

FROM DARKNESS TO THE LIGHT

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*"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall
make you free" (Jn. 8:32)*

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The titles in this series on Internet are:

Who is Jesus?

From darkness to the light

The judgement seat of Christ

The Antichrist

Israel

The rapture

Revival

Hell - what the Bible says about it

Spiritual warfare

Steps on the way of salvation

There is a definite way that the Lord follows with a sinner to save his soul, to equip him for service and prepare him for eternal life in heaven. The willingness and full co-operation of each one of us, according to fixed Biblical guidelines, is necessary if we wish to avert the tragedy of a false repentance. We can all share in the wonderful experience of how the Lord calls us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

I invite you to explore with me in the Word of God the unsearchable riches of the Lord's saving grace, and to appropriate it for yourself in faith.

1. CALLING

The Lord Himself gives the first step on the way of a sinner's salvation. He calls him to repentance and also supplies the means for his salvation.

“God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Since the price for all our transgressions has been paid, people everywhere are invited to come to the Lord for the forgiving of their sins:

“Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28).

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Is. 1:18).

The purpose of the Son of man's coming to the world is to offer new life to lost humanity. His main mission is to call sinners to repentance:

“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mt. 9:13).

“For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10).

Sin and condemnation

It is important to clearly discern the calling of the Lord, as it will determine the nature of your response. You must thoroughly realise the full extent of your problem, namely, that you are heading for disaster without the Lord Jesus. There is no room for complacency or self-justification in your state of spiritual darkness, as “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

You must gain full knowledge about sin, and particularly about your own sins that separate you from God (Is. 59:2). There should not be the slightest doubt in your mind that God has imposed the death penalty on sin (Rom. 6:23); consequently all unsaved people are heading for eternal condemnation. If they are not saved, the following sentence will be passed on them from the great white throne:

“Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:41).

Salvation through the expiatory death of Jesus

When the Lord calls you He does not only identify your problem of sin and condemnation, but also offers the solution. The good news is that God loves you and has provided for the forgiveness of your sins through the expiatory death of Jesus on the cross:

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation of our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10).

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18).

“...we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him (Christ) *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:20-21).

Counting the cost

The calling of God must be so clear to the sinner that he fully realises the implications of counting the cost to become a Christian. Jesus made Nicodemus to understand that theological knowledge and a good life was not enough to inherit the kingdom of God – he *had* to be born again. A condition to obtain the new life is that a person should confess and forsake all known sins.

Jesus told the rich young man that he first had to break with his sin of materialism (Lk. 18:22). To this young man, who was otherwise very religious, it was hard to part from his besetting sin and he left sorrowfully. Many people find it hard to repent because they don't really *want* to part from their sins. To them all the Lord Jesus says:

“Strive to enter in at the [narrow] gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Lk. 13:24).

To enter in at the narrow gate is a wonderful experience, and you must seek it until you find it (Lk. 11:9). Remember that the gift of eternal life is something that you can't merit or buy. The counting of the cost relates to your willingness to put off the filthy garment of your old life before you can be clothed with Christ's robe of righteousness (Eph. 4: 22-24). Are you really prepared to break with your sins?

Awakened to realise your sinful state

A sinner who received God's call to repent, has spiritually awakened to the realisation of his lost state. His eyes have been opened to see his sins, but also God's solution to the problem of sin. The awakened sinner is not yet saved, but he heard the knock on the door of his heart which conveys the following message to him:

“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14).

The Holy Spirit convicts him of his sins, thus rendering the *awakened sinner* also a *convicted sinner*. He is not yet

saved, but he realises that he is heading for hell unless something is urgently done about the sins that condemn him before God. The person can react in two ways to the conviction of sin:

- + He can yield to the pleading of the Holy Spirit who convicts him of sin, righteousness and judgement (Jn. 16:8), confess his sins and accept the righteousness of Christ in faith. He will then escape the judgements of God.
- + He can also, to his own ruin, resist the call of God: "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3:7-8). If he keeps on hardening his heart, the voice of the Holy Spirit will grow dim and it will become more difficult to react to it. Don't allow your heart to be hardened to the extent that you will later have no desire for the things of the Lord (Eccl. 12:1).

2. SORROW

An awakened sinner realises that he has a case to settle with God. He is deep under the conviction of his sin and lost state. He feels accused and condemned because of what he has done. His remorse and sense of guilt drives him to the Lord Jesus – the One who paid the price by dying such a humiliating death for the salvation of sinners.

Have you experienced the intense sorrow that leads to true repentance?

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation"
(2 Cor. 7:10).

The sorrow or remorse that the Bible speaks about is to have a repentant heart which will lead to a true conversion:

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

A paraphrase of the above text would be:

"Repent ye therefore [*have compunction or sorrow; feel differently*] and be converted [*turn about*] that your sins may be blotted out."

