distinctly taught that regeneration, or the new birth, is produced by "water and the Spirit." A man must be born of water and of the Spirit ere he can see the kingdom of God, or enter into its profound and heavenly mysteries. The keenest mortal vision cannot see the kingdom of God, nor the most gigantic human intellect "enter" into the deep secrets thereof. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2: 14) "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

It may be, however, that many are at a loss to know what is meant by being "born of water."

Certainly, the expression has been made the ground of very much discussion and controversy. It is only by comparing scripture with scripture that we can ascertain the real sense of any particular passage. It is a special mercy for the unlettered Christian — the humble student of the inspired volume, that he need not travel outside the covers of that volume, in order to interpret any passage contained therein.

What, then, is the meaning of being "born of water?" We must reply to this question by quoting two or three passages from the word. In the opening of John's Gospel, we read, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even *to them that believe on His name: which were born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of *God*." (John 1: 11-13.) From this passage, we learn that every one who believes on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is born again — born of God. This is the plain sense of the passage. All who by the power of God the Holy Ghost, believe on God the Son, are born of God the Father. The source of the testimony is divine; the object of the testimony is divine; the power of receiving the testimony is divine; the entire work of regeneration is divine. Hence, instead of being occupied with myself, and inquiring, like Nicodemus, how can I be born again, I have simply to cast myself, by faith, on Jesus; and thus I am born again. All who put their trust in Christ have gotten a new life, are regenerated.

Again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, *he that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me*, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." (John 5: 24) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life." (John 6: 47) "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, *believing, ye might have life through his name*." (John 20: 31) All these passages go to prove that the only way in which we can get this new and everlasting life is by simply receiving the record concerning Christ. All who believe that record, have this new, this eternal life. Mark, it is not those who merely say they believe, but those who actually do believe, according to the sense of the word in the foregoing passages. There is life-giving power in the Christ whom the word reveals, and in the word that reveals Him. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." And then, lest ignorance should marvel, or scepticism sneer, at the idea of dead souls hearing, it is added, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth — they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5: 25, 28, 29) The Lord Christ can make dead souls, as well as dead bodies, hear His quickening voice. It is by His mighty voice that life can be communicated to either body or soul. If the infidel or the sceptic reasons and objects, it is simply because he makes his own vain mind the standard of what ought to be, and thus entirely shuts out God. This is the climax of folly.

But the reader may feel disposed to inquire, "What has all this to do with the meaning of the word "water," in John 3: 5?" It has to do with it, inasmuch as it shows that the new birth is produced, the new life communicated, by the voice of Christ — which is, really, the word of God, as we read in the first chapter of James, "of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth*." (Ver. 18) So also, in first Peter, "*Being born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible *by the word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter 1: 23) In both these passages, the word is expressly set forth as the instrument by which the new birth is produced. James declares that we are begotten "by the word of truth;" and Peter declares that we are "born again by the word of God." If, then, our Lord speaks of being "born of water," it is obvious that He represents the word under the significant figure of "water" — a figure which "a master of Israel" might have understood, had he only studied aright Ezekiel 36: 25-27.

There is a beautiful passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians in which the word is presented under

the figure of water. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the *washing of water by the word*." (Eph. 5: 25, 26) So also in the Epistle to Titus: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3: 5-7)

From all these quotations, we learn that the word of God is the grand instrument of which the Holy Ghost makes use in calling dead souls into life. This truth is confirmed, in a peculiarly interesting manner, by our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, for, instead of replying to the repeated inquiry, "How can these things be?" He sets this "master of Israel" down to learn the simple lesson taught by "the brazen serpent." The bitten Israelite of old was to be healed by simply *looking* at the serpent of brass on the pole. The dead sinner now is to get life by simply looking at Jesus on the cross, and Jesus on the throne. The Israelite was not told to look at his wound, though it was the sense of his wound that made him look. The dead sinner is not told to look at his sins, though it is the sense of his sins that will make him look. One look at the serpent healed the Israelite; one look at Jesus quickens the dead sinner. The former had not to look a second time to be healed; the latter has not to look a second time to get life. It was not the way he looked, but the object he looked at, that healed the Israelite; it is not the way he looks, but the object he looks at, that saves the sinner, "*Look unto me*, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

Such was the precious lesson which Nicodemus was called to learn — such the reply to his "how?" If a man begins to reason about the new birth, he must be confounded; but if he believes in Jesus, he is born again. Man's reason can never understand the new birth; but the word of God produces it. Many are astray as to this. They are occupied with the process of regeneration, instead of the word which regenerates. Thus are they perplexed and confounded. They are looking at self, instead of at Christ; and as there is an inseparable connection between the object at which we look and the effect of looking at it, we can easily see what must be the effect of looking in upon oneself. What would an Israelite have gained by looking at his wound? Nothing. What did he gain by looking at the serpent? Health. What does a sinner gain by looking at himself? Nothing. What does he gain by looking at Jesus? "Everlasting life."

