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Partakers of the Divine Nature

by A.J. Gordon

Transfusion

A single grain of truth

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (II Peter 1:4).

Man fell by reaching up after the Divine attributes; he is lifted up by God's reaching down to him and making him a partaker of the Divine nature. "Ye shall be as gods," was the lying promise of the tempter to our first parents, and by listening to this falsehood they were cast down to the level of the beasts. But now God comes with the veritable promise that they shall, through faith, be made god-like, sharers of His nature and conformed to His image. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," is the promise of the gospel. And this means not simply that our natural life shall be prolonged into endless duration; but that we shall be endowed with a supernatural life; that God's own immortal nature and being shall be communicated to us through regeneration.

Does it seem a strange thing that by one act of disobedience sin could come into the world with all its endless consequences of corruption and misery? But God will more than match His adversary. By one act of obedience to the gospel, life now comes back to the fallen soul with all its endless consequences of blessedness and incorruption. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life," says Christ. He has it, that is, the instant he believes, by the new birth from above, by the communication of the Divine nature.

"Verily, verily say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Is passed already, -- not shall pass when the narrow bridge of death is crossed, or the lofty portals of heaven have been entered, but is now delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," -- is in this present world a son of the Highest, and a citizen of heaven. These are the exceeding great and precious promises by which we are made partakers of the Divine nature. One forth-putting of the hand towards "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" grasped eternal death, and spite of tears, and cries, and struggles, that hand has never been able to let go of it; one forth-putting of the hand towards Christ takes eternal life, and spite of sins, and falls, and failures, that life will never let go of us. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

The fallen life of Adam reproduces itself in endless corruption, sin begetting sin, death following on death, and the stream of perverted life having no power to arrest its own flow. The Divine life of Christ in the soul is constantly unfolding in the fruits of righteousness; faith begetting faith, and holiness blooming into holiness until the end. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever." Oh, wondrous mystery! A word of Scripture truth is dropped into the heart and appropriated by a living faith; and henceforth this incorruptible seed is growing and expanding, the Divine more and more mastering the human, when it is powerless to recover itself.

This is God's solution of the problem of evil, and the more I work upon that problem, the more it seems to me to be the only conceivable solution. Humanity has proved itself impossible without divinity. Not only does it fail to rise above itself, but it more and more sinks below itself, unless it is laid hold of and uplifted by the superhuman. God's life alone can save us from falling into Satan's life, which is death.

Transfusion

Science in its highest discoveries is perpetually stumbling on Scripture analogies. Feeling after the secrets of nature, we are startled to find that, though all unconscious of it itself, it has grasped some secret of the gospel, which we can now use to translate and interpret the deep things of grace. Medical skill you know has recently succeeded in curing by "transfusion," as it is called. When a patient's blood has become so impoverished that his case is hopeless, they will open the veins of a healthy body and pour into his circulation some of this strong, rich blood. We may thank science for such a ser

mon preached by the surgeon's art. That is what God has been doing for centuries with our invalid and dying humanity, - restoring it by a Divine transfusion. Through Christ's heart the healing tide has been pouring into our race to recover it from its mortal sickness.

Regeneration is simply the pulse-beat of the eternal life throbbing in human hearts. Redemption, which began in the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, is carried on from age to age by the communication of His life to men through the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Of course the illustration is inadequate, as every such an analogy must be. It is not in this instance human life at its highest ebb helping human life at its lowest; it is the Divine assisting the human; it is God yoking His holy nature up with our fallen, helpless nature, that He may lift it out of its low estate. It is so great a fact -- this communication of God's life to man -- that one has well called it "the miracle of miracles, the sum of all miracles, the standing miracle of the ages."

And do you not see how all this bears on the question of development and spiritual education which are so much commended among us? Development is the unfolding; but there must first be something to unfold. Education is the drawing out; but there must first be something from which to draw. And here is just the difficulty, -- that naturally we lack the root and basis of holiness. Therefore culture, as a substitute for religion, instead of its supplement, is a mockery.