Sorrow because of sin is the result of the Holy Spirit's work of convicting you of sin. It drives you to the Lord and works a true repentance to the living God. Sorrow is a deep spiritual realisation of your total unworthiness before the Lord. You know that you are a hell-deserving sinner who has no right to pardon. In this hopeless state you can only cast yourself on the mercy of God.

When Peter denied Jesus, he went outside and wept bitterly (Mt. 26:75). That was true sorrow. He did not pity himself, but he had a terrible feeling of remorse because of the grief that he caused to Jesus. A sinner must realise that through his sins he has offended God by sinning against Him. This is godly sorrow and it leads to a true confession with the heart, which is a condition for forgiveness.

How can a person truly confess his sins before he has given the Holy Spirit the opportunity to convict him of the abominable consequences of sin? This conviction grows in his heart when he thoughtfully reads the Bible, a Christian book, or when he listens to a good sermon. When the Lord calls you, he shows you exactly where you stand with Him. The sorrow that will then come over you according to His will, puts you on the way that leads to true repentance.

There is no place for hidden pride and self-justification when you approach God to save your soul. That would counter the disposition of sorrow and brokenness of heart: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jas. 4:6). You must get to the end of yourself and admit that you have made a failure of your life. Only then will you unconditionally put your trust in the Lord to save you. You don't deserve anything.

3. REPENTANCE OR CONVERSION

When the repentant sinner decides to settle his case with the Lord, he turns around on the course of his life that was leading away from God, and approaches the throne of grace with the confession of his sins. He does not quickly and casually ask the Lord to forgive his sins, but meets the

condition for forgiveness by thoroughly and honestly confessing his sins:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:8-9).

The Lord Jesus is waiting on you to confess your sins (in the plural form, i.e. all of them) and to turn your back on them. You must break with your sins and firmly resolve not to do it again:

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesseth **and forsaketh *them*** shall have mercy” (Prov. 28: 13).

Sinners who are repenting, as well as the backslidden Christians who have again become entangled by sin in their lives, must be fully prepared to walk out of their old life by confessing and forsaking their sins. The prodigal son took a definite decision to this effect when he said:

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee” (Lk. 15:8).

David said:

“I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in Thy sight... wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:3-4, 7).

It is evident that there is a case to be settled with God before you will be purified of a bad conscience that condemns you because of your sins. A quick, collective confession of sins will not do. It won't help to merely say: “Forgive all my sins”, and with that to regard your obligation as met. You must take time and confess your sins one by one as the Holy Spirit reminds and convicts you of the evil in your life. Only then do you satisfy God's condition of confession that is not only done with the mind, but also with the heart.

Faith

Another very important condition for the confession of sins and the receiving of Jesus as your Saviour, is that it should be done in faith. A sinner who has not yet responded to the calling of God, is dead in his sins and transgressions. He has no faith as he is still an unbeliever with a hardened heart. When he hears the gospel message, he is awakened to realise his sinful and lost state. Prevenient grace is then bestowed on him, which enables him to put his trust in Jesus to save his soul. Like the penitent publican, he can then exclaim:

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Lk. 18:13).

About the obtaining of faith to confess your sins in a true repentance, Paul says:

“So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

When a sinner reads or listens to a good evangelical message on repentance, the Holy Spirit gives faith in his heart to believe the message and to react to it. However, there are those people who maintain that they simply can't believe. The solution to this problem is not to argue it away theologically, or to convince a person that he must only accept the facts with his mind. He needs further exposure to the Word of God, because the principle remains that *faith comes by the Word of God*. Let him read long sections from the New Testament and listen to good sermons. Faith will eventually be poured out in his barren heart if he deals with the living Word. Jesus said:

“...the words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life” (Jn. 6:63).

Now that the awakened and convicted sinner can believe and take a decision to receive Jesus as his Saviour, he can come to the throne of grace with boldness and in full assurance of faith. He believes that his sins will be forgiven:

“Without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

The Lord Jesus “is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Do you believe it? Then the door of grace is also open to you.

In faith you enter into the holiest by the new and living way that Jesus has consecrated for us. At the throne of grace you confess your sins and accept salvation as a gift of God. He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Jesus promised to accept you. He said that “him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn. 6:37).

To **believe** in Jesus (Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31) comprises more than the mere fact that He came to the world to die for the salvation of sinners. I must believe:

- ✠ that He is the true God and eternal life, and the Saviour of the world (1 Jn. 5:20; Lk. 19:10);
- ✠ that I have to repent with the confession of my sins to obtain His forgiveness (Mt. 9:13);
- ✠ that He is able to make me a new creature, that the old things can pass away and that everything can be made new (2 Cor. 5:17);
- ✠ that the Lord Jesus purchases me with His blood when He saves me, and that I henceforth belong to Him to be used by Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19);
- ✠ that through the rebirth I make a new beginning in life which implies a process of growing up to spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:13-14; Heb. 5:12-6:1); and
- ✠ that I must be filled with the Holy Spirit, study the Bible, and commit myself to a life of service to be a witness for the Lord (Acts 1:8; Eph. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:18, 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Tim. 4:2).

