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FUNDAMENTALS OF A CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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Isaiah 40:6-8, *“The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”*

John 16:8-9, *“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me.”*

Romans 3:19, *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”*

WHAT IS AN EXPERIENCE OF GRACE?

An experience of grace is a supernatural experience in a sinner, which begins in CONVICTION and ends in GLORIFICATION. Everything done for the sinner from the time of his effectual calling until his body is raised from the dead is a work of grace. In a more limited sense, an experience of grace includes all those emotions of the soul in its passage from death unto life. These emotions must be spiritual in their content, or it will be a counterfeit experience, and the soul thus exercised will become another tare in the field of profession. A Christian experience is not a series of fleshly emotions. A Christian experience is something more than a religious feeling. Romans 10:1, *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”* I have been religious from my

early childhood, and many a time, under the spell of some emotional appeal, I came dangerously near uniting with the church before I had discovered that I was a sinner, to say nothing of my utter ignorance of the way of salvation.

The salvation of sinners finds its cause and explanation in God rather than in man. II Timothy 1:9, *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”* Ephesians 2:3, 4, *“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.”* Titus 3:5, *“Not of 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.”* Salvation is something done by God and experienced by man, and since God is under no obligation to do such a work, it is an experience of grace. It is God writing certain facts upon the human heart; the fact of sin; the fact of the gospel. It is God writing the meaning of Calvary upon the human heart. In response to this Divine work, the sinner repents and believes and is saved.

There is room for individuality in conversion. Individual temperament may have much to do with the outward expression of one’s experience. One may shed tears, another may not. One

may shout, another may not. One person may go through a long period of mourning, another may not. One may be loud and noisy in his profession, another may be very reserved, even timid. One may remember the time and place of his conversion, another may only know that he is alive and saved. None of these outward expressions are fundamental to a Christian experience. That which is fundamental is internal and not external.

One of these graces is conviction for sin; the deep-seated consciousness of the fact of sin and the need of a Saviour. It is an abiding grace. The saved man never reaches the place in this life where he is not conscious of sin and the need of a Saviour. One of the most alarming symptoms of the state of Christendom today is the weakened senses of sin. The vast bulk of church members have no better estimate of what is sinful and wrong than the average man of the world. Worldliness is a terrible cancer that is eating at the very vitals of the life of the churches. I John 2:16, *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”* This is the leaven that has well nigh leavened the whole lump of organized Christianity. The line of demarcation between the church and the world is almost rubbed out. So few have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil. Everywhere the bitter is called sweet and evil is called good.

There is no revolting at anything hardly today. The church no longer feels the shame of loose and impure living on the part of its members. Sin is treated as a joke. The sinner is admired for his

smartness instead of being wept over for his wickedness. Psalm 119:53, "**Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.**" Psalm 36:1, "**The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.**"

WHAT IS SIN? The way men answer this question in their hearts reveals the state of their souls. Murder? Yes, but the lost will agree to that. Theft? Certainly, but the unregenerate will admit that. Adultery? To be sure, but a lost man whose conscience is not seared over, will confess that. WHAT IS SIN? Unless you can go deeper in your conception of what sin is, it is very evident that you have nothing supernatural about you.

CONVICTION OF SIN

Salvation is God at work in a human life. And where God works in the human heart there will be a detecting of sin where the unregenerate will never see and feel it. WHAT IS SIN? Lack of prayer? Yes, for the Bible says men ought always to pray and not to faint. Unbelief? Yes, that is the besetting sin of all, and the man of grace pleads for an increase of faith. Mark 9:24, "**Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.**" Foolishness? Yes, Proverbs 24:9, "**The thought of foolishness is sin...**" Matthew 12:36, "**But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.**" This is the day of foolishness. This is the shrine where the masses worship today. Lack of love to Christ? Yes, I Corinthians 16:22, "**If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be...**" accursed when the Lord comes. Covetousness? Yes, the Bible says covetousness is idolatry. Remember that the worst of the seven churches of Asia was the one that thought it was in the best condition. Beware of a feeling of self-complacency and self-sufficiency. The best men of all the ages have been the ones who thought themselves to be great sinners; and the worst have been the most self-righteous. Contrast Newton, John Bradford, Augustus Toplady, Jonathan Edwards, John Gill, John Bunyan, Ann Judson, et al., with Napoleon, Rosseau, Edwin Forrest, Lord Nelson, John Y. McCane. The greatest of sins is to be conscious of none.

