



SELF-OCCUPATION :

ITS CAUSE AND CURE.

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THAT there are more believers distressed and disappointed with themselves than we know or possibly think, is evident to those who have to do with souls personally. Sometimes disclosures are made which bear witness to this.

It is not so much a question of sins, especially past sins, as people speak, that is the root of the mischief—though at times we do meet with those not clear about the sins they have committed since they were converted—it is rather a sort of chronic self-occupation.

Many are cast down and perplexed

because of what they find working in themselves — evil thoughts and lusts. When they try to do good, and are quite sincere in the effort, they find the power of evil assaulting them, so forcibly described by two verses, “When I would do good, evil is present with me”; “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” Though they may appear happy in meetings where everything is fervent and glowing, and thus favourable, yet in their quiet moments they are often unhappy and perplexed.

Indeed, if the truth were known and told it would be found that much of the religious zeal abroad to-day is begotten of hearts not at rest in God's presence. They do not find their home there. Work, work, work, is too often in many quarters

the order of the day. It is a bad sign when people work to make themselves happy. If they work because they are truly happy in the Lord, and their work is the fruit of communion with Him, then all is right. Such work is most acceptable to God, because it is all the fruit of His grace working in us.

Their cry is not, Oh, what a great sinner I have been! but, Oh, what a wretch I am! Like one who told me that she had had a dream, and in her dream thought she saw herself in a coffin a mass of corruption, which well-nigh horrified and drove her to despair, though she had been converted for over fourteen years. I have not the least doubt that Satan who delights in troubling sincere souls, especially those not established in the truth, takes advantage of such and does his utmost to upset them.

Occupation with one person is the cause of all the trouble, and that the wrong man—really self. That man God totally abandoned long ago. After four thousand years of the most careful culture, man proved a total failure in every way, so God said, as it were, I give him up as a bad case; I will *end* that man.

As an illustration of this: not long since I met a friend who had known the Lord for thirty years, and he said to me, "Is it not wonderful the power the devil has over us at times? I seem to be as low down as I can be." He was like many others, looking inside himself for a clean heart and perfect love. He was really seeking to be made perfect in the flesh. Knowing that the system he was connected with was a system where man in the flesh was cultivated and exalted, I perceived at once where he was.

I said to him, "Did you ever think of 2 Corinthians xii., where Paul tells us, 'I know a *man in Christ*, about fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth), *such an one* caught up to the third heaven. . . . *Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities*?'"

You observe that in these verses Paul views himself as a completely new creation in Christ. There is a new man formed which he distinctly contrasts with himself (old Saul, if you please). As such he was caught up to the third heaven, which was the immediate presence of God, and heard wonderful things that mortal man could not utter. "*Of such an one will I glory,*" that is, of the new man in Christ; but of himself, old Saul, as a man in the flesh he would not glory. I drew attention to the

marked distinction he makes between the man in Christ and himself. He could glory in what God had made him in Christ, but he could not glory in himself. He had evidently dropped himself altogether as a bad case, except indeed it was to boast or take pleasure in his infirmities. He gloried in what a man in the flesh would rather conceal—his weaknesses.

I also called his attention to the words God put into the mouth of the wicked Balaam when hired by Balak to curse the people of Israel. "He hath not beheld iniquity *in* Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness *in* Israel." How could a holy, righteous God use such language, consistently with what He is in holiness and righteousness, if He had not viewed the people in and through another?

Moses said to the same people, "Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew

you," which was quite true. One has only to read their history to see the truth of such a plain statement. Yet you see when the enemy would bring a charge against them God becomes their justifier. All that they were in themselves and their poor failing history was covered, and God becomes at once their defender. Why? Because the serpent of brass having been lifted up, He looks at them from the top of the rocks. He views them in the light of His own purpose.