4. JUSTIFICATION

The sinner's *salvation* by the Lord includes two aspects, i.e. the forgiving and blotting out of his sins (*justification*) and the granting of a new life to him (*rebirth*). These two aspects are closely associated because fallen man is spiritually dead as a result of his transgressions. He needs to be justified *and* made alive.

Justification demands the satisfaction of God's law which decrees the death penalty for sinners (Rom. 6:23). Either the sinner must pay this penalty himself, or somebody else must die in his place (a substitutionary death). Only a sinless person can substitute fallen men, as sinners can only die for their own sins, not for those of others.

The basis for the forgiveness of sins is the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. He is the sinless Lamb of God who died on behalf of all sinners. By this act of love He paid the death penalty for our sins and provided for the remission of our sins according to the greatness of His mercy:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in His blood” (Rom. 3:23-25).

“He *was* wounded for our transgressions, He *was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* on Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5).

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

Every sinner on earth has a list of sins that condemns him. His numerous transgressions of the ordinances of God must be blotted out before he can be reconciled to God. The question is whether *you* have taken the list of *your* sins seriously by systematically working through it, confessing and forsaking each one of them, and accepting God's forgiveness in faith? He will forgive your sins and make you spiritually alive:

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses: Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13-14).

5. REBIRTH

The clear command in the Bible to be born again is of the greatest significance in the salvation of sinners. Through this concept the Lord clearly tells us:

- ◆ that we are spiritually dead because of our sins and need to be made alive by Him; and
- ◆ that our old life (the ‘old man’) is utterly depraved; it cannot be improved or changed – we need to become new creatures by being born again if we want to share in the kingdom of Christ.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3).

The new life of the believer is likened to the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. By virtue of His death on the cross our trespasses are forgiven and we also die for the old life. At the same time we are made alive in Him to participate in His resurrection life:

“Blessed *is* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

God does not only forgive your sins – He also gives you a new life. Do you know Jesus as Saviour *and* as the resurrection and the life? God imparts the new life to all believers through the Holy Spirit:

“...according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3: 5-6).

6. SANCTIFICATION

To the true church of Jesus Christ, i.e. those people who have been born again, the command is given to deny themselves, be filled with the Holy Spirit, be sober minded and holy, and to bear fruit that befits repentance. We are all called to a life of holiness. The first command on the way of sanctification and discipleship is very clear:

“And He said to *them* all, If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23).

According to Luke 14:27-33, the cross of self-denial is related to counting the cost of discipleship. A definite choice must be made whether you want to please the desires of the flesh (your old nature), or whether you are prepared to renounce the world and serve the Lord with your whole heart and everything that you have. You can't pursue the riches and fame of the world *and* at the same follow and please the Lord Jesus. Can you testify with Paul that the all-important matter to you is the crucified Christ, and that through His cross you regard yourself as dead to the world and its lust?

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14).

If I deny the sinful lusts of the old life, God will endue me with a life of victory and holiness:

“That ye put off concerning your former [conduct] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which was created after God in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24).

The cross of self-denial must be taken up *daily* in order that the old man *remains* crucified and is not allowed to revive and regain its influence over me. In this position I can seriously deal with the following commands because I com-

ply with the condition of being emptied of myself before I can be filled with the Spirit:

“...be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

“But as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of [conduct]; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification... For God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness. He therefore who [rejects *this* rejects] not man, but God, who hath also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thes. 4:3, 7-8).

Through sanctification and my continued dedication afterwards, the Lord changes me into a pure vessel which is fit for His service. He enables me to bear the fruit of the Spirit, to be victorious against the onslaughts of the enemy of my soul (Eph. 6:10-11), to comply with the demands of discipleship, to stick to my principles of faith in the midst of fierce opposition, and to persevere on the narrow way until He comes (Heb. 12:1-2).

Neglect to observe the command of holiness, restricts many Christians to the deplorable low spiritual standards of the congregation of Corinth:

“An I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people*, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with [solid food]: for until now ye were not able *to receive it*, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3: 1-3).

Most of the congregations in the world today are also incessantly afflicted by the problems of spiritually passive, fruitless, powerless, meddlesome, quarrelsome, and carnal members – let alone the large number of nominal believers who are not even saved and only have a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). What is even more disturbing is the many voices of condemnation that arise from these decadent and

backslidden congregations against the doctrine of holiness.

