

Reading: 1 John 1:1-10

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 Jn 1:8)

An oft-quoted Bible verse in Christian discipleship programmes is 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!” But the new disciple soon finds out that at least in his case this Scripture is not experienced. He wonders why. He dares not ask others about it. He struggles within himself, sometimes even for years, without finding a satisfactory explanation. He worries whether he is the lonely struggler. If no one gives him a clear teaching on this subject, he settles down for the status quo and even thinks that such promises in the Bible are applicable only to deluxe editions of Christians. May be, dear reader, you are in such a condition. The total change promised in this text seems to be out of your reach. You are however constantly bothered by the question, When will I ever change?

Spiritual rebirth through faith in Christ does not make us unable to sin. If sinning becomes an impossibility, there was no need for the writers of the New Testament epistles to call the readers not to entertain anger, jealousy, immorality, covetousness and the like. The recipients of these letters were actually believers, called to be saints (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; etc.) Think of the condition of the Corinthian Christians! Sinless perfection is not at all promised during our earthly sojourn. On the other hand, the Scriptures emphatically state, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” and “We all stumble in many things” (1 Jn 1:8; Js 3:2a).

Change of character is a process. It begins with the crisis experience of rebirth. We must not be slack or passive but be patient. Jesus said, “In your patience possess your souls” (Lk 21:19). We must resist the temptation to give up. It’s always too early to quit. It was easier for the Israelites to get out of Egypt than to get Egypt out of them! To develop a distaste for the Egyptian onions and garlic was not easy (Num 11:5). They had to struggle. So also in Christian life we don’t grow from babyhood to adulthood overnight. Having tasted the mercy of God and the milk of His Word, we must take conscious and consistent effort to develop a dislike for all malice (1 Pet 2:1-3).

More about Jesus let me learn,

More of His holy will discern;

Spirit of God my Teacher be,

Showing the things of Christ to me!

(Miss Eliza E. Hewitt, 1851-1920,

an invalid for a long time and a friend of Fanny Crosby)

Our Father who is in Heaven,

We worship You as the God of Patience. We worship You as the God of Peace. We worship You as the God of Grace and Truth. But for Your patience, we all would have perished long long ago. We thank You for chiding us in Your patience. We thank You for chastising us in Your patience. We thank You for correcting us in Your patience. We thank You for not giving up on us. As a Potter, You are remoulding us any number of times until we take the shape You desire. As a Refiner, You are cleansing us again and again until we partake of Your holiness. Thank You, O God, for this non-stop work on us.

Gracious Lord, we come to You with our repeated failures. Sorry, Lord, we are angering You again and again. Our self-dependence takes us nowhere. Our self-righteousness makes us more and more miserable. Our self-efforts don't carry us far enough. We come to You again for cleansing by the blood of Your Son. We come to You again for the power of Your Holy Spirit. We come to You again for strengthening us through Your Word. Forgive us our incomplete surrender. Forgive us our selective obedience. Forgive us for indulging in questionable things. Forgive us for avoiding Your light and walking in gray areas. Forgive us for mistaking Your patience and grace.

Father God, we thank You for Your promise to heal our backsliding when we return to You. We decide today that we would fill ourselves with your Word so we would be able to say no to sin. We decide that we would endeavour to walk like Jesus and not copy the world. We decide that we would depend on the Holy Spirit to overcome lusts. We decide that we would not neglect the fellowship of Your children lest we succumb to the deceitfulness of sin. We decide that we would become accountable to our Shepherds. We decide that we would sever our links with those who entice us into the sinful ways of the world. Search us, O God, and lead us in the paths of righteousness.

Dear Lord, order our steps so we may not slide. Give us sensitive ears to listen to the voice of Your Spirit when we turn to the left or to the right. Thank You for Your promise to lead us by keeping Your eyes on us and holding our hands. Help us, O Lord, to go from victory unto victory, and from holiness unto holiness. Let our path become brighter and brighter towards the noonlight. Help us turn a deaf ear to the devil when he discourages us if we fall. Let us arise from the dust and walk again with You jubilantly. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

*(Psa 23:3; 32:8; 103:8; 139:23,24; Dt 32:4; Lam 3:22; Jer 18:4; 2 Tim 2:20,21;
2 Pet 1:3,4; Isa 30:21; 52:1,2; 64:6; 1 Jn 1:7; 2:6; 1 Thess 5:21; Hos 14:1,2;
Gal 5:16-18; Heb 3:12,13; 1 Pet 2:25; Prov 4:18; Eph 5:14)*