



## Major principles of living the Christian life

A question of major importance is 'How am I to live as a Christian'? It is one thing to be certain on biblical grounds that I have life from Christ, now I must be clear as to how I am to live the life of Christ. My purpose in setting before you some of the major principles of living the Christian life is three-fold:

1. I wish to sketch in a biblical theology of the Christian life. My purpose is unashamedly one of indoctrination. I wish by God's help, by Spirit and Word, to indoctrinate you in a basic biblical theology of the Christian life.
2. I wish to inoculate you and to immunize you against the major false views of the Christian life. Some of us desperately wish we had received such an inoculation early in our Christian experience. We spent many years chasing rabbits that we could never catch. We went after experiences and states of mind and heart in the hope that somehow in so doing we would find what it really meant to live as a Christian.
3. I wish to purge you of any existing misconceptions which you may presently have. It may not be pleasant but it is in your own best interests.

We now examine these major principles of the Christian life.

### **No one master key**

#### **a) *There is no one master key to living the Christian life***

The kind of teaching I am purposing to focus upon in this principle goes something like this: There is a Christian who for many years has found himself in the doldrums. He has had his sails hoisted but he goes nowhere. It seems that he knows little of the wind of the Spirit filling his sails and carrying him anywhere. Or, to change the analogy, he may have his sails hoisted but they seem for ever to be full of holes, and while all around him have hoisted sails and appear to be making progress he seems to be going nowhere. And then one day at a conference or while reading a book or in his own devotions he comes across a passage of Scripture, say John chapter 15, and there he reads in the words of our Lord Jesus that beautiful analogy of the Christian's relationship to Christ as the relationship of a branch to a vine. This so ignites his own spiritual life that he is almost overnight lifted to an entirely new plateau of spiritual vitality. Either the holes in his sails get mended or it is as though a mighty zephyr from God himself fills his sails, causing them to billow out to the full. He makes more substantial progress in the Christian life in six months than he has made in the previous six years. This man says that the master key to the Christian life is understanding John 15 and if others will only come to understand the concept of Christ's relationship to his people as the branch and the vine are related they too will come to an entirely new plateau of spiritual vitality and reality in their Christian walk.

Another example could be someone who has been struggling with a certain besetting sin which leaves him continually bowed down and crippled with guilt. Here is a young Christian struggling with a certain area of besetting sin, unknown to others, and he is constantly bogged down. His wheels are up to the hub-caps in mud, and no matter how much he changes the gears and pushes down on the accelerator he is spinning his wheels and all he is doing is using up petrol and making a mess. He is in that position for weeks and months perhaps, and then one day at a conference or reading a book or in his own devotions he comes to Romans, chapter 6, and he reads the glorious truth that in union with Jesus Christ all that he was as old man has been put to death, and in union with Jesus Christ the totality of the old life has been buried in Christ's tomb and he is now a new man in Jesus Christ and he sees that he is called upon to reckon it so, and in the light of that, present himself as alive from the dead. He reads the statement, '*Sin shall not exercise lordship*

over you'. You are no longer in the realm of law, with condemnation, guilt and all of its crippling power, you are within the orbit and the dynamics of grace. What happens? In the believing appropriation of that truth the wheels are suddenly out of the mud, he is on solid tarmac and when he puts the thing in gear and presses on the accelerator he goes somewhere. And to everyone he meets he says, 'Do you know what the key to the Christian life is? It is there in Romans 6'.

Now you know what a master key is? It is the key that will unlock any door. There is no one master key to living the Christian life. The Bible nowhere presents us with a master key. What it presents us with is a key ring on which is hung every text of the Bible. In Matthew 4:4, our Lord, quoting from Deuteronomy, said '*Man shall not live by bread alone*' but by what? '*Every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*'. If you are to be a whole Christian you need the whole of the Word of God, not one master key.

Again, 2 Timothy 3:16, 17: '*All scripture is breathed out of God and is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for child-training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work*'.

It is the totality of scripture that is calculated to make whole men and women. '*All scripture is breathed out of God*' and all scripture '*is profitable for reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness*' in order that the man of God may be complete. We need the whole Bible to make us whole Christians. We could take Psalm 1. How is the blessed man described? Blessed is the man, negatively, who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. You want to be blessed? You will not be blessed spending hours in front of your 'telly'. For the most part the counsel of your television is the raw counsel of ungodliness, explicitly and implicitly, and there is no-one who makes any significant strides in grace who spends hours at indiscriminate television watching.

The counsel of the ungodly comes through your popular tabloids, filthy gossip sheets. You do not grow in grace feeding your minds on that filth.

*'Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly nor stands in the way of sinners'.*

Do not tell me you are growing in grace when you stand with the utterly lawless patterns of life of your big-name rock stars and you let their drug-oriented, lawless, sex-soaked lyrics filter into your mind. Do not tell me you grow in grace. You cannot and you will not when you walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners, sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in ... the one great key to live the Christian life. That is not what it says! His delight is '*in the law of the Lord*'. '*The law of the Lord*' means the totality of God's revealed will. He meditates in the law of God day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. He shall be fruitful. He shall be one whose leaves never wither. He shall be the one who prospers in whatever he does. There is no one master key to living the Christian life. The view violates the entire structure of the Bible, particularly the epistles of the New Testament.

