Article

• The chastening of the Lord
The chastening of the Lord

Most of us have frequently heard the Word of God speaking about the two natures that we have after the new birth. The Bible speaks of them in many places, calling the old one as old man or flesh and the new one as new or inner man or spirit\(^1\). In addition, it also informs us of the ceaseless fight that there is between them. Really, in Galatians 5:17 we read:

Galatians 5:17

"For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you would"

[NKJV-KJV]

Also Romans 7:21-23 tells us:

"I find then a law that when I would - do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But 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."

When we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his resurrection from the dead (Romans 10:9), our old man did not stop to exist. Instead, he got a competitor: the new man. Paul in the above does not just describe the existence of the two natures but also the fight between them, as I believe we all know it: to know the good but when the old man is in charge, to find a wall in you that blocks you from doing it.

The mind of Christ

As long as the old man is in charge we cannot be useful to God. While He wants us servants, we want to be bosses. We do works in His name but, despite the fact that they may have a «spiritual» cover, it is WE that lead them and they are of our own self.

\(^1\)Where the word «spirit» is put in contrast with the word «flesh».
On the contrary, the true spiritual works are works that GOD PREPARED for us to walk in them (Ephesians 2:10), and in which HE IS THE LEADER. He does not ask us to DO our own thing, to prepare our own way, but rather to be subjected and walk in the way HE HAS ALREADY PREPARED. Unfortunately, while we easily understand the rough expressions of the flesh, we miss the parts that have a «spiritual» cover. Yet, the truth is that it is impossible for us to do any spiritual work by our own power and self. As Christ himself said:

John 5:30
«I can of myself do nothing»

And Paul tells us:
Romans 7:18
«For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells»

and II Corinthians 3:5
«Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God»

also I Corinthians 15:10
«But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me»

and Galatians 2:20
«I have been crucified with Christ; it is not longer that I who live, but Christ lives in me»

The question really is: who lives in us? The old man or CHRIST? Who does the work? The old man or CHRIST? Who do we manifest in our fellowship with each other and with the other men? The old man or CHRIST? We are not asked to do works that
look spiritual, BUT ARE TRULY SPIRITUAL. We are not asked to pretend to be men of the spirit, BUT TO TRULY BE MEN OF THE SPIRIT. As the Lord said in Luke 14:

Luke 14:26-27, 33
"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life, HE CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE……… whoever of you DOES NOT FORSAKE ALL THAT HE HAS CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE"

What do we consider as «ours», as our «rights»? It may be our job, our family or the right to have a family, our health, or the right to be healthy. Is it bad to have a family? Is it bad to have a job? No. What is bad is to be attached so much to those «rights», that to deny to surrender them in the hands of God. It is bad to fight for them, instead of trusting God for them. As long as we consider ourselves as having belongings, «rights» that have not been surrendered to God to do to them whatever He wants, we will not be disciples of Christ. This «right» that was not satisfied when we wanted and as we wanted, that promise that it had to be fulfilled when and as we wanted will come before us as a wall - till we put it on His throne, till we resign of it and say «Lord do to this whatever you want. You know». As long as we have not emptied ourselves casting all our care, all the affairs of this life, on the Lord, the old man will have space to come forward and claim a place in our heart. As the Word says:

Philippians 2:5-11
"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, BUT MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION, [Greek: «emptied himself»] TAKING THE FORM OF A BONDservant, AND BECOMING IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND IN APPEARANCE AS A MAN HE HUMBLED HIMSELF AND BECAME OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS. Therefore God also highly exalted him and given him the name which is above
The Word tells us to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. What was this mind? It was the mind that lead him to the cross. It was the mind of self-denial and full subjection to the will of God, even when this will was death. It was a «not as I will but as YOU will» (Matthew 26:39) mind. Only when we empty ourselves we will be useful to HIM. Only when we empty ourselves, what will come out of us will not be Tassos, John or Jim but CHRIST in Tassos, John and Jim. Otherwise the new man will indeed be in us but he will not be able to be expressed, being imprisoned by the old man that is in charge. We will know the will of God but when we will try to do it, a wall will be blocking our way.

2. The chastening of the Lord

The old man is the greatest obstacle to the purposes of God. We are not going to be the men that He wants us to be as long as the old man is in control. He is not pleased by the proud hearts but by the CONTRITE HEARTS. He is not pleased by the high minded but by the humbly - minded. He does not want men that are «able», but men that are UNABLE to become HE, that is ABLE, their power. As He said to Paul:

II Corinthians 12:9-10
«My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.» Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me»

It is the weak, the humble and the contrite ones those with whom God is able to communicate. As He says in Isaiah 57:15
Isaiah 57:15

«For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones»

And again in Ezekiel 6:9 speaking to the Israelites:

Ezekiel 6:9

«then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they shall be carried captive, when I have broken their whorish heart which has departed from me, and their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; and they will loath themselves for the evils which they have committed, in all their abominations.»

