

“YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN”



A Treatise
On Conversion and The Way To Life
In Christ Jesus

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THE AWAKENING

When the divine light begins to dawn in a human soul and the soul becomes aware of its uncleanness and unworthiness, what is more natural than that one should resolve to mend his ways, to discontinue doing the things which the quickened conscience shows him to be wrong, and to do better!

Thus begins the first skirmish of a battle which is to go through many stages before victory is won and the soul attains to its liberation from the power of darkness and evil.

Often as long as one is a willing servant of sin he is apt to harbor the illusion that, should he choose to do so, he could, any time, at will, throw off his vices and live a virtuous life. It is only after the soul has challenged the power of sin by making a resolve to cease from sinning, that the soul discovers how great is the power of sin over it.

Wise are they who at this state learn quickly to seek Jesus Christ, the Saviour, who has broken the yoke of Satan and who is able to make those who believe and obey Him truly free. But often this wisdom is not so quickly learned. The human heart is proud and is loath to confess itself, thus unable to free itself. So the struggle goes on. Sometimes the soul has victory and rejoices therein, then again it suffers defeat, finding itself overcome by the power of sin to do what it would not¹ and goes down into the depths of despair being condemned of its own conscience. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death²."

¹ Rom. 7:19 ² Rom. 7:24

UNDER THE LAW

Thus the soul is brought under the law. Ever trying to keep the law of righteousness to be justified thereby, but often failing, it finds no satisfaction and no peace.

No, this is not the way to attain the newness of life. This is patchwork, mending a rent here, while a greater one appears elsewhere. Overcoming one weakness by a concentration of the will, only to find oneself fallen into another and perhaps greater one. This is the error to which Jesus refers when he says, "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth upon an old garment³." Christ means by these words to warn us against patchwork; against efforts to mend and improve the old natural life in order to attain virtue and be justified before God.

The remedy is not to improve our natural life, but to give it up, to lose it, as Jesus said: "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall find it⁴." Paul said strikingly to the Romans: "Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin⁵," Now, we were not physically crucified with Christ, but we are crucified with Christ, when through repentance our sinful nature, the sinful life, is nailed to the cross and perishes.

Thus the way is paved for the new life, for the new birth, as Christ said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God⁶."

But what is more natural than Nicodemus's question: "How can a man be born when he is old?" Or the question of the prison keeper to Paul and Silas: "What must I do to be saved⁷?"

³ Mark 2:21

⁴ Luke 9:24

⁵ Rom. 6:6

⁶ John 3:3

⁷ Acts 16:30

THE WAY

In the following paragraphs we shall endeavor to show, in words as direct and simple as possible, the way by which men can attain to the new birth, realizing, however, that our best efforts in this direction are vain if God does not open the hearts to receive, understand and believe His word.

The first essential, therefore, is a humble attitude, a receptive mind, a willingness to be instructed and corrected; in short, a willingness to cooperate with the grace of God and not to resist Him.

We must have confidence toward God, that He desires our salvation, as Paul writes to Timothy, "It is the will of God that all men should be saved⁸." There is nothing lacking on His part. He has prepared the way and calls men through the gospel to come to Him on this way. He is faithful and true and keeps His words of promise: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you⁹." For He promises two things, two specific works in the **New** covenant, namely to enable us to choose and to do His good pleasure¹⁰.

But our seeking of God must be a sincere and wholehearted affair. God is not impressed by words and phrases. He sees the heart, and the sincere yearnings of our hearts reach Him if they are expressed only in deep sighs or in such simple words as, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." On the other hand, He is unmoved by the most eloquent and finely phrased prayers which scholars can form, if they are not the true expressions of the heart's yearnings.

⁸ 1 Tim. 2:4

⁹ Matt. 7:7

¹⁰ Phil. 2:13-16

If a person would attain to the new life, he should be honest and sincere with himself and with God for He knows all things and cannot be deceived. If we lack sincerity we deceive only ourselves. If we approach and seek God in sincerity and true earnestness and in the way prescribed in the Gospel, we cannot fail, for God's way is a way upon which the simple cannot err, if they are sincere and obedient.

Not only is simplicity of mind no obstacle to our finding God's ways and to our understanding His message but it is in fact an essential condition to understanding God's ways. Christ says: "Verily I say unto you whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein¹¹."

Among all the obstacles we meet in turning from the natural to the godly life, one of the most difficult is false human wisdom and philosophy. Just as the human heart desires to be justified in its own virtue, so does it also desire to be guided by its own wisdom and both of these desires are serious obstacles to God's work.

