Mark 7:21-23 (Cyrus Ingerson Scofield) 122098

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Believer’s Two Natures (7:21-23)

The Scriptures teach that every regenerate person is the possessor of two natures: one, received by natural birth, which is hopelessly bad; and a new nature, received through the new birth, which is the nature of God Himself, and therefore wholly good. The following Scriptures will sufficiently manifest what God thinks of the old, or Adamic nature:

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

"There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10-12).

God does not say that the unregenerate are not refined or cultured, or able, or sweet tempered, or generous, or charitable, or even religious. But He does say that none are righteous, none understand God, none seek after God. It is one of the sorest of faith's trials to accept the divine estimate of human nature; to realize that our genial and moral friends are utter despisers of God's rights, and untouched by the sacrifice of His Son, whose divinity they deny, and whose Word they reject (1 John 1:10;5:10). This difficulty is vastly increased by the current praise of humanity from the pulpit.

How startling the contrast between appearance and reality in the time before the flood: "There were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men, which were of old, men of renown" (Gen. 6:4).

It appeared that the world was growing better in men's eyes; a continual improvement could be traced, and the apparent result of the unholy intermarriage of the godly with the worldly was the lifting up of human nature to still grander heights. But "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).

"Out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23).

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Cor. 2:14).

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God... they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

The unconverted man may be gifted, friendly, generous and religious. He may be truthful, industrious, a good husband and father—but he has a threefold incapacity: he can neither obey God, please God, nor understand God.

The believer, on the contrary, while still having his old nature unchanged and unchangeable, has received a new nature which "after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The following Scriptures will show the origin and character of the new man: that regeneration is the bringing in of a new thing, not the change of an old. Just as we received human nature by natural generation, so do we receive divine nature by regeneration.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

"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 1:12-13).

It will be observed what bearing these Scriptures have upon that utterly unscriptural phrase, "the universal fatherhood of God, and the universal brotherhood of man"—an expression all the more dangerous for the half-truth of the last clause. Not all who are born, but all who are born again are the children of God.

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

And this "new man" is linked with Christ. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and 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. 2:20).

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4).

"For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11-12).

But this new divine nature, which is Christ's own, subsists in the believer together with the old nature. It is the same Paul who could say, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," who also says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18), and, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21).

Between these two natures there is conflict. Study carefully the battle between the two "I's" the old Saul and the new Paul in Rom. 7:14-25. It is an experience like this which so discourages and perplexes young converts. The first joy of conversion subsides, the walk becomes unwatchful, and the convert is dismayed to find the flesh, with its old habits and desires, reassert itself. This leads him to doubt his acceptance with God. This is a time of great discouragement and danger. In this crisis, Paul cries out for deliverance, calling his old nature a "body of death." The law only intensifies his agony, and he finds deliverance from "flesh," not through effort, nor through striving to keep the law, but "through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom. 7:24-25).

The presence of the flesh is not, however, an excuse for walking in it. We are taught that "our old man is crucified with Christ." In that sense, we "are dead" and we are called upon to make this constant experience by mortifying ("making dead") our members.

The power for this is that of the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer (1 Cor. 6:19), and whose blessed office is to subdue the flesh. "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:16-17).

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). Therefore, instead of meeting the solicitations of the old nature by force of will, or by good resolutions, turn the conflict over to the indwelling Spirit of God.

Rom. 7 is a record of the conflict of the regenerate man with his old self, and is, therefore, intensely personal. In Rom. 8 the conflict still goes on, but how blessedly impersonal! There is no agony, for Paul is no longer a part of it; the conflict is now between the "flesh" (Saul of Tarsus) and the Holy Spirit. Paul is at peace and victorious. Consider the following passages:

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

"Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11).

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14).

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