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The New Birth Is A Mystery

I once wrote of the need of the inner witness and pointed out that the lack of it is producing a strain of feeble Christians, weak, half-hearted and pitifully unsure of themselves. A reader wrote to say in effect that she agreed with me fully and wanted very much to experience the inner witness but did not know how to proceed. She ended her letter with the request that I write something that would make the whole thing clear to her and others.

Much as I should like to comply with this request I am, of course, unable to do so. Indeed the very notion that the things of God can be reduced to a formula is back of many of our spiritual failures. Christian workers, in their eager desire to get the seeker "through," will, it seems, stop at nothing. They try to induce faith by baiting the seeker with Bible texts, all the while smiling and "helping" by voice and gesture. The whole

performance, while undoubtedly wellintentioned, acts as a powerful suggestion to raise expectation and predispose the seeker's mind to accept whatever the worker desires that it should. Then follows a series of questions and answers, the questions carefully put in such a way as to suggest the answers, ending usually with the familiar "Well, if He doesn't cast you out, what does He do?" Of course there is only one answer to that question and the bewildered seeker gives it, "Why, He takes me in." This brings on a burst of Amen's, along with a deal of backslapping and handshaking, and another convert has been made. That such a convert lacks inward assurance is not surprising. About the intimate workings of the Holy Spirit in the human heart there is a highly personal relationship in which no third person can share. The sacred work of redemption was wrought in darkness. No strange eye could see what was taking place when the sins of the world entered

the holy soul of Christ that He might die under their weight and thus make "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 27:46).

That there is a deep mystery about the pay birth is plainly stead by

the new birth is plainly stated by The wind our Lord. bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not. how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? (John 3:8-12)

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It is bordering on the irreverent to suggest that this sovereign work of the Spirit can be induced at the will of a personal worker by means of a textual recipe. The moment this is attempted, the Spirit withholds His illumination and leaves the worker and the seeker to their own designs. And the tragic consequences are all about us.

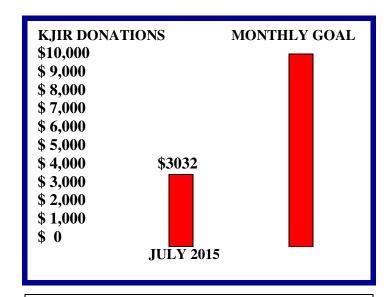
All any Christian worker can do is to point the inquirer to "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (1:29). That was all John the Baptist did. He did not attempt to create faith in any of his hearers. The Spirit alone can open the heart, as John well knew. It is our task to arrest the sinner's attention, give him the message of the cross, urge him to receive it and meet its conditions. After that the seeker is on his own. The individual is out of the hands of the instructors and helpers and in the hands of the God with whom he has to do.

It is fear of falling into the hands of God that makes us so eager to get things reduced to a formula. We feel that if we can learn the "secret" of salvation or the "steps" into the blessed life, we can control our future and (though we would not admit it) control God Himself to a large degree. This saves face and preserves our self-confidence, but it also mutes the voice of power in the gospel and weakens the operations of God in the soul. Only the despairing heart can know the inward witness.

In the final analysis, no one can lead another to God. All he can do is to lead the inquirer to the door of the kingdom and urge him onward. Between God and the returning soul there is a zone of obscurity through which he cannot see. It is the light that no man can approach unto and past which no one can go on his feet or by means of reason or theological knowledge. There faith must make its leap of pure trust into the arms of God crying with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15), or with Newton, "O Lord, I trust in Thee completely, and if I go to hell I'll go down standing on Thy Word."

It is this utter desperation that brings the witness, and yet I cannot tell anyone how to reach such a state. All I can do is to urge everyone to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. If the repentance is genuine and the faith real, all human confidence will come crashing down and the humbled soul will be forced to make its leap of faith alone.

The reader that cannot find his way from here is in all probability still impenitent. And let him beware of seeking cheap comfort from a text jockey who will cry "Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). He had better by far take his Bible and retire to the secret place to seek God alone. If there's hope for him, he'll find it there. But he'll find it nowhere else.



Thy gentleness hath made me great Psalm 18:35

The blessed Comforter is gentle, tender and full of patience and love. How gentle are God's dealings even with sinners. How patient His forbearance. How tender His discipline with His own erring children. How He led Jacob, Joseph, Israel, David, Elijah and all His ancient servants until they could truly say,

Thy gentleness hath made me great.

The heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells will always be characterized by gentleness, lowliness, quietness, meekness and forbearance. The rude, sarcastic spirit, the brusque manner, the sharp retort, the unkind cut – all of these belong to the flesh and have nothing in common with the gentle teaching of the Comforter.

The Holy Dove shrinks from the noisy, tumultuous, excited and vindictive spirit and finds His home in the peaceful soul.

The fruit of the Spirit is...gentleness, ...meekness. Lord, make me gentle. Hush my spirit. Refine my manner. Let me have Christ in my bearing and my very tones, as well as in my heart.

A.B. Simpson

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