

Church Action is Final

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The independence of a church implies the right of a majority of its members to rule in accordance with the laws of Christ. In 2 Cor. 2:6 it is written: "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." A literal translation of the words rendered "of many" would be "by the more" — that is, by the majority.

If, as has been shown, the governmental power of a church is with the members, it follows that a majority must rule—that is to say, either the majority or the minority must govern. But it is absurd to refer to the rule of the minority. That a majority must rule is so plain a principle of Independency, and so plain a principle of common sense, that it is needless to dwell upon it.

It has been stated on a preceding page that the power of a church cannot be transferred or alienated. From this fact results the finality of church action. The church at Corinth could not transfer her authority to the church at Philippi, nor could the church at Antioch convey her power to the church at Ephesus; nor could all the apostolic churches delegate their power to an Association, a Synod, a Conference, or a Convention.

The power of a church is manifestly inalienable, and, this being true, church action is final. That there is no tribunal higher than that of a church is evident from Matt. 18:15-17:

"Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

Here the Saviour lays down a rule for the settlement of grievances among brethren. If the offender, when told of his fault, does not give satisfaction, the offended party is to

take with him "one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." But if the offender "shall neglect to hear them," what is to be done? "Tell it to the church." What church? The aggregate body of the redeemed? This is equally impossible and absurd.

I ask again, what church? Evidently the local congregation to which the parties belong. If the offender does not hear the church, what then and finally? "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican"—that is, let the offender no longer be held in church-fellowship, but let him occupy the place of "a heathen man and a publican." There is to be

an end to Christian fellowship and association. This idea cannot be more fully emphasized than by the reference to "a heathen man [a Gentile] and a publican," the most unworthy character, in Jewish estimation, to be found among Gentiles.

But can there be no appeal from the action of a single local church to an "Association" or a "Presbytery" or a "Conference"? No; there is no appeal. Shall an Association or a Presbytery or a Conference put the offender back in church-fellowship, when the church by its action classed him with heathens and publicans? This is too preposterous. What kind of fellowship would it be, when the church had declared the excluded member unworthy of its fellowship?

Will it be asked, what is to be done if the action of a church does not give satisfaction to all concerned? I answer — do what is done when the action of a Presbyterian General Assembly or a Methodist General Conference or an Episcopal General Convention does not give satisfaction. Do nothing. There must be a stopping-place; there must be final action. Baptists say, with the New Testament before them, that the action of each local congregation of baptized believers is final.

(The above reasoning takes it for granted that the excluded member is justly excluded. If so, he must give evidence of penitence, in order to his restoration. If unjustly excluded, and the church does not, when the injustice is shown, annul its action, the excluded member may apply for admission into a sister-church, which may, in the exercise of its independence, receive him without encroaching on the independence of the excluding church. The opposite view would imply that the excluding church has a monopoly of independence, which is absurd.)

Let those who oppose the Baptist form of church government show anywhere in the Scriptures the remotest allusion to an appeal from the decision of a church to any other tribunal. It cannot be done. There were, in apostolic times, no tribunals analogous to modern Synods, Conferences, or Conventions. Let those who affirm that there were such "courts of appeal" adduce the evidence. On them rests the burden of proof. Baptists deny that there is such proof, and say that for any man to furnish it is as difficult as for "a camel to go through the eye of a needle." (Matt. 19:24)

The view which I have presented of the independence of the first churches is in such full historical accordance with

the facts in the case that many distinguished Pedobaptists have been obliged to concede it. They have done this while giving their practical sanction to other forms of church government. Hence Mosheim, a Lutheran and a bitter opponent of Baptists, in referring to the first century, says:

"The churches, in those early times, were entirely independent, none of them being subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each governed by its own rulers and its own laws; for, though the churches founded by the apostles had this particular deference shown to them, that they were consulted in difficult and doubtful cases, yet they had no juridical authority, no sort of supremacy over the others, nor the least right to enact laws for them." (Maclaine's *Mosheim*, Baltimore edition, vol. i., p. 39)

Archbishop Whately, a dignitary of the Church of England, referring to the New-Testament churches, says: "They were each a distinct, independent community on earth, united by the common principles on which they were founded, and by their mutual agreement, affection, and respect, but

not having any one recognized head on earth, or acknowledging any sovereignty of one of these societies over others."

Again: "A CHURCH and a DIOCESE seem to have been for a considerable time coextensive and identical. And each church or

diocese (and consequently each superintendent), though connected with the rest by ties of faith and hope and charity, seems to have been (as has been already observed) perfectly independent, as far as regards any power of control." (*Kingdom of Christ*, Carter's edition, pp. 36, 44. 18)

This is strong testimony from a Lutheran and an Episcopalian. They would have given a different account of the matter if they could have done so consistently with truth. They virtually condemned their denominational organizations in writing what I have quoted. I might refer to Neander, and to many other Pedobaptists of distinction who have expressed themselves in substance as Mosheim and Whately have done; but it is needless. Baptists are not dependent on the testimony of church historians. They make their appeal to the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

If all the church histories in the world said the monarchical or aristocratic form of church government was maintained from the death of the apostle John onward, they would not

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be moved by it while the New Testament represents every church as a democracy fully competent to transact its own business. "To the law and to the testimony." (Isa. 8:20) "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)

Baptists have ever regarded every church as complete in itself, independent, so far as its government is concerned, of every other church under heaven. They have watched with jealous eye all encroachments on church

independence. For their views on baptism — its subjects and its act—a regenerated church membership, and the independent form of church government, they have been persecuted, tortured, put to death. Their blood has flowed like water. From their ranks have been taken martyrs who, having endured "much tribulation," (Acts 14:22) are now before the throne of God. But the principles of Baptists still live, and will live; for they are indestructible—divinely vital—cannot die.