A century ago when Dr. Andrew Murray proclaimed the message of rebirth and sanctification with great zeal, there was revival in several congregations in South Africa. People were saved and many were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were witnesses to Christ and also proclaimed the message of salvation in the mission-fields.

The enabling power of the Holy Spirit is also at our disposal in this late hour, to do great things for the Lord. It depends whether we *want* to serve the Lord with all our heart. Will He find us busy with the great commission when He soon comes back to take the saints away to their home in heaven? Or will He find us in the company of the lax, compromising, superficial, carnal, and sleeping church of the end-time?

The Lord Jesus does not want passive followers who only *believe* in Him, but are not truly committed to Him and the interests of His kingdom. They must be witnesses of His saving grace, and lead a life of active prayer. If they pay nominal lip-service to Him while only believing in Him with their carnal minds, their hearts being cold and untouched, they are deceiving themselves:

“Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 7:21).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit it is possible to do the will of the Father and live a life of godliness. If you don't delight in doing His will on earth, how will you ever be happy in heaven where only His will is done?

We don't work for the Lord *to be* saved, but *because* we are saved. Jesus said, “As My Father hath sent Me, even so I send you” (Jn. 20:21). We have been sent to the uttermost parts of the world, and we have a very important message to deliver to all men. The Holy Spirit will empower us daily to perform this important task. Are you ready and available?

7. GLORIFICATION

The last step on the way of salvation is glorification. That will occur during the first resurrection when all Christians will receive incorruptible resurrection bodies:

“Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

The full details of our glorified position in heaven have not yet been revealed to us. But we do know that when Jesus appears, we will be like Him. He is the head of the body of believers, but we will share in His glory:

“For our [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

In anticipation of our glorification we must now be prepared for the coming life in heaven by being pure and holy. Our present spiritual state determines our future position. Apart from being born again, we must live Spirit-filled lives of dedication to the Lord. For our labour in the Lord we will receive rewards at the judgement seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The following crowns are mentioned:

- ✳ The crown of rejoicing for soul-winners (1 Thes. 2:19).
- ✳ The incorruptible crown for a holy life (1 Cor. 9:24-25).
- ✳ The crown of life for Christian martyrs (Rev. 2:10).
- ✳ The crown of glory for faithful shepherds (1 Pet. 5:2-4).
- ✳ The crown of righteousness for those who loved the ap-

pearing of the Lord (2 Tim. 4:8).

Will you stand empty-handed on that day, saved as by fire (1 Cor. 3:15), or will you be declared a worthy servant? You can know now whether the following words will on that occasion be directed at you:

“His Lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mt. 25:21).

All the way

It is obvious that the Lord Jesus did not only come to save people from hell, but to make disciples. He doesn't only want to be your Saviour, but also your Leader, King, Lord, and heavenly Bridegroom.

You were called out of darkness into His marvellous light, and then equipped to do your duty in the evangelising of the world. In this regard you are a co-labourer of God in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 3:9).

In this life you are also prepared for your future role to reign as king with the Lord Jesus in His kingdom. In anticipation of that role, you must learn to prevail over sin and unrighteousness in your own life. In the Name of Jesus you must also move out and achieve victories for His kingdom in this evil world. Don't stop at the entry point of salvation, but go all the way with the Lord. Learn to do His will and to please Him in every aspect of your life.

The spiritual shallowness of the modern churches falls far short of the Lord's standard of holiness. Most Christians are satisfied with their low standard and do not live up to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). The reason for this state of affairs is that many of them are not born again, while some of those who do have a testimony of salvation, don't live in the power and victory of the Holy Spirit.

I want to challenge you to evaluate your spiritual life very critically in the light of God's Word. Examine your spiritual foundation to determine whether you are truly in the

faith (2 Cor. 13:5). In the next section I discuss a number of false foundations upon which many people build their lives, deceiving themselves that they are Christians. You can't afford to have any doubts about your real spiritual state as your eternal destiny depends on it.

If you do have the witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart that you are a child of God, you should also evaluate your life to see whether it meets the standards and expectations of the Lord. Do you bear fruit that befits repentance and do you use your God-given talents in the service of the Lord, or are you hiding your talents while lapsing into a life of carnality and spiritual inactivity?

FALSE FOUNDATIONS

There are various false foundations that the enemy of our souls and his accomplices offer to people when they want to become Christians. His first objective is to deter them from going through with the Lord and be born again. If he can't succeed with *Plan A*, he does not abandon his efforts with this person. *Plan B* is then put into operation, which includes well-calculated efforts to side-track young converts by depriving them the power of the Holy Spirit through worldliness, persecution, and ignorance of biblical truths. The following are a number of the false foundations upon which many people's lives are built:

Unclear calling

As a result of poor preaching and books with shallow messages, many people do not receive a clear calling to settle their case with the Lord. Preachers lull their audiences into a deep spiritual sleep and leave them with the impression that they are Christians if they are members of a church and subscribe to its confession. They have no motivation to long for a personal encounter with the Lord, and go through life with a mere form of godliness.

