

ACCUSATIONS— THEIR CAUSE AND CURE

R. L. BERRY

Lack of Experience in Spiritual Things

Judging from my own experience and from that of those with whom I have conversed on this subject, I believe that one of the main causes of accusation is a lack of knowledge in spiritual things, or, in other words, that accusations are possible because we do not understand the laws governing our souls in relation to God.

Once we were all in sin, following the course of our depraved nature, thinking little of God, and knowing less of Him. In the course of time we received enough light to reveal to us our lost condition and the need of repentance. Then we forsook sin, turned to God, and received a gracious pardon. But we were indeed new-born babes, not having much more knowledge of spiritual things and of the laws of spiritual development than infants have of the laws of physical life.

The effect of salvation was to place in our hearts an intense dislike for all sin and wrong, and to make us careful of our deportment. But while we immediately broke off sinful habits, we did not at once discontinue such soul-injuring practices as laughing too much, indulging in idle thoughts, allowing the mind to wander, speaking hastily,

using by-words, etc. Taking advantage of this fact, Satan made us believe that something must be wrong about us or else we should have been free from such things.

When I was a new convert, I well remember that when I heard a sermon that disclosed to me some of my lacks, I would experience an almost overwhelming confusion and accusation. If the preacher would say that some people's experiences were not satisfactory and that the best thing for such persons to do would be to throw away their experiences and get new ones, I would tell the Lord about it, reject my experience, and try to obtain a better one. But the one I would receive would be just like the one I had thrown away.

After repeated experiments of this kind, I saw that some other method must be pursued if I was ever to arrive at a plane of constant victory.

As new converts, we were all ignorant concerning temptations, and we were tempted in many ways that we never thought of before. We did not expect that we should have many temptations, or that if we did, they would be such as we were well acquainted with and such therefore as we could easily resist. But lo, a thousand curious forms of temptation seemed to have been invented just on purpose for us. And they were presented with such astonishing force as almost to paralyze our powers of resistance. This was Satan's means of bluffing us out so that we would not fight.

Then we were ignorant of the laws of spiritual growth. Instead of keeping our minds on the Lord, we placed them on ourselves. We watched our growth very carefully. We were like the child who after planting some beans went and

dug them up to see how big they had grown. We were always working at ourselves. In doing so we often dug up, as it were, the seed of the Lord's planting and tried to replant it ourselves so it would grow better.

These various things we shall consider in detail as we proceed.

Our mistakes are a fruitful source of accusation and trouble to us until we learn how to meet them and profit by them. One thing about mistakes – mark this fact – is that everybody makes them. Perhaps we may do and say things of which we are afterwards sorry, and this is the reason why some are greatly accused. Unthinkingly we may give way in small things, such as not being as sober as we should be, or staying away from meeting for some small excuse, etc., and when these are brought to light, we are almost overcome with a feeling of discouragement at our Christian progress.

Mistakes result from force of habit; from lack of experience (not of salvation); from lack of understanding in spiritual things, or in knowledge and wisdom; from former teaching, etc.

Force of habit is a hard thing to overcome. We do not mean sinful habits, for these are broken in conversion, but such habits as we mentioned in a previous paragraph. Take, for instance, persons who are in the habit of laughing at every display of anything humorous. After their conversion they will generally find that it is still easy for them to see the funny side of things and that they can break the habit only by persistent effort and resistance. It is the same with other habits of this nature.

There are habits of mind as well as of body. A person whose thoughts ran in certain sinful ruts until it became

perfectly natural for him to think along those lines will find after his conversion that he must with decided effort change the tenor of his thoughts and cut a new channel through his brain, so to speak, in order that his mind may naturally think on the good and pure. For illustration, take a person ambitious to be well-to-do, or to arise in life by commercial achievement. After his conversion, thoughts of this kind may come trooping through his mind as they did before. This is true of lascivious thoughts, daydreams, thoughts of social honor, etc. These come from force of habit and also because Satan uses them to tempt and try the soul. All these can be overcome by patient resistance and attention to our devotions and spiritual duties.