The Duties of Church Members Towards Each Other

J. A. James

From *The Baptist Manual*, 1849 – (Part 1 of 3)

I. The first, and that which indeed seems to include every other, is Love.

The stress which is laid on this in the Word of God, both as it respects the manner in which It is stated, and the frequency with which it is enjoined, sufficiently proves its vast importance in the Christian temper, and its powerful influence on the communion of believers. It is enforced by our Lord as the identifying law of his kingdom. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

By this we learn that the subjects of Christ are to be known and distinguished amongst men, by their mutual affection. This injunction is denominated the new commandment of the Christian economy; not that love was no duty before the coming of Christ; but it is now placed more prominently amongst the duties of believers is urged on fresh grounds, enforced by a more perfect example, and constrained by stronger motives.

The dispensation of Jesus Christ is a system of most wonderful, most mysterious grace; it is the manifestation, commendation, and perfection of divine love. It originated in the love of the Father, and is accomplished by the love of

the Son. Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love in our world. He was love living, breathing, speaking, acting, amongst men. His birth was the nativity of love, his sermons the words of love, his miracles the wonders of love, his tears the meltings of love, his crucifixion the agonies of love, his resurrection the triumph of love. Hence it was natural, that love should be the cardinal virtue in the character of his saints, and that it should be the law which regulates their conduct towards each other.

And it is worthy of remark, that he has made his love to us, not only the motives but the pattern of our love to each other. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:17) Let us for our instruction dwell upon the properties of his love, that we may know what should be the characteristics of our own. His was real and great affection, and not a mere nominal one. "My little children, so let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18)

His was free and disinterested, without any regard to our deserts: so ours should be independent of any regard to our own advantage. His was fruitful unto tears, and agonies, and blood, and death, so should ours in everything that can establish the comfort of each other. His was a love

of forbearance and forgiveness; so should ours be. His was purely a spiritual flame; not loving them as rational creatures merely, but as objects of divine affection, and subjects of divine likeness. His was unchangeable notwithstanding our weaknesses and unkindnesses. Thus we are bound to love one another, and continue unalterable in our affection to each other, in opposition to all those little infirmities of temper and conduct which we daily discover in our fellow Christians.

The Apostles echoed the language of their Master, and continually enjoined the churches which they had planted, to love one another, and to let brotherly love abound and increase. It is a grace so important that, like holiness, no measure of it is sufficient to satisfy the requirement of the Word of God. It is the basis, and cement, and beauty of the Christian union. The church where love is wanting, whatever may be the number or gifts of its members, is nothing better than a heap of stones, which, however polished, lacks the coherence and similitude of a palace.

In the best and purest ages of the church, this virtue shone so brightly in the character of its members, was so conspicuous in all their conduct, was expressed in actions so replete with noble, disinterested, and heroic affection, as to become a proverb with surrounding pagans, and call forth the well-known exclamation, "See how these Christians love one another!" A finer eulogium was never pronounced on the Christian church; a more valuable tribute was never deposited on the altar of Christianity. Alas! That it should so soon have ceased to be just, and that the church as it grew older should have lost its loveliness by losing its love.

But it will be necessary to point out the manner in which brotherly love wherever it exists will operate:

1. In a peculiar complacency in our fellow members, viewed as the objects of divine love.

Complacency is the very essence of love; and the ground of all proper complacency in the saints, is their relation and likeness to God. We should feel peculiar delight in each other as fellow heirs of the grace of God; partakers of like precious faith, and joint sharers of the common salvation. We must be dear to each other as the objects of the Father's mercy, of the Son's dying grace, and of the Spirit's sanctifying influence. The love of Christians is of a very sacred nature, and is quite peculiar. It is not the love of

consanguinity, or friendship, or interest, or general esteem, but it is an affection cherished for Christ's sake.

They may see many things in each other to admire, such as an amiable temper, public spirit, tender sympathy, but Christian love does not rest on these things, although they may increase it, but on the ground of a common relationship to Christ. On this account they are to take peculiar delight in each other as being one in Christ. "These," should a believer exclaim, as he looks on the church, "are the objects of the Redeemer's living and dying love, whom he regards with complacency, and out of affection to him, I feel an inexpressible delight in them. I love to associate with them, to talk with them, to look upon them because they are Christ's."

2. Love to our brethren will lead us to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)

When we see them oppressed with a weight of anxious care, instead of carrying ourselves with cold indifference and unfeeling distance towards them, we should cherish a tender solicitude to know and relieve their anxieties. How touching would such a salutation as the following be, from one Christian to another:

The church where love is wanting, whatever may be the number or gifts of its members, is nothing better than a heap of stones, which, however polished, lacks the coherence and similitude of a palace.

"Brother, I have observed, with considerable pain, that your countenance has been covered

with gloom, as if you were sinking under some inward solicitude. I would not be unpleasantly officious, nor wish to obtrude myself upon your attention, farther than is agreeable, but I offer you the expressions of Christian sympathy and the assistance of Christian counsel. Can I in any way assist to mitigate your care, and restore your tranquillity?"

At such sounds, the loaded heart would feel as if half its load were gone. It may be, the kind inquirer, could yield no effectual relief, but there is balm in his sympathy. The indifference of some professing Christians to the burthens of their brethren is shocking; they would see them crushed to the very earth with cares and sorrows, and never make one kind inquiry into their situation, nor lend a helping hand to lift them from the dust. Love requires that we should take the deepest interest in each other's case, that we should patiently listen to the tale of woe which a brother brings us, that we should mingle our tears with his, that we should offer him our advice that we should suggest to him the consolations of the gospel. In short, we should let him see that his troubles reach not only our ear, but our

heart. Sympathy is one of the finest, most natural, and easiest expressions of love.

3. Love requires that we should visit our brethren in their affliction.

"I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me; (Matt. 25:36) "Inasmuch as ye have it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me;" (Matt. 25:40) Such is the language of Jesus Christ to his people by which he teaches us how important and incumbent a duty it is for church members to visit each other in their afflictions. Probably there is no duty more neglected than this.