Now what kind of problems did Christians in the New Testament have? Take the church at Corinth. They had the problem of divisions, they had the problem of immorality, they had questions about marriage, questions about Christian liberty — shall I do this, do that, go here, go there? They had questions about self-denial, they had questions about spiritual gifts. You see, if there were one master key to the Christian life, Paul would simply hang out that key and say, 'Here it is. Whatever your problem is, here is your key'.

You need to be immunized against this teaching that there is one master key to the Christian life. There is no one master key, much as your flesh and my flesh would love to have one!

## **No escape from tension**

### **b) *There is no escape from tension and conflict in living the Christian life***

I do not say that the Christian life is all tension and all conflict. The kind of teaching I am attempting to expose as fallacious is as follows: At a conference a speaker takes a text out of context to which

he attaches or from which he extracts a shibboleth — perhaps the shibboleth of Christ living his life through us, or the saving life of Christ, or the abiding life. Then the preacher, having expounded his theory of the Christian life, gives an appeal like this 'Child of God, are you weary of the tension of wrestling with your remaining sin? Are you tired of struggling in prayer? Are you weary of having to battle with impure thoughts and thoughts of envy and pride and jealousy? Are you tired of this incessant conflict?' And every true Christian sits there with his fangs dripping, saying, 'Oh God, you know I am tired, I would give anything to have one day, one day in which I did not have to battle with dullness of heart and distraction of mind and the seductions to sin that come from without and from within' And the speaker then says 'Ah, if you are tired of the tension, weary of the conflict, if you will but take these steps', then Christ will so live his life through you that it will be a life marked by the negation of tension and conflict. You will be so filled with the Spirit, so taken up in the Spirit, that tension and conflict for all intents and purposes will be a thing of the past as long as you maintain the posture of the abiding life. The moment you feel tension and conflict, it is because you slipped out of that life, back to your old ways. Now that is not a caricature, that is spelled out in page after page, book after book. Beware of the writings of Watchman Nee! Beware of some of the writings of such as Norman Grubb and Hannah Whithall Smith. Beware of these writings, because if you take them seriously they could drive you either into a world of unreality or into a world of scepticism.

Now what proof do I offer from the Word of God for that proposition?

1. *Because of the reality of indwelling sin with its incessant and powerful actions upon us.*

Galatians 5:17: *'The flesh is lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these two are contrary the one to the other, so that you may not do the things that you would'*. And Paul does not go on to say that there is a way to be utterly, totally delivered from that consciousness of tension and conflict. He does tell us that we need not be dominated by the flesh: *'Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh'*. But he nowhere says that the consciousness of the flesh's lusting will be negated, and where flesh is lusting against Spirit, there is conflict.

I hold to the time-proven exegesis of Romans 7:14-25, which is the description of the agonizing daily conflict of a regenerate man. *'When I would do good'*, and it is precisely at the point where I would do good, *'I find another law in my members'*. The more spiritual the activity you contemplate engaging in, the more powerful will be the actings of remaining sin against it. You come home at the end of a busy day and say 'Well, I think I'll just pick up the *Times* and take in a little news'. Do you ever feel a powerful surge of indwelling sin when you contemplate sitting down and just picking up the *Times* and reading a little news? I never have! But you come home after a busy day and say to yourself, I had only a few minutes in the Word this morning, I think I will sit down and read my Bible for half an hour. What happens? All of a sudden this dullness comes over your mind and you say, 'I didn't realize I was so tired'. A dullness creeps over your mind and you feel so totally unspiritual that you think it would dishonour God to read his Word in that frame of mind. What is that? It is your indwelling sin.

When you go on the phone to talk to one of your friends you are tired, but after talking for five minutes about this, that and the other, suddenly your mind is alert and your tongue is flowing just a mile a minute. But decide to go and spend five minutes in prayer and what happens? Your mind is dull and distracted and your tongue feels as thick and lifeless as a glob of meat hanging in the butcher's shop. God says that indwelling sin is going to be your unwelcome companion till the day you cross the river and enter the celestial city. That is why there is no release from tension and conflict in the Christian life.

2. *There is the world with its restless, aggressive pressure upon us.*

Romans 12:2: *'And be not conformed to this world'*. Phillips translation, or paraphrase, accurately catches the mind of the Spirit in that passage, 'Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould'. This world's system is life in the totality of its organized existence, devoid of God, hostile to his Word and his law, that is what the world is with its standards, its goals, its opinions, its mindset, its people, its philosophy. It is the totality of unregenerate humanity in

opposition to God. The Scripture makes plain that the world has never signed a treaty with those who have been delivered from it. It is aggressively and continually exerting pressure to squeeze us into its mould. The world cannot stand it when someone thinks contrary to its accepted canons. The world says that what counts is what you see and what you have in your bank account and what you have on your body and what you have in terms of title to homes and lands. God says what counts is the treasure that you have in heaven. The world says that what counts is that you have got your act together externally and that you are a head-turner. God says that what counts is the hidden beauty of the heart. And as long as the world exists in its aggressive restless pressure upon the believer there is going to be tension, there is going to be conflict. That is why John had to write 1 John 2:15-17:

*'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away and the lust thereof but he that is doing the will of God abides for ever'.*

One of the things that is frightening to me, and I am old enough to have seen this happen, is that I look out on the faces of young men and women and I wonder how many of those who now show a refreshing wholesome enthusiasm for the things of God will in ten years time be as dead as a dodo in spiritual things. What will make the difference? Jesus said that some receive the Word, but as in a plot of land that receives good seed, the weeds grow up and they choke that plant. You know what Jesus said the weeds were? The cares of this world and the lusts of other things enter in and they choke the Word. The world hates you if your life-style is a markedly contrasting life-style that exposes its vanity. If you hold things loosely and if you are not living for things and for station and ambition, and your great passion is that your life will be so controlled by Jesus Christ and poured out in the purposes of his kingdom that your life will count and you will have treasures in heaven, you are a constant irritation to the world and the world will never be content until you are just like one of them. If you have got just a little bit of religion to make you respectable, the world will love you all the more because then you are a monument of its philosophy.