But right here is where many fail. Instead of going forward and using their mistakes as stepping-stones to higher planes of victory, they get their eyes on their mistakes, their failures, their slowness of spiritual growth, and enter a period of discouragement and accusation that becomes more intensely painful as it progresses.

But God expects us to make mistakes. Hence in His love He has made proper provision for them. Turn to Heb. 12:5, 11, and read it carefully. If we sin, the Father takes us away (John 15:2), but if we make a mistake, he chastens us as sons.

We may be led to testify in a meeting, but as someone else arises just then, we keep our seat. We make a mistake and receive a chastening. Perhaps we are too mirthful and get another; we stay away from meeting and receive still another. If it were not for these chastenings, we should wander far away. One time the Lord anointed me to preach on a certain subject. Afterwards, when at another place, I

was a little negligent about studying, and finally concluded to preach on the subject that I had such liberty in presenting before. The result was a big failure, and for my negligence I received a good chastening from which I profited.

Oversensitiveness

I have given to this chapter the above title because under the preaching of the gospel a fruitful source of accusation and trouble arises from oversensitiveness.

The gospel must be preached radically. It can never be the instrument it should be unless it is preached without compromise. I did not say it must be preached harshly or overbearingly. There are multitudes of people professing to be Christians who can be reached only by gospel preaching that will show the Christian life to be a life free from sin. Again, it is the preacher's place to magnify the grace of God and present themes on how to live on higher planes. And we might say that unless a preacher is able to show us some new attainment in divine things he will fail to do us any good. But while he is doing these things, some dear souls already oppressed by accusation will almost go completely under by simply listening to such preaching. When they see the liberty of the preacher and realize how far short they are of such spiritual attainment, they become more discouraged than ever. They should not, however, be thus influenced. This depression is sometimes caused by their taking to themselves what was probably meant by the Spirit for others.

Here arises one of the problems of preaching, namely, how to get certain teaching to those who need it and yet keep some oversensitive souls from taking it to themselves,

To illustrate: During a series of meetings once the preacher in charge gave an opportunity for testimony before preaching. I testified and ended with a short exhortation. In the sermon following, the minister said that when some people have backslidden and grown cold they exhort the people to get saved. I took that to mean me, and, as a result, I experienced no little trouble. I have known of frequent cases of this kind under my own labors. People would apply to themselves things intended by the Spirit for somebody else.

Another manifestation of oversensitiveness is one's feeling oppressed when in the presence of some of the ministers. If a minister, while preaching, happens to look at such an oversensitive person, the latter is likely to think that what the minister says just then is intended for him, and, in consequence, may experience a great amount of trouble and accusation.

A curious idea prevails, also, that some preachers have wonderful discernment and can "see through" individuals. So it follows that if a minister should happen to look at an oversensitive person, he will imagine that the minister can see all kinds of evil in him. Let me say right here that ministers of God are not trying to see all the evil they can, nor wasting their time in "discerning" people whom they know nothing about.

It is pretty hard to get an oversensitive person to keep from being crushed and accused, for he is likely to take things wrongly. A good cure for oversensitiveness is for the person to realize that he has a better right than anyone else in the world to know himself and his spiritual condition; that no man can act as a mediator for him nor rob him of his individuality in divine things; hence that if he has

forsaken sin and is doing God's will to the best of his ability, then he is saved and that everybody who "discerns" him right will know he is saved. This will give him a feeling of security and will give him liberty when testifying before anyone.

Overconscientiousness

There is one very good principle in every person troubled with accusations and doubts, and that is, they are conscientious to a scruple. They are as conscientious a class of people, I believe, as any on earth, and perhaps a little more so than any other. Their own mistakes cause them great mortification and sorrow, and more pain than do the mistakes of others. As a rule, they watch themselves instead of others, which is a good point in their favor. In short, they are good people.