Christians often lie on beds of sickness for weeks and months successively, without seeing a fellow member cross the threshold of their chamber door. How often have I been shocked, when upon inquiring of the sufferer whether such and such an individual residing in their neighbourhood had been to visit them, it had been said in reply,

"Oh, no, Sir, I have now been stretched on this bed for days and weeks. My pain and weakness have been so great that I have scarcely been able to collect my thoughts for meditation and prayer. The sight of a dear Christian friend would indeed have relieved the dull monotony of this gloomy scene, and the voice of piety would have been as music to blunt my sense of pain, and lull my troubled heart to short repose, but such a sight and such a sound have been denied me.

"No friend has been near me, and it has aggravated sorrows, already heavy, to be thus neglected and forgotten by a church, which I joined with the hope of finding amongst them the comfort of sympathy. But alas! Alas! I find them too much occupied with the things seen and temporal to think of a suffering brother to whom wearisome nights and months of vanity are appointed."

How could I help exclaiming, "O, Christian love, bright image of the Saviour's heart! Whither hast thou fled that thou so rarely visitest the church on earth to shed thine influence and manifest thy beauties there?"

There have been ages of Christianity, so historians inform us, in which brotherly love prevailed amongst Christians to such a degree, that, fearless of the infection diffused by the most malignant and contagious disorders, they have

ventured to the bedside of their brethren expiring in the last stages of the plague to administer the consolations of a hope full of immortality.

This was love; love stronger than death, and which many waters could not quench. It was no doubt imprudent, but it was heroic, and circulated far and wide the praises of that dear name which was the secret of the wonder. How many are there, now bearing the Christian name, who scarcely ever yet paid one visit to the bedside of a suffering brother. Shame and disgrace upon such professors! Let them not expect to hear the Saviour say, "I was sick, and ye visited me."

That this branch of Christian love may be performed with greater diligence, it would be a good plan for the pastor at every church meeting to mention the names of the afflicted members, and stir up the brethren to visit them. It would be particularly desirable for Christians to go to the scene of suffering on a Sunday, and read the Bible and sermons to the afflicted at that time as they are then peculiarly apt to feel their sorrows, in consequence of being cut off from the enjoyments of public worship.

Nothing can be more absurd than those pretensions to love, which are not supported by exertions to relieve the wants of the object beloved.

4. "Pray one for another." (James 5:16)

Not only "with" but "for" one another. A Christian should take the interests of his brethren into

the closet. Private devotion is not to be selfish devotion. It would much increase our affection did we devote more of our private prayers to each other's welfare.

5. Pecuniary relief should be administered to those who need it.

"Distributing to the necessities of the saints," (Rom. 12:13) is mentioned amongst the incumbent duties of professing Christians. How just, how forcible is the interrogation of the Apostle, 1 John 3:17, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Nothing can be more absurd than those pretensions to love, which are not supported by exertions to relieve the wants of the object beloved. It must be a singular affection which is destitute of mercy. So powerfully did this holy passion operate in the first ages of the church that many rich Christians sold their estates, and shared their affluence with the poor. What rendered this act the more remarkable

is that it was purely voluntary. It is not our duty any more than it was theirs to go this length.

Still, however, it is evident both from general principles as well as from particular precepts that we are under obligation to make some provision for the comfort of the poor. This duty must be left in the statement of general terms as it is impossible to define its precise limits. It does not appear to me to be at all incumbent to make regular periodical distributions to the poor, whether in circumstances of distress or not.

Some churches have a registered list of pensioners, who come as regularly for their pay, as if they were hired servants. If they are old, infirm, or unprovided for this is very well, but for those to receive relief, who are getting a comfortable subsistence by their labour is an abuse of the charity of the church. The money collected at the Lord's Supper should be reserved for times of sickness and peculiar necessity.

It should be recollected also that public contributions do not release the members from the exercise of private liberality. The shilling a month which is given at the Lord's Supper seems in the opinion of many to discharge them from all further obligation to provide for the comfort of their poorer brethren, and to be a sort of composition for the full exercise of religious charity. This is a great mistake; it ought rather to be considered as a mere earnest, or pledge of all that more effective and abundant liberality which they should exercise in secret.

Every Christian who is indulged with a considerable share of the bounties of providence ought to consider the poorer members of the church, who may happen to live in his neighbourhood, as the objects of his peculiar care, interest, and relief.

6. Forbearance is a great part of love.

"Forbearing one another in love." (Eph. 4: 2) In a Christian church, especially where it is of considerable magnitude, we must expect to find a very great diversity of character. There are all the gradations of intellect, and all the varieties of temper. In such cases great forbearance is absolutely essential to the preservation of harmony and peace. The strong must bear with the infirmities of the weak.

Christians of great attainments in knowledge should not in their hearts despise, nor in their conduct ridicule, the feeble conceptions of those who are babes in Christ; but must meekly correct their errors, and most kindly instruct their ignorance. This is love. In very many persons, there

will unhappily be found some things, which although they by no means affect the reality and sincerity of their religion, considerably diminish its lustre and have a tendency, without the caution of love, to disturb our communion with them.

Some have a forward and obtrusive manner; others are talkative; others indulge a complaining, whining, begging disposition; others are abrupt, almost to rudeness, in their address. These, and many more, are the spots of God's children—with which we are sometimes so much displeased as to feel an alienation of heart from the subjects of them, although we have no doubt of their real piety. Now here is room for the exercise of love. These are the cases in which we are to employ that charity which covereth all things. Are we to love only amiable Christians?

Perhaps, after all, in the substantial parts of religion, these rough characters far excel others, whom courtesy and amiableness have carried to the highest degree of polish. I do not say we are to love these individuals for their peculiarities, but in spite of them. Not on their own account, but for Christ's sake, to whom they belong. And what can be a greater proof of our affection for him than to love an unlovely individual on his account?

If you had the picture of a valued friend, would you withdraw from it your affection, and throw it away, because there was a spot upon the canvass, which in some degree disfigured the painting? No; you would say, "It is a likeness of my friend still, and I love it, notwithstanding its imperfection." The believer is a picture of your best friend; and will you discard him, neglect him, because there is a speck upon the painting?