If we look at ourselves as in the flesh we shall not find ourselves one bit better notwithstanding all the light that God has given us. The flesh is still in us though we are not in the flesh before God. Their wilderness history, with all its murmuring and complaining, is a true photograph of our own. If we have learned ourselves, and judged our failing

history aright, we shall surely say so. But that does not alter God's eternal purpose with regard to us in Christ Jesus our Lord, "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." Our state down here is one thing, and what God has made us in Christ is quite another. "He hath made us accepted in the beloved." Nothing can add to or take from such a statement. This is not a matter of attainment. Far otherwise. It is true of the weakest as well as the most advanced, the youngest as well as the eldest. It is all a matter of divine grace, which depends not on what we are or on what we have done. Of course every one's enjoyment is not alike. We only enjoy it as we enter into it by faith in the power of the Spirit.

Where souls are deluded is that they are looking for title and

fitness in themselves. If they are happy they think that they must be more acceptable to God; if they are unhappy they conclude they must be altogether out of His favour. The finished work of Christ is the believer's title, and Christ Himself is his fitness. He is the best robe that fits us for the Father's house. God has made Him everything to us. "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Think of Christ being our wisdom! If He is our wisdom we do not want the wisdom of man. Think of Christ being our righteousness! If so we have no need to patch up the flesh, which is only human righteousness at the best. Think of Christ being our sanctification (holiness)! If so we never can attain to, nor do we want anything higher or holier than He. Think of Christ being our

redemption! If so we have, as the children of Israel had when they crossed the Red Sea, complete deliverance from the whole power of Satan as an oppressor. Redemption sets us free from the bondage and thralldom of Satan's power.

The poor bewitched Galatians went back from the liberty of the Spirit, and put themselves under the bondage of law where many are to-day; they had begun in the Spirit, but were seeking to be made perfect in the flesh. So Paul says to them after strongly condemning their declension, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

All teaching that makes anything of man in the flesh is most hurtful, and does frightful damage to the growth and spiritual progress of souls. Where could we find saints

in a worse moral condition than the assembly of God at Corinth? Paul says, "Ye have reigned as kings without us," which was significant of the worldly state into which they had fallen. They were not following in the footsteps of a rejected Christ, or they would not have enthroned themselves in this world. He also says, "Ye are yet carnal" (fleshly): evidence of their low moral condition. There was envying and strife and divisions, which shewed that the flesh was working and that they were not under the influence and control of God's Spirit. They were so insensible to the holiness of God's house, that drunkenness was not uncommon among them. They were suing each other at the world's law courts, and glorying and puffed up in the flesh when they ought to have been humbled and broken-hearted on account of licentiousness in their

midst. Yet Paul does not unchristianize them, he does not treat them as the world, and say that they needed to be converted over again.

He begins his letter by addressing them as God's assembly, or dwelling-place, and as sanctified or set apart in Christ Jesus. What grace! Yet this does not lead him in the least to wink at or pass over their sins. On the contrary, he uses it all to deal with their consciences, that he might awaken them to a sense of their responsibility, and thus help them to clear themselves of all that was inconsistent with what divine grace had wrought for them. Looked at as the assembly of God and as sanctified in Christ Jesus, they were unleavened. Therefore they were exhorted to put away from their midst the leaven of malice and wickedness. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new

lump, *even as ye are unleavened*. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."

All self-occupation is bad unless indeed to judge, repudiate, and abhor oneself. This can only be effected by the power of God's grace in the light of His presence. The evidence that it has been produced is that we cease to talk any more about self, good or bad. All Job's sufferings did not produce the least self-judgment in him. It was only when he was brought into the light of God's presence that he exclaimed, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

A deceased but well-known teacher used to say, "If you look *within*, you will be miserable; if you look *around*, you will be distracted; if you look *above*, all is bright and beautiful." Christ is now above, and He fills the whole scene with brightness and

glory. He is there to the full joy and satisfaction of the Father's heart. All the delight of God is centred in Him now as man because of what He has accomplished and what He is. The measure of God's delight and satisfaction in Him is the same toward those who are His.

Paul addresses the saints at Rome as "BELOVED of God." In Colossians he uses the same terms in speaking of the saints as of Christ, "Elect of God, holy and beloved." Wonderful grace! If we were more simple and believing, and like Stephen filled with the Holy Ghost, all the brightness and glory of that scene would be brought into our hearts and thus we should triumph as he did over every contrary element P. W.