INWROUGHT EXPERIENCE

Conviction is an inwrought experience. It is produced by the Holy spirit. It is not native to the human soul. Man, by nature is proud and self-righteous. I know most any man will confess that he is a sinner, but begin to probe into his life, and he will belie his confession, and reveal his self-righteousness. Conviction is not produced by human argument. Nor is it the work of the devil. He wants to keep men blind to their need of salvation. Spurgeon said it was not the devil who killed the self righteousness in him. It is the Holy Spirit who drives the sword of truth through the bowels of self-esteem. It is the Holy Spirit who uses the word as a hammer to dash out the brains of self-righteousness. A woman once said, "I am lost," the preacher replied, "I am glad." There is hope for those who know they are lost.

INITIAL WORK

Conviction is an initial work. It is prerequisite to repentance and faith. It is the preparation of the soul for other graces to take root. Humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance etc., are beautiful flowers of God's grace, but they grow nowhere except in a soul that is conscious of sin. Conviction leads the sinner to turn to God and trust Christ for salvation. It is to the soul what hunger is to the body; a hunger for the bread of life. It led the publican to say, "*let the blood propitiate thee for my sins.*" It caused the Philippian jailer to cry, Acts 16:30, "**...What must I do to be saved?**" It brought from the lips of the dying thief, "**Lord, remember me.**" Conviction is letting in the light so that the sinner may see himself as he is. No man can see a Saviour until he first sees a sinner that needs to be saved. He cannot magnify grace until he sees that sin is exceeding sinful. He cannot see that Christ is a mighty Saviour until he sees that he is a hopeless sinner. Luke 7:42, 43: he loves much who realizes he has been forgiven much. "**...Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.**"

WORK OF DESTRUCTION IN HUMAN SOUL

Conviction is a work of destruction in the human soul. It is the destruction of former hopes; the withering of self-esteem; and the pulling down of the walls of self-confidence. Spurgeon calls it the withering work of the Holy Spirit. The self-righteous religionist builds what looks to him a stately temple righteousness, but the Holy Spirit sends the tornado of conviction, and it is razed to the ground; not one stone left upon another. He imagines himself to be blameless before the law; but the Holy Spirit flashes the terrors of Sinai into his soul, sin revives and he dies. He rushes to the loom of ritualism, and ceremonialism, and weaves a garment which he thinks will hide his moral shame; the Holy Spirit throws the light of truth upon it, and lo! it turns into filthy rags even in his own sight. Where there is a real work of grace in the human heart, it is begun with a pulling down, and drying up. Isaiah 40:6-7, "**...All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it...**" When the spirit of God blows upon human goodness it vanishes into thin air.

REALIZE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SIN

Conviction of sin is a realization of responsibility for sin. Oh, how lost men need this truth brought home to their hearts. The world is at heart antinomian. In this day of indifference, human accountability does not grip men as it once did. An antinomian is one who denies responsibility. We see this in Adam and Eve and Cain. The popular method of escaping judgment in human courts today is to deny responsibility. It is popular now, when a man commits some terrible crime, to call in the alienists and have them define the limits of human responsibility. If the criminal's mother or grandmother or some other ancestor is found to have thrown a few mad fits in their lifetime, that is urged as the reason why he should not be punished. But that is nothing new. That has ever been the attitude of man towards God's law. Cain said. Genesis 4:9, "**...Am I my brother's keeper?**" He was denying responsibility for the murder of his brother.

Israel tried this in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, but did not get by

with it. They admitted their sins, but said, "We are not to blame." Ezekiel 18:2, "***What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?***" But God stopped their mouths. Verse 4, "***Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.***" Blaming somebody else for your sins will not work with God. There will be no excuse at the judgment bar of God. Every mouth will be stopped somewhere and sometime, either in conviction which ends in conversion, or in conviction that ends in despair. Conviction as an experience of grace is the stopping of the sinner's mouth; no excuses, no alibis, no insanity pleas. It is the end of all self-defense. Human responsibility is a terrible thing, and the only way to escape is to have Jesus Christ for your advocate, and plead His finished work as the ground of escape.