7. Love should induce us to watch over one another.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) was an inquiry suitable enough in the lips of a murderer, but most unsuitable and inconsistent from a Christian. We are brought into fellowship for the very purpose of being keepers of each other. We are to watch over our brethren, and admonish and, reprove them as circumstances may require. I do not mean that church members should pry into each other's secrets, or be busy bodies in other men's matters, for that is forbidden by God and abominable in the sight of man. (1 Thess. 3:11; 1 Pet. 4:15)

Much less are they to assume authority over each other, and act the part of proud and tyrannical inquisitors. But still we are to "exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:13) We are not to suffer sin to be committed, or duty to be omitted

by a brother, without affectionately admonishing him. What can be more incumbent, more obligatory, than this? Can we indeed love anyone, and at the same time see him do that which we know will injure him without entreating him to desist? "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." (Gal. 6:1)

Let us then take heed against that Cain-like spirit which is too prevalent in our churches, and which leads many to act as if their fellow members were no more to them than the stranger at the ends of the earth. Striking are the words of God to the Jews, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." (Lev. 19:17) Not to rebuke him then when he sins is, instead of loving him, to hate him. This neglect is what the apostle means by being partakers of other men's sins. The admonition to "warn the unruly," (1

Thess. 5:14) was delivered not merely to ministers, but to private Christians.

I know no duty more neglected than this. It is one of the most prevalent defects of Christians. Many a backslider would have been prevented from going far astray, if in the very first stages of his declension some brother, who had observed his critical state, had faith-fully and affectionately warned and admonished him. What shame, and anguish, and disgrace, would the offender himself have been spared, and what dishonour and scandal would have been averted from the church by this one act of faithful love!

I am aware it is a difficult and self-denying duty; but that cannot excuse its neglect. Love will enable us to perform it, and the neglect of it violates the law of Christ.



Ye Are Not Your Own

Dr. Howell

From *The Baptist Preacher*, May 1847

"Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." (1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

What do we mean when we say that what we hold is not our own, but another's? We mean that we have no right to use it as our own. We must be governed in our use of it, simply by the direction of the owner. If we appropriate it to our own use, we are dishonest. We are guilty of robbery. Or, if he allows us to use it, or any part of it, for ourselves, we must be governed in all respects by his will. If a man commit his property into my hands for a term of time, I must surely do with it just what he prescribes.

And, again, we must give up what is not our own, whenever the owner calls for it. If we refuse, we are dishonest. We have no right to retain either the whole, or any part of it. All of it is the owner's, and he is the only rightful proprietor. If you lend a man a hundred dollars, and when you call upon him for it he declines to surrender your property, or puts you off with a shilling, you would never trust him again.

Now this is precisely what is meant, when, in our text, it is said, "Ye are not your own." Whatever we possess is not our own, but Christ's. A certain nobleman delivered to his servants talents, and said, "Occupy till I come." (Luke 19:13)

You are called by the name of Christ. You profess to be his. You say you are not your own. But have you ever reflected on the meaning of this confession? You are a professional man; your learning, and talent, and influence, are Christ's. What right have you to use them for the purpose of fostering your own ambition, or in any respect ministering to yourself? If you thus use them, you rob Christ.

You are a minister of the gospel. You have been in a peculiar manner set apart to the service of the Saviour. You have, by your own will, laid yourself upon his altar. Have you then a right to live as other men live? Have you a right to shrink from hardship, and reproach, and inconvenience, and toil, and declare that you will serve Christ, but it must be in a comfortable settlement? Have you a right to pursue

what studies you please, to read what books you please, engage in what enterprises you please, for the sake of reputation, or honor, or power; or, in a word, to make your calling as an ambassador for Christ, an instrument for attaining to temporal ease, or honor, or benefit? Christ had infinitely greater facilities than you for doing this; did he use them thus? Paul was an abler and more learned man than you, yet he rejoiced in being made the offscouring of all things for Christ. (1 Cor. 4:13)

You are a merchant or mechanic. You are by industry and skill acquiring property and standing. But you say that these are not your own. By what right then do you use them as you do? In your arrangements at home and abroad, in your expenditures for pleasure or amusement, for yourselves or your children, in your principles of accumulation, I do not see that you even profess to differ from honest worldly men around you, who never profess that they are not their own.

But I have said that if anything with which you are entrusted is not your own, you are under obligation to surrender it up as soon as the owner calls for it. If what you hold be his, when he requires it, you have no right to retain it a moment longer.

Christ intimates his claim by the facts brought to your knowledge. A world for which he died is perishing. He has

spread their case before you. They are demanding the Word of Life at your hands. They will perish if you do not come to their aid. Your talents, and labors, and wealth, are necessary to save a world from destruction. If you do not surrender them when he thus demands them, what do you mean by saying you are not your own? Will a man rob God? (Mal. 3:8)

Christian minister and candidate for the ministry, have you heard the cry of perishing millions? Christ demands your services. Have you offered them to him? Have you ever brought it home to your conscience, "My talents are not my own, and Christ has a right to use them where he will?"

Christian minister and candidate for the ministry, have you heard the cry of perishing millions? Christ demands your services. Have you offered them to him? Have you ever brought it home to your conscience, "My talents are not my own, and Christ has a right to use them where he will?" Have you not often looked around you on your circle of friends, your goodly

parish, the comforts of home, the respect with which you are treated by your fellow-citizens, and said in your heart, "I cannot give up all this for Christ?"

Christian layman, the salvation of the heathen cannot, unless by a miracle, be accomplished without your property. Christ demands it of you. It is a solemn fact. You cannot escape from it. He does not ask for that which you do not feel. He requires that you make sacrifices for him, and to do it to any extent that may be necessary for carrying on his work of mercy.



The New Birth

John Stock, LL. D.

From the book, *A Handbook of Revealed Theology*, 1883

We have now to consider that great change which is in Scripture designated, a being born again (John 3:3), a quickening from death (Eph. 2:1), and a new creature (Gal. 6:15).