Their only fault is their intense scrupulousness in small things. A mistake assumes mountainous proportions in their sight, and they are bound by a law stricter than the old traditions of the Pharisees. Most overconscientious people set stakes to which to live. They map out a course for the perfect Christian and endeavor to follow it perfectly, whether able at present to do so or not. They are not patient with themselves. They ignore the law of development and growth and try to be matured all at once. I knew one such person who would not smile nor laugh until he had time to pass a critical judgment on the supposed funny thing, and then if he thought it all right to laugh, he would laugh. If not, he would remain sober. He was trying the impossible.

Overconscientiousness is a cause of accusation, because it leads the mind to question many things and opens an

avenue for Satan to bring in accusations. It also leads a person to lose confidence in himself. To have confidence in one's self, in one's consecration, faith, etc., is just as essential to a life of victory as it is to have confidence in God.

Now, dear soul, be patient with yourself. Do not endeavor to be like some saint that has been on the way many years. Give yourself time to grow. Let the Word be your standard. Do not try to go by any self-appointed standards. Above all, be humble. Humility will help you not to expect too much from yourself and not to be hurt very much at your mistakes. It will help you to have faith in God.

Satanic Influence

There is no doubt about Satanic influence in the matter of accusation. By means of suggestions Satan throws many honest souls into dreadful confusion and trouble, and when he has a sensitive, overconscientious soul to work upon, he makes havoc of that person's peace and happiness.

Satan can present a thousand groundless fears. If he is routed from one false position, he tries another, and continues to work in this harassing manner for days and weeks at a time. He suggests that the preacher knows you are not right, that his sermons are intended for you, that you never will get established, etc., and after your repeated failures or giving way to the accuser he then tells you that you have sinned against the Holy Ghost. Oh, the subtlety of Satan's work along this line! By means of suggestive temptations he causes honest souls to doubt their own motives and to do things that otherwise they would never have thought of doing.

If a person be sorely tempted, Satan says to him, "You are not yet dead to the world or else you would not be so severely tempted." If the temptation assumes some curious form, Satan is sure to suggest, "You must have a very wicked heart or else you would not have such temptations." If one feels pleased when well spoken of, Satan will whisper, "Puffed up." He will cause bad and curious feelings to come over a person and then say that Christians are always happy.

The enemy does not often make his approach with, "I am the devil and am going to make you sin," but takes a more subtle method and tries to wear a person out with evil suggestions, etc. Overconscientious and oversensitive people are the ones whom he usually harasses the most in this manner. To an innocent, pure person Satan may whisper the vilest thoughts and then try to make it appear that these come from within. He will bring to mind all kinds of bad words, evil sayings, funny songs, and sinful acts of the past, and try to convince you that you are still in sin. He will argue you out of your salvation if you let him. He will argue with you all day and do his best to disturb you even in your dreams. Dear soul, resist the devil. Do not argue with him at all. He is too artful a debater for you to talk with. The Bible way is to resist him in faith.

Now the question arises, To what extent does Satan control those whom he accuses? He controls some to a greater extent than others, but none so much that they cannot resist him and compel him to flee. Let us not misunderstand this. I believe there is not a single one who cannot, by God's help, gain complete victory over the devil on these points. Some may receive help through others, but the victory is

gained through personal effort and faith. The way to do is steadfastly to believe and trust God.

A person badly confused and accused has considerable difficulty to find a starting-point. He hardly knows whether or not he is justified, or where he is spiritually. Sometimes he even doubts his own sincerity. These questions must, of course, be settled. You must meet the Bible conditions and then settle it that you are justified, sanctified, or whatever it is that is contested. When you get one point decided, go on to others. Pay no attention to how you feel nor how unreal it seems. Declare you belong to God and stick to it. A feeling of hypocrisy will try to keep you back, but ignore it, and you will soon feel all right.

