

Flesh and Faith: Their Energies from the First.

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Gen. 3, 4, 5

These are very important chapters. They show us the production of the two great energies which, to this day, animate the whole moral scene around us; and also show 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 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 immediately 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 is it 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 with 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 26. 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 were 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 rule "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 it 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 word of the gospel, 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 at once he 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 everything 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 world 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 elect, and displays its power very blessedly. We learn our own 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. 5: 24).

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