I. If the doctrine of the Fall and of man's consequent depravity be true, the necessity of regeneration to salvation is its logical corollary; and, vice versa, if the doctrine of regeneration be true, man's natural depravity is proved.—If man has lost the life of godliness by his fall,

only a divine power can restore it; and if he needs to be quickened by the Holy Spirit, he cannot be naturally "alive unto God." Thus the various doctrines of the orthodox faith prove each other.

These solemn facts the doctrine of the new birth assumes. Because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); because "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9); and because "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only

evil continually" (Gen. 6:5, compared with 8:21); therefore man must undergo a great moral and spiritual change in order to salvation.

2. Moreover, the thoroughness of the change required is commensurate with the radical character of the evil to be overcome. As we have already seen, man has sustained a terrible blow by his voluntary rebellion against his Maker. He has become morally dead; "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). He is altogether "as an unclean thing;" and all his "righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7).

Hence, if man is to be recovered from his natural state of alienation from his Maker, it must be by a change as radical and complete as the depravity of which he is the subject. The change, to be effectual, must go to the very root of the evil. As man's heart and soul are vitiated, they must be renewed. As the fountain of action is corrupt, the only way in which the streams can be purified is by making their source holy. Hence we see how insufficient are science, philosophy, and secular education to accomplish this great work. These may soften the manners, but they cannot change the heart or renew the moral nature.

3. The Scripture references to this great work are in harmony with the foregoing observations; for they represent it as being a complete change in the whole of the moral tastes, dispositions, habits, and actions. They speak of it as "a new birth." "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). They describe it as "a quickening of the dead." "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephes. 2:1).

They call it a new creation: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). They style it a renewal in the spirit of our mind (Rom. 12:2): Ye "have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

Now these and similar figures convey most emphatically the idea of a thorough, radical, and universal change. The truly holy man is called a new man. The child of God is born again, or from above (John 3:3). He has received what may figuratively be called a new life.

It is quite true that the new birth communicates no new mental faculties. The human soul is, as to its natural powers, the same after conversion as before. We love God after regeneration with the same powers wherewith we hated Him before that great change.

The man is the same as to all that constitutes a man; the same rational responsible agent. But he has undergone a great moral and spiritual change, nevertheless. As to his inclinations, his preferences, and aversions, he is a new creature. Here old things have passed away, and all things have become new.

It is sometimes said that we must not expound figures too literally or rigorously. Granted; but a figure is intended to give instruction, and a metaphor is often full of meaning. The question is—What do these figures of a new birth, a new creation, a quickening from death, and the communication of a new life mean? Of course, they refer not to natural powers, or essential functions. They describe a spiritual change, which makes the man, so far as his habits and inclinations are concerned, a new creature. He is, to all intents and purposes, morally, a new man.

Hence, if man is to be recovered from his natural state of alienation from his Maker, it must be by a change as radical and complete as the depravity of which he is the subject.

4. And we are told in Holy Writ that this change is in all cases absolutely necessary. For "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth

anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). The Papist and the Puseyite, with all their magical ceremonies, must fail here.

The mere moralist who has reformed his past excesses, and is now trusting in an altered and decent life, has neither part nor lot in this matter. This great work must be wrought, or our salvation is impossible. For, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). Nothing will do as a substitute for the new birth. "We must be born again" (verse 7).

5. This glorious work is described as being emphatically and primarily a change of heart. These are the terms in which it is presented to us:

"I will give them an heart to know me that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return to me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:7).

"I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever" (Jer. 32:39a).

"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19, 20).

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them" (Ezek. 36:26, 27).

These promises evidently relate to the times of the gospel. They describe what the blessed Spirit does when He renews a man in the spirit of His mind. The heart is the fountain of action. As is the heart, so is the man; if that be not right with God, everything else must be wrong. Hence the spirit of God changes the heart; He makes it "a new heart," "a heart of flesh," "one heart." He makes the spirit of the mind "a right spirit." Thus the very fountain of character and conduct is cleansed. The root of depravity is reached. And, as the result of this inward and spiritual change, the whole life is transfigured, and becomes radiant with moral beauty.

6. Every mental faculty is influenced by this important work. It is not confined to the heart, but reaches to every power of the soul. The Understanding is enlightened (Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:9; 1 John 5:20). The Imagination is purified, so that instead of revelling in iniquity, it delights to meditate in God's law (Psa. 63:6; Psa. 77:12; Psa. 143:5). The Memory is sanctified, and it loves to treasure up the precious truth of God, and to chronicle His merciful works (Psa. 92:6; Psa. 77:10, 11; Psa. 119:55).

The Conscience is made a good conscience, approving of that which is holy, and condemning that which is corrupt (Heb. 9:14; Heb. 10:22; Gen. 39:9). The Will is brought into harmony with the will of God: hence it chooses what He commands, and refuses what He forbids (Psa. 84:10; Heb. 11:25; Luke 10:42). Thus every mental and moral faculty participates in the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

It is unprofitable to dispute as to which mental faculty is the first to feel the converting influence, whether the intellect or the affections. Into the metaphysics of regeneration we decline to enter. It is enough to know that

the Divine Spirit operates upon the whole mental and moral man. Besides, though we speak of the faculties of the soul, we must not forget that the soul itself is one. It is a simple, indivisible spirit. It is not, like the body, compounded of various elements, and possessed of various members. Hence the regeneration of the soul involves the regeneration of all its powers—of the whole soul.

It is, consequently, absurd to dispute whether the Holy Spirit does first enlighten the understanding or purify the heart; for, in truth, when He operates upon one, He operates upon the other. "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psa. 119:130); and by the same act by which He flashes His illuminations upon the intellect, He changes the heart. By the same mental process wherewith we perceive the loveliness of Christ and the attractions of holiness, we love them. To appreciate that which is lovely, is to love it.

Faculties are but the various functions of the one soul. The Affections are the soul loving or hating; the Understanding, the soul perceiving; the Imagination, the soul musing; the Memory, the soul remembering; the Conscience, the soul approving or condemning; the Will, the soul choosing or rejecting. To renew the soul, is to renew it in ALL its powers.