Moralising

The idea is often instilled in church-goers that seeing they are such good people, they comply with the standard which is expected of Christians. Being extremely pleased by this idea they do not experience the conviction of sin and resist any suggestions to this effect. They never seriously consider the possibility that they may be lost. These people boast in their moral irreproachability and are intent on doing good works by which they hope to gain the favour of society, of the church *and* of God. These *good people* are going to hell because they did not repent.

Baptismal regeneration

Many thousands of people build their lives on the false foundation of baptismal regeneration. They cling to the deceptive idea that the baptism and confirmation ceremonies in a church ensure their salvation. After being ritualised, they take it for granted that they have entered into an eternal covenant with God. They argue that through baptism they have been born again and are now heading for heaven. The Bible teaches that religious activities that are not preceded or followed by a genuine commitment of faith are of no avail:

“For to us was the gospel preached, as well as to them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*” (Heb. 4:2).

‘ We are all sinners ’

Unsaved church members who struggle with sin in their lives, are often told that ‘we are all sinners’ and that we must make peace with our sinful cravings and desires. We should try our best to contain these evil desires and be *moderate sinners*. The only difference between a Christian and those in the world is that we are *saved sinners* and they are *unsaved sinners*. Within this frame of mind they only pray for the forgiveness of sins without realising their lost state and without trusting the Lord for salvation.

Changed ideas

Many people's religion consists only of changed ideas. Much of the preaching is in enticing words of man's wisdom, and not in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. 2:4). The result is that people's minds are addressed by cold, theological arguments, while their soul and spirit get nothing to respond to. Such a person confesses the Lord with his lips, but his heart is far from Him. The person's ideas have changed, but not his heart. His mind confuses him by telling him that he is a Christian who is guided by the Holy Spirit, while it may not be the case at all:

“Ye are those who justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk. 16:15).

This person never experienced the sorrow of the Lord because of his sins. He hasn't got a convincing testimony of salvation and his life only changed superficially.

Emotional repentance

People are often only touched emotionally. They take a decision that is not founded in faith but in a feeling. Because emotions come and go, decisions of this nature do not last very long:

“But he that receiveth the seed on stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and [immediately] with joy receiveth it, yet hath he no root in himself, but endureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, he [immediately stumbles]” (Mt. 13:20-21).

Note that this person received the Word of God with *joy*. That is an emotion which should not be confused with *faith*. A superficial, emotional repentance does not lead to a deep acceptance in faith of the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and is a false repentance. Such people even have a date when they 'received the Lord with joy', but they deceive themselves as they did not make a real commitment in faith.

Instant repentance

We live in a time of instant solutions to problems and the mass production of commodities that are in demand. Unfortunately, mass evangelism is often also done in this way, being aimed at quick results. Without giving personal attention to people, large groups of them are led to pray a short prayer after the preacher at the end of the sermon. They are then declared saved, while many of them may only be at the first stage of spiritual awakening and the conviction of sin. They did not even have the opportunity of counting the cost of a true repentance, and to confess their sins to the Lord with sorrow, when the process is cut short and declared as complete. Before they leave, they are exhorted never to doubt their repentance, while it may not even have occurred.

The disillusion of a false repentance of this nature discourages many people to come to the Lord again. Those who were ready for a decision may be saved under circumstances such as these, but to many other people's souls incalculable damage can be done.

Cheap grace

Many preachers are offering cheap grace as a gift that may be obtained unconditionally by anybody. Although it is a free gift from God, grace is not cheap because its acceptance is attached to certain conditions. True repentance and the confession of sin opens the way for a sinner's salvation by grace. It is of no avail to only pay lip-service to the doctrine of salvation and to think that grace will be imputed to you if you merely indicate your willingness to become a Christian. In this easy way you will never receive the witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart who will testify with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:16).

Follow the way of the Lord and allow His Spirit to bring you under a deep conviction of your sin, but also of the righteousness of Christ that is offered to you. Then you will be on the right track for a lasting regeneration of your life.

Only believe

Another form of cheap grace is that you must only believe and do nothing. Works, including the confession of your sin, are viewed with the greatest disapproval. These people like to quote the following two verses:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

That is quite true, but if a sinner wants to be saved by grace he *has* to repent with the confession of his sins. He must be prepared to forsake all evil in his life and to call on God for mercy. His salvation should immediately be followed by a life of good works – not to deserve his salvation, but to please God and to give heed to biblical commands. The verse following the above quotation about grace and faith *without* works, assigns a central role to works in the lives of all true believers:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Christianity is a dynamic life demanding your full co-operation. You are called to become a co-labourer of God in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 3:9), and also to discipline your will to this effect. In living this life you do not draw on your own resources, but on the abundant grace of God. Paul said:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Saving grace is followed by grace to fulfil your ministry. To comply with the conditions for grace, opens a completely new life under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Grace does not only make you a Christian but also keeps you a Christian if you wholeheartedly co-operate with it.