God's wisdom is infinitely higher than human wisdom, and one of the highest lessons that we must learn in coming to God, is to completely subject our own wisdom and thought to His wisdom and doctrine. The child is receptive and teachable, whereas the adult mind is full of preconceived notions and conceit which hinder the wisdom from above from finding lodgment in our hearts. That is why, as Christ said, if we are to receive the Kingdom of God, we must do it in childlikeness¹², that is, by being teachable, receptive, and in simplicity.

¹¹ Mark 10:15 ¹² Matt. 18:3

When the soul has reached a state of humility, of teachableness and a realization of its dependence upon Christ for grace and guidance, a large forward step has been taken toward the new birth. Often this is the most difficult part of conversion, for the natural man loves his "own life" and is slow to give it up so that Christ might be born in him.

IN REPENTANCE

All this time, prayer is playing a great role in the work of regeneration. Many of us were taught from childhood to pray but as long as the soul is untouched by the divine life our prayers are mostly an empty form, mere words and phrases rendered largely through habit and a sense of duty. How futile are such prayers! But a change is taking place. The divine light is dawning in the soul. The conscience is quickened and condemns pitilessly not only our past transgressions but such new transgressions as are still committed as long as the soul has not laid hold in faith on Christ as its Saviour. Now the soul is truly under conviction and is lashed by the accusation and condemnation of the Law. Having not yet laid hold on faith nor received the strength which comes only through faith in Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, Who is the victor over the power of sin and death, the situation seems hopeless. Doubt, fear, and despair torture the soul.

Now prayer partakes of a different nature. It becomes a yearning, a crying, a sighing to God for help. The fine phrases are forgotten. Sometimes without words the soul sighs to God, and sometimes with such simple words as, "O Lord help me, O Lord

be merciful to me and forgive me my many sins and make me free from sin¹³."

These are days of darkness and despair, but Oh, how healing are they if we allow them to serve the purpose for which they are sent; namely, to lead us to truly and earnestly seek the Saviour. These days make it possible for the soul to bring to God the one offering which he will not despise, a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart¹⁴. This is repentance in the sense used in the gospel. It is a deep feeling of remorse and regret for past sins, a struggle to become free from sin and a reaching out to God for help. 't is born out of a realization that God is holy and righteous and that those who would stand in his presence must be purified and sanctified in order to be acceptable.

CONFESSION

A new important need is now experienced by the soul - a need which is quite the opposite of what the soul previously desired. The natural man, in darkness, is not very much concerned because he has sinned, but he does fear that he might be found out by his fellow men. Therefore, to keep his sins under cover of darkness is one of his chief concerns. Now that the soul is enlightened, it is tortured by the consciousness of its guilt before its Maker and has an actual desire, even a deep felt need to make confession of its sins.

It is like the impurities of the body gathering into a large painful boil. The pain becomes very severe and the sufferer longs for the time when the boil

¹³ Rom. 10:13 ¹⁴ Psalm 51:17

becomes "ripe" so that it may belch forth its pus and impurities and allow the healing process to begin. So the soul in repentance has an increasing desire to "open up" and pour out a confession of its past sinfulness. David experienced this after he once forgot God and fell into a great sin for which he afterward repented so contritely. His confession of repentance was made openly and written into a psalm of instruction and published, even printed into the Bible, where you and I may read it until this very day. It is recorded in the thirty-second Psalm, where he says: "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer, I acknowledged my sin unto thee and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin¹⁵."

APOLOGIES

When a repentant person becomes convicted in his conscience, of wrong doing against another person it is essential to confess and apologize and where possible make restitution to that person. Sometimes this is not so easy because it involves personal pride. In such cases it is all the more necessary and wholesome that it be done. Not only is it very helpful and healing to the confessor but it gives the very best kind of testimony to the wronged person of the change which the Grace of God is accomplishing in the repenting person. There have been cases where a person to whom the apology is made by a repenting person

¹⁵ Psalm 32:3-5

was so struck and impressed by the humble and penitent attitude of the confessor that it caused that person also to turn to repentance and thereby became the direct means of saving a soul.

But there are sins which are against God. and His law only and involve no other person. In fact, all sins are primarily against God and only secondarily against our fellow men. The truly repentant person will feel the need of confessing these also. While such confessions are usually made to elders and ministers of the church, that is not absolutely essential. Such confession can be made to any mature believing person in Christ toward whom the confessor has a feeling of confidence that he or she will understand and sympathize and will know how to counsel the confessor, and will keep such confession confidential. Of course, such a confession is always to be made in sincerity and uprightness.

That confession of sins is an essential fruit of true repentance is evident in many places of the Scriptures. Even of John the Baptist it is written, the people "were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins"¹⁶." When the gospel of Jesus Christ was brought to the Ephesians and accepted by them we also find that confession was the fruit of repentance. We read: "And many that believed came and confessed, and shewed their deeds"¹⁷."