7. The instrument in connection with which the regenerating influences of the Spirit are exerted, is the Word of God. It is for this reason that we are said in Holy Scripture to be born of the Word. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). "Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet 1:23). "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26).

In these and in other parallel passages, regeneration is ascribed to the truth which the Holy Spirit leads us to receive. It is in connection with the hearing, reading, or remembering of the Word of God, or of the general truths which it makes known, that the Holy Ghost puts forth His power. It is to induce us to receive this truth that the Divine Spirit is imparted. Hence it is that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The word is the occasion of the new birth. The Holy Spirit works by the truth. The Word of God is His sword (Eph. 6:17). It is the fire with which He burns up our dross, and the hammer with which He breaks our rocky hearts in pieces (Jer. 23:29).

8. The regenerating influences of the Spirit are, nevertheless, exerted, not upon the Word, but directly upon the human soul. The Word of God undergoes no change when a soul is born again. It is not in such a case the Word that is converted, but the man who receives it. The truth, as it is in Jesus, is immutable; it liveth and abideth for ever, the same glorious revelation of divine mercy. In popular phraseology, we speak of "power as being put into the Word." In prayer we often ask God to "clothe His Word with power." And in Holy Scripture the gospel is said to come unto the saved, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5).

But manifestly such allusions do not imply any alteration in the ever-living and unchangeable truth of Jehovah. The man's perceptions of the truth are altered, not the truth itself. To him the revelation has become like a new book, for he sees in it beauties and blessed adaptations which he did not perceive before. If a man born blind were suddenly to be endowed with the power of vision, he would, as it were, enter upon a new world; and yet the external world would not be affected by his endowment with sight; it would still be the same; the change would be in the man's perceptions, and emotions, and impressions.

So, when a man is quickened to the possession of spiritual life, it is not the gospel of our Saviour that has any fresh elements of beauty put into it, but the man wakens up to act entirely new apprehension of its glory and suitability to his case as a sinner. No additional power is put into God's truth, but, by divine influence, "the heart is opened to attend unto it and to receive it" (Acts 16:14).

What we want is "an heart to perceive", "eyes to see" and "ears to hear" (Deut. 29:4) the glories which are ever in that blessed system of saving truth. In the parable of the sower and the seed, the different results of the seed sown were attributed to the different character of the soil, that is to say, heart, on which it fell. It was the same kind of seed, as good in one case as in another; but the ground on which it fell was very diversified. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15).

In the effects of God's Word, then, everything depends upon the state of the heart that hears it. Hence it is manifest that the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit are exerted upon the human soul.

The power of the Spirit of God, though imparted in connection with the Word, and in order to its reception, is not in the Word, but is altogether distinct from it. Some of our modern theologians tell us that the Spirit is in the Word, and that there is no presence or power of the Spirit vouchsafed to the saved, but that which is already and necessarily in revealed truth. The power of the Spirit is, with them, simply the influence which His truth exerts over those who receive it. Any direct operation upon the mind they deny.

This theory is, however, both irrational and unscriptural. We say it is irrational, because, obviously, if there be any influence exerted at all, it must be exerted upon the mind of the man who is to be changed, and not upon the truth, which is in its nature unchangeable. We affirm, further, that this theory is unscriptural. God opens hearts to attend to, and to embrace His own truth (Acts 16:14); He prepares hearts to receive the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:15); and when His gospel is believed to salvation, it is because it "comes not in word only," as it does in many cases; "but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5).

What we want is "an heart to perceive", "eyes to see" and "ears to hear"

But if the Spirit were in the Word, that Word could never come in word only. In such a case it would always come with power. How clear is it from this passage that the

power is not in the Word, but in a sovereign influence which is altogether distinct from it, though operating through it as a medium. It is the presence or absence of this free and gracious influence over the heart which makes all the difference as to the results of our preaching the truth as it is in Jesus.

In the belief of this great truth David breathed the prayer, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Psa. 119:18). If all the gracious influences which God intends for the Church are in the Bible, on what principle could David pray for an operation of God's grace upon his mind, to enable him better to understand and appreciate the wondrous glories of that word? This was clearly prayer for an influence extraneous to the truth, and by which the latter was to be understood.

Thus regenerating and sanctifying grace is not the mere indwelling of the Spirit in the Word, but is the divine influence which works upon the soul, inclining it "to receive the love of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:10).

It is quite true that, in a popular sense, the Holy Spirit may be said to be in His own Word, just as we say the thoughts

and sentiments of an author live in a book in which he has fully and earnestly expounded them. The Bible contains "the mind of the Spirit" as truly as if it were only just inspired. His voice will be heard addressing the nations in its doctrines, promises, precepts, and prophecies, through all the ages of time.

But this is a very different thing from that powerful influence by which souls are brought to God, and are saved from death. The Holy Spirit must open the human heart to receive His own word. It never converts, per se, but only as a medium or occasion for the impartation of the power of the Spirit.

The Scriptures distinguish between the truth by means of which men are renewed in the spirit of their minds, and the Spirit by whose power and grace the truth is made effectual to the accomplishment of its destined end. The Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephes. 6:17). His influence is as distinct from the truth by means of which He operates as is a human hand from the sword which it grasps. "The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). The weapon is one thing; the power that applies it is another.

To us it appears that the direct agency of the Spirit in regeneration is a truth implied in the doctrine of His personality; and that the resolving of His influences into the mere effect of the truth upon the mind is the first step towards a denial of His personality. Such a view tends to Socinianism.

If there be no influence of the Holy Ghost in regeneration, above and beyond that of the effects of revealed truth upon the mind of man, we may well inquire whether there be any Holy Spirit at all. But the Scriptures affirm that there is on the part of the Divine Spirit in regeneration the exertion of a positive and direct influence, emanating from Himself, extraneous to the Word, and effectuating all the sanctified impressions which revealed truth produces.