There is no escape from conflict and tension, but as the years pass and habits of godliness are established, does it not get easier? I have seen half a century and thirty-two of those years have been spent in the way of grace and I tell you, the battle rages more fiercely as I come down the other end of the road than ever it did at the beginning. Old Bunyan had it right, there was no rest till they were carried across the river.

### 3. *There is the devil with his vicious, devouring intentions.*

1 Peter 5:8: *'Be sober, be vigilant, your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking'* ... to be a spectacle outside of the zoo? No, he's in business. The business of attracting attention to himself! He walks about seeking whom he may ... what? Simply bite and leave a few fang marks? No! *'seeking whom he may devour'*. He is out to devour you. That is why James said in James 4:8: *'Resist the devil and he will flee from you'*. Ephesians 6:12:

*'Our wrestling — our agony, our hand-to-hand combat, the agony of spiritual struggle — is not with flesh and blood but against principalities and powers'.*

Paul does not say that it is until you get a glorious baptism of the Holy Ghost and then it is all over! Or that it is until you go to a conference and learn the secret of the abiding life and then it is all over! Or that it is until you read Watchman Nee's book, *Sit, Walk, Stand*, and then you are in! No! As long as you are a true Christian in touch with reality, the devil is out to devour you with an unprincipled fiendish viciousness.

### 4. *We are saved in hope.*

We are saved in the context in which the best is yet to come. All we have now is the down-payment. Notice how this works. When God is done with you what are you going to be like? According to the Bible, you are going to be like Jesus Christ. You are going to have a body

fashioned like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21). You are going to have a spirit that is fashioned like unto his. You will not be God, but every last fibre of inbred sin will be purged from you so that you will have the capacity to love perfectly in keeping with your capacity as a creature. Think of it! Not to go through just a day, but to go through a succession of aeons, and never have a distracting thought, an impure thought, a jealous thought! God has marked us for perfection — a mind and a spirit unstained with sin, a body capable of carrying out all the impulses of a perfectly holy heart. You know those times when the Lord is especially precious and near and your spirit fain would leap out of this body and serve him as an angel. The thought of an hour of unbroken communion with him is sheer delight but you find after twenty minutes that weariness steals over your body and there is distraction and dullness. You see, we are marked for perfection in body and in spirit but God has not ordained to give us that perfection now. What is the result? Tension! Because we are saved in hope and hope is not yet realized, there is tension, there is conflict. We often think, what must it have been like if we could have been in a home where the Apostle Paul lived or stayed on one of his journeys, and sneaked up to the door of the room where he was praying one morning. Oh, what would it have been to hear this man pray! Well, you know what it would have been like some mornings? You would have heard groaning! You say to yourself, this must not be Paul's room so I had better try another one! No, it is Paul's. He says in 2 Corinthians 5: *'We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened'*. There were times when he groaned because in that holy heart transformed by grace there was this burning passion to serve Christ. But he had a body described in 2 Corinthians 4:17: *'The outward man is decaying day by day'*, and he groaned. Romans 8 tell us the same thing,

*'The whole creation groans and travails until now. And not only so, but we ourselves who have the first-fruits of the spirit groan within ourselves, longing for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body'.*

That sounds like conflict and tension, and rather than being a sign of an unspiritual frame, it is a sign of wholesome spirituality. There are groans and sighs that are the mark of a wholesome piety. There is no escape from tension — if you think you have attained an escape you are out of touch with reality.

## **No suspension of use of faculties**

### **c) *There is no negation or suspension of the conscious employment of any faculty of our redeemed humanity in living the Christian life***

What are the faculties of a redeemed man? He has his hands, his feet, his eyes, his nose. He also has his intellectual faculties — his mind and his judgment, his emotional faculties of action, his volitional faculties, his will. He has his appetites, his feelings, his desires and some of the psychological and physical overlap and interpenetrate. These are the faculties of our humanity. When God regenerates a sinner he creates no new faculties, nor does he kill or destroy any existing faculties. Grace works wonderfully and powerfully so as to give new functions and new perspectives to those faculties. God does not cancel, kill, negate any of the faculties or create any new faculties. When I live the Christian life I live the Christian life with the full engagement of mind, judgment, the ability to think, the ability to weigh and evaluate my affections, my feelings, my emotions, my appetites, my inclinations, my hands, my eyes.

What teaching am I seeking to expose by articulating that principle? There are those who teach that the problem with most Christians is that they are trying to live the Christian life and God never intended they should. And then you are told that just as God never expected you to save yourself by going to the Cross for yourself, he does not expect you to live the Christian life. All he expects you to do is to let go and to let Jesus Christ live his life through you. I call it the funnel theory! You just get so adjusted and make sure everything is just right and you get totally passive and Christ will pour his life through you. Christ lives his life again in you and there is the suspension of many of your faculties! The reason you get in such a muddle is that you are using your mind! Don't use it. Let your mind go into neutral. Let Christ's mind be your mind. The problem is that you are using your will and that it is getting in the way. Now negate your will and let Christ will through you. It

sounds so spiritual but it is a travesty of the Biblical teaching and I want to focus on three specific expressions of this kind of teaching.

