1 John 3:9 (John Thomas Mawson) 174974

Answers to Correspondents, He Cannot Sin (3:9)

H. C. K. The passage you find it difficult to understand runs in the A.V. as follows: “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.”

A more correct rendering of the words “doth not commit sin” reads “does not practice sin” (J. N. Darby’s New Translation), and the change makes more clear the great truth stated: that is, that the practice of the child of God is not sin. He has been born of God, and in consequence his nature is to love what God loves, and hate what God hates.

This Scripture moreover views the child of God abstractly as such, and hence the statement “he cannot sin”: he revolts from it as foreign to his nature, somewhat as Joseph in the words “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” It is not that he may not unguardedly be betrayed into sin, inasmuch as he still has in him the flesh with its sinful tendencies, but that is abnormal, and a grief to the child of God: he does not practice sin, it is not his deliberate choice, it is not what marks his manner of life.

A sheep does not wallow in the mire, a sow does (2 Pet. 2:22): in the figure the children of God answer to the sheep, and the children of the devil (1 John 3:10) to the swine.: nevertheless though a sheep does not wallow in the mire, that being contrary to its nature, it may fall in; but if so, is distressed, and seeks to get out again, just as the Christian who has been betrayed into sin is distressed and grieved, and seeks restoration.

We hope these remarks will make clear to you what has been a difficulty.

Several answers to correspondents must be held over until our January issue owing to lack of space.

Our thanks are due to those correspondents who have kindly called our attention to the fact that G. V. Wigram’s hymn, inserted last month as “hitherto unpublished,” appeared some years ago in at least two collections.