When unrepentant people came to John the Baptist for baptism, he refused them with these cutting words: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance"¹⁸."

¹⁶ Matt. 3:6 ¹⁷ Acts 19-18 ¹⁸ Matt. 3:7,8

Undoubtedly an essential part of the fruit consistent with repentance which John missed in these insincere candidates for baptism was a readiness and willingness to confess their sins as the others had done, to whom John's baptism was administered.

That confession is an essential part of the cleansing of the heart, not only in the original cleansing during repentance, but also in after life, if a Christian should again through unwatchfulness commit sin, is shown by the following Scripture texts: "Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed"¹⁹." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."²⁰."

EXPERIENCE

Not only is the confession of sins as an essential part of the Cleansing of the heart in repentance throughly established in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures but the experience of those in our days who have attained regeneration through repentance and faith, confirms the absolute need of confession as a means of unburdening the heart and of obtaining the strength to resist and throw off the power of sin.

To the soul in repentance who is not yet ready and willing to make confession of its sins we can only say: "The fruits of repentance are yet incomplete. Press forward until you have grace to pour out all filth (be it much or little) of the old life." It is no disgrace for a repentant person to confess sins, but an honor. It marks definitely the end of

¹⁹ James 5:16 ²⁰ 1 John 1:9

the old life of uncleanness and the beginning of the new life in Christ in righteousness and purity.

However, the doctrine of confession as herein expounded must not be confused with the Roman Catholic Confessional, where the believer, supposedly standing in grace, is permitted to come from time to time to confess his sinfulness to a priest who is supposed to have authority to forgive the sins of those who accept the penance he prescribes, which often consists at least in part of the payment of money, ostensibly at least, for a good cause.

Nowhere in the Scripture do we find a commandment to confess sins to a priest or any officer of the church but the Scripture says, "Confess your faults one to another²¹." For all true believers, united in the Church which is the body of Christ, are a part of the "royal priesthood²²" and they being in union and communion with Christ can intercede for each other with Christ and with the Father.

WRESTLING WITH GOD

In this state of repentance the soul must wrestle with God and Christ in prayer as did Jacob who wrestled with an angel of God all through the night, seeking a blessing. The angel said to him, let me go, for the day breaketh. Jacob replied, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Jacob prevailed and received a blessing and a new name; "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou wrestled with God and men and has prevailed²³. So may the repenting soul say to the Lord, "I will not give up. Thou hast promised to help me and forgive me. I hold Thee to Thy promise.

²¹ James 5:16 ²² I Peter 2:9 ²³ Genesis 32:26-28

It is not hardness nor unwillingness to forgive sins, that causes God to allow the soul thus to suffer and struggle in the slough of despond. This experience is necessary to bring about certain changes in the heart. Willfulness and stubbornness must give place to obedience to Christ; pride and arrogance must be displaced by humility and meekness, and doubt and unbelief must yield to faith. The will and determination to serve God only must become overwhelming. Those in repentance, who ask God's forgiveness, must learn to forgive, where others have offended against them.

The love of things sinful must be changed into a loathing of them and the power of sin over us must be broken. The love of vain things must perish out of the heart. These are fundamental changes which are the real essence of conversion - of being born again.

Superficial evangelists often speak lightly of "accepting Christ as our Saviour." That of course is necessary. But our marriage to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom, like all marriages, must be a mutual affair. It is not only a question of whether we accept Him, but much more of whether He accepts us. He will accept us, He is bound by His Word and His promises to accept us and His love prompts Him to accept us when we meet His conditions and come with the true fruits of repentance asking to be forgiven by Him and to be accepted of Him. It is while the fruits of repentance are being developed and ripened that this struggle must go on. The length and fierceness of the struggle does not depend nearly so much upon the degree of our sinfulness,

(for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross is sufficient to atone for all sins, though they be as scarlet) as upon the stubbornness of our will and the tenacity with which we cling to our old life.

Repentance, then, is not merely remorse for past wrongdoing but a struggle within ourselves, a struggle between the forces of good and evil, a struggle in which our will plays an important, but not the decisive, part. Our own will unsupported could never overcome the evil in our nature, not only for lack of strength, but because it, itself, is not perfectly pure.

As the struggle goes on, the soul becomes more conscious of its need, of its complete dependence upon the grace of God, in snort, of its lost condition without Christ. It wrestles with God, pleading to be forgiven, pleading for strength and victory, pleading for peace, and vowing over and over to God, to obey and serve Him unto death if He will only help and receive us.

The soul becomes more and more ready and willing to yield itself to Christ and to believe and accept God's way of salvation; to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to believe in His atonement for sin through His death upon the cross and in the shedding of His blood, as a blameless, perfect Lamb of God, for the atonement and the forgiveness of the sins of all men who believe and accept His salvation.

