

LIVING AN EXCHANGED LIFE

By A W Tozer

A great preacher whom I heard a few years ago said that the word "renew" in Isaiah 40 v31 really meant "exchange"; so the text should read, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength".

Oddly enough I do not now remember how he developed his sermon, nor just how he applied the text, but I have been thinking lately that the man had hit upon a very important idea; namely, that a large part of Christian experience consists of exchanging something worse for something better, a blessed and delightful bargain indeed.

At the foundation of the Christian life lies vicarious atonement, which in essence is a transfer of guilt from the sinner to the Saviour. I well know how vigorously this idea is attacked by non-Christians, but I also know that the wise of this world in their pride often miss the treasures which the simple hearted find on their knees; and I also remember the words of the apostle, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5 v21). This is too plain for anyone to miss who is not willfully blind. Christ by His death on the Cross made it possible for the sinner to exchange his sin for Christ's righteousness. It's that simple. No one is compelled to accept it, but at least that is what it means. And that is only the beginning. Almost everything thereafter is an exchange of the worse for the better. Next after the exchange of sin for righteousness is that of wrath for acceptance. Today the wrath of God abides upon a sinning and impenitent man; to-morrow God's smile rests upon him. He is the same man, but not quite, for he is now a new man in Christ Jesus. By penitence and faith he has exchanged the place of condemnation for the Father's house. He was rejected in himself but is now accepted in the Beloved; and this not by human means but by an act of divine grace.

Then comes the exchange of death for life. Christ died for dead men that they might rise to be living men. Paul's happy if somewhat involved testimony makes this clear: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2 v20).

This is mysterious but not incredible. It is one more example of how the ways of God and the ways of man diverge. Man is a born cobbler. When he wants a thing to be better he goes to work to improve it. He improves cattle by careful breeding; cars and planes by streamlining; health by diet, vitamins and surgery; plants by grafting; people by education. But God will have none of this cobbling. He makes a man better by making him a new man; He imparts a higher order of life and sets to work to destroy the old. Then as suggested in the Isaiah text, the Christian exchanges weakness for strength. I suppose it is not improper to say that God makes His people strong, but we must understand this to mean that they become strong in exact proportion to their weakness, the weakness being their own and the strength God's. "When I am weak, then am I strong" is the way Paul said it, and in so saying, set a pattern for every Christian.

Actually the purest saint at the moment of his greatest strength is as weak as he was before his conversion. What has happened is that he has switched from his little human battery to the infinite power of God. He has quite literally exchanged weakness for strength, but the strength is not his; it flows into him from God as long as he abides in Christ.

A.B.Simpson knew by experience the unavailing struggle to be holy, and he knew also the Bible way to holiness. In a little hymn composed to be spoken at the conclusion of one of his sermons he starts it in this way: "I take Him as my holiness. My spirit's spotless, heavenly dress, I take 'The Lord my righteousness', I take He undertakes." We

have but to abandon the effort to be holy and trust God to do the work within us. He will surely undertake.

There are many other happy exchanges we Christians may make if we will, among them being our ignorance for His knowledge, our folly for His wisdom, our demerit for His merit, our sad mortality for His blessed immortality, and faith for sight at last. (from The Alliance Witness - an old "holiness" magazine.)

"The day of Jesus Christ is the day of resurrection. That is to say, it is an event which cannot take place gradually and which leaves no room for realization in steps. There are no transitions, no approximation, between the two. There is a sharp line of demarcation and all continuity from one to the other by successive states of realization is excluded. This event is one which comes exclusively from God's side and not from ours." (Emil Brunner)

