



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

A Right Conception of Sin

Its Relation to Right Thinking and Right Living

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an excerpt from Chapter 6 *"The Atonement and a Sinning Religion"*

To be superficial in our conception of faith will lead to much superficiality in practical Christian work. Indeed, there is a direct connection between the loose theology we have been discussing and many modern methods of evangelism. Those methods of getting converts which we condemn as inexcusably shallow are but the natural consequences of those insufficient ideas of God's method of dealing with sin in the individual heart. Because many preachers do not realize the importance of the great, supernatural work wrought by God within and upon the nature they of course do not emphasize a thorough repentance, earnest seeking, or make any mention of the witness of the Spirit as being a universal privilege and necessity. Thus their regeneration is an anemic variety, consisting only of that change within the person which makes him willing to become religious; and their conception of conversion becomes a mere matter of acceptance. The chief change which takes place is one's standing before God. The cry is, "Believe! Believe! Your sins were forgiven away back there on the cross; the work is all done, all you need to do is accept it." This is a practical application of the doctrine of "finished salvation," mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

In the light of such a theology their methods of getting people "saved" become at once understandable and consistent. Signing a card, being confirmed, answering some questions before the minister, being publicly baptized, or whatever methods they use for "taking their stand for Christ," are sufficient conditions of becoming a Christian. The candidate has publicly accepted Christ, the Father accepts him and in Christ his standing is now complete; could anything more be necessary? The writer saw a fond father bring his two daughters to the altar one night. He wanted them to "take their stand." But that stand was not to create a scene by tearfully confessing their sins to God, although it was plain they wanted to. He desired that they be asked a few questions, whereas the minister longed to urge them to pray. That night had been planned by that family as the night of "decision" and would be considered the rest of their lives as the time the girls were saved. Had not their father been converted that way?

Here we have a quotation which represents another group, with somewhat different ideas, but in the same general school of thought: "If you wait for some miracle to be performed in you, you will wait forever, and will go to hell. But if you will be baptized and join the church, you will be all right." In such manner do they overlook the radical change of

nature, inwrought by the Holy Ghost, which is God's method of dealing with the sin problem.

But all this is not New Testament regeneration; nor will it produce anything but a spurious and helpless church. For in the first place, as we have already noted, the faith it presents as the sole condition of salvation is not true saving faith. Secondly, woven through its very foundation is the false notion of "finished salvation." It assumes that the work of redemption was completed at Calvary in the sense that nothing more or new needs to be done for each individual. This is a confusion of atonement and pardon. **The fact is**, the atonement did not actually accomplish the forgiveness of sins of a single individual, but simply made possible and justifiable such forgiveness. We were provisionally saved at Calvary, but not actually and personally. The death of Christ was "*an expiation for all men, but an acquittal for none*" (FIELD). When each applicant comes for salvation, something must be done which has never been done before: God, by a free act of His mercy and grace, on the merits of the blood, must pardon that person, accomplish his adoption, to which the Holy Spirit bears witness, and effect by the Spirit the instantaneous change of nature (heart) known as regeneration. And regardless of any amount of intellectual acceptance, the person is not saved until this is done. Now we see the necessity of coming directly to God in prayer, instead of merely to the minister or baptismal font. We see that conversion is not merely a matter of "acceptance" but often may be a matter of earnest seeking. It is not only "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," but also "Whosoever shall *call* upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." It is a "broken and contrite heart" that will not be despised. With this understanding of things it is easy to see the importance of thorough repentance, for we are seeking the favor of the God who said, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts," and who promised, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" and who said also, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy." It also becomes clear why we must emphasize the witness of the Spirit as the privilege of every seeker, for without it how will he know with *joyful* assurance that God has heard his cry and granted him the desire of his heart? It is true we are saved by believing the Word of God, but a proper claiming of His promises will always bring the witness. No one, therefore, should ever rest content until his repentance is so complete, his seeking so definite and earnest, and his faith so deep from the heart that it brings to him the witness of the Spirit that his sins are forgiven and he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

If it be argued that this type of experience is too subjective, that it detracts the attention away from Christ and centers it upon one's own feelings, we answer that the objection shows a very imperfect understanding of the real nature of regeneration. Exactly the opposite is true. The attention is released from self, and like a spring with heavy pressure removed, leaps to its normal position, focused upon Christ. Pure and natural affection to the Lord is not a question of mental concentration but of heart condition. One may have an intellectual knowledge without a saving knowledge of Christ. It cannot be attained by any amount of contemplation of him, either of his deity, his atonement for us, or any of the other doctrines concerning him. Rather, the longer the natural man thinks of Christ the more miserable he becomes, because such contemplation will only reveal to him his own sinfulness and guilt. Before he can emerge from this "slough of despond" he must indeed turn his attention inward. He must repent and pray until the guilt is gone and the chains are severed. Then his heart beats in unison with his Lord's and he thrills with a love he never could have known before. The gratitude felt for Christ's work for *humanity* becomes boundless joy for what Christ has done *for him*. He is not just the world's Redeemer in a vague, impersonal way; he is *his* Saviour. The genius of regeneration is that it makes one's life and affection Christ -conscious and Christ -centered. There fills one's soul an

overwhelming desire to pray to this Christ, to read about him, to sing of him, to praise him, to tell of him, and bring others to saving knowledge of his love. These are the natural, joyous impulses in the heart of the truly regenerate. Such marvelous fruits you will not find on a dead tree.



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