Inapt words of comfort

An awakened sinner who is under the conviction of sin, often seeks advice from Christians about his dark feelings of guilt. It is a big mistake to tell such a person that he is not as bad as he thinks. Family members often make such remarks in sympathy with the afflicted person. In doing so, the salvation of the sinner can be defeated. He must rather be made to understand that his problem is even bigger than he could ever imagine. There is no human solution to the problem of sin. The inevitability of an eternal hell that awaits all unsaved people is so gruesome that nobody on his way to this terrible destination can be consoled in any way. Now is the time to proclaim the solution, i.e. that the Lord Jesus died to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life. He came to destroy the works of the devil and to save us from all our sins as well as the punishment for sins.

Self-pity

People often suffer from self-pity because of their failed lives and the things that happened to them. Nothing good can emerge from these feelings, as “the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Sorrow that comes from the conviction of sin, is worked by the Holy Spirit and leads you to the cross where the solution for your sins and lost state is found. Self-pity, on the other hand, influences you to look for sympathy and excuses. This road leads to your downfall and ruin, and not to repentance and victory over your sins. Read the Bible and discover your own complicity in your spiritual problems under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Another kind of sorrow will then come over you and induce you to call upon the Lord for mercy.

Physical manifestations of God’s power

A form of deception that is lately gaining much ground is the view that God reveals Himself more in the physical than in the spiritual realm through the Holy Spirit. This assumption gave rise to a theology of experience rather than faith.

People are waiting on the Lord to show Himself in signs and wonders. If He does not do it, it is said that He did not work powerfully in the midst of His people.

Many people 'believe' they are Christians because of a certain experience, and not because of the conviction of sin and the confession of sins during repentance. They may have fallen down, laughed, received a vision or were healed, and now believe that the Lord has touched and saved them because of that experience.

Millions of people are deceived in this way, and they feed their emotionally-based 'faith' by exhilarating worship services that can soothe their conscience and uplift their depressed feelings to last for another few days before they need a further injection of physically perceptible Christian experiences. They must make very sure where they stand with the Lord. Many people will one day say: "Lord, Lord, have we not... in Thy name done many wonderful works?" The Lord will say to them: "I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22-23).

'All Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit'

There are also false foundations for a life of holiness. A very common assumption is that since all Christians are born again by the Holy Spirit, they are also filled with the Spirit. It is argued that the Holy Spirit is a Person who cannot be diminished or increased, consequently a second work of grace to become Spirit-filled is not necessary.

This statement is contrary to the Bible and deprives many Christians of a Spirit-filled, victorious life. The fact is that your old nature must be denied and crucified before the full authority of the Holy Spirit will be established in your life. The carnal Christians of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 can in no way be regarded as Spirit-filled Christians, and they desperately needed the experience of sanctification. Every believer must be conscious of this relationship and obey the Spirit: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

HOW TO GROW IN GRACE

There must always be progress in the life of a Christian. After he has come over from the darkness of the old life to the light of the kingdom of God, he must keep on growing in grace, holiness and the knowledge of God:

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18).

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

The following is a summary of the thoughts expressed by the well-known revival preacher, Charles Finney, on the subject of growth in grace in his book *Lectures on revival*:

“But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Grace is favour. In the Bible the word *grace* often signifies a free gift. The grace of God is thus the *favour* of God, His free gift to us.

The command to grow in grace doesn't enjoin us to gradually give up sin. Strange enough, some people think it means that. But nowhere does the Bible command us to leave sin bit by bit. Rather, every word requires us to break with it instantly and completely. We are to grow in God's favour, in His estimation of us and satisfaction with us and in worthiness of His favour.

Conditions of spiritual growth

The following are some of the basic conditions that must be met if we are to grow in grace:

† **We must already be *in* grace**

Just as growth or increase in anything implies a beginning, growth in God's favour implies that we have found favour in His sight. We are already indebted for grace received; as one of God's favoured ones we are already *in* grace.

† **Our sins have been abandoned and forgiven**

Growth in grace presupposes that we have already repented of sin, that in practice we have abandoned all known sin. Being approved by God implies that we are pardoned and favoured by Him for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His favour assumes that we have renounced rebellion against God; we can never stand in favour with God while we knowingly indulge in sin against Him.