3. We come, now, to consider, in the third and last place, the results of regeneration — a point of the deepest interest. Who can estimate aright the glorious results of being a child of God? Who can unfold those affections which belong to that high and hallowed relationship in which the soul is placed by being born again? Who can fully explain that precious fellowship which the child of God is privileged to enjoy with his heavenly Father? "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: there fore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3: 1-3) "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: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and *joint-heirs* with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified *together*." (Rom. 8: 14-17)

It is most important to understand the distinction between *life* and *peace*. The former is the result of being linked with Christ's *Person*; the latter is the result of His *work*. "He that hath the Son hath

Life." (1 John 5: 12) But, "being *justified* by faith we have peace." (Rom. 5: 1) "Having made peace through the blood of his cross." (Col. 1: 20) The very moment a man receives into his heart the simple truth of the gospel, he becomes a child of God. The truth which he receives is the "incorruptible seed" of "the divine nature." (1 Peter 1: 23; 2 Peter 1: 4) Many are not aware of all that is involved in thus simply receiving the truth of the gospel. As in nature, the child of a nobleman may not know the varied results of the relationship, so it is, likewise, in grace. I may be ignorant both as to the relationship and its results; but I am in it, notwithstanding; and being in it, I have the affections which belong to it, and I ought to cultivate them, and allow them to entwine themselves artlessly around their proper object, even Him who has begotten me by the word of truth. (James 1: 18) It is my privilege to enjoy the full flow of parental affection emanating from the bosom of God, and to reciprocate that affection, through the power of the indwelling Spirit. "Now *are* we the sons of God." He has made us such. He has attached this rare and marvellous privilege to the simple belief of the truth. (John 1: 12) We do not reach this position "by works of righteousness which we have done," or could do; but simply "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. That, being justified by his grace, we should be *made heirs* according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3: 5-7) We are "*called sons*," and "*made heirs*;" and all this, simply by the belief of the truth of the gospel, which is God's "incorruptible seed."

Take the case of the very vilest sinner who, up to this moment, has been living a life of gross wickedness. Let that person receive into his heart the pure gospel of God; let him heartily believe "that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures;" and he there, then, and thus, becomes a child of God, a thoroughly saved, perfectly justified and divinely accepted person. In receiving into his heart the simple record concerning Christ, he has received new life. Christ is the truth and the life, and when we receive the truth we receive Christ; and, when we receive Christ, we receive life. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life." (John 3: 36) When does he get this life? The very moment he believes. "*Believing* ye might have life through his name." (John 20: 31) The truth concerning Christ is the seed of eternal life, and when that truth is believed, life is communicated.

Observe, this is what the word of God declares. It is a matter of divine testimony, not merely of human feeling. We do not get life by *feeling* something in ourselves, but by *believing* something about Christ; and that something we have on the authority of God's eternal word — "the holy scriptures." It is well to understand this. Many are looking *in*, for evidences of the new life, instead of looking *out* at the object which imparts the life. It is quite true that, "he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5: 10); but, be it remembered, it is "the witness" of a life which is received by "*believing* on the Son of God," not by looking in upon oneself; and the more undividedly I am occupied with Christ, the more distinct and satisfactory will be "the witness" in myself. If I make the witness my object, I shall be plunged in doubt and uncertainty; but if I make Christ my object, I have the witness in all its divine integrity and power. There is special need of clearness as to this, because of the strong tendency of our hearts to make something *within* the ground of our peace and contentment, instead of building, absolutely and exclusively, upon Christ. The more simply we cling to Christ, apart from all beside, the more peaceful and happy we shall be; but directly we take the eye off Him, we become unhinged and unhappy.