Our Relationship to God

The relationship that exists between us and God is that of parent and child, intensified by the element of divine love. God is our Father and we are His children. Our Father is a loving Father. "God is love" (1 John 4:16). He pities His children (Psa. 103:13). We are "obedient children" (1 Pet. 1:14). We are "dear children, and walk in love" (Eph. 5:1, 2).

God is infinite, but we are finite, and being finite, we make mistakes. God does not cut us off for our making them, but He does chasten us (Heb. 12:5-11). This He does for our profit. It does not feel pleasant to be chastened, but the results are good if we are rightly exercised in them.

We are told not to faint when we are rebuked of the Lord. For what purpose do you suppose this is written in the scripture? It is the wise provision of a loving Father, so that we shall neither become discouraged nor wander away.

Some people brood over their mistakes a long time and try to ascertain how they occurred. A better way is immediately to tell the Lord all about the mistake, and then instantly to forget about it and go on as if nothing had happened. If we do that, we are not half so likely to make the same mistake again.

We are to be humble children. Humility will help us to tell the Father all about our mistakes and not to grieve over them.

Growth and Experience

It is according neither to nature nor to scripture for us to be full-grown at once. To recognize this will cure a great deal of accusations. We are simply to act naturally. Under accusation we act and feel unnaturally. If you are a new-born babe, you should act just like a babe. If you are a lamb, do not try to act like a sheep. Give yourself time to grow. If anything is peculiarly tempting, avoid it until you have grown stronger.

Faith

Faith is the very foundation of our experience of grace. A person with real, live, active faith cannot be troubled with accusation. Faith is a shield. Faith is that which unites us to God and fills our hearts with that spiritual energy with which to overcome the devil.

Humility is a great aid to faith. The humbler you are, the more active will be your faith. Humility will enable you to put yourself wholly in God's care and keep your own hands off.

After having a very unpleasant experience with accusations, I was engaged in prayer. The Lord stopped me and

made plain to me the uselessness of my praying and then doubting. He gave me to understand that I might as well quit as to go on in that way. I promised God I would believe Him right along all the time. I made a consecration and believed that God accepted it, though I felt nothing at all. It all seemed as hollow as nothing, but I stood by my promise. I believed the Lord kept me. I believed that He controlled me, inside and out, my words, thoughts, feelings, and actions. I absolutely refused to entertain any thoughts that God did not have full and perfect control of me. The result was sweet tranquility, unspeakable joy, and sweeping victory. The devil was so completely defeated that he gave up. In fact, he was compelled to do so.

Patience

I want to emphasize the necessity of patience in one's overcoming the accusations of the devil. It is very doubtful whether any person that once gets into the habit of doubting and letting the devil accuse him, ever gains the victory by one act of faith. I have talked to some accused persons on this point and have found almost all of them expecting to gain victory at one bound. This is practically an impossibility. But why should this be an impossibility? Because, as I stated before, accusations are caused by wrong attitudes and an imperfect understanding of spiritual things, and it takes time to learn these things.

The dear souls who are troubled with doubts and accusations have such an intense desire to be rid of them all, and feel so discouraged and disgusted at their mistakes and failures, that they want to make one consecration so perfectly, and exercise faith so definitely, that they may never be

bothered again. And the very fact that they have been trying their best to overcome these things is why their failure is so extremely discouraging to them, Many times they have thought they had arrived at the proper point, only to find that they again failed to keep victory. Hence I say, you must be patient. Expect to gain perfect victory. Set the star of hope before you – but be patient in your striving to reach it. Quit struggling and straining. Do not expect so much all at once.

One of the first steps toward perfect victory is to get composed. As long as a person is agitated with various feelings and thoughts he cannot progress.