† **Continuous growth**

Once grace has started, there is room for everlasting growth. As we know God more, we will be capable of loving Him more, displaying broader and deeper confidence in Him. God reveals Himself to us through Christ Jesus, and in Him we discover the true personality of an infinite God. The text therefore says, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of *our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*” The more we love, the more we believe; the more we know God – if we conform to this knowledge – the more God will be pleased with us; and as we stand higher in His favour, the more and greater gifts He will continue to grant us.

† **Entirely committed to God**

To grow in grace we must increase in knowledge of what it means to be entirely given to God. True conversion involves consecrating ourselves and all we have to Him. New believers are not aware of everything involved in consecration’s highest forms. Fully surrendering everything we are, have, desire, and love, as quickly as these objects come to mind, is a condition of growth in God’s favour. As you receive new light your consecration must enlarge by each day and each hour, or you will stop growing. Whenever you hold back, not leaving all on the altar of consecration, at that moment you cease growing. Let this sink deep into your heart.

† **Conformity to the Holy Spirit’s teaching**

A further condition of growth is constant conformity to the Holy Spirit’s teachings. We are to deepen our Christian

practice by seeking spiritual light through the Holy Spirit's illumination. You won't gain any effective spiritual insight except through the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. You must constantly, earnestly pray for His teaching, and guard against resisting and grieving Him. You must also continue in the attitude of a disciple of Christ. He won't teach you by His holy Spirit unless you renounce self and live continually given to Him.

† **Unwavering faith in God**

More and more *implicit* faith in God leads to growth. We need a confidence in God's character so profound that we trust Him in the dark as well as in the light, as deeply when we understand His ways and requirements as when we don't. Implicit faith is unwavering, unquestioning faith, a state of mind that rests in God, His promises, His faithfulness and love – no matter how trying and apparently unreasonable His commands or guiding circumstances may be.

† **Complete sanctification**

A more thoroughly sanctified soul – the seat of desires, affections, emotions, feelings, appetites and passions – is another condition of growth in God's favour. In its depraved condition, human nature as a whole is hideous. Even though the will is surrendered to God, the soul may still be unsightly to those who can see its desire, passion and lust. And it is through our soul that temptation attacks us. The will battles these appetites to keep them subjected to God's will, and if the human will maintains its integrity and clings to God's will, sin does not occur. Nevertheless, these rebellious leanings hinder the will in serving God: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). As the soul becomes more and more subdued and in harmony with the will's devotion to God, we are free to give God unhampered service. So the more thorough the sanctification of the soul the more thoroughly we will be in God's favour.

† **Filled with the Holy Spirit**

Growing in God depends on an increasing presence of the Holy Spirit. Every step in the Christian's life must be taken under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that in *all* things we will be led by God's Spirit. "For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live"(Rom. 8:13). "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh"(Gal. 5:16). Remember that to grow in grace you must grow in the fullness of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

† **A more intimate knowledge of Christ**

A deeper personal, experiential knowledge of Christ and how He works and relates to us must come before growth in grace. The Bible introduces Christ as a living Person. What is said of Him should lead us to seek intimacy with Him, for through a personal relationship with Christ, God makes us like Him. Know Him in His fullness, by faith personally appropriating Christ in each area of relationship. Clothe yourself with Christ, taking Him as your own, for He is your wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption; your prophet, to teach you; your king, to govern you; your high priest, to atone for you; your mediator, your advocate, your strength, your Saviour, your hiding-place, your high tower, your captain and leader, your shield, your defence, your reward. Know Him personally in each of these areas, appropriating Him by faith. This is an indispensable condition of growth in His favour.

False signs of growth in grace

A number of things can mislead us into thinking that growth takes place when it is not. These are false signs of spiritual progress:

- ◆ Growth in knowledge isn't conclusive evidence of growth in grace. Knowledge is indispensable to walking in God's favour, being one of the conditions of growth in grace. But knowledge itself isn't grace. A person can explode in

knowledge yet have no grace at all. Knowledge must lead to a deeper dedication to God and in that way be transformed into a spiritual asset.

- ◆ Growth in gifts isn't proof that an individual is living nearer to God. One who professes Christ can pray more fluently, preach more eloquently, exhort more powerfully without being any more holy. It is common for people who have no favour from God to excel in outward religious practices.
- ◆ Just because a person thinks he is growing spiritually doesn't mean he is. A person can be impressed with his spiritual progress when others clearly see his spiritual decline. Someone who is rotting spiritually seldom knows it. This is natural. The conscience of someone in spiritual decline will become increasingly calloused as he resists the light. He thinks he is on his way up precisely because he has less sense of sin, and while his conscience sleeps on he may continue in fatal delusion.