9. In the impartation of regenerating grace the Holy Spirit acts with absolute and uncontrollable sovereignty. The Holy Ghost is the great agent in the accomplishment of this work and in its production acts freely and graciously. The sovereignty of the Divine Spirit in this transformation appears from two things:

a. It is apparent from the nature of the case. Nothing can deserve the Divine favour but holiness. This is a truism. But regeneration is itself the beginning of holiness in a sinner's soul. Hence it is self-evident that there can be nothing in a sinner's soul antecedently to regeneration

that can be to Jehovah an object of complacency or a ground of favour. And hence, that which implants in a man the first germs of genuine holiness must, from the very nature of the case, be an act of the most perfect free favour on the part of God.

b. But we are not left merely to a logical demonstration in this matter. The Scriptures plainly affirm the same truth. Of regenerate believers they testify that "they were born, not of blood (not of carnal descent from their parents, as Jews were born Jews), nor of the will of the flesh (not by their own efforts), nor of the will of man (not by the labours of ministers or other servants of the Lord), but of God" (John 1:13). This work is absolutely and entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, so far as the efficient power by which it is brought about is concerned, and is the result, not of the will of man, but of the will of God. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). How emphatic this testimony to the uncontrollable sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the impartation of the divine life!

"The Son quickeneth whom He will" (John 5:21). The Holy Spirit comes as the representative of Jesus, to execute His sovereign will. We may address all the regenerate in those memorable words: "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

10. The regenerating influences of the Spirit are personal and special. They are a gift peculiar to those who receive them, altogether different from that universal grace, the existence of which is asserted by some.

Undoubtedly there are portions of Scripture which teach that all men are more or less indebted to the Son of God. But for what? - That is the question. We read that "Christ is the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). But what are those benefits which every man receives from Christ Jesus? We apprehend they include the following things:

- The entire world is spared for the sake of Christ's atonement; all men derive natural life, with its various endowments, from the Saviour, as the Creator of all things;
- by His Providence, as the Sustainer of the universe, they are preserved in being; He is the Creator and the Actuator of the conscience, which leads men to distinguish right from wrong; and

- He is the Giver of that blessed Spirit, by whose inspiration the records of the New Testament were penned for the instruction of all the nations of the earth.

There is not a passage in the Holy Scriptures usually quoted by the advocates of universal grace which may not be explained as having reference to some or all of the blessings which we have mentioned. Such an exposition of these portions does no violence to their obvious import, and renders them harmonious with other passages that clearly teach the existence of a personal and special grace.

When a man is truly regenerated, this fact is the result of a peculiar and gracious operation of the Spirit upon his mind, and not of the man's laudable improvement of a universal grace communicated to all men equally. "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour " (Titus 3:4-6).

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk therein" (Eph. 2:10). "So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy...Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." (Rom 9:16, 18)

What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Rom. 9:16-24)? Those who perish are fitted by their own sins for destruction; those who are saved are made ready for glory by a peculiar and preparatory influence from heaven. The latter are "vessels which He (God) prepared beforehand for the glory" to which they are destined.

The doctrine of special grace has its difficulties, but need we be surprised at this? Are our faculties so vast; are our perceptions so comprehensive, have we so thoroughly grasped the whole of truth in its infinite forms and combinations that we are warranted in making our ability to strip a doctrine of all difficulty the test of its truth or

falsehood? Are the evidences of the inspiration of the Bible conclusive? If they are, and if the book proved to be divine teaches the truth of special grace, then our business is to receive it, and wait for further light in the solution of its difficulties.

The doctrine is not unreasonable—it is simply in some respects above reason. The analogy of nature and providence seems rather to confirm it. We find that in the economy of Divine Providence Jehovah gives us innumerable illustrations of His special favour to men, altogether irrespectively of their own works. Some are born with vigorous and healthy bodies, others bring disease into the world with them; some are endowed with strong and acute mental powers, others have minds characterized by feebleness and obtuseness; some are brought into existence in the lap of luxury, others in the haunts of poverty; some have every opportunity of polishing their minds, and others are born in the wilderness, among savages, and are surrounded with almost insuperable hindrances to the attainment of the lowliest mental cultivation.

What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory

And in all these cases the original condition of the individual is quite irrespectively of any conduct of his own, whether good or bad. The volume of Providence contains multitudes of such facts, and if we are to reject the doctrine of special grace BECAUSE it has its difficulties, for the same reason we must reject

a special Divine Providence, and, in fact, turn Atheists. Rather let us say with our Great Teacher, as we survey God's free and sovereign grace in regeneration, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

11. Regeneration is not a gradual but a complete work. In this respect it differs from sanctification, which is progressive. Regeneration is the implantation of spiritual life, sanctification is its development, and glorification is its consummation. The moment the heart opens to receive Jesus it is alive unto God. The germ of heaven is in that soul, and glory itself will invest it with no new moral elements.

It is made a new creature in Christ Jesus at once; and as the acorn contains the germ of the oak, and the infant of the full-grown man, so the soul just born from above has in it the seeds of all holiness, and of heaven itself. It has life, and that life must expand into the perfect man in Christ Jesus! (Ephes. 4:13)

12. The great difficulty in this doctrine, however, yet remains; we mean the question whether regeneration precedes faith in the Saviour, or faith in the Saviour precedes regeneration, or whether the two are simultaneous? Two things are clear:

First—That the reception of Christ by the sinner is ascribed to a divine influence. Hence faith is styled "the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8), and "a fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22); "the heart is opened" to receive Christ (Acts 16:14); "flesh and blood do not reveal Jesus to the soul, but our Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17); "God reveals these things unto babes" (Matt. 11:25); "They are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). But another truth is as clearly asserted in Holy Scripture, viz.:

Secondly—That until a man has received the Saviour, he has no life in him. Thus our Lord testified, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53). Until a man by faith receives the sacrifice of Christ, he has no life, not even its first elements, in his soul. There are several other passages which are in the same strain. "To as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). "If a man eat of this bread he shall live for ever" (John 6:51). "He that eateth me, shall live by me" (John 6:57). Thus Christ is emphatically our life, while without faith in Him we have no life.

