



## Charles Simeon: On the true Christian

Simeon recognized that false judgements may be made about a man's standing before God.

*'True and genuine piety', he pointed out, 'cannot always be certainly known by men's intercourse with their fellow creatures. Appearances may be so plausible, that they cannot, except by Him who searches the heart, be distinguished from realities. But in their intercourse with the Deity, the truth or falsehood of their profession may be clearly discerned'. He assessed that 'Christians are either nominal or real. Each class has gradations from the highest to the lowest; but between the two classes there is an immense gulf ... The difference between the two classes is this: the nominal Christian, however eminent in appearance he may be, is partial in relation to and in his regard for God's precepts; but the true Christian loves and approves them all without exception ... The nominal Christian accepts those rules that support his own party, that do not condemn him, and give him ground for rejecting the gospel, but he does not love the sublime and spiritual precepts, or self-denial ones, or that strike at besetting sin. The true Christian loves all God's evangelical and moral commands. He loves them as perfective of his nature. He loves them as conducive to his happiness ... At the same time he "hates every false way".'*

Simeon's concept of holiness was that of *'conformity to the divine image, as sin is to the image of the devil'*. In the Christian there should be a steady growth in it from spring bloom to autumn fruit. *'A progress in holiness is above all things to be desired'*, he said. Not that a believer would be ever perfect, but *'he must aim at perfection, and be continually pressing forwards for the attainment of it'*. In his pursuit he made a distinction between God's natural perfections which no creature can obtain, and his moral perfections which *'we both may and must resemble if ever we would behold the face of God in peace'*. And not only partake of them, but *'have them all united and harmonizing in us, as they unite and harmonize in God'*. Thus, the graces of justice, mercy, truth and love must operate constantly and harmoniously with their opposites of faith, fear, humility, confidence, meekness, fortitude, contrition, and joy. So it is with light that assembles different rays to unite and constitute light; *'and then only when all the graces are in simultaneous exercise, each softening and tempering its opposite, then, only, I say, do we properly resemble God'*. Such, for Simeon, was spiritual-mindedness.

But this conformity to God can never be achieved without the Cross of Christ, which was central to his own daily living and to which he brought his sins and weaknesses. To him Calvary was no mere saving event in history, but a daily and hourly experience as he applied to his failings the eternal efficacy of the shed blood of the Saviour. In it he found a counteraction to the opposition he faced. When tempted to resign his church and leave Cambridge he opened his little New Testament at Luke 23:26, *'They took hold of one Simon (Simeon) and on him they laid the cross'*. Its effect was profound. *'Then, Lord, lay it on me and I will bear it for thy sake to the end of my life; and henceforth I bound persecution as a wreath of glory round my brow'*, he cried. He saw then that the present tense of Christ's sacrificial blood was only one side of sanctification. To carry the cross after Jesus and to esteem his reproach the greatest riches can only be by a willing bearing of the cross. *'It is our great aversion to the cross that makes it burdensome'*, he wrote. *'When we have learned to glory in it, we have found the philosopher's stone ... till we have learned this lesson, nothing can be done to any good purpose'*.

As to redemption itself, Simeon saw it firmly in the Godhead of Jesus.

*'It is of great importance that we have just views of the divinity of Christ'*, he said, *'On that depends the sufficiency of the Atonement he has offered for the sins of men'*. He continued,

*'If he were only a creature how can we assume that the shedding of his blood has any more virtue and efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats? But if our redeemer be God as well as man, then we see at once that, inasmuch as he is an infinitely glorious Being, there is an infinite merit in his obedience unto death, sufficient to justify the demands of law and justice for the sins of all mankind'.*

The ground of his 'cross-centredness' in relation to salvation and sanctification was the doctrine of penal substitution. In biblical thought-forms he saw plainly that as in Judaism sins were transferred to the Scapegoat, so it was that Jesus took man's curse to bear away sin forever, cancelling guilt, satisfying justice. And, by the gift of the Spirit the cross procured for man, our nature is changed by his operations so that we may delight in God. Yet, as the Father did not take pleasure in inflicting punishment, so neither did the Son in enduring it for itself. But it is impossible for man to understand this mystery. *'Shall we wonder'*, he asked, *'if there be some mysteries in the revelation and in the providence of God that we cannot explore?'* It is sufficient to know that the creator God has become the redeemer God. Simeon stressed often that the sinner is justified by faith in Christ's sacrificial death, but this means not merely recognition of the atoning sacrifice but appropriation of it.

But in his supreme emphasis upon the saving and sanctifying death of Jesus, Simeon was careful not to minimise the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit as he experienced Him in his spiritual life. To Simeon the whole Godhead was at Calvary in the redeeming act; the Father to whom the sacrificial offering was made, the Son who made it, and the Spirit by whom it was made. In relation to the sinner, the Holy Spirit's breath in creation is analogous to his moving upon the soul in regeneration.

Thus, *'Christ is ALL in procuring salvation for us, so the Holy Spirit is ALL in imparting it to us'*, he said. And again, the Spirit is *'the Agent who applies to our soul all the blessings which Christ has purchased for us'*.

He attributed regeneration to *'the Holy Spirit drawing man to God with "love-bands", not as machines. As with the ocean responding by tides to the moon's influence, "In like manner the change wrought in the hearts of men depends altogether on the influence of the Holy Spirit; and however incapable we may be of comprehending the Spirit's operations, we must refer to him the entire change wrought in us in the conversion of our souls to God"'*. Simeon went further in stressing that the proof of conversion is self-loathing and self-abhorrence as the *'first and indispensable sign. Nothing short of this can be admitted as evidence of a real change'*. It shows itself in repentance as *'in every view so desirable, so necessary, so suited to honour God, that I seek that above all. The tender heart, the broken and contrite spirit are to me far above all the joys that I can ever hope for in this vale of tears. I long to be in my proper place, my hand on my mouth and my mouth in the dust ... I feel this to be safe ground. Here I cannot err'*. At times he had, he confessed, *'such a sense of my sinfulness as would sink me into utter despair, if I had not an assured view of the sufficiency and willingness of Christ to save me to the uttermost and at the same time I had such a sense of my acceptance through Christ as would upset my little bark, if I had not ballast at the bottom to sink a vessel of no ordinary size'*. Almost his last word before his death, *'Jesus Christ is all in all to my soul'*, could have been written over his entire life from the moment the redeeming love of the risen Lord had gripped him.

Arthur Bennett

© 2015  
[www.christianstudylibrary.org](http://www.christianstudylibrary.org)