In a word, then, my reader should seek to understand, with scriptural accuracy, the distinction between *life* and *peace*. The former is the result of the connection with Christ's *Person*; the latter is the result of believing in His finished *work*. We very frequently meet with quickened souls who are in sad

trouble and disquietude as to their acceptance with God. They really do believe on the name of the Son of God, and, believing, they have life; but from not seeing the fullness of the work of Christ, as to their sins, they are troubled in conscience, they have no mental repose. Take an illustration. If you place a hundredweight upon the bosom of a dead man he does not feel it. Place another, and another, and another, he is wholly unconscious Why? Because there is no *life*. Let us suppose for a moment, the entrance in of life, and what will be the result? A most distressing sensation occasioned by the terrible weight upon the bosom. What, then, will be needful in order to the full enjoyment of the life which had been imparted? Clearly, the removal of the burden. It is somewhat thus with the sinner who receives life by believing on the Person of the Son of God. So long as he was in a state of spiritual death he had no spiritual sensations, he was unconscious of any weight pressing upon him. But the entrance in of spiritual life has imparted spiritual sensibilities, and he now feels a burden pressing upon his heart and conscience, which he knows not exactly how to get rid of. He sees not as yet all that is involved in believing on the name of the only-begotten Son of God. He does not see that Christ is, at once, his righteousness and his life. He needs a simple view of the finished atonement of Christ, whereby *all* his sins were plunged in the waters of eternal oblivion, and he himself introduced into the full favour of God. It is this, and this alone, that can remove the heavy burden off the heart, and impart that profound mental repose which nothing can ever disturb.

If I think of God as a judge, and myself as a sinner, I need the blood of the cross to bring me into His presence, in the way of righteousness. I must fully understand that every claim which God, the righteous Judge, had upon me, a guilty sinner, has been divinely answered, and eternally settled, by "the precious blood of Christ." This gives my soul peace. I see that, through that blood, God can be "just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3: 29) I learn that, in the cross, God has been glorified about my sins; yea, that the whole question of sin was fully gone into and perfectly settled between God and Christ, amid the deep and awful solitudes of Calvary. Thus my load is taken off, my weight removed, my guilt cancelled; I can breathe freely; I have perfect peace; there is literally nothing against me; I am as free as the blood of Christ can make me. The Judge has declared himself satisfied as to sin, by raising the sinner's Surety from the dead, and placing Him at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

But, then, there comes another thing of immense value. I not only see myself as a guilty sinner provided with a way of access to God, as a righteous Judge; but I see God, in pursuance of His eternal counsels of electing love, begetting me through the word of truth, making me His child, adopting me into His family, and setting me before Him in such a way as that I can enjoy communion with Him as my Father, in the midst of all the tender endearments of the divine family circle. This is, obviously, another phase of the believer's position and character. It is no longer a question of his coming to God in the full and settled consciousness that every just claim has been met; This, in itself, is ineffably precious to every sin-burdened heart. But there is far more than this. God is my Father, and I am His child. He has a Father's heart, and I can count on the tender affections of that heart in the midst of all my feebleness and need. He loves me, not because of what I am enabled to do, but because I am His child.

Look at yonder tottering babe, the object of ceaseless care and solicitude, wholly unable to promote his father's interests in any one way, yet so loved by the father that he would not exchange him for ten thousand worlds; and if it be thus with an earthly father, what must it be with our heavenly Father? He loves us, not for ought that we are able to do, but because we are His children. He has begotten us, of His own will, by the word of truth. (James 1: 18) We could no more earn a place in the heart of the Father than we could satisfy the claims of the righteous Judge. All is of free grace. The

Father has begotten us; and the Judge has found a ransom. (Job 33: 24) We are debtors to grace for both the one and the other.

But, be it remembered, while we are wholly unable to earn, by our works, a place in the Father's heart, or to satisfy the claims of the righteous Judge, we are, nevertheless, responsible to "believe the record which God has given of His Son." (1 John 5: 9-11) I say this, lest by any means, my reader should be one of those who entrench themselves behind the dogmas of a one sided theology, while refusing to believe the plain testimony of God. Many there are — intelligent people, too — who, when the gospel of the grace of God is pressed upon their acceptance, are ready to reply, "I cannot believe unless God gives me power to do so; nor shall I ever be endowed with that power unless I am one of the elect. If I belong to the favoured number I *must* be saved — if not I *can't*."

This is a thoroughly one-sided theology; and not only so, but its one side is turned the wrong way; yea, it is so turned as to wear the form of an absurd but most dangerous fatalism, which completely destroys man's responsibility, and casts dishonour upon God's moral administration. It sends man forth upon a wild career of reckless folly, and makes God the author of the sinner's unbelief. This is, in good truth, to add insult to injury. It is, first, to make God a liar, and then charge Him with being the cause of it. It is to reject His proffered love, and blame Him for the rejection. This is, indeed, the most daring wickedness, though based, as I have said, upon a one-sided theology.