I used to liken accusations to a deep pit. Those troubled with accusations are in the pit and the Lord is at the top. The Lord lets down the rope to pull them out. It matters not how deep the hole is, the Lord has a rope that is long enough to reach them. Now, if they lay hold of the rope, the Lord will attend to the pulling. They must not expect to see the top until they have reached it. If they keep hold of the rope, they find themselves on top after a while. They should not question when or how the Lord will bring them out. He will attend to that. They must quit trying to work themselves out, or if they fail to get out just as quickly as they desired, they must not let go and fall back again. To drop the figure, you who are troubled with doubts and accusations must turn the whole matter over to the Lord. He alone can manage your feelings, trials, temptations. You must believe that everything that comes to you is a part of God's plan to get you to a place of victory. You must believe this whether it seems that way or not. You must just submit all to the Lord and let Him have His way all the time.

But be patient. Your trying to get out all at once of such a bad habit as doubting and letting Satan accuse is not the way. It hinders you. You must learn to believe straight along, so begin now to believe and to trust. Then if the old feeling and doubts come back and through force of habit you yield, do not shed a tear over your failure. Resist these inclinations, and when you come out, forget your failure and look forward to greater victory next time. Then you will soon begin to see through the devil's tricks and one by one you will overcome every one of the giants and reign a real conqueror, with Satan under your feet.

The Exercise of the Will

The will is that faculty of the mind by which we determine either to do or not to do an action; it is the faculty that is exercised in deciding, among two or more objects, which we shall embrace or pursue. The will is the real man – the I.

In the life of perfect peace and victory the will plays a most important part. True religion resides in the will. As long as we entertain the thought that religion or salvation resides in the feelings or emotions, we can never be settled in our experience. When we choose to quit sin and serve God, it is the will that does the choosing; it is not how we feel about it at all. Now, as long as we will to serve God, we can serve Him. And as long as we will all we have over to the Lord, He takes it as His own and cares for it. Nothing can alter this. Our feelings may clamor against it or rebel or be indifferent about it, but if we will ourselves to the Lord, we are His anyway.

Here is where many are dreadfully accused. If they are sensible of a certain duty and their feelings rebel or rise against it, they instantly conclude that they are not consecrated and hence not sanctified. They have not yet learned to ignore their feelings, hold fast through their will, and go ahead and do that which God wishes them to do. You see, it is how our will is, and not how we feel about it, that counts with God.

Which shows the greater fidelity to God – to do His will even contrary to our feelings, or to do it because they impel us? Which is the better developer of character? Some people wait for their feelings to prompt them to do a certain thing and if these do not impel them, then they leave the thing undone.

In the matter of temptations, the will plays an important part, especially when we are tempted to doubt. If doubts come up, we must steadfastly declare we can, we will, we do believe. And if it appears that we have absolutely no faith, but are full of doubt instead, even then we must declare we do believe. It will seem hypocritical to say so, but you must say it and hold the will steady. If you hold steady in your will, you soon will find your emotions harmonizing with your choice of will. The decision of the will is what counts.

“But will it be real if I believe that way?” some may ask. It most assuredly will be real. In fact, that is the only real faith there is.

Feelings are quite variable. Hence any experience built thereon will also be unstable and unsatisfactory. After a person has been accused a while, his feelings are developed to an abnormal degree. He has peculiar and unnatural

feelings. Feelings are like unruly children in a household, but as the firm hand of a matron can bring those children under control, so a firm will can soon reduce feelings to their proper place. Children under control become a source of enjoyment. So do feelings in their proper place.

The will is, as we have said before, that which determines which course we shall pursue. Now, when tempted to doubt, which will you pursue? Will you valiantly determine to believe God, regardless of feeling, or will you allow yourself to believe what Satan says just at that time?

You must see that it is a case of believing God or believing the devil. It is a fight of faith. If your will holds fast and wins the day, you come off more than a conqueror. A few such victories will place you well on the road to perfect victory.

Do not forget that patience is a great help in holding the will steady and that humility also will be a great help to patient faith. It will not be long, dear reader, if you thus hold fast in your will, until your feelings will become natural and will contribute to your enjoyment.