Proofs of growing in grace

There are also several proofs that we are growing in God's favour:

- ◆ If you are conscious that you exercise more childlike and complete confidence in God, this proves that you are growing in grace. As your life, attitude, and spirit manifests this ever-expanding faith, you demonstrate to everybody that you are increasing in the favour of God.
- ◆ If you are weaned from the world, you have grown in grace. A soul crucified to the world signals spiritual progress.
- ◆ Fewer reluctant feelings when called to exercise self-denial reveals growth in grace. It shows that the feelings are less despotic, that the will is gaining mastery of them and that the soul is blending into harmony with the will's intent and the mind's dictates.

- ◆ Less temptation to sins of omission is another sign of growth. Less temptation to shy from the cross, from unpleasant responsibilities, from prayer, Scripture reading, private and family devotions displays growth.
- ◆ Deepening intensity and steadiness of zeal for God's causes reveals growth in God's favour. Sometimes a Christian's zeal cools, and at other times it warms; sometimes it is committed, at other times it is fickle and fleeting. As Christians grow in devotion, their zeal becomes deep, intense and steady.
- ◆ Withering self-consciousness and respect for self in every action of life reveals growth in God's favour. Some are so self-conscious about everything they say and do that it hinders their Christian life. New Christians, for example, sometimes can't speak, pray or do anything in public without being either proud or ashamed of having performed in front of others. As they lose sight of self and consistently work for God's glory, they grow in His favour.
- ◆ Deadness to flattery or condemnation signals growth in grace. Paul counted it a small thing to be judged by others. He sought only to find God's approval.
- ◆ A growing graciousness in accepting the whole will of God reveals spiritual growth. Some rebel against His will or in His ordering of events. But those growing in grace embrace His entire revealed will with greater and greater love for it.
- ◆ Calmness in hardship evidences growth. It shows that the soul is firmly anchored in Christ.
- ◆ Tranquillity in the face of sudden, crushing disasters and losses. The more tranquil the soul when storms of circumstances suddenly overwhelm it, sweeping away its loved ones and destroying its earthly hopes, the greater its proof of being favoured by God.

- ◆ Patience under provocation and less temptation to worry.
- ◆ When you find that you not only tolerate but accept God's will when it calls you to suffer, when you can endure patiently and joyfully, this shows you are growing in God.
- ◆ An increasing deadness to all that the world offers or threatens.
- ◆ Less temptation to focus on troubles or talk about them to others shows that we think less and less of self and accept our trials with more and more submission to God.
- ◆ Dwelling less and less on other's faults and their shortcomings.
- ◆ Speech that is gentle rather than sarcastic, uncharitable or severe. A growing delicacy and tenderness in speaking of other's real or supposed faults.
- ◆ An increasing reluctance to think of or treat anyone as an enemy, and an increasing ease in treating them kindly, praying for them heartily and working to do them good.
- ◆ An ability to forgive rather than hold grudges, and a lack of desire to retaliate for injuries.
- ◆ Conformity to God and growth in His grace is clearly displayed by a growing jealousy for God's honour, and for the church's purity.

How to grow in grace

We can grow in grace by fulfilling the conditions of spiritual growth noted in the discussion above. Remember that every step of spiritual growth must be made by faith, not by works. Some good Christians have made truly amazing mistakes on this subject. Many teach that the way to be sanctified is to work for it, calling sanctification by faith an absurdity and describing growth in grace as the formation of habits of obedience to God.

This is quite surprising. The fact is that every step of progress in the Christian life is taken by a fresh and fuller appropriation of Christ by faith, a fuller baptism of the Holy Spirit. As our weaknesses, infirmities, and recurring sins are revealed to us by the circumstances we face, our only help is found in Christ. We grow only as we step by step appropriate Him more fully, as we more fully “put Him on”. We mature only as fast as we are emptied of self-dependence, as we renounce any expectation of forming holy habits through our own obedience, as we partake by faith of deeper and deeper baptisms of the Holy Spirit, and as we more thoroughly put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nothing is more erroneous and dangerous than the common idea that we grow up spiritually by forming holy habits. We appropriate Christ by acts of faith alone, and we are sanctified by faith as truly as we are justified by faith.

I say it with sorrow: The teaching of many pastors is a stumbling block to the church. Under their instruction converts are never established in grace, and they never become useful or live lives honourable to Christ. Such teachers don't know how to grow themselves. In order to instruct converts and keep the church moving on in holiness, the pastor himself must move forward. He must be a truly vital, growing Christian.

Many churches in many places weep for lack of living devotion and growth in their pastors. Their ministers are intellectual, literary, philosophical, and theological in their teaching, but are sadly deficient in unction, having little power with either God or people. They instruct the intellect but not the heart because they preach an intellectual rather than a spiritual Gospel.

It is obvious why so many people backslide. I stand convinced that where a disastrous falling away has followed a revival, almost always the lack of timely and proper instruction has been to blame. But to be timely and proper, instruction must be anointed by the Holy Spirit.