Here, then, is the difficulty; if men receive a divine influence in order to believe in Christ, are they not made alive to God by this influence, and are they not consequently regenerated before receiving Christ into the soul? But if they are regenerated before believing in the Saviour, and if they were to die in this state, they would assuredly go to heaven (for no regenerate soul can be lost), and would thus obtain eternal life without having believed in Christ, which is contrary to one of the first principles of revelation. Our Lord emphatically says that, except we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have NO life in us.

Besides, regeneration is the implantation of a holy life, and no man can become holy until he has believed in Jesus. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). No action can be holy until it is performed under the influence of love to Jehovah; and no sinner can be brought to love the whole character of God, until he has learned to

look upon that character as it is revealed in the death of Jesus. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Hence, as no man can love God without faith in Jesus, no man can be holy without faith in Jesus, for love to God is the essential principle of holiness. As then, without faith in the Saviour, we cannot be holy and cannot please God, it is manifest that without faith we cannot be regenerated.

The explanation of this grave difficulty we apprehend to be simply this: The influence by which men are awakened and convinced, and made to see their need of Jesus, is only preliminary to regeneration. We are not regenerated or made holy until we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Then we receive Christ, "who is our life." To those who receive Christ He gives the privilege of becoming instantly the sons of God (John 1:12). We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). Faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9), overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), and works by love (Gal. 5:6). "Whosoever believeth

that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). The preparatory influence, though not regeneration, is absolutely necessary to its production.

Many are awakened by natural conscience who are never converted, and the only decisive evidence that our convictions are of God, is their leading us to a

hearty reception of the gospel plan of redemption. Out of Christ there is no salvation (Acts 4:12); but if men are regenerated who have never been to Christ, they are in a state of salvation without faith in that precious name. The influence by which we are regenerated is the sovereign grace of the Holy Ghost; but the influence by which we are regenerated is one thing, regeneration itself is another. It is confounding the efficacious cause with the blessed result that has created the difficulty now under consideration.

The influences of the Spirit are not regeneration, but are simply the mighty power by which that stupendous work is wrought. In short, we are not regenerated until we believe; and we never believe until led to do so by the gracious and almighty influences of the Eternal Comforter, the glorifier of Christ in the hearts and consciences of men. Thus regeneration is, from beginning to end, the effect of the Spirit's power; though the change is wrought in us at the instant of closing in with the Messiah as the hope of Israel.

The influence by which men are awakened and convinced, and made to see their need of Jesus, is only preliminary to regeneration. We are not regenerated or made holy until we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

There is no evidence of the new birth in the mere dread of hell. The fear of punishment is an instinct of human nature. Many ungodly men are at times most terribly alarmed on account of the prospects lying before them. But, obviously, there is no moral excellence, and, consequently, no evidence of a renewed state of mind, in a mere conviction that the effects of our sins will be ruinous.

Many men who know this well enough persist in hugging the sins which are sinking them to hell. There is no proof of regeneration until we have learned to abhor and forsake sin at the foot of the cross. We must not confound a mere dread of the punishment of sin with the turning of the heart from sin itself. Conviction of sin, even when wrought by the power of the Spirit, is not to be confounded with the new birth, though all the people of God have to pass, more or less deeply, through this preparatory discipline. Some are much more powerfully agitated with these terrors than others, but all alike pass from death unto life, when

through grace they believe in Jesus, "to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39)

The regenerating grace of the Spirit is undoubtedly a great mystery. The fact of its existence we believe, but the mode of its operation we cannot explain. We receive it as a fact, upon the testimony of revelation and our own consciousness; but we confess our inability to unravel many questions arising out of its existence. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

The influence is real, positive, and direct, notwithstanding its mysteriousness. The unlettered rustic, who is in perfect ignorance of all the physiological phenomena of inspiration and expiration, knows, nevertheless, that he breathes, and that by breathing life is sustained



The Lord's Day

Pastor Robert J. Sargent
From *The Beacon*, March 2016

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together..." (Acts 20:7)

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is the day Bible-believing Christians assemble together in one place as one body in Christ — as the Lord's church.

WHY THE "FIRST DAY?"

There are three reasons why our church meets on the first day of the week:

First: it is "Resurrection Day" — the day we commemorate Christ's resurrection.

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it ... And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not

here: for HE IS RISEN, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:1-6)

"Now when Jesus was risen early the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils" (Mark 16:9)

Second: it is the day when the early New Testament churches consistently met.

"Then the same day at evening, being the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:19-21)

“And after eight days AGAIN his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you” (John 20:26)

“And upon the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7)

“Upon the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Third: it honors the principle of putting God FIRST in our lives. For example:

“But seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God, and his righteousness — Matthew 6:33.

“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the FIRSTfruits of all thine increase” — Proverbs 3:9.

Giving Christ the first day of the week helps keep the right perspective on life!

IS SUNDAY A “HOLY” DAY?

We do not observe the first day of the week in the way Israel kept the Sabbath. Believers are not under the Law.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an HOLYDAY, or of the new moon, or of the SABBATH DAYS: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17)

“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye OBSERVE days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:9-11)

Our Sabbath (the word means “rest”) is found in Jesus Christ.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST. Take my yoke upon you, and

learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find REST unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30)

“For we which have believed do enter into REST, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into MY REST: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Hebrews 4:3)

“There remaineth therefore a REST to the people of God. For he that is entered into HIS REST, he also hath ceased from his own work...” (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Yet, the Lord’s Day is a holy day in that it is set apart as unto the Lord.

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, REGARDETH IT UNTO THE LORD; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it...” (Romans 14:5-6)

IS IT A SIN TO “SKIP” CHURCH?

Yes, if we deliberately forsake assembling with our church! (Illness, and unavoidable travel, employment, deployment, etc. wouldn’t be considered a “forsaking.”)

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25)

Honoring the Lord’s Day after the New Testament pattern and example plays absolutely no part in our salvation — but it does in our sanctification!

“And he gave some...pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:23-24)