### **1. *An imbalanced doctrine of the indwelling Christ***

There is a doctrine of the indwelling Christ in Scripture —

Galatians 2:20: *'I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.'*

Colossians 3:4: *'Christ who is our life...'*

Romans 5:10: *'We are saved by his life...'*

Many well-meaning people take those phrases and, totally ignoring both the immediate context and the analogy of faith (the total witness of the Bible) they spin out a theory of the indwelling Christ. The kindest thing we can say about it is that it is woefully imbalanced because they teach a doctrine of the indwelling Christ in which, according to such authors as Mrs. Hannah Whitall Smith, Watchman Nee and A. B. Simpson, Christ literally lives his life through you, and to the extent that there is the negation and suspension of your thought, your judgment, your will, your affections. To that extent, they say, Christ will successfully live his life through you.

### **2. *An unwarranted deduction from analogies of the Christian life***

Some of this teaching is derived from unwarranted deductions from the likenesses or analogies of the Christian life. Is the Christian life in one degree or another like the relationship between a branch and a vine? Yes, but you know what some people do? They take that analogy and they wrench it loose from all other biblical teachings and they spin out a whole theology. I have heard it put this way 'How many of you have ever walked by an orchard at the time when the fruit was coming to full bloom?' and when people raised their hands, the speaker said, 'Now let me ask you something, Did you ever see a tree struggling to bring forth such beautiful apples, did you ever see a tree agitated to bring forth apples? All the lovely little branches do is just hang there, joined to the main trunk and the sap flows and the apples appear and all the lush fruit of the Spirit will be born.'

Others take the deductions from the biblical analogy of being united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, and they say, 'Are we dead with Christ? Well, if you go to a dead man and hold the most beautiful smelling perfume under his nose, do you get any response? Of course not, he is dead. Or if there is a particular food that he was obsessed with in his life you can hold it under his nose, but do you get any response? So if you really are dead with Christ sin will have no real and valid appeal to you'. Unwarranted deductions from analogies of the Christian life!

### **3. *Inaccurate doctrine of sanctification by faith alone***

The teaching goes something like this. When you were conscious of your guilt and stood under the condemnation of a holy God, and there was nowhere to flee for refuge, you were told that Jesus Christ the incarnate God lived the life we should have lived, died the death we deserved and on the basis of that perfect life of obedience culminating in his obedience to the death of the Cross there is a God-righteousness, a perfect righteousness, available to all who will believe. And then they say, What did you need to do to obtain that perfect righteousness? Nothing! you simply believed. The empty hand of faith took it. Now, they say, in the same way in Jesus Christ is held forth sanctification. What do you need to do? Simply believe! Faith operates in exactly the same way in our sanctification as it does in our justification.

Now what is wrong with all of those theories that have as their common denominator the suspension or the negation of the conscious engagement of all our faculties as redeemed men and women?

- I. They ignore the fact that God, in the Bible, addresses all of our faculties with commands, with imperatives. *'Set your mind on things that are above'*. Who is supposed to do that — you or God? Jesus said *'If your hand offend you ... trust the indwelling Christ to make it rot*

away?' *'If your hand offends you cut it off and cast it from you'*. You are to do it. You are addressed. Paul said *'I buffet my body and I keep it under lest in preaching to others I myself should be a castaway'*. He didn't say the indwelling Christ did it. *'I buffet it...'* Yield your members as instruments of righteousness. You do it! And I could quote dozens of texts in which every faculty of body and mind is addressed. *'Flee fornication'*. How do you flee from it? You flee it with your feet. God says the best way to avoid fornication is with your feet.

II. *Mortification is said to be our responsibility by the Spirit.*

Romans 8:13: *'If you by the Spirit do mortify...'* I commend John Owen's dissertation on this in volume 6 of his *Works*. Furthermore the description of the positive cultivation of Christian graces: all of those descriptions show that it is our responsibility to cultivate them. 2 Peter 1:5 *'Besides this, showing on your part all diligence, add to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge and to knowledge self-control...'* Colossians 3:1-2: You and I are to set our minds, our affections, on things above. *'He that sayeth he abides in him ought to walk as he walked'*. We are to walk in the Spirit. We are to follow his steps. The positive cultivation of grace demands the engagement of all of our faculties. The dominant images of the Christian life are the images of the military and the athletic and I could quote many such texts. We turn to what Dabney calls *'the epitomizing text'*. He told his young preachers always to preach from epitomizing texts which distil the essence of broad biblical teaching in a simple statement.

Philippians 2:12 is perhaps the most helpful text in all the Bible on this subject. *'So then, my beloved brethren, even as you have always obeyed (notice he didn't say, even as the indwelling Christ has always lived his life through you) not in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in you to will and to work for his good pleasure'*. Notice the basic teaching. The imperative is this: *'Work out your own salvation'*. He doesn't say *'work to attain it'*. They were a forgiven people. They are to work out the implications. They are to work towards the completion of this salvation that is theirs in Christ. And they are to do it with fear and trembling, that is, with the sense of God's eye upon them and with the awful realization of the seriousness of the task *'with fear and trembling'*. And they are to do it with what encouragement? *'For it is God who is working in you (now notice carefully) both to will and to work for his good pleasure'* (v. 13). God's work in grace both enables me to will and to do, and it is because he is working in me to will and to do that I can work out with fear and trembling. Well, does he work or do I work? His working and our working are concurrent realities. His working comes to manifestation in my working and my working is the proof of his working. You see the beauty of that! And I need never fear that I will work out more than he is working in. You never need fear that your working out will ever outstrip God's working in.