Now, does any one imagine that an argument so flimsy will hold good, for a single moment, in the presence of the king of terrors, or before the judgment seat of Christ? Is there a soul throughout the gloomy regions of the lost that would ever think of charging God with being the author of its eternal perdition? Ah! no; it is only upon earth that people argue thus. Such arguments are never breathed in hell. When men go to hell they blame themselves. In heaven they praise the Lamb. All who are lost will have to thank *self*; all who are saved will have to thank *God*. It is when the impenitent soul has passed through the narrow archway of time into the boundless ocean of eternity, that it will enter into the full depth and power of those solemn words,

"I would, but ye would not."

In truth, human responsibility is as distinctly taught in the word of God as is divine sovereignty. Man finds it impossible to frame a system of divinity which will give each truth its proper place; but he is not called upon to frame systems, but to believe a plain record, and be saved thereby.

Having said thus much by way of caution, to any who may be in danger of falling under the power of the above line of argument, I shall proceed to unfold a little further the results of regeneration, as seen in the matter of the discipline of the Father's house.

As the children of God, we are admitted to all the privileges of His house, and, in point of fact, the discipline of the house is as much a privilege as anything else. It is on the ground of the relationship in which God has set us, that He acts in discipline towards us. A father disciplines his children because they are his. If I see a strange child doing wrong, I am not called upon to chasten him. I am not in the relationship of a father to him, and, as a consequence, I neither know the affections nor the responsibilities of that relationship. I must be in a relationship in order to know the affections which belong to it. Now, as our Father, God, in His great grace and faithfulness, looks after us in all our ways; He will not suffer ought upon us, or about us, which would be unworthy of Him, and subversive of our real peace and blessedness. " Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. 12: 9, 10) Thus the discipline is a positive privilege, inasmuch as it is a

proof of our Father's care, and has for its object our participation in the divine holiness.

But, then, we must ever bear in mind that the discipline of our Father's hand is to be interpreted in the light of our Father's countenance, and the deep mysteries of His moral government to be contemplated through the medium of His tender love. If we lose sight of this, we shall be sure to get into a spirit of bondage as respects ourselves, and a spirit of judgment as respects others, both of which are in direct opposition to the spirit of Christ. All our Father's dealings with us are in perfect love. When He furnishes us with bread, it is in love, and when He takes down the rod, it is in love also. "*God is love.*" It may frequently happen that we are at a loss to know the why and the wherefore of some special dispensation of our Father's hand. It seems dark and inexplicable. The mist, which enwraps our spirits, is so thick and heavy as to prevent our catching the bright and cheering beams from our Father's countenance. This is a trying moment — a solemn crisis in the soul's history. We are in great danger of losing the sense of divine love, through inability to understand the profound secrets of divine government. Satan, too, is sure to be busy at such a time. He will ply his fiery darts, and throw in his dark and diabolical suggestions. Thus, between the filthy reasonings which spring up within, and the horrible suggestions which come from without, the soul is in danger of losing its balance, and of getting away from the precious attitude of artless repose in divine love, let the divine government be what it may.

Thus much, with reference to our own souls, while under any special visitation of the hand of God. The effect as to others is equally bad. How often may we have detected ourselves in the habit of cherishing a spirit of judgment, in reference to a child of God whom we found in circumstances of trial, either of "mind, body, or estate." This should be carefully guarded against. We ought not to imagine that every visitation of the hand of God must necessarily be on account of some special sin in the person. This would be an entirely false principle. The dealings of God are preventive as well as corrective.

Take a case in point. My child may be in the room with me enjoying all the sweet intimacies which belong to our relationship. A person enters who I know will utter things which I do not wish my child to hear. I, therefore, without assigning any reason, tell my child to go to his room. Now, if he has not the fullest confidence in my love, he may entertain all manner of false notions about my act. He may reason about the why and wherefore to such a degree as almost to question my affection. However, directly the visitor takes his leave, I call the child into my presence and explain the whole matter to him; and, in the renewed experience of a father's love, he gets rid of the unhappy suspicions of a few dark moments.

Thus it is often with our poor hearts, in the matter of the divine dealings both with ourselves and others. We reason when we ought to repose: we doubt when we ought to depend. Confidence in our Father's love is the true corrective in all things.

We should ever hold fast the assurance of that changeless, infinite, and everlasting love which has taken us up in our low and lost estate, made us "sons of God," and will never fail us, never let us go, until we enter upon the unbroken and eternal communion of our Father's house above. May that love dwell more abundantly in our hearts, that so we may enter more fully into the meaning and power of regeneration — what it is — how it is produced — and what are its results. God grant it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

C. H. M.