ACCEPTED BY THE SAVIOUR

But the climax comes, not when we accept Him, but when He accepts us. When He

sees the fruit of repentance ripened, the heart purified, the will subdued into obedience to Him, then he changes our hope and belief that He can and will forgive our sins and accept us, into a conviction, into an assurance that **He has** accepted and forgiven us. Thus the struggle ends. Peace and joy fill the heart. An all-consuming love fills and overwhelms the soul. This love knows no bounds. It embraces all men - friend and foe - and burns with a desire to tell all men of the life-giving, soul-saving, healing, and liberating power of God in Jesus Christ.

That soul is converted!

BAPTISM

The man of sin has perished in the heart, has been nailed to the cross with Christ; "old things are passed away; behold all things are become new!"²⁴

The man of sin, the Adam nature, being now slain, crucified with Christ, that soul may now be baptized into the death of Jesus Christ and arise with him to "walk in newness of life"²⁵.

Thus baptism is not the means of obtaining forgiveness of sins, but is the en sealing of an established fact, of a conversion that has gone before. By immersion into water, the burial of the Adam nature is symbolized; by arising out of the water the resurrection to a new life of godliness and holiness is symbolized. The bath in water symbolizes the cleansing of the heart, which cleansing, however, is not done with water, but by the atonement in the blood of Christ.

²⁴ II Cor. 5-17 ²⁵ Rom. 6:4

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now, the heart, being cleansed, is prepared to receive the Holy Ghost as a permanent tenant. He shall be, and is needed as a comforter, as a guide through life, to guide us into all truth²⁶. Jesus said, "He shall teach you all things and brings all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you²⁷."

The anointing of the Holy Ghost is an essential part, without which no converted soul is fully furnished and equipped for the journey and battle of life. A solemn rite is ordained in the Word of God which, when accepted in obedience and faith, and after proper preparation, becomes the means by which this precious gift is received, namely by the laying on of hands, with prayer, after immersion.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews includes this rite, along with repentance and baptism as among the **principles** of the doctrine of Christ when he says, "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment²⁸."

Also we find that the Apostles Peter and John when they went to Samaria, having heard that Samaria had received the Word of God through the preaching of Philip, practiced the laying on of hands for the giving of the Holy Ghost upon those who believed and were baptized. We read: 'Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost²⁹.'

²⁶ John 16:13 ²⁷ John 14:26 ²⁸ Heb. 6:1,2 ²⁹ Acts 8:17

While this rite is ignored or neglected by most denominations of nominal Christianity, it is well established in the Holy Scripture and should be gladly embraced by all true believers who desire to accept the whole counsel of God.

WHAT A BLESSING

What a wonderful experience, to be lead out of darkness into light! To be lead by God's goodness into repentance; in repentance to be lead to faith in the Son of God; by Him to be freed from the power of sin; by Him to be washed and cleansed of our sins that are past, to receive forgiveness of sins and peace with God; to be clothed with the white garment of justification through Jesus Christ; to receive baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; by the laying on of hands to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; to have the love of God richly poured out into our hearts!

WHAT A RESPONSIBILITY

What an experience! What a blessing! Also what a **responsibility!**

Henceforth we are no more our own, but are betrothed as the bride of the Lamb, to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, the heavenly Bridegroom.

Henceforth we may no more live unto ourselves but unto Him who lived and died for us.

Blessed are we if we continue in this faith and in the love all our days, being faithful unto death, bearing fruit of the Spirit³⁰, serving God and our fellow men in love, keeping the commandments of

³⁰ Gal. 5:22

Christ, growing rich in good works, done in the Lord. "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ³¹."

But woe unto us, if, after being saved, and having vowed to serve God and to keep the Commandments of Christ, we fail to do so; if we content ourselves, merely because we no longer live in sin, and neglect to labor in Christ's vineyard and harvest field; if after having said, "I go, sir," when the Lord called us to labor for Him, we neglect to go and neglect to labor.

Woe unto us and double death, if after we have been "once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if we shall again fall away, and crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame³²." There is no second regeneration for such. "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak³³."

³¹ II Peter 1:11³² Heb. 6:4,5 ³³ Heb. 6:9

- BEN SOMMER

¹ (Rom 7:19 KJV) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

² (Rom 7:24 KJV) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

³ (Mark 2:21 KJV) **No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.**

⁴ (Luke 9:24 KJV) **For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.**

⁵ (Rom 6:6 KJV) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

⁶ (John 3:3 KJV) Jesus answered and said unto him, **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**

⁷ (Acts 16:30 KJV) And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?