Philippians 4:13: *'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'*. Paul says *'I can do'*. How much can you do, Paul? *'All things'*. And in the context the *'all things'* refers to all the things necessary in responding to the providence of God. He said, *'At times I am in want, at times I am in plenty, at times I have got to learn what it is to be joyful when my stomach is playing a tune on my backbone, I am so hungry'*. At other times, he said, *'I am so full I wonder if maybe I even verged on the border line of excessive indulgence I have been so blessed with so much'*. But, he said, *'whether learning how to be abased or how to abound in a godly manner, I can do all things. I do them! But I do them through him who strengthens me from within' 'I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live and the life which I now live in the flesh...'* Who lives Paul's life in the flesh — Christ or Paul? Paul does. But, he said, *'I live it in faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me'*.

## **No crisis experience**

### **d) *There is no crisis experience promised or commanded as an essential element in living the Christian life***

There are many teachings regarding the Christian life which assert that only a low level of Christian experience can be realized by the person who has not had a crisis experience subsequent to

regeneration, or at least, subsequent to conversion and to the beginning of conscious Christian experience. Furthermore, it is asserted that it is this crisis experience which is both commanded and promised by God as the entrance into a qualitatively new dimension or level of spiritual experience, reality and power.

Throughout the history of the Church, there are many different strands of this crisis teaching.

There is what we might call 'old classic Wesleyan perfectionism'. This teaching concentrated particularly upon sanctification and spoke of a baptism of purifying fire, or it spoke of coming into a state of perfect love. This teaching concentrated not so much on power for service or upon inward feelings, but on a crisis experience in which the power of indwelling sin would be for all intents and purposes negated. Now I have read enough of classic Wesleyan theology to know that there are different opinions, even as to what Wesley himself taught on the subject but in a general descriptive manner this, I believe, is an accurate representation of old classic Wesleyan perfectionism.

Then, there is 'the old Pentecostalism' on which the emphasis was upon a baptism in the Holy Spirit generally subsequent to conversion, and this baptism of the Spirit was always invariably manifested with speaking in tongues. One need not have the gift of tongues imparted, but the way you knew that you had this baptism of power was that on the occasion of the baptism of power you spoke in tongues and the primary focus in old classic Pentecostalism was the matter of power for service.

Thirdly, there is the modern 'charismatic movement'. Like old classic Pentecostalism, they use many of the same passages out of the book of Acts to support their theory of this necessary and promised crisis. So they emphasize that in most cases — and there are different schools amongst modern charismatics — it will be manifested by the speaking in tongues. Some are content to believe you have got 'it' if you have a season of holy laughter and there are others who say you haven't spoken in tongues because you have some psychological hang-ups and if we can remove these hang-ups the tongues are there. You just haven't let them out. Here the emphasis is not so much on a baptism of purifying fire as in the case of old classic Wesleyan perfectionism, or the baptism of power as in the case of old classic Pentecostalism, but here the emphasis is more upon a baptism of joyful praise-filled experience. These are generalities, but they are accurate.

In the fourth place there are the various forms of 'higher life' teaching. And what they all have in common is this, that you are simply converted, you are simply united to Christ, you are simply regenerated and in the way until you come to this crisis of surrender and faith — the crisis in which you let go and let God', the crisis in which you appropriate the indwelling life of Christ. The common denominator is that it is a crisis without any external manifestation of tongues or holy laughter or shouting or jumping, but the end result will be new power to live a holy life, so that the emphasis falls upon the ability to be more efficient in the path of holiness.

Fifthly, there is a category of teaching which has both old and some modern proponents that focuses upon the matter of assurance and has been expressed in terms of the biblical language of 'a sealing of the Holy Spirit'. Some of the old Puritans taught this, Goodwin for one, but he was certainly not the only one. There have been certain preachers in our own day who have believed this very strongly and emphasized it repeatedly. The basic concern in this teaching is that subsequent to regeneration and conversion there is a crisis experience in which the believer enters into a qualitatively new dimension of assurance by a sealing of the Spirit. Some would say that the baptism in the Spirit and the sealing of the Spirit are synonymous and this results in a bright new vibrancy in one's own spiritual experience, and in one's testimony, but that the critical thing about such a person is this, his true usefulness comes subsequent to his sealing in the Holy Spirit.

The above are five of the major strands of teaching, all of them with various sub-teachings under them. But these are the major categories which teach that a crisis experience subsequent to conversion and regeneration is both promised, and some would say, commanded, as an essential element of living the Christian life.



## **What are the common denominators in all this teaching?**

1. *Regeneration and conversion, or they will often say 'mere' conversion, leaves one inadequately furnished for living a Biblically normal Christian life.*

The language goes something like this: 'Now you are a Christian, you are saved, you are indwelt by the Spirit, fine! But if you would really live, live with a capital L, live with power, live with overcoming grace, live with usefulness, live with grip in your testimony; you must have this higher, this more noble, this more glorious, this more fulsome experience of God's grace. Oh, yes, you are converted, but you see the action is really not to be seen in the fact that you are converted but it is to be seen in that you obtain this experience. Conversion or regeneration will fit you to die, but they really do not equip you to live. If you are really to live you need this crisis experience.'