The Difference Between Accusations and the Conviction of the Spirit

The Lord talks to people through the Holy Spirit. He so speaks that we understand. He never overwhelms us with bad feelings to get us to understand. Neither does He crush us and then talk to us. And He does not confuse us nor accuse us. No, a thousand times, no. When the Spirit of God talks to us, there is a sweetness in the communication that encourages, that lifts us up. We may have made some mistake, or we may need to make an advancement. If we have made a mistake, it is plainly shown, not to crush us, but

merely to enable us to see how we should have done, and the Spirit encourages us to do better. If we ought to advance, the Spirit gives us a view of that higher plane and gently leads on.

Even if we fall into sin, the conviction of it is accompanied with encouragement and assurance of pardon. There is a sweetness in God's convictions. His voice does not depress and crush us. God is love. "He knoweth our frame." He pities us. Therefore, listen to His voice. It always comes with tenderness and encouragement.

Dear soul, listen to the voice of the Savior, but heed no longer the voice of the accuser. You have listened to him so long that you find it hard to resist. He tells you that if you do not listen, you will be deceived and lose your soul. You know how it is. When you heed him, he sports with you, and bruises you, and finally leaves you to mourn. Can you not see this? Harken only to the Savior's kind voice. If other voices come, you must fearlessly ignore them. You can get rid of the most insistent accusation that ever presented itself to you if you refuse to listen. Listening is what causes the trouble. If you pay no attention to accusations, they can do you no harm. Do you see? Voices will tell you that you are deceived, that you are a hypocrite, that you are lost and doomed, etc., but give no heed, be patient till the Savior speaks. He will show you all you need to know. He will not allow you to be deceived.

Satan would have you take his false light and investigate the past. He will endeavor to make you think you did not repent of something away back somewhere. You must refuse to investigate. Let the past go under the blood.

How to Detect an Accusation

I am glad there is a way of knowing the accusations of the enemy. If we could not know, then we should be under his power with no prospect of deliverance. An accusation is just what the term implies. The devil is the great accuser. When we once learn how to detect the accusation we have the key that opens the door to victory.

Accusations generally come in two ways. First, some come quietly. The accusing voice will merely suggest to the person that a certain thing which he did was not quite right. If he begins to investigate, however, the suggestion is turned into a positive assertion, and with that assertion comes a wave of discouragement and confusion that almost engulfs him. All kinds of things are now suggested to his mind. One is, "You never will be able to overcome." Another is, "You have doubted, and therefore you are a sinner" and, "Even if the act was not wrong, you have doubted now, and so you are a sinner anyway." He becomes perplexed, confused. If he resorts to prayer for relief, he is reminded as he prays that he had better repent. And thus it goes for days at a time, the poor soul suffering agony under this oppression.

Second, accusations sometimes come like a flood. When a person is apparently getting along well in his soul, suddenly an overwhelming accusation comes on him regarding something he has said or done, perhaps years ago. Confusion, discouragement, and accusation are all mixed together, and the poor soul is prostrated. He now finds it almost impossible to pray. But thanks be to God, there is victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Now, how shall we discern the accusation? Simply by the manner in which it comes. If a suggestion regarding any matter is accompanied with confusion, discouragement, and bad feelings, that suggestion is of the devil. You do not need to give it the least bit of attention. And you must steadfastly refuse to investigate it, or to think about it, or even to pray about it. Tell Satan boldly that the thing came from him, and command him to take it and go, and go quickly. A few decided stands like this will win you the victory. If the thing comes all at once with an overwhelming flood of evil attached to it, treat it the same way. Of course, the suggestion will be made that you will be deceived if you do not investigate the matter, but you must not believe that, but declare it to be one of Satan's lies and there hold fast, keeping your trust in God. If you know in your heart that your will is to do His will, you may rest assured that He will keep and direct you. Fear not.

So put it down, write it in your notebook, get it stamped on your mind that every suggestion, every thought, accompanied by an oppressive, confusing, discouraging power is not of God but is of the enemy and that your only safety lies in your absolutely ignoring it.