(RSV -KJV)

When the old man is high and mighty, when our flesh is untouched, we are not, «not I but Christ» as Paul was, but rather «not Christ but I». Even the work He may have committed to us, becomes a mean for the satisfaction of the sinful secret lusts of the old man: power, dominion, authority, status. Instead of hiding ourselves as Christ did after a miracle, we haste to make ourselves known, to go to the front positions, to be admitted by the others. Thus the work is not done for and from God, but rather for personal

2 In the Greek text I used when I first wrote this article, the translation of the phrase «I have broken their whorish heart» was along the lines of the RSV(Revised Standard Version) I give above. However, when I checked the KJV I found that its translation was «I was broken by their whorish hearts» i.e. God was in the passive. A better examination showed that the Aramaic, Syrian and Vulgate translate this phrase as RSV. According to the Online Bible, the same also happens with Durby's translation though in the margin it also translate it the other way around. This also happens in the normal text by the KJV, the ASV, the NIV, to refer some well known versions. Probably this is because, according to the Online Bible, the form of the verb that is used here can be translated both in the passive form («I have been broken»), as well as in the active form («I have broken»). Both ways make sense, and I'm not going to argue against or in favor of either of them. If you read the context of Ezekiel 6:9 (chapters 5 and 6) you will see God in the active, breaking. If you also read other parts of the Word you will see God broken and sorrowful by the wrong in the heart of His people (Isaiah 63:10).
purposes. Our heart is ill and against the Lord though we may speak using «Christian» words. It is a hard and stony heart THAT NEEDS HEALING, THAT NEEDS CRASHING. And this will do the fatherly hand of the Lord. As with the Israelites in the above passage of Ezekiel, the Father will stretch His hand to crash our stony heart and the old man that reigns in it. After the crash, we will remember Him as they did. When He brings into light our true self, when we loathe ourselves for the apathy, the tolerance towards sin, and the way we used to think, WE WILL COME NEAR TO HIM. In the pain of crashing He will come to meet us, for He speaks with the contrite in the heart. Then, we will return to Him and say, «I can't do anything Lord by my own self. I don't want even to look at what I did.» However let's not have false expectations. Every crash brings pain. And the crash of the old man brings pain and is done through pain. Here is the chastening of the Lord that, though it is initially painful, really how could we live without it? In Hebrews 12:4-11 we read:

Hebrews 12:4-11
"You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons: "My son, DO NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what sons is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He FOR OUR PROFIT, THAT WE MAY BE PARTAKERS OF HIS HOLINESS. NOW NO CHASTENING SEEMS TO BE JOYFUL FOR THE PRESENT, BUT PAINFUL; NEVER THELESS, AFTERWARD IT YIELDS THE PEACEABLE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED BY IT"
Many of us reject any pain as coming from the independent action of the devil. Thus we also reject the pain of the chastening of the Lord. But really, if any pain comes independently from the devil, then where is the chastening of the Lord that is painful? We admit the pain we cause to our children chastening them, but we reject it when it comes to the Lord and our own chastening. However, the truth is that pain is not always a negative thing. A surgery also causes pain. A knife is cutting your flesh, a wound is created and blood is running. However it is done for your good, and in the case of our heart, it is done by the tender hand of the Father who cuts us taking away the scrap. Of course we will pain. Of course we will sorrow. Of course we will cry. But as the Word says:

Proverbs 20:30
«Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart»

and Hebrews 12:11
«Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it»

After the initial sorrow, joy is born. The joy of health. That fever that terrified you is no longer there. That gap, the apathy and the inability to express Christ, has gone with the cleansing of the Lord. As Christ «though he was a Son, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered» (Hebrews 5:8), so also we learn obedience by the things we suffer. Let's not therefore disgust all the things we have suffered as works of the devil, as something «out of what is considered as normal in Christian life». Chastening and the initial pain it implies IS normal in Christian life, and though it is initially painful it is used by the Father to make us the men that HE wants us to be.
3. The paradox of exaltation

It is difficult, we do not like to speak for crash, sorrow, chastening, persecution, humility. We prefer to speak ONLY for blessings, power, glory, exaltation, knowledge. We seek the blessings, and of course the material ones. WE HAVE ALL THE SPIRITUAL ONES (Ephesians 1:3), but it seems that we do not care that much. We count our faith and the faith of others from the material blessings they have. If something bad happens, if they delay, then we are responsible, we do not have.....much faith, it is a .....secret old sin etc. We read for Paul's persecutions, for Steven's stoning, for James' execution but we try to forget them. We bypass them quickly with such excuses as «such things do not happen today» or even more extreme ones as ..... «these people didn't hear God»!!!! We cannot imagine that some could die for Christ. Probably because we can't. How to leave our blessings? Our home, our TV, our fireplace? The gospel of prosperity does not allow it. Material welfare and Christianity is the same thing for many of us. However, it is not for the Lord. For the Lord, disciple of Christ is he who denies everything for the sake of Christ and follows the Lord wherever He calls him. It is he, who stands having his eyes focused on the Lord and on His hand waiting for His commands. He does not stand before the Creator as before ...... his youngest brother. HE IS THE ALMIGHTY GOD, before whom all should OBEY.

Pakistan, India, Turkey, Iran and the other so-called «closed» countries are not closed because they are muslim. Christianity did not start when people were already Christians! It didn't start in a friendly ground but in a place whose inhabitants had just killed the Lord. In Pakistan, Christianity began, by martyrs like Steven that lose their life for it. Now, does it mean that we should lose our lives as well? Does it mean that we should sell everything, leave our families, and go to preach the Word say in Iran? If the Lord tells it, YES. However, either He tells it or not, we should reckon all as His, and our own selves as naked and empty before Him. This was the mind of Christ that the Word tells us to have. When we are naked and empty before Him, He comes and exalts us, without doing anything from our own part. When we exalt ourselves before Him, He brings us down. When we are humble before Him, He exalts us. In Philippians 2:8-9 we read:
Philippians 2:8-9
"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name"

and Proverbs 18:12
«before honour is humility»

I Peter 5:5-6
"Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time"

Luke 18:29-30
"So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more this present time, and in the age to come eternal life"

The Lord brings exaltation, but this comes only as a result of humility. The cry brings joy. The pain, healing. The Lord will not keep anything that He considers as good for you (Psalms 84:11). Do not be anxious, do not try to do it by yourself. Be still and know that He is God (Psalms 46:10). Tell Him «Lord everything is yours. You know it all. Let it be to me according to your will» and He will bring to your life the best, what HE considers as the best.

Tassos Kioulachoglou