2. *An experience subsequent to regeneration is to be sought and obtained on the basis of meeting certain conditions or in the use of certain means.*

Some who teach these various doctrines would say the experience has come to some men unsought but, be that as it may, it is our duty to seek such an experience and to obtain such an experience and in the pursuit of obtaining that experience to meet certain conditions. Each school of thought has its own set of conditions and within each school there are differing conditions, but one of the common denominators is that the experience is to be sought until it is obtained and it is to be sought in the way of meeting certain conditions.

3. *All who have the experience will know it because it registers at the level of Christian consciousness.*

In other words, a person may be brought to repentance and faith in a context of very poor teaching and because adoption and justification are legal declarations of God, made the moment the weakest faith lays hold of the promised Saviour and the salvation that is in him, it is perfectly possible for a man, a woman, a boy or a girl to be as justified as the Apostle Paul and as adopted as Saint Augustine and yet not to know it and be unaware of it for lack of clear teaching. But all the proponents of crisis experience theology say that is not so as far as this crisis is concerned. All who have the experience will know it because it is registered in one's consciousness.

Now at this point I have to say that the old Pentecostals were about the least cruel, because they said you had an absolutely clear criterion by which to know you had it – you spoke in tongues. Others who teach this doctrine and who don't give some criterion or criteria are cruel for they awaken in people the conviction: 'I must have this experience. If I am just an ordinary Christian without it I can't really become the Christian I ought to be until I have it. How will I know when I have it?' But the basic answers of all schools run, you will know it because it registers in your consciousness.

4. *The basis of this teaching is a very selective and questionable use of certain texts of Scripture.*

All of these crisis teachings claim to be based upon Scripture and often the very language of Scripture is used to hold forth the experience. For instance, one of the phrases which is almost a shibboleth in old Wesleyan perfectionism is 'heart purity' taken from Acts 15:9 *'Purifying their hearts by faith'*. That was a great classic Methodist text. In the context it is talking not about a second work of grace; it is talking about the first work of grace that God performed in the hearts of Cornelius and his friends. The concept of entire sanctification is taken from 1 Thessalonians 5:23: *'I pray God your whole body, soul and spirit be preserved entire'*. The idea of the saving life of Christ, the well-known term of someone who has a theology of the higher life, is taken from Romans 5:10: *'If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more now being reconciled we shall be saved by his life'*. A whole theology of a crisis of surrender in which we enter into the victorious life is couched in that biblical phrase and then strung into this terminology, 'the saving life of Christ'.

Now one of the common denominators of all of these crisis theology theories of the Christian life is that the teaching is based on a very selective and questionable use of certain texts of Scripture.

*How do we know that this teaching is not scriptural?*

There is not one suggestion in the New Testament that any problem faced by any Christian or any church was ever resolved by urging them to seek a crisis of experience.

#### I. The problem of divisions.

There was party spirit at Corinth. Somebody did a little sanctified tattling to Paul — the household of Chloe. *'It has been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe that there are contentions among you...'* (1 Corinthians 1:11). And he describes how those contentions are manifested. What can be more carnal than believers with a party spirit? believers who have been already, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13, all of them, baptised by the one spirit into the one body and have all been made to drink of the one spirit. They have had a common experience in the Holy Spirit. There were not two levels of Christians — those who had just been converted and those who had been baptised in the Spirit; those who were just converted and those who had entered the higher life; those who were merely Christians, those who had had a baptism of fire. There was no hint of those two levels of Christian experience. He writes to the Church sanctified in Christ Jesus and says *'Now among you there are these divisions'*. He describes them. Some have attached themselves to Paul, some to Peter, and then the real spiritual ones said *'We are the Christians, the real Christians, we are attached only to Christ'*. But Paul puts them in the same class as the others.

How does Paul deal with this? Does he say that it is evident to him that the reason they have the divisions is because they have never been baptised in the Spirit, that they have never come to grips with what it is to be cleansed from inbred sin? What does he offer as the antidote to this deep-seated and pervasive problem of division? He doesn't tell them to go on to get something more. What he does is he tries to bring them to come to grips with what they already are and what they already have. He says *'Is Christ divided? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?'* He goes on to show them that they must come to grips with what they already have and already are, and in the outworking of what they have and they are the divisions will be swept away. You see the difference? He doesn't say, 'You must get something more'; he says, 'You must understand and appropriate what is already yours in Christ'.

#### II. The problem of immorality.

Surely, if you have Christians that are fornicating, they are living at a terribly low level of Christian experience and they need, if anyone needs, a baptism of fire to cleanse them from inbred sin. It is Christians who are even consorting with prostitutes and possibly even with the temple prostitutes. How does Paul deal with that problem?