*"My only plea,
Christ died for me."*

When God begins to work the sinner feels wretched. He is silenced from boasting. Isaiah 66:2, "***...But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.***" Better to be silenced now than at the judgment. The man who appears there without the wedding garment will stand speechless, and when his mouth is opened it will be with weeping and gnashing of teeth. But in an experience of grace, the mouth is stopped from all excuses and then opened to plead his blood and shout his praises.

Napoleon was full of self-sufficiency and self-importance. Heine represented him as saying to the world, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Rousseau, in his confessions, glosses over his vices and magnifies his virtues. "No man can come to the throne of God and say I am a better man than Rousseau." When dying he said, "How happy a thing it is to die, when one has no reason for remorse or self-reproach." Addressing God, he said: "Eternal Being, the soul that I am going to give thee back is as pure at this moment as it was when proceeded from thee." Yet this man was a libertine, nearly all his children were born out of wedlock and then sent to a foundling hospital.

Edwin Forrest, when accused of being converted in a religious revival, resented it and sent a denial to the press, bragging on himself, said when he died he expected to lie down to pleasant dreams.

John Y. McCane when sentenced to Sing Sing prison for violating election laws, declared he never did anything wrong in his life. He was a Sunday School Superintendent.

REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

Acts 11:18, "***When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.***" Acts 5:31, "***Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.***" Acts 17:30, "***And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.***"

Fundamental to a Christian experience is the grace of repentance. Without repentance there is no salvation. Luke 13:3, "***...Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.***" It is one thing to repent, and quite another thing to be able to define repentance. One may repent and yet not understand the doctrine of repentance. Actual repentance is essential to salvation; knowledge of the doctrine is essential to being built up in the faith.

There are various definitions given of repentance; raging all the way from that of the Rationalist, which makes it a mere mental change, to that of the Romanist, which makes it the doing of penance. The true meaning of the term involves two words; sin and grace. The Rationalist view denies sin; the Romanist view denies grace. Any view of repentance that ignores the awfulness of sin is false, and any view that ignores grace is likewise false.

Let me emphasize that repentance belongs to the system of grace. There is no place for repentance in law. The law says, "Do and live, sin and die." Luke 24:47, "***And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.***" A man may commit murder, and repent in tears, but that will not satisfy the law, and result in his acquittal.

We will first make a negative

approach to the doctrine, and then give a positive answer to what repentance is.

It is not a work to be performed by the sinner in order to obtain salvation. This would conflict with all those passages that make it clear that salvation is not of works. Repentance is from dead works.

It is not a hard term imposed upon the sinner by God in order to salvation. Such a view confuses repentance with penance. The monk does penance by sleeping on an iron bed and by wearing a hair shirt. When Anselm of Canterbury died, his under garments were found alive with vermin which he had cultivated in order to mortify the flesh. Thieves do penance by giving a part of their ill gotten wealth to charity. According to the Romanist view of repentance (penance) there are three elements: contrition; confession; satisfaction. Of these three, only the first is an element in true repentance.

Reasons why repentance is not a hard term imposed by God: this would be inconsistent with God's love. God's love is manifested, Romans 5:8, "***... in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***" Suppose that a man had given his son, whom he tenderly loved, to die that your life might be spared. Would you have any suspicions of that man's love? Would you expect him to make hard terms in dealing with you? Surely not! Hard terms would be inconsistent with the display of such love. Yet, this poorly depicts the love of God. Romans 8:32, "***He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?***"

It would be inconsistent with God's way of salvation. It is not a hard way. If salvation is to be had without money and without price; without works; if it is a gift, then how can it be said to be a hard way? The way of salvation is made hard; not by God, but by the pride of the natural heart. It is pride and a feeling of self-sufficiency that leads men to ask, Mark 10:17, "***Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?***"