"My nature needs training and nurturing," says one, "just as my garden only needs weeding and hoeing." -- I am quoting the actual words of an objector. -- Yes; but what fruit would you get from your garden if you only weeded and dug it? There must be the seed brought from the granary and cast into the soil, before a harvest is possible. And God teaches us that "the incorruptible seed of the word" must be cast into our hearts before they can bear the fruit of righteousness and true holiness. And, therefore, how practical, how direct, how immediate, is the duty which Christ puts upon us, -- that of receiving the seed of the word by faith. He does not set us to training or pruning ourselves. He does not ask us to let Him train or prune us, first of all. If we make that proposal to Him, he will repel it. "Master, we know thou art a teacher come from God," says Nicodemus. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," is His abrupt reply. It is not education, but regeneration, that you need first. And so how direct and simple our duty is. "Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls." Clear away the stubble of pride and prejudice and self-conceit with which the ground is cumbered, and the underbrush of fruitless culture, if that is there, and into the meek soil of faith receive God's word. This is the process of regeneration. And this must be, before a true and profitable education can begin.

A single grain of truth

It is so wonderful how a strong, holy life will build itself, all silently and unconsciously, out of a single grain of Scripture truth accepted and believed. I have no doubt that to many it seems like a fine-spun theological fancy, this bringing in of a new and Divine life by the belief in a single promise of God. But I am as sure of it as I am of the most unquestionable fact which you can mention; and the history of God's Church bears incontrovertible testimony to the fact. Augustine, Luther, and Bilney were all regenerated by a single word of Scripture; the first from a dissolute life, the others from blind superstitions and agonizing failures in self-help; and their regeneration meant a new age for their respective countries. They were not only new men, but mighty sons of God, who nursed whole empires into the faith of God. And yet they could say, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures."

Incredible! Yes, and how many things are incredible. Search the acorn or the kernel of wheat with your scalpel; peer into its heart with your microscope, and tell me if you can see the stalwart oak or the yellow waving harvest there. And you confess that you cannot. "The words that I speak unto you," says Jesus, "they are spirit and they are life." You cannot see that life; you cannot find that spirit by searching; but it is there. I hold up one of God's exceeding great and precious promises. There are holy saints and faithful missionaries in that text; there are noble lives and great charities and mighty revolutions there. There are heaven and the eternal weight of glory lying in embryo there. So has the Divine come into our fallen race by the simplest of methods, but with infinite consequences of blessing and grace. And this Divine life waxes stronger and stronger within us, subduing our wayward natural impulses, subjecting to itself our turbulent and rebellious passions. Our growth in grace, therefore, is not the mending and improving of the old, but its conquest and subjection by the new, till God becomes all in all within us, as He shall become all in all without us.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again into a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The Redeemer did not attempt to lift up our fallen race by standing outside of it and laying hold of it with an external grasp. He came into it and knit up all the fibres of His life with its flesh and its soul, and when He rose He raised us with Him and as a part of Him. And regeneration is the same process going on forever in the world; the holy nature of God weaving itself into our being, and making us one with the Father and the Son.

And thus we have something within us that tends heavenward by its own law; something that has in itself a Divine buoyancy.

yancy. It is the spirit of Christ in us, lifting us up into union with the personal Christ upon the throne. "My little children, of whom I travail in birth until Christ be formed within you." -- Each heart that opens itself to His entrance becomes a member of Jesus; there the miracle of the incarnation is repeated, there the Holy Ghost again brings God and man into union in the same person, and one who was born from beneath in his human nature is now born from above with a Divine nature. He has Christ in him now as the power for attaining unto the likeness of Christ without him -- a Divine spirit to mould him to the Divine person. As the iron in the blacksmith's blood makes him strong to wield the iron in the bar, so the believer has eternal life within him with which to "lay hold on eternal life," which is set before him.

And now, friends, I offer you this gift of God, which is eternal life. I want you to know its blessed help, to share its exalted privilege, to possess its eternal crown. Why will you die? Nay, why will you remain dead? Christ hath brought life and immortality to light in the gospel. And they are yours now, if you will by your faith and obedient choice deem yourself worthy of them. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Do we sing this exultant strain without a sigh or a tear for those who are still rejecting the adoption of sons? God forbid. With the deepest longing we take up the prophet's question, "How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a goodly land and a pleasant heritage?"