*'Meats for the belly, the belly for meats, but God shall bring to naught both it and them. But the body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised the Lord and will raise us through his power. For do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? God forbid. Know ye not that he that is joined to a harlot is one body, for the two, said he, shall become one flesh, but he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, which you have from God and you are not your own? You were bought with a price. Glorify God, therefore, in your body.'*

(1 Corinthians 6:13-20)

You see what Paul is doing? As he faces this thorny problem of gross, moral deviation he does not suggest in the slightest way that what these Corinthians needed was a qualitatively new experience of grace. He doesn't say, 'You need the baptism of the Spirit to purify this sordid filthy propensity to fornication'. He suggests no such thing. He says 'Don't you know, Don't you know, Don't you know...?' Think of what you are, think of the relationships that already obtain when in

repentance and faith you were called into union with Christ. That was a real union. 1 Corinthians 1:9: *'God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship'* (the *koinonia*), the shared life of Jesus Christ. Don't you know that it is a real union. When you go to the house of the prostitute you go in union with Christ. Would you take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Don't you know your body is a purchased possession? When Christ bled and died, when he was inundated by the fiery fury of divine wrath upon the Cross he died to purchase you. Your hands, your feet, your sexual organs, are purchased property. Corinthians, don't you realize it, don't you know it? Not once does he suggest that the reason they lived the way they lived is because they were short-changed in some crisis experience. He says, here are the great indicatives — you are joined to Christ, you are indwelt by the Spirit, you have been bought with a price. Now the imperative is not to seek another experience but to live out the implications of what you are and of what you have.

You can go through 1 Corinthians with all the problems and that is the emphasis that comes through again and again. All the way through the Epistles you will find that principle again and again.

I do not say that believers do not have spiritual crises; that would contradict everything taught in the Bible, Old and New Testament, and in Christian biography. Christians do have crises and some of these crises bring them in the space of a very short time to a level of spiritual reality and power that they have never known before. I am not debating that. I would be a fool to take such a position and to say that Christians don't have crises. What I am saying is that the Bible nowhere commands or promises a spiritual crisis of any kind as essential to living the Christian life. There is a world of difference in the two things. You can go right through the New Testament and notice how every problem is taken up, at least in principle, every moral problem, every ethical problem, problems of inter-personal relationships, problems with indwelling sin, problems with the world and with the flesh, but never, never, never do the apostolic writers ever command or promise a crisis experience as God's answer for those particular problems.

The question now comes, 'What about the whole teaching in the Book of Acts concerning those four Pentecosts — Acts 2; Acts 8; Acts 10; Acts 19'. We cannot expound those passages here but I heartily recommend that, if you are serious in coming to grips with what they teach, you read Frederick Dale Brunner's book on the Holy Spirit, *The New Testament Witness to the Pentecostal Experience*. But first, two warnings: there are one or two places where a bit of the leaven of a Barthian view of Scripture comes through. He speaks of Paul possibly contradicting himself in 1 Corinthians 11:14. I do not hold that view. He also takes what some have called a realistic view of baptism — some of us call it sacramentalist view — grace actually meeting men in the water of baptism. But apart from those two flaws Mr. Brunner's exposition of those passages in Acts is masterful and as far as I am concerned unassailable, in which he demonstrates the true significance of those four Pentecosts.

Now does that mean I am saying that a Christian should not pray that he be more full of the Spirit tomorrow than he was today? No! Am I saying that a Christian should not pray that he have a qualitatively deepened experience of the knowledge of Christ tomorrow than that which he had today? No! As much as I abominate with all of my being all of this crisis teaching which leads to confusion, and, in many cases, to cynicism and fanaticism, I also abominate the spirit of Laodicea — *'Rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing'*. 'We've got everything in Christ, sit back...' That spirit is nowhere taught in the New Testament. Though we have in union with Christ, in the language of Ephesians 1:3: *'been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ'* we shall be a life-time working out and appropriating even the fringes of those blessings, for at best it is only a down payment; the best and the most is yet to come. And God abominates the spirit of indifference — *'because thou art rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing'*, Jesus said, *'I am about to vomit you out'*.

We are continually to pray for more and copious supplies of the Spirit.

Luke 11:13: *'If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him'*. Paul writes in

Ephesians 1, *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us...'*

And then there is that theology in eulogy in which he blesses the triune God for so great salvation, the Father for electing and predestinating grace, the Son for redeeming grace, the Spirit for sealing us unto the day of redemption. Yet he goes on in verse 15 to say, *'For this cause I bow my knees that God would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, that you may know what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, that you may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power'*. He says, You have all of this, but I, plead with God that you may have a deeper, richer experimental knowledge of all that you have in Christ and all that Christ has in you. And as though that were not enough, in chapter 3 he says *'I bow my knees and now I pray for the unprayerable'*. He says, *'I pray that God would make you strong to comprehend the incomprehensible that you may know the length and breadth and height and depth and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God...'* And he is not praying that they will have some kind of a specific charismatic experience, he is not praying that they will have a second work of grace, he is not praying that they will have any of those five categories of experience that I described, but he is praying that they will have enlarged capacities, that they will have expanded spiritual perception, and that they will have increased spiritual appropriation of the fulness that is in Christ.

As clearly as the New Testament teaches that there is no crisis experience subsequent to regeneration and conversion that we are commanded to seek or that is promised to us, it teaches with equal clarity that hungering, thirsting, panting, longing, pleading, yearning, seeking, advancing, are the characteristics of the healthy soul. There are times when I despair and say, 'O Lord is it possible that we can even expect to see people who have grasped that Biblical emphasis?' It seems that people either go off on the one hand to all the excesses of crisis Christianity, or they drift off to this dull, lifeless, non-experimental, bland, cold kind of Christianity. So often it bears the name Reformed and frankly, I would rather be with a warm-hearted, woolly-headed Wesleyan who thinks he had a second work of grace but who is hungry for God, than the man who can sit for hours and prove that there is no such thing and whose heart is as cold as stone.

### **Divine chastisement**

#### **e) *There is no escape from Divine Chastisement as an integral factor in the Christian life***

Hebrews 12:5 onwards, proves this point.

*'You have forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as sons, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when you are reprov'd of him ... for whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges every son whom he receives.'*

If God, in grace, has adopted you into his family then he has adopted you into the family of his chastised ones. *'What son is there whom his father does not chasten? If you are without chastening whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons'*. You see, it is the illegitimate son whose father is ashamed that he is his father. He does not openly own him — that's the son who is left without chastisement. God has no illegitimate sons. His true sons he chastens because he is committed to make them partakers of his holiness. *'Our earthly fathers, indeed for a few days, chastened us as seemed good to them, but he for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness'*. Never forget it, God's basic purpose in redemption is not to make you happy, it is to make you holy. *'Whom he did foreknow he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son'*. There will be plenty of happiness along the way but this passage says that *'no chastening for the present is joyous'*. I never once spanked one of my children and had them dance a jig around the kitchen! No chastening for the present seems joyous.

This idea that if you only get the experience you can have a thirty-two-tooth grin twenty-seven hours out of every twenty-four hours is the curse of the charismatics. We see all the plastic smiles

of the leaders. What do you do when a chastened child of God comes in bitterness of soul? You become a Job's comforter. You say, 'O your problem is, you don't have the Holy Ghost. If you only spoke in tongues, you would just go to your room and babble for an hour and you would feel good'. That is not caricature; I have heard that Job's friend's counsel given to people. Dear child of God, settle it as a fundamental principle of the Christian life, until you are made into the perfect likeness of Jesus Christ you are going to feel the sting of God's rod. No chastening for the present seems joyous. Whom the Lord loves he chastens. Revelation 3:19: *'As many as I love I rebuke and I chasten'* and I tell you, when God is chastening, it is not always in terms of physical affliction. God's chastening must never be viewed simply in terms of physical and financial calamities. They may be chastening; they may not be. To me the worst chastening is the withdrawal of countenance, when you pray and you don't sense and know realized communion with God. What more bitter chastening to a true Christian than to be unable to engage God in conscious, delightful communion and prayer! I know of no more bitter chastisement than that. And that is enough to set any true Christian searching his heart saying, *'O God, where have I grieved you that you have turned your face? Hide not your face from me in my distress. Lift up the light of your countenance upon me'*. The Psalms are full of it. Child of God, face the fact that there is no escape from divine chastisement as an integral factor in the Christian life.

### **Means of grace**

#### **f) *There are no effective substitutes for the appointed Means of Grace in progressing in the Christian life***

Those means of grace fall into two categories: (1) personal and private (2) public and social.

##### **I. Personal and private**

And we know what personal and private are. Jesus prays, *'Father sanctify them in thy truth: thy word is truth'*, John 17:17. *'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. Thy word have I laid up in my heart that I might not sin against thee'*. Secret prayer! Prayer, that mysterious and awesome and yet, at times, delightful privilege. *'You have not because you ask not'*. Why are some of you going on still crippled with certain besetting sins? You have not because you ask not. You do not bring those sins in prayer to the blood of Christ and to the Cross of Christ and to the withering power of the Spirit of Christ. If you became more earnest you would see those besetting sins losing their grip. There are no effective substitutes for the appointed means of grace for making progress in the Christian life. The private means — prayer, the meditation upon the Word of God, self-examination when necessary, perhaps seasons of fasting, saying no to legitimate physical appetites in the midst of a crisis when you need to give yourself to earnest seeking of God's face, the keeping of a blood-washed conscience. *'Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men'*. Acts 24:16.

##### **II. The corporate means of grace**

Acts 2:42: *'These all continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers'*.

Fellowshipping, praying, shared life — if there is one place in the world where you ought to be able to feel safe in letting people into your heart it is amongst God's people. Fellowship is not simply sitting in the same seats, under the same roof, on the same day. Fellowship is shared life. Who knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him? How can I carry your burdens if you don't get them out where I can see them to put my shoulder under them? God said, *'Share one another's burdens'*. He said, *'Weep with those who weep'*. How can I fulfil that if you have got this silly, carnal notion of the stiff upper lip. Where does God's Word say, Have the stiff upper lip? Where does the Bible say that? Nowhere! So many Christians are emotional wrecks because they are not in a community where, when it is proper to weep, they can weep and have their brethren weep with them. Some of my most effective pastoral counselling has not come out of my mouth, it has come out of my tear ducts when I have just sat with a weeping brother or sister

and wept and sobbed with them. It was all I could do, their pain was too deep to be reached with words. That is fellowship.

May God help you young men and women to pray and labour to see churches formed where people won't run after the charismatics because at least it seems as though they have some 'felt' religion! I think I would run there, if my theology would let me, if I had to exist in some of the so-called 'Reformed' churches that I have been in. The chill goes to one's bones like Highland weather! You would not dare weep, you would be afraid the whole structure would come tumbling down by a tear shed within its walls. I do not mean to caricature, but it is true. The means of grace God has given is the church — a caring, loving, weeping, rejoicing, serving, evangelising body of God's people. God's appointed means are these private and public means and there are no effective substitutes for